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Covering Crime in Washington, D.C.: Examining the Nature of Local Television News Coverage of Crime and its Effect on Emotional Response

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Abstract

This paper examines the nature of local television news coverage of crime and its effects on emotional response. Specifically, I present the results of a content analysis of two months of local television news coverage of crime from a network affiliate in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Consistent with what others have found regarding local television news, I find that most local news crime stories are episodic in nature and focus on violent crime, particularly murder. Moreover, there is a specific racial cast to this coverage – significant attention is given to black perpetrators while black victims are under-covered. Using an experiment that compared two types of crime stories taken from the content analysis to explore how coverage influences viewers' emotional reactions, I find, contrary to my expectation, that a thematic story about violent crime generates greater and more varied emotional response than an episodic story dealing with a specific murder. When I vary the race of the perpetrator portrayed in the episodic story to try to examine the influence of the prevalence of visuals of black perpetrators in the crime coverage, I do not find differences in how participants in this study respond to the murder story based on the race of the perpetrator. I discuss the implications of my findings and suggest future directions for this research.

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Local television news is the most popular news source for Americans and crime coverage is its dominant offering. Thus, local crime coverage would seem a natural venue for research on media effects. While much research has been devoted to documenting the nature of local crime coverage, and some research has tried to examine effects, little attention has been paid to affective responses. This seems surprising for two reasons. First, its emotional impact is arguably one of the attractions of crime coverage for stations seeking to attract viewers. Second, the belief that crime coverage generates fear and anxiety in viewers underlies many of the worries about its effects. Moreover, we know that emotion can play a crucial role in how citizens process information and arrive at political judgments (Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000). Consequently, more systematic research examining affective responses to crime news should provide a fuller understanding of the effects of local television crime coverage.

This paper is a first step in that direction – examining both the content of local crime news and the emotions people experience in response to particular crime stories. More specifically, I seek to answer the following questions: How does local television news cover crime? Does local television coverage of crime influence emotional response? If crime coverage does influence emotion, what discrete emotions are generated by crime coverage? Does emotional response vary based on different characteristics of crime news (e.g. different frames and different characteristics of the perpetrator)? What might be the effect of these emotional reactions? Do emotional responses influence opinion on crime policy? In answering these questions, the paper contributes to our understanding of the effects of local television news and the effects of news frames more generally.

I begin this paper by reviewing the results of previous studies examining the nature and consequences of local television news. I also review the literature on framing effects, defining

the frames that are the focus of my research and arguing for the importance of paying attention to affective responses. After reviewing this literature, I present my analysis of the prominence of episodic and thematic frames in local crime coverage and the portrayal of perpetrators and victims in crime news. I then present the results of experiment examining the influence of crime coverage on emotional response. I conclude by discussing the implications of the experimental results.

Local Television News

Despite declines in ratings, local television news remains America's most popular news medium. In a 2003 survey, almost 50 percent of the public said they get "most of their news" from local television. Twice as many as said they got their news from network television, while four times as many as said they get most of their news from their local daily newspaper (Papper, 2003).¹ People see local news as more factual and less focused on opinion than other news sources. Seven in ten Americans said their overall opinion of their local television news was favorable (Pew Research Center, 2005). When asked what they liked about local television, those who expressed a favorable opinion most frequently mentioned its ability to offer local stories that allowed them to remain connected to their communities and be informed about local affairs (Pew Research Center, 2005).

And what do citizens learn about from watching local television news? One thing they learn about is crime. Crime rates in most U.S. cities have been on the decline for a decade, yet local newscasts still seem to operate under the mantra, "if it bleeds, it leads" (Downie & Kaiser, 2002; Hamilton, 1998; McManus, 1994). An analysis of local television news in fifty markets from 1998—2002 found that one quarter of all stories dealt with crime and that two fifths of lead stories dealt with crime (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004)² These findings are

consistent with a large body of previous research. A number of studies have concluded that crime news dominates local television coverage and is more likely than other topics to lead the newscast (Garofalo, 1981; Dominick, 1978; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Kaiser Family Foundation, 1998; Klite, Bardwell & Salzman, 1997). Violent crime in particular is given more play than is warranted by actual crime statistics (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon & Wright, 1996; Gilliam & Iyengar 2000; Graber, 1980; Halloran 1978; Jaehnig, Weaver, & Fico, 1981; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981).

Violent crime is arguably more newsworthy than property crime although the latter is much more likely to occur. Yet this level of attention to violent crime seems excessive and, as many have argued, its effects may be troubling. Some scholars have found that the predominance of violence in local television news cultivates fear (Jaehnig et al., 1981; Perse, 1990; Romer, Jamieson & Aday 2003). Gross and Aday (2003) found little evidence that local television viewing predicted increased fear when personal experience is taken into account. However, they did find agenda-setting effects. Those who watched local television news were significantly more likely to see crime as an important problem. This is not surprising since that would seem to be the message local news sends both through its level of crime coverage and its tendency to feature crime in the top stories.

Several studies have also examined the portrayal of race in local television crime news. Most of this work has found that news over represents African-Americans as perpetrators of violence while under-representing them in more sympathetic roles such as law enforcement personnel or victims of violence (Dixon & Linz 2000a, 2000b; Romer, Jamieson & De Coteau, 1998).³ Black perpetrators are also portrayed as more threatening than white perpetrators (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). While work which tries to compare the media portrayal of crime

with arrest rates for different groups suggests a somewhat less distorted picture than work that focuses on comparing the types of roles African-Americans occupy in crime coverage or work that focuses on comparing the numbers of black and white perpetrators, the implications of this research for public attitudes is troubling.

As Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) argue, coverage of this nature creates a “crime script” in which crime is violent and perpetrators are black. Repeated exposure to this script promotes and reinforces negative racial stereotypes. Kang (2005) uses the metaphor of the “Trojan Horse Virus” to describe how local television news of this nature can, without viewer’s awareness and without intent on the part of news producers, create and reinforce associations between blacks and violence in the mind of citizens.⁴ Once this crime script is not just a news script, but part of the script or schema individuals carry around with them in their heads, it is not surprising that it will have consequences for how people think about politics and approach the world.

Some evidence for these real world effects comes from experiments by political scientists and psychologists. For example, Duncan (1976) found that an act (an ambiguous shove) was interpreted as more violent when performed by a black than when the same act was performed by a white, consistent with the notion that “black” and “violent” has become linked in the minds of many individuals. Kang (2005) cites a study in which participants were to shoot an armed target but not an unarmed target. The target individual was either black or white, was holding either a gun or another object, and was presented in a realistic background. Under time pressure participants were more likely to mistakenly shoot an unarmed black target than an unarmed white target and more likely to mistakenly not shoot a white target that was armed than a black target that was armed (Correll, Park, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2002). In other words, participants in the study were more likely to assume wrongly that a black individual was a criminal and assume

wrongly that a white individual was not. Using an experimental design and survey analysis, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) demonstrate that exposure to a black perpetrator in a local television news crime story increased whites' support for punitive crime policy and their tendency to attribute crime to personal failings.⁵ Priming a black crime suspect influenced people's assessments of the perpetrator (Peffley, Shields & Williams, 1996), of presidential candidates (Valentino, 1999), and of issues (Mendelberg, 2001; Avery & Peffley, 2003). Taken together, these studies suggest that the racial elements of local television crime news may have important and troubling effects.

Framing and Emotion

Framing research provides an important theoretical perspective for thinking about media effects. What are frames? According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987) a frame is "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (143). Entman (1993) defines framing similarly: "To frame 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." Frames provide a particular way of thinking about or understanding an issue. Thus, affirmative action may be discussed in terms of reverse discrimination, unfair advantage or a rectification for past injustice; domestic wiretapping could be about terrorist surveillance or violating civil liberties and breaking the law. Emotional appeals would seem to be an important element in constructing a frame or storyline. Partisans looking to frame issues to their advantage try to tap into emotions to produce more persuasive frames. Reporters seek emotionally compelling storylines to draw in readers and viewers. Yet most of the research on framing has

focused on its cognitive effects (for exceptions see Brewer, 2001; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; and Nabi, 2003).

The key premise of the framing literature is that frames will, by highlighting certain aspects of an event or policy, guide audience members' thoughts and feelings about that event or issue in predictable ways, to predictable conclusions. Returning to the domestic wiretapping example, if most Americans see domestic wiretapping as "terrorist surveillance" or as an important tool in the war on terror, then we would expect support to be higher than if most Americans saw domestic wiretapping as a violation of civil liberties. Numerous studies have focused on establishing that such framing effects exist (e.g. Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Druckman, 2001a; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Iyengar, 1991; Jacoby, 2000; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Mendelberg, 2001; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997).⁶

Much of this work argues that framing works through an accessibility-driven process (Iyengar, 1991; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Zaller, 1992). When asked for an opinion, individuals sample from the considerations that are cognitively accessible at the moment, with frames helping to determine such accessibility. When a given frame dominates coverage of an issue, the considerations raised by that frame come to the fore and others fall behind. Other research, particularly that of Nelson and his colleagues, argues that frames work not by altering the accessibility but by altering the importance attached to various considerations (Nelson et al., 1997; Nelson, Oxley & Clawson 1997; Nelson & Oxley, 1999).⁷ Just as frames may alter the accessibility or import of the considerations brought to bear in formulating opinion, they also may alter the considerations available when formulating emotional response (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004).

The claim that framing should affect emotional response follows from cognitive appraisal theories of emotion.⁸ These theories posit that “emotions arise as a result of the way in which the situations that initiate them are construed by the experiencer” (Ortony, Clore & Collins, 1988, p.1). People do not experience emotion randomly but rather as a product of their cognitive evaluations (appraisals) of an event or phenomenon (e.g., Ellsworth, 1991; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988; Roseman, 1991). Emotions reflect the information and beliefs that people access to evaluate a situation, as well as how that situation fits with their values and goals. Different emotions can arise from the different assessments that people make of a given situation. So if frames alter the information and considerations subjects have at hand, cognitive appraisal models would predict that emotional outputs should differ. In some cases the emotions themselves may be different and in other cases the explanations people generate to explain or understand their emotional response may be different.

Consistent with this theoretical approach, Gross and D’Ambrosio (2004) found that frames alter the explanations citizens gave for their emotional response and that frames alter the relationship between emotional response and predispositions. Other work also finds that framing influences emotional response. Kinder and Sanders (1990) showed that affirmative action framed as unfair advantage invoked indignation in a way that affirmative action framed as reverse discrimination did not. Negative emotions -- anger, disgust and fury -- were associated more sharply with opinion on affirmative action under the unfair advantage frame. Masters and Sullivan (1993) reported the results of an experiment suggesting that peoples’ emotional reactions toward leaders can be shaped by news commentators’ judgments and interpretations.

Furthermore, past research has shown that emotion can play a crucial role in how citizens process political information and arrive at political judgments (Abelson, Kinder, Peters & Fiske,

1982; Brader, 2005; Conover & Feldman, 1986; Huddy, Feldman, Taber & Lahev, 2005; Kinder, 1994; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000). If different frames elicit distinct emotional reactions, the effect of frames on policy views may operate at least partly via these affective responses. For example, Brewer (2001) showed that the persuasive effect of a welfare reform frame depends on the participant's emotional response to the frame.

News Frames

One could distinguish between two types of framing that occur in media coverage. First, the news media provide outlets for partisan messages, popularizing the frames developed by supporters and opponents of various policy positions (Gamson, 1992). These frames, and the arguments embedded in them, tend to be specific to a particular issue or position and designed to persuade. Such frames are constructed by advocates to maximize the likelihood that the frame will be picked up by the news and ultimately sway the opinions of the audience in one direction or another (Jacoby 2000). Another class of frames can be thought of as more general frames or storytelling devices. Such frames can be used across a variety of issues and are not defined by a particular position on that issue. Journalists employ these more general frames not in an explicit attempt to persuade or advocate for a particular side but rather as a way to tell the story so as to make it understandable and accessible for the reader.

Previous research examining the effect of frames on emotion focused on frames that are specific to an issue or context. In this study, I focus on a particular set of these more general “news frames” – episodic and thematic ones. Episodic frames present a political issue by offering a specific example, case study or event-oriented report (e.g., covering unemployment by presenting a story on the plight of a particular unemployed person). Thematic frames, on the other hand, place political issues into a broader context (e.g. covering unemployment by

reporting on the latest unemployment figures and offering commentary by economists or public officials on the impact of the economy on unemployment). Few news reports are exclusively episodic or thematic, yet episodic coverage often predominates particularly in television news (Iyengar 1991).⁹

In his book, *Is Anyone Responsible*, Iyengar (1991) argues that the prevalence of episodic framing in political news coverage may have important consequences. Episodic framing of political problems diverts attention from societal responsibility and leads people to hold individuals responsible for their predicament, thereby dampening support for government programs designed to address the problem and shielding leaders from responsibility. Episodic framing may also encourage a “morselized” understanding of political problems by presenting recurring problems as discrete instances (Iyengar, p. 136). Citizens exposed to a steady stream of episodic frames may fail to see the connections between problems such as poverty, racial discrimination and crime when they are presented as discrete and unconnected. Iyengar’s framing hypotheses are born out in various experiments, across a variety of issues. In the face of episodic frames, individuals are more likely to offer individualistic attributions; in the face of thematic frames they offer more societal attributions.¹⁰

It is important to note that results for crime coverage were more complicated. Iyengar (1991) found differences in attributions between stories that dealt with black crime and stories that dealt with white crime – subject matter effects that overshadow the framing effects. Episodic frames elicited higher levels of individual causal attributions, but the effect was not significant. The interactive effects were significant, suggesting that for white crime frame mattered but that framing effects were absent for black crime (Iyengar, 1991, p.39-45).

In this paper, I extend the work on episodic and thematic framing by examining the effect of such frames on emotional response in the context of crime coverage. I also examine the role race plays in influencing emotional reactions to crime coverage. Racial differences in the individuals portrayed in crime news may be especially consequential in episodic framing where attention is drawn to a specific victim or perpetrator.

Method

This study used a multi-method approach to examine the nature and potential effects of local television news coverage of crime. In order to understand the nature of this type of news coverage of crime, I undertook a systematic content analysis of two months of local television news coverage in Washington D.C. The content analysis was designed to examine the prominence of episodic and thematic frames in local television crime coverage, as well as the racial nature of the portrayal of local crime. The analysis of media content allowed me to determine the nature of local news crime coverage. It did not, however, allow me to determine the potential effects of that content. For that, I turned to an experiment. Experimental designs provide important tests of media effects. Properly designed experiments allow the researcher to draw inferences about the effect of media content by comparing the reactions of different groups who vary only in the particular content to which they are exposed. In this case, the experiment was designed to compare the effect on emotional response of episodic and thematic framing of crime stories, as well as to see what role the race of the perpetrator played in an episodic account.

Expectations

How does local television news cover crime? Based on the prior literature, I expected to find that crime was a common story in local evening newscasts in the Washington area, that it was given a prominent place in the evening newscast, that crime coverage was episodic, and overrepresented black perpetrators while under-representing of black victims.

Because little prior research has been done exploring the effect of episodic and thematic framing or the effect of crime news on the expression of discrete emotion, my investigation into the effects of coverage was designed to answer the following research questions: Do episodic and thematic frames generate different emotional reactions? Are individuals more or less likely to experience discrete emotional responses depending on the frame they receive? Do these frames influence how individuals explain their emotional response? How might the characteristics of the individuals within a particular episodic crime story influence emotional response?

I expected the “human interest” details of the episodic frames to be more emotionally engaging than the thematic frame. Work in the cultivation tradition suggests that crime stories promote fear and anxiety. In telling the story of a particular crime, however, episodic stories can seemingly engage the viewer in a variety of emotional responses toward the various individuals involved – pity and sympathy for the victim and her family, anger and disgust at the perpetrator for their action, fear for personal safety. Emotional response to perpetrators or victims likely varies with the circumstances of the crime but might also vary with the race of the individuals involved. For example, if white attributions for negative behaviors on the part of blacks are more likely to be attributed to individuals’ choices (dispositional attributions) and less likely to

be attributed to external circumstances (situational attributions), one would expect less sympathy or pity and more anger or disgust on the part of whites. Recall, research has found that a black perpetrator increases support for punitive crime policy and attributions of individual responsibility. Perhaps these effects are related, at least in part, to emotional response. Here, the literature would lead us to expect increased fear and anxiety when primed with a black perpetrator, which might facilitate more punitive approaches. A black perpetrator might also produce increased expression of aversive emotions – anger and disgust. Most perpetrators of violent crime are clearly seen as violating societal values but black perpetrators in particular may generate increased expressions of disgust and anger.¹¹

Content Analysis – Method and Results

Sample and Coding Procedure

I examined 727 news stories that aired between 6 and 6:30 p.m. on the local NBC affiliate station in Washington, D.C. The sample included all news stories except weather and sports that aired during May and June 2005.¹² All local-news crime stories were coded for type of crime, news frame, length of story, and whether the story was the lead story. For purposes of this study, crime stories included not only stories about a specific crime but also those dealing with crime in general or stories that focused on police and citizens who were trying to do something about crime. In addition, all perpetrators and victims were coded for whether the individual was named, the presence of a visual image, their race/ethnicity and their gender. (See Appendix A for more detail on the coding.)

Results – How Local Television News Covers Crime

My analysis shows that local Washington, D.C., television news broadcasts give much attention, indeed prominence, to local crime. Nearly a quarter of all the stories on the local NBC affiliate dealt with local crime, including half of all “local” news.¹³ Crime stories were, on average, slightly longer than other local news stories (see Figure 1). The statement “if it bleeds it leads” aptly describes Washington’s local news. Fifty-one percent of all lead stories dealt with crime during the two months analyzed (Figure 2). News about local issues led the broadcast more generally, with 80 percent of the top three stories centered on local, as opposed to national or international, issues. The top local stories were disproportionately about crime (64 percent). This attention to crime is not unique to Washington, D.C., local news, since my results are consistent with what others have found for local news more generally.

Figures 1 & 2 Here

This focus on crime was really a focus on violent crime, crime that involves force or the threat of force (e.g. homicides, sexual assaults, robbery and aggravated assault). Violent crime was the subject of 75 percent of all local crime stories, and 83 percent of local crime stories that aired at the top of the broadcast (first three stories). The news coverage focused on murder in particular. Forty-six percent of all crime stories aired in this period dealt with murder.

Nearly all crime coverage was episodic in nature (94 percent). In other words, when the local news covered crime, it reported on a specific crime or incident. Few stories could be considered thematic – setting a particular crime story in the larger context, discussing trends in crime, or discussing causes and possible remedies for addressing crime.¹⁴

Coverage of this nature misrepresents the reality of crime in the Washington metropolitan area. Obviously, comparing news coverage with “reality” can be difficult. Here I try to provide

some context for evaluating crime coverage by comparing it with the preliminary crime data for May-June 2005 for the District of Columbia.¹⁵ Specifically, I examined the proportion of all major reported crimes (homicide, sexual assault, robbery assault with a deadly weapon, burglary, theft, vehicle theft and arson) that were violent and compared this with the proportion of all crime stories that dealt with violent crime (Table 1). This comparison reveals the degree to which the viewer of local television news was given a skewed perception of the relative threat of violent crime in the region. Violent crimes accounted for 21 percent of all crimes reported by the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police in this two-month period and murder accounted for less than 1 percent of crimes reported. In other words, while violent crime accounted for about one-quarter of the major crimes that occurred in the district during this period, fully three-quarters of the crime news dealt with major crimes. My use of crime statistics from the District of Columbia represents an overestimate of the relative amount of violent crime, because the district has the highest violent crime rate of all the jurisdictions in the metropolitan area; thus, a comparison that looked at the entire metropolitan area—the area the news sees itself as covering—would show even greater disparities between the coverage and the reality of crime.¹⁶

Table 1 Here

Clearly, murder and violent crime may be more “newsworthy” than more common types of property crimes. Yet the emphasis on violent crime should give pause. A potential consequence of an overemphasis on violent crime might be misperception of risk. Some evidence suggests that the dominance of crime coverage should increase fear. Even if such coverage does not lead to greater fear, it does increase the extent to which citizens view crime as the major problem facing the metropolitan area (Gross & Aday, 2004).

In covering crime, local television news provides viewers not only with information about the prevalence of crime but also with information on those who commit crime and those who are victims of crime. In the two months of news examined, 73 percent of the stories about crime mentioned at least one perpetrator for a total of 183 codable mentions of perpetrators. Seventy-eight percent of the stories about crime mentioned at least one victim for a total of 189 codable mentions of victims.¹⁷

Table 2 shows the gender and race/ethnicity for the perpetrators and victims discussed in news coverage. Seventy percent of the perpetrators mentioned were male and 14 percent female, while for the remaining 16 percent the gender was not identified either verbally or visually. Women were more likely to appear in the news as perpetrators in nonviolent crime stories; the opposite was true for males—77 percent of perpetrators in violent crime stories were male. For nonviolent crime stories, fifty percent were male). Forty-nine percent of the individual perpetrators were named. African-American perpetrators were slightly more likely to be named than white perpetrators (83 percent compared with 63 percent). For half of the individual perpetrators no image was shown. These cases are treated as not revealing the race of the perpetrator (Table 2, “unrevealed”). Perhaps, however, it is more accurate to say in such cases that race is not revealed explicitly. In at least some of these stories, someone watching might infer the race of the individuals involved from visuals of the neighborhood, interviews with neighbors and friends, or the perpetrator’s name.¹⁸

Table 2 Here

African-Americans were the most frequently portrayed perpetrators of violent and nonviolent crimes (see Table 2). Looking only at the subset of stories that provide a visual image of individual perpetrators, 63 percent of the perpetrators shown on NBC during this two-

month period were black, 21 percent were white, 9 percent were Latino and for 6 percent the race was unclear. In stories about homicide in which the race of the perpetrator was identified, 82 percent of perpetrators were African American. Unfortunately, I do not have arrest statistics for the metropolitan area by race and crime against which I might compare the television portrayal.¹⁹ This makes it difficult to assess whether the portrayal was disproportionate relative to the rate at which crimes were committed in the metropolitan area. It may be that this portrayal was accurate to the metro area once one accounts for the overrepresentation of homicide in news coverage. And yet, I would still be concerned about the ultimate lesson that is learned from such coverage. This is precisely the type of coverage that Kang (2005) argues reinforces and perpetuates stereotypes of black males as violent (see also Entman, 2005).

Since violent crime is not victimless crime, the overrepresentation of violent crime means that relatively similar numbers of victims and perpetrators were mentioned (e.g., the story reports that an individual has been the victim of a crime). Yet much less identifying information was given about victims than perpetrators on the nightly news (see Table 2). For 34 percent of the victims the gender was not identified, either verbally or visually (41 percent of victims were male, 25 percent of victims were female). Only 37 percent of victims were named (compared with 49 percent of perpetrators). There was no visual image for most of the victims (72 percent compared with 51 percent of perpetrators), so relatively little information was transmitted regarding their race. Fifteen percent of violent crime victims in news stories were white, 10 percent were black. Race went unrevealed for 72 percent of victims. In those cases (both violent and nonviolent) where at least some information on an individual victim's race and ethnicity was provided, 46 percent of victims were white, 37 percent were black, 16 percent were Latino, other or Asian, and for 7 percent the race was unclear. In the case of stories dealing with homicide, 48

percent of racially identifiable victims were white and 40 percent of racially identifiable victims were black. Overall, the local news portrayal of crime for this period was consistent with the view that more men are victims of violent crime than are women. However the local news seemed to misrepresent the level of victimization faced by blacks and whites.²⁰

It is particularly striking that a greater proportion of those victims for whom race was identifiable were white, especially when set against the results on perpetrators. Local television news coverage reinforces the message that blacks are violent but fails to show that they might also suffer disproportionately from such violence. Put another way, local television news stories on crime seem likely to invoke negative emotions toward black Americans – emotions like anger and disgust – rather than empathetic emotions – emotions like sympathy or pity.²¹

This examination of two months of local television news coverage suggests four main conclusions: (1) Crime, particularly violent crime, remains a dominant feature of local news coverage. In highlighting violent crime the local news ultimately provides its viewers with a distorted picture. (2) Crime coverage is almost entirely episodic in nature, focusing on reporting individual incidents of crime rather than on broader discussions of the causes and consequences of crime. (3) The predominant visual portrayal is of black perpetrators. While the demographics of the metropolitan region and the overemphasis on murder in news coverage may account to some degree for the nature of coverage, the predominance of black perpetrators may still have troubling effects on viewers. (4) Victims remain nameless and faceless. Viewers are given relatively little explicit information on the kinds of people who are victimized.

Experiment – Method and Results

Design and Procedure

To assess the effects of different aspects of local television news on emotional response, participants in the experiment were randomly assigned²² to view one of four crime stories embedded in a nine- minute segment of local news coverage and then answer a questionnaire. Participants watched a news segment that contained three news stories, some banter among news anchors, and a preview of the stories that would follow a commercial break before breaking. All stories were taken from coverage that aired on the Washington, D.C., NBC affiliate during May and June 2005.²³ The first and third stories were constant across experimental conditions; the middle story dealing with crime was experimentally varied (See Figure 3).

Figure 3 Here

Specifically, participants saw one of four possible crime stories: a thematic story dealing with the murder rate in Prince George's County, Maryland (a suburb of Washington, D.C.) or one of three different versions of an episodic story dealing with a particular murder. All the crime stories included details that could arouse emotions. The thematic story dealt with the rising murder rate in Prince George's County. Like many thematic stories, it began with reference to a specific episode (two shootings) and segued into a thematic discussion of violence in Prince George's County. The story included some detail on the two murders that had taken place, an interview with the police chief about the rising murder rate and unsolved murders, a discussion of the causes of crime in the county, and discussion of what was being done. The episodic story dealt with the murder of Richard Gluckstern, a computer specialist. Gluckstern was found in his home in Fairfax, Virginia, after his parents called police to check on him. The race of the victim was not revealed in this crime story, consistent with much of the actual coverage. The apartment complex, a new housing development, was shown. There is nothing about the visual images of the neighborhood that would suggest this was a high crime area. The

report included on-camera interviews with a police officer and a woman at the victim's place of employment (Freddie Mac) as well as a phone call from the victim's father. The use of actual stories from the NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C., lends realism to the experiment. However, it should be noted that the use of actual stories means that the thematic and episodic stories were not truly identical except for the frame, a point I will discuss later.

To assess whether the racial characteristics of individuals presented in an episodic story matter, I altered the presentation of the suspect within the episodic story. There were three versions: in one there was no mug shot of the suspected perpetrator, although he was mentioned by the reporter. In the other two versions a mug shot of either a white or a black individual was shown.²⁴

After watching the newscast, participants completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire included measures of support for crime policies, measures designed to assess message processing, measures of relevant political predispositions and demographics. To assess the effect of crime coverage on emotion, I measured both the experience and content of emotional response. Participants were asked whether they felt a series of emotions—anger, sympathy, worry, hope, disgust, pity and fear—while watching stories on the crime and on the District of Columbia public schools (“While watching the story did you feel angry?”). These emotions have been included as a part of the ANES batteries of emotional response or have been used in other studies of emotion and politics. Moreover, past research has found some distinctions between similar emotions, such as anger and disgust, making it useful to include both (Kinder 1994). Respondents were also asked about the object or impetus for their emotional response (“If yes, why did you feel this? What was it that made you feel angry?”). This open-ended

question allowed me to examine the nature of emotional responses in greater depth. See Appendix B for more detail on these measures.

Sample

A total of 313 students at a mid-Atlantic private university participated in the experiment during January and February of 2006.²⁵ Sixty-one percent were female. Eighty-five percent were white, 3 percent African-American, 4 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, and 5 percent identified as some other race, mixed race or neglected to identify their race. Fourteen percent of participants regularly watched local television news, 46 percent sometimes watched and 39 percent hardly ever or never watched. Forty percent of the participants reported that they regularly read a daily newspaper, 41 percent sometimes read a daily paper and 15 percent hardly ever or never read a daily newspaper. Sixteen percent of participants identified as Republicans, 49 percent identified as Democrats and 35 percent identified as Independents (52 percent of Independents leaned Democratic, 25 percent of Independents lean Republican). Twenty percent of participants considered themselves conservative, 16 percent moderate and 63 percent liberal. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35, the average being 19. In keeping with the Democratic and liberal orientation of this student sample, participants tended to be supportive of equality (mean .69, standard deviation .20 on the-six item ANES equality scale), less supportive of limited government (mean .35, standard deviation .38 on the three item ANES limited government scale) and not very racially resentful (mean .37, standard deviation .25 on two items from the Kinder and Sanders (1996) racial resentment battery).²⁶ There were between 77 and 79 participants in each condition.²⁷ One must be careful in generalizing from student samples (Sears, 1986), a point I return to in the discussion.

Results – Does the framing of crime coverage affect emotional response?

I had expected that episodic coverage would be more emotionally engaging for viewers, yet I find it is the thematic story that engages viewer's emotional responses (Table 3). Those viewing the Gluckstern murder story mainly expressed sympathy (and to a lesser degree pity and disgust). The thematic story about violence in Prince George's County resulted in more emotional reactions overall and more varied types of emotional response than the episodic story focused on an individual murder. The mean number of emotions mentioned by those who viewed the thematic frame condition was 2.5 compared with 1.9 emotions for those in the white and black mug shot conditions and 1.6 for those who did not view the mug shot ($F=5.61, p<.01$). Those who viewed the thematic condition were also significantly more likely to say they felt negative emotions – anger, worry, disgust, and fear – than those who saw the episodic crime stories.²⁸ Only in the case of sympathy was the pattern reversed. Those in the episodic conditions expressed somewhat (but not significantly) greater sympathy.

Table 3 Here

While I found differences in response between the two types of crime stories (episodic frame and thematic frame), I found almost no differences among the episodic frames in the nature of emotional response. More accurately, I found small differences in the expression of aversive emotions in the presence of a visual of a perpetrator but no differences depending on the race of the individual shown in the mug shot.²⁹

The open-ended questions asking respondents to explain why they felt a given emotion allow me to further explore the nature of these emotional responses. Participants seemed quite willing to offer explanations for their emotional reactions. These responses varied from a word or two to several sentences containing multiple explanations or elaborations. Table 4 presents

distribution of open-ended responses for each emotion across the different content categories. This can include multiple distinct responses from a single individual. Participants offered similar responses, particularly across similar emotions (anger/disgust; sympathy/pity and fear/worry) consistent with the fact that all were being asked to describe their emotional reactions to a news story about violent crime. However, some differences emerged in how individuals characterized the reason for or target of a particular emotion between the episodic and thematic conditions.³⁰ The differences that emerged map quite reasonably on to the different types of information highlighted in thematic versus episodic stories. Just as the thematic condition led to more discrete emotional reactions (e.g. a greater variety of emotions), it also led to more varied targets or explanations for a particular emotion.

Table 4 Here

Looking at Table 4, one sees that pity and sympathy responses centered on pity and sympathy for victims (e.g. Gluckstern or unnamed victims of violence) and the family, friends and coworkers of those victims. While participants expressed these empathetic emotions toward victims in both the episodic and the thematic frame conditions, sympathy and pity for family and friends of victims were cited in the episodic frames but not in the thematic frame. In the thematic frame 61 percent of pity responses and 49 percent of sympathy responses targeted the situation more broadly, and the community more generally. In contrast, across the three episodic conditions 77 percent of sympathy responses and 70 percent of pity responses mentioned Richard Gluckstern's family, friends and coworkers. One could argue that these emotional responses are similar—all center on sympathy and pity for individuals who are or might be touched by violence. Yet I would contend that the policy implications could be very different.

Pity and sympathy for Richard Gluckstern's family do not seem as likely to prompt support for policy change or government action as sympathy and pity for a community beset by violence.

Looking at the content of the other emotions, I found participants in the study mainly expressed anger and disgust at murder and killing (in the episodic conditions) or with the situation that confronted Prince George's county (in the thematic condition).³¹ Interestingly, anger and disgust were also directed at the news itself (27 percent of all anger responses and 17 percent of all disgust responses). Anger and disgust elicited by the nature of news coverage occurred almost completely in the episodic coverage. Worry responses also contained an explanation that was not associated with any other emotion – a concern justice would not be served or the police would be unable to solve these crimes. Beyond this, the vast majority of the explanations for worry or fear in the episodic conditions dealt with personal safety – the idea that the participant or someone they knew could somehow be a victim of violence. While relatively few participants expressed worry or fear after viewing the episodic frames, for those that did, the coverage created anxiety regarding personal safety. In the thematic frame condition, participants expressed anxiety over personal safety but they also expressed anxiety that appeared more other directed (worry and fear targeted at the situation facing the community).

Do these emotional responses matter?

How might emotional response matter? Prior research has found that emotion regulates the extent to which citizens engage with and seek out political information and that emotion shapes political judgment. I take up both possibilities here.

First, I assess whether emotionally engaging stories are also processed with greater attention and depth. I used questions that asked participants to assess the extent to which they found themselves to be engaged with, interested in, and focused on the story (see Appendix B for

more detail) to examine the relationship between emotional response and message processing. I found significant differences across framing conditions for motivation and ability. These were questions that asked about how interesting the issue was and whether the participant was distracted or whether their mind wandered while watching the story. Those in the thematic frame – the frame that induced greater emotional response – reported greater motivation (interest) and greater ability (less distraction) than those who viewed the episodic frame with no mug shot or the episodic frame with a white mug shot (Motivation Scale: ($F=10.04$, $p<.01$); Ability Scale: ($F=5.29$, $p<.01$)).³²

Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen (2000) have demonstrated that the experience of anxiety predicts increased media attention in the campaign context. Consistent with the affective intelligence model, my results suggest that when information provoked anxiety, it was more carefully attended to. Those in the thematic condition were significantly more likely to experience both worry and fear (emotions of anxiety). Participants in the thematic condition also reported finding the story more interesting and reported they were less distracted when viewing the story compared with those who viewed the episodic crime story featuring the white perpetrator and the episodic crime story featuring no visual of the perpetrator.

Of course, this difference across frames could represent direct effects of the frame unrelated to the differential emotional response evoked by the frames. I examined the direct effect of emotion on message processing by regressing emotion and frame condition on the ability, motivation and depth scales. When I did this, I found direct effects of emotional response controlling for frame. Worry, sympathy and anger were associated with increased focus on the story (ability). Worry, sympathy and hope were associated with increased interest (motivation). Worry and anger were associated with increased attention to the story (depth).

I also found that emotional response was related to support for punitive crime policy.³³ I estimated a model that predicted support for punitive crime policy from emotional response and a series of demographic and attitudinal variables that are associated with opinion on crime. Because the episodic frames and the thematic frame produced different types of emotional response, I ran two separate regression equations (one for those in the thematic frame and one for those who were in one of the three episodic frames). The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Here

As Table 5 demonstrates, the different frames make different considerations accessible in determining views on crime policy. Among participants who watched one of the Gluckstern murder stories, worry and fear were associated with increased support for punitive crime measures over and above the effect of various background measures. In other words, two similar individuals who varied only in whether or not they expressed fear would significantly differ in their support for punitive approaches to crime. By contrast, the emotional response most likely to be generated by the episodic frames, sympathy, was not systematically associated with opinion on crime policy.³⁴ As I suggest earlier, sympathy for Gluckstern and his parents did not invoke greater support for getting tough on crime. Those who watched local television news were also significantly more likely than those who do not to support punitive approaches to crime. Not surprisingly, conservatives and those who believe personal characteristics are an important cause of crime were also significantly more likely to supportive punitive approaches as well.

In short, specific types of emotional response play a role in determining support for punitive approaches to crime. Although relatively few individuals in the episodic conditions expressed fear or worry, those that did differed significantly in terms of their views on crime

policy. For those who watched the thematic crime story, the expression of fear and worry did not predict views on crime. Here, those who expressed pity were significantly more supportive of punitive crime policy. Sixty percent of pity responses in the thematic conditions mentioned the situation faced by those in Prince George's County. The results suggest that this emotional reaction facilitated support for getting tough on the crime plaguing the county. In highlighting the problems faced by residents of the county, the thematic condition also made equality a more important component of opinion on crime policy. Those who support equality were significantly less supportive of punitive crime policy (as were those who see situational characteristics as an important cause of crime, though this difference was not statistically significant). Presumably such individuals would see other kinds of measures as important in solving these problems.

While the experimental results are only a first look at the effect of crime coverage on emotion, I want to highlight three of them. First, framing can influence emotional response. I find differences in how individuals react to the episodic and thematic frames and in the explanations offered for those reactions. Though the discrete emotions produced by different types of coverage are not consistent with what I had expected, the general results support the claim that emotion is subject to framing effects. Second, I find some evidence that emotional reactions are associated both with attention to the story and views on crime policy. These first two results, taken together, support the claim that news coverage of crime influences emotion and emotional response influences views on crime policy. These conclusions suggest further study is warranted. The third result I highlight is the lack of evidence that the race of the perpetrator affects the emotions individuals report after watching a particular crime story. Here my experimental results suggest that the race of the perpetrator has no effect on emotion given the same details about a specific crime. This is an interesting result though I treat the conclusion

as tentative. In the next section, I discuss the implications of these results in the context of what the content analysis shows about the nature of crime coverage. I also discuss how these results may have been influenced by the nature of my treatments and my use of a student sample.

Discussion

The results of my content analysis show that crime news on local television in Washington looks much like the rest of the country – episodic and violent with plenty of black perpetrators shown but many fewer black victims. The experiment provides a preliminary look at the potential effects of some aspects of coverage. Overall, the experimental results suggest that frames influence emotional response, though not necessarily in the ways I had expected. Consistent with cognitive appraisal theories of emotion, I found that frames influenced the emotions individuals reported experiencing in reaction to news coverage. Different types of crime coverage – episodic and thematically framed crime news – produced both different levels of emotional response and different explanations for a particular emotion. However, the nature of coverage (frames as well as racial cues) did not necessarily influence emotions in precisely the ways I had expected.

I had expected that the focus on specific individual stories in the episodic frame conditions would generate greater emotional response, that the story of a particular person touched by crime would be more emotionally engaging. Yet, it was not the story of a particular individual's murder but rather the thematic story that generated the greatest emotional response. This result suggests emotion is less likely to be generated by the kind of coverage that dominates local nightly news – episodic stories dealing with a particular violent crime. Episodic crime

coverage is not, perhaps, as emotionally engaging as those who place it at the top of the newscast might think.³⁵

Furthermore, the emotions generated by this type of story were not necessarily those that some prior research implied should be the result of crime coverage – fear and worry for one’s own personal safety. It is true that when viewers who watched the story of a specific murder said they felt fear or worry, their emotions centered on fears for the personal safety of themselves and their families. Yet these responses were relatively rare; less than 10 percent of participants in episodic frames expressed fear and less than 15 percent expressed worry. The thematic story, by contrast, invoked significantly greater levels of both fear and worry (targeted more broadly than just personal safety). Why might this be? It is possible that this particular pattern of results stems from the specific stories used as treatments in the experiment. By showing a suspect, the episodically framed story suggests that crime can be solved and that the police are pursuing the case. Conversely, the thematic story may lend itself to the interpretation that crime is out of control. The particular story used in my experiment talks not only about the rising murder rate in Prince George’s County, but also about the large number of unsolved homicides. In providing greater context, in emphasizing the causes of crime, and in focusing on what can be done, the thematic story ultimately ends up showing how difficult it is to address the problem. This distinction might explain greater levels of fear and worry on the part of those exposed to the thematic coverage. In this frame crime is not seen as being “controlled.” It is also possible that this result is related to the fact that the thematic story emphasizes black violence.

This experiment does not suggest that the presence of a black perpetrator produces a significantly different effect on emotional response given a particular set of facts about a crime. Priming participants with a black mug shot within the episodic frame did not enhance the

expression of either anxiety (fear and worry) or aversion (anger and disgust) relative to showing a white mug shot or no mug shot. This result would seem to run counter to the results obtained by Gilliam and Iyengar (2000).³⁶ Again, it is hard to know if this result can be attributed to the particular crime story I chose to use as my treatment or to something about the population of participants. The thematic condition, which highlights black violence, invoked much greater levels of fear and worry. This could be because of its thematic nature or could be an effect of the visuals implying “black crime” is the focus of the story. Because of this, I treat this conclusion as tentative and advocate more study.

My content analysis showed that less information was provided about victims than perpetrators in crime coverage. The episodic story used in the experiment did not provide information on the race of the victim but provided considerable attention to him. I found that those who were exposed to this story expressed sympathy for the victim and his family and friends. I did not test the effects of the portrayal of the race of the victim and have no measure of what participants assume his race to be. It could be that the effects on emotional response vary more with the race of the victim than the race of the perpetrator. An important next step will be to assess how varying the race of the victim influences emotional response to crime news.

Overall, the results of the experiment suggest that those who are critical of local news coverage for its constant attention to violent crimes may exaggerate the extent to which it promotes fear. However, this particular emotional reaction to crime is consequential. Those who watched episodic news stories and expressed fear or worry were significantly more likely to support punitive crime policy.

There are, of course, a number of limitations in generalizing from this experimental study. My use of actual news stories drawn from the content analysis lends realism to the

experiment. However, this also makes it difficult to isolate the specific elements that result in differences between the episodic and thematic coverage. My use of a student sample also makes generalizing from this study difficult. In this case, the student sample was both more liberal and less racially resentful than the general population. Since predispositions matter in determining emotional reactions (Gross & D'Ambrosio 2004), further work with more diverse samples is needed to show how emotional response is contingent on both the nature of the frame and the specific individuals portrayed in crime news. It is hard to know precisely how my use of a student sample affected the results. As noted, students have a very different demographic profile than the general population. Students are also less familiar with the region, so prior information about different communities may play less of a role in determining their views, leaving them more susceptible to crime news. On the other hand, students may also be less susceptible to effects of crime news because they do not see such information as relevant to their lives since they are not long-term residents of the area. Nonetheless, I believe the results presented here – which suggest emotional response does vary with the nature of crime coverage and that emotional response is associated with opinion on crime policy – show that further research is warranted and that examination of the effects of crime on emotion is valuable.

I find that coverage of crime on the local television news in Washington follows the “crime script” (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000) in which crime is violent and perpetrators – but not necessarily victims – are black. I would follow Kang (2005) and Entman (2005) in raising concerns about the potential effects of such coverage. For whites, this coverage certainly provides considerable information that reinforces links between crime, violence and African-American men. At the same time, it fails to provide much context that would allow citizens to get a better understanding of crime as a problem. Specifically, it fails to show the effects of the

level of crime on the black community both through the lack of thematic coverage and the lack of attention to black victims. In covering crime almost solely through a focus on specific incidents – through episodic coverage – the viewer is left with the impression that crime is mainly caused by the individual choices and actions of violent black men. Such coverage may be missing the opportunity to transmit information that would provide for a more nuanced portrayal.

Of course, it is important to remember that crime coverage is not the only place the local television news transmits information about African-Americans. On every local station in Washington, D.C., there are African-American reporters and anchors and the metro area has many black political leaders and professionals. Local news does provide information that gives a contrasting portrait to crime news, a portrait of success. Because this study focused on only crime news, I cannot assess the relative contribution of this type of coverage versus crime news in what viewers see during the newscast. However, this would again be a place where the prominence of crime news is troubling since it likely results in greater prominence of the more negative portrayal.

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Appendix A

Coding for Content Analysis

All news stories where a story was defined as an individual segment devoted to a particular topic were coded. Weather and sports segments were not coded although news stories about weather or sports would be coded (e.g. a news story on devastation from a Hurricane would be coded). Introductions, teasers and headlines for subsequent stories as well as stories that a “recapped” (stories which were presented in full earlier in the broadcast but are summarized again in a short segment at the end of the broadcast were not coded).

For each story, a trained coder recorded the date, affiliate, whether or not it was the lead story, the length of the story, the type of story (national/international or local). Local stories were defined as any story that is set in Washington, D.C., Maryland, or Virginia (including Baltimore and Richmond). Local stories could also include stories that might be set outside this area, but have a direct impact on the Washington D.C. metropolitan area where that local impact was the focus of the story. For all local stories, we coded whether the story dealt with crime. A story was considered to be about crime if it was primarily about crime (minor mentions of a crime in a story otherwise unrelated to crime were not coded as crime stories). Additional detail was coded for each crime story including: the type of crime (violent crime, nonviolent crime, both or general crime with no specific crime mentioned); the specific crime mentioned and the news frame (Episodic or Thematic). In coding the specific crime, we used the definitions given by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for Part 1 crimes. These are the crimes that agencies must report under the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program: homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. The specific definitions were taken from the 2004 Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/handbook/ucrhandbook04.pdf>). We also recorded other assaults and other crimes. Violent crime is defined as four offenses: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Finally, each crime story was coded for the presence of perpetrators and victims. A perpetrator was anyone that the police or a reporter implied might have committed the crime in the story. This included, but was not limited to, anyone in a crime story who was convicted of the crime, charged with the crime, arrested for the crime, was a suspect in the crime, or is a “person of interest” in the crime. For both perpetrators and victims we recorded whether the person was named, whether there was a visual image of the individual, their gender and their race/ethnicity. When the race/ethnicity was unclear from the visual and verbal account, we coded this variable as unclear. When no indication of the race or gender was available (no visual or verbal cues) then we coded it as unrevealed. Race was not coded from name alone though it could be coded if the news segment verbally identified the race or a visual was provided. Additional detail on the coding is available from the author.

Appendix B

Survey Measures

Emotion. Emotion questions are asked for both the crime story and the District of Columbia schools story. This was done to reduce the attention to the crime story in particular. The experience of emotion is measured using a closed ended question. Those who said yes were then asked an open-ended follow-up question designed to measure the content of emotional response. The questions asked were:³⁷

While watching the story did you feel angry? (response options: yes/no).

If yes, why did you feel this? What was it that made you angry?

Respondents were quite willing to offer explanations for their emotional responses, with some individuals offering more than one reason for an emotional reaction. Moreover, there was considerable overlap in the types of responses offered for a particular emotion by different participants, allowing this data to be reduced to a smaller number of common categories. The author analyzed each of these open ended responses, coding them first into a larger number of categories and then reducing them to the smaller number discussed in the text. In collapsing categories and folding together similar types of responses it is possible for an individual to be coded as giving two responses that ultimately appear in the same category in Table 4 (for example, pity for parents and pity for coworkers). More information on the coding of these open-ended measures is available from the author.

Message Processing. The survey also included a series of questions designed to measure different aspects of message processing. I use a reduced number of questions from a set developed by Wolski and Nabi (2000) to assess four factors related to how respondents perceived they were processing the articles: motivation, ability, depth and bias. Motivation to attend to the message is assessed based on questions about interest and motivation. Ability is assessed based on whether a respondent reported being distracted. Depth is related to how much the respondent felt he or she focused and paid attention to the arguments. Bias is a measure of how objective a respondent felt she could be. Other work has found greater depth of message processing to be positively associated with higher levels of interest, attention and focus.

Specifically, participants were asked “Still thinking about the story on crime, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.” These 8 statements were recoded into four scales. Motivation Questions: This issue is interesting to me; I don’t find this issue very interesting (Pearson Correlation=-.78) Depth Questions: While watching the story, I paid close attention to each point that was made; I concentrated on the arguments in the story (Pearson Correlation=.59). Ability Questions: My mind kept wandering as I watched the story; While watching the story, thoughts about other things kept popping up in my head (Pearson Correlation=.78). Bias Questions: My prior beliefs about the issue prevented me from being objective; I tried to remain impartial as I watched the story (Pearson Correlation=-.21). Motivation, depth and ability scales are correlated (Pearson correlation ranges from .29 to .57), but bias scale is not particularly correlated with the others (-.07 with motivation, -.06 with depth and -.11 with ability). I treat these measures as assessments of respondent’s *perceptions* of their attention to, interest in and objectivity toward the article.

Views on Crime Policy. All participants were asked whether they favored or opposed the death penalty for persons convicted of murder and a law that banned the sale of handguns (response options: strongly favor, favor, neither favor nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose). They were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following potential remedies as a means of reducing violent crime: stricter gun control laws, putting more police on the streets, jobs programs for inner city areas, restrictions on the amount of violence shown on TV and three strikes and you're out legislation which imposes automatic life sentences after three felony convictions (response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree). These response options to these variables were recoded to range from 0-1 where 1 represents the punitive or conservative position on crime policy.

In general, this sample is fairly liberal on crime policy, opposing the death penalty, supporting a ban on handguns and gun control laws, supporting jobs programs and opposing three strikes legislation. For the sample as a whole, death penalty: mean .39, s.d. .31; handgun ban, mean .36, s.d. .31; stricter gun control laws, mean .12, s.d. .27; more police on the street, mean .72, s.d. .21; jobs program, mean .16, s.d. .17; restriction on violence on tv, mean .35, s.d. .27; three strikes legislation, mean .47, s.d. .30.

I create a scale for opinion on punitive crime policy from the questions on support for the death penalty, support for three strikes legislation as a means of reducing crime, support for jobs programs as a means of reducing crime and support for putting more police on the street as a means of reducing crime. To create the scale, I created four dichotomous variables treating those who agreed or agreed strongly with the punitive position on these policies as 1 and all others as 0 (e.g. Those who favor or strongly favor the death penalty were coded as 1, those who strongly agree or agree with putting more police on the streets and three strikes legislation are treated as 1, those who oppose or strongly oppose jobs programs are treated as 1). I then summed across the four questions and divided by 4 to create a scale that ranged from 0 – 1 where 1 represents those who give a punitive response across all four questions.

Predispositions and Demographics. The questionnaire assessed ideology and partisan identification using a traditional seven-item scale (strong republican, weak republican, independent leaning republican, independent, independent leaning democratic, weak democrat, strong democrat). I assess racial resentment using two items from Kinder and Sanders (1996) racial resentment scale. Students were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following: "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class." and "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough: if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites." Support for equality was assessed using the six-item American National Election Study scale. Support for limited government was assessed using the three-item American National Election Study scale. I include questions asking how important participants think "personal characteristics" and "characteristics of the situation" are as causes of crime. Finally, I ask a series of demographic variables (age, gender, year in school, race).

Table 1. Comparing Crime in the Local Television News with Washington D.C. Crime Rates

	Crime on Television News	Crime in Washington D.C.
Violent Crime	75% of Local News Crime Stories (N=178)	21% of Major Crimes (N=6245)
Homicide	46% of Local News Crime Stories (N=178)	Less than 1% of Major Crimes (N=6245)
	60% of Local News Crime Stories focused on Violent Crime (N=134)	3% of Violent Crimes (N=1350)

Note. Major crimes are those reported by the Washington Metropolitan Police Department (homicide, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault, burglary, theft, vehicle theft and arson). Violent crime is defined as the first four categories.

Source. NBC local television news for Washington D.C., May-June 2005. Washington Metropolitan Police Department Crime statistics are the source of the crime in Washington figures.

Table 2. The Portrayal of Perpetrators and Victims by Race, Gender and Type of Crime

	Perpetrators		Victims	
	Violent Crime	Non-violent Crime	Violent Crime	Non-violent Crime
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
White	9%	14%	15%	3%
African-American/Black	32%	29%	10%	7%
Latino	5%	2%	2%	3%
Asian-American/Asian	1%		1%	
Unclear	2%	5%	2%	3%
Unrevealed	51%	50%	72%	83%
	N=140	N=42	N=153	N=29
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	77%	50%	45%	21%
Female	8%	33%	27%	14%
Unrevealed	16%	17%	28%	66%
	N=141	N=42	N=158	N=29

Source: NBC local television news for Washington D.C., May-June 2005.

Table 3. Emotional Response, by frame condition

	Episodic frame no mug shot	Episodic frame black mug shot	Episodic frame white mug shot	Thematic frame
Anger	11%**	16%	14%	26%
Sympathy	70	75	72	60
Worry	14***	13***	11***	39
Hope	9	6	8	14
Disgust	34***	42	52	56
Pity	32	42	43	36
Fear	9**	8***	9**	23
Anger2	3***	12	11**	23
Disgust2	26***	33***	37**	54
N	77	79	79	78

Note. Table entry is the percentage of respondents in a given frame reporting that they felt the particular emotion. Anger2 and Disgust 2 report the results for anger and disgust directed at things other than the way the news covered the story or the particular reporter (e.g. I have treated those who give this kind of explanation for their emotional response as not feeling anger or disgust). The results are similar when I examine emotional response by frame dropping those individuals who were sensitive to the race/crime focus of the story with one exception: the results for anger that includes anger at the newscast, the difference between frames no longer significant in the smaller sample.

Difference of proportions relative to thematic frame, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Table 4. Content of Emotional Response

Reason or Target for Emotion	Proportion Expressing this Reason or Target for a Given Emotion
<i>Sympathy (N=301)</i>	
• Sympathy for Gluckstern, for people who murdered, for victims of violence in general and general references to innocent people dying	18%
• Family, friends and coworkers of those who killed	65%
• The situation, including sympathy for those who live in PG county, those who live in violent areas and cannot move, drugs and guns in the community, the amount of violence in area, for the police	9%
• Sympathy because the murders go unsolved, because it is not clear what happened to Gluckstern	3%
• The way in which the story was covered invoked sympathy	2%
• Other	2%
<i>Pity (N=159)</i>	
• Pity for Gluckstern, for victims of violence in general and general references to innocent people dying	21%
• Family, friends or coworkers of those who killed	59%
• Perpetrator	3%
• The situation, including sympathy for those who live in PG county, those who live in violent areas and cannot move, drugs and guns in the community, the amount of violence in area, for the police	13%
• Sympathy because the murders go unsolved, because it is not clear what happened to Gluckstern	1%
• The way in which the story was covered invoked pity	1%
• Other	2%
<i>Anger (N=59)</i>	
• Expressions of disgust centering on the newscast including the reporter, how the news covered the story, news focusing on one particular murder	27%
• The murderer, people who commit murder, because person killed, innocent people die	31%
• The situation, ongoing violence, levels of violence, little being done to solve the problem	34%
• Racial aspect	3%
• Other	5%

<i>Disgust (N=167)</i>	
• Expressions of disgust centering on the newscast including the reporter, how the news covered the story, focusing on one murder	17%
• The murderer, people who commit murder, because a person was murdered, because innocent people died	52%
• The situation, ongoing violence, drugs and guns, that little was being done to address the situation, that police unable to address the problem	18%
• Disgust at racial aspect	2%
• Manner of death	4%
• Other	7%
<i>Worry (N=69)</i>	
• Expressions of concern for personal safety, notion that crime can happen to anyone, can happen in seemingly “safe” areas	46%
• For people who victims, who could be victims of violence	6%
• Worry about increasing violence, murder rate, guns	14%
• Case not solved, need justice, will be unable to solve these problems	30%
• Other	3%
<i>Fear (N=40)</i>	
• Expressions of concern for personal safety, notion that crime could happen to anyone	73%
• Fear for innocent victims or those who could be victims	5%
• Fear for the city and the situation (increasing violence, guns and drugs plaguing the city)	18%
• Other	5%
<i>Hope (N=30)</i>	
• Hope that murderer would be caught, justice would be served, that had the right suspect in custody	40%
• Hope expressed explicitly with reference to actions of police and other institutions in addressing crime (police making progress on the problem, police chief speech on how to address problems gave hope)	40%
• Hope as a result of efforts of the community to address crime problems	17%
• Other	3%

Note. Table entries are the proportion of respondents giving a particular explanation for their emotional reaction for those who said they felt the specific emotion. Because participants could offer more than one emotional response target, the total N for each emotion is the total number of reasons offered not the number who said they felt that emotion.

Table 5. The Effect of Emotion on Opinion on Crime Policy, By Frame

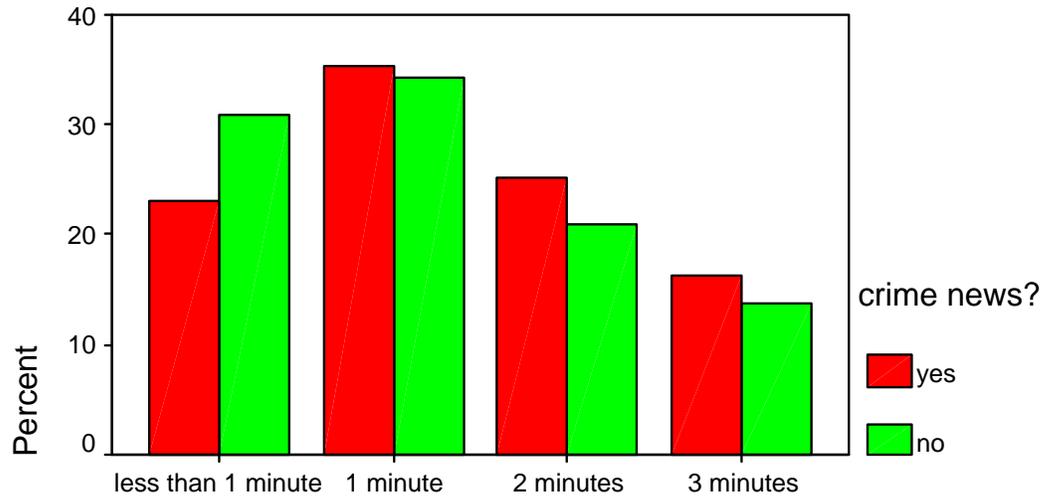
	Episodic Frames	Thematic Frame
<i>Felt Emotion:</i>		
Anger	-.01 (.05)	-.01 (.06)
Sympathy	-.03 (.04)	-.01 (.05)
Worry	.10 (.05)*	-.06 (.06)
Hope	-.02 (.06)	.07 (.09)
Disgust	-.02 (.03)	.05 (.06)
Pity	.03 (.03)	.13 (.06)**
Fear	.11 (.06)*	.02 (.07)
Support for limited government	-.04 (.05)	.06 (.11)
Support for principle of equality	-.01 (.10)	-.31 (.15)**
Personal characteristics important cause of crime	.16 (.07)**	.004 (.13)
Situational characteristics important cause of crime	-.04 (.09)	.21 (.15)
Watch local television news	.21 (.06)***	-.005 (.09)
Read daily newspaper	-.06 (.06)	.08 (.12)
Female	-.002 (.03)	-.01 (.06)
Party Identification (Republican)	.004 (.09)	.04 (.21)
Ideology (Conservative)	.35 (.12)***	.22 (.29)
Constant	.13 (.08)	.37 (.18)
R2	.28	.45
Standard error	.20	.19
N	202	67

Note. Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is punitive crime policy scale based on responses to questions about the death penalty, more policy as a way to reduce violent crime, three strikes legislation and a jobs program as a means to reduce violent crime. It is coded to range from 0-1 where 1 represents those who give the punitive response across all four questions. Party identification and ideology are coded 0-1 where 1 represents the very conservative or strong republican position. Emotion variables are dummy variables indicating whether a participant felt that emotion.

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Figure 1. Local News Story Length

Crime News Versus Other Local Stories

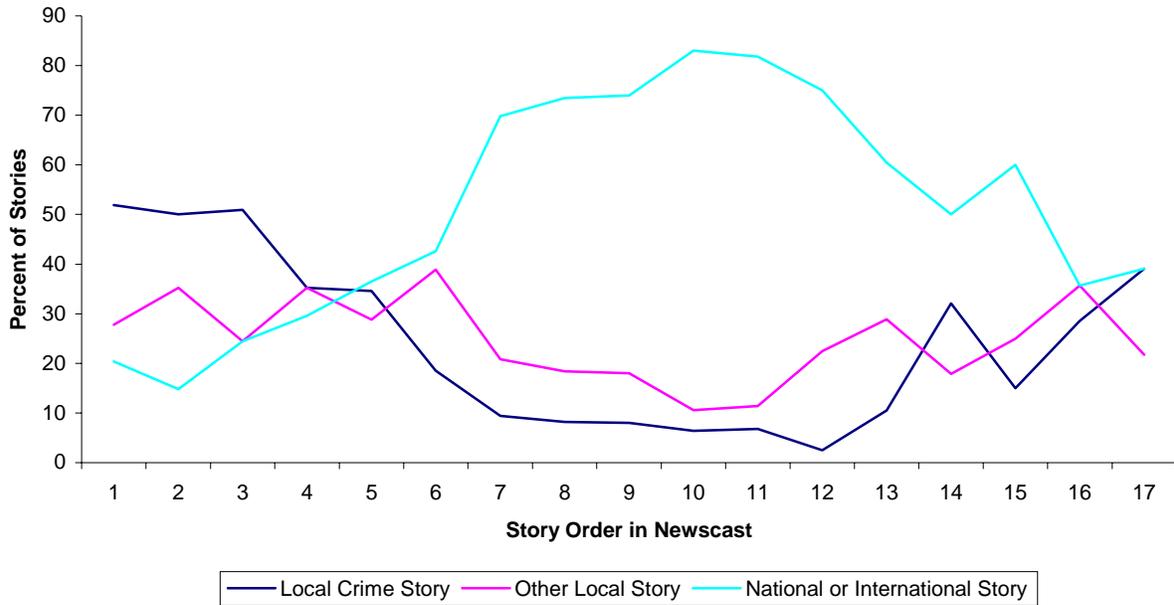


Story Length

Source: NBC local television news for Washington DC, May-June 2005

Crime News N=178, Other Local News N=181

Figure 2. When Local Crime Stories Appear in Newscast



Source: NBC Local Television News, Washington D.C., May-June 2005.

Figure 3. Experimental Design

Episodic Crime Story	Episodic Crime Story	Episodic Crime Story	Thematic Crime Story
Richard Gluckstern murder story with no mug shot of the suspect	Richard Gluckstern murder story with mug shot of the suspect (white suspect)	Richard Gluckstern murder story with mug shot of the suspect (black suspect)	Murder Rate in Prince George's County

¹ The Pew Research Center has been examining media use over the past decade through its Biannual News Consumption Surveys. In 2004, 59% of respondents said they regularly watched local television news. This was the lowest proportion since 1996 but still higher than for any other news source. In general, the trends for local news mirror those for other sources. The Pew surveys show declines in news consumption across traditional news sources. The exception was growth in the audience for online news. Perceptions of favorability and credibility are also down across news outlets compared with a decade ago (credibility more so than favorability). This general decline in credibility may be related to the fact that citizens are more cynical about the press. Citizens question the press's motives, are less supportive of the watchdog role, and are more likely to see the press as biased than they once were (Pew Research Center, 2004; 2005).

² The results are from the Project for Excellence in Journalism's local television news project. The Project for Excellence in Journalism's State of the News Media 2004 provides a summary of the content analysis results across the five years (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). There is no reason to think things have changed. In an analysis of one day of coverage across three cities from 2005, roughly half of the newshole that was not devoted to weather, sports or traffic was devoted to crime and accidents (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). Furthermore, people reported paying more attention to crime news than any other topic except weather (Pew Research Center, 2004).

³ The results are somewhat complicated by the use of different standards for comparison. Three types of comparisons are found in the literature: (1) Comparing the extent to which members of different racial groups are portrayed as perpetrators (e.g. Are there more black perpetrators than white perpetrators?); (2) Comparing the extent to which a given racial group is portrayed in more and less sympathetic roles (e.g. Are there more black perpetrators than black victims?) or (3) Comparing the media portrayal with "reality" through the use of measures like crime reports and arrest statistics. Dixon and Linz (2000a, 200b) undertook all three types of comparisons using a sample of local television news from Los Angeles. They found that both Blacks and Latinos were more likely to appear as lawbreakers than Whites and that both Blacks and Latinos were more likely to appear as perpetrators than as law enforcement officers while the opposite was true for Whites. Using arrest statistics, they found that Blacks were overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime while Whites and Latinos were underrepresented as perpetrators (Dixon & Linz, 2000a). Turning to the examination of the portrayal of victims, they found that Whites were more likely to be portrayed as victims of crime than both Blacks and Latinos; and Blacks and Latinos were both more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than victims. Their comparison of media coverage and crime reports showed that Whites were overrepresented as victims in the news, Latinos were underrepresented and Blacks were neither over nor underrepresented as victims (Dixon & Linz, 2000b). Gilliam et al. (1996) found that blacks were overrepresented in news coverage of those who commit violent crime as measured by arrest statistics. Using a different sample of local news from Los Angeles, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that blacks appear in crime news at rates not much different than the actual black arrest rate for Los Angeles County. Work that engages in these "inter-reality" comparisons suggests that the media portrayal is less distorted than the comparison of black to white perpetrators might imply. However, this is where the overemphasis on violent crime becomes especially troubling. Even if the racial portrayal of crime in a given community on the local television news did not distort the rate at which blacks committed violent crimes in that community, the focus on violent crime distorts the total crime coverage. See Dorfman and Schiraldi (2001) for a review of this literature and a discussion of the findings for other news outlets, also Entman and Rojecki (2000).

⁴ Kang (2005) draws on psychological work on implicit attitudes (see pages 1506-1514 for a description of this work by Mahzarin Banaji, Anthony Greenwald and others) in describing how coverage may be detrimental. Implicit attitudes research shows that whites express some explicit preference for their own group but much greater levels of implicit preference. Even individuals who honestly self report positive attitudes toward individuals in other racial categories may hold implicit negative attitudes toward that group (see also Devine, 1989).

⁵ Subjects were exposed to no crime story (control condition), a murder story with no information identifying the race of the perpetrator, a murder story with a mug shot of a black perpetrator or a murder story with a mug shot of a white perpetrator. The murder story was identical across conditions with the exception of the mug shot. Relative to the control condition, exposure to the black perpetrator significantly increased support for punitive approaches but exposure to a white perpetrator did not. (It is not clear whether support for punitive crime policy is significantly different in the white mug shot condition from the black mug shot condition.) Gilliam and Iyengar also found that all crime stories influenced racial stereotyping (including the white mug shot condition, though the effects were greatest in the no perpetrator condition, then the black perpetrator condition and then the white perpetrator condition). Using data from the Los Angeles County Social Survey, they demonstrate that frequent local news

viewers (who presumably have greater exposure to the crime script) are more punitive. The survey results lend external validity to the experimental results.

⁶ While considerable empirical research has focused on establishing that opinion is susceptible to framing effects, other work has emphasized that citizens are both susceptible to and capable of resisting frames. This work has tried to answer the question of when framing effects should be successful. For example, citizens are less likely to be influenced by frames that are weak (Chong & Druckman, 2005), frames from sources not perceived as credible (Druckman 2001b) and frames which are inconsistent with their political predispositions (Brewer 2001, Gross 2001; Haider-Markel & Josslyn 2001).

⁷ A strong version of the accessibility explanation would hold that citizens use whatever consideration are made accessible by a frame and use them in the way suggested by the frame. Recent studies that show limitations on framing effects (see previous note) challenge the idea that citizens cannot and do not critically evaluate the arguments found in frames. In contrast to earlier research that emphasized the power of framing, this line of inquiry has emphasized how active processing on the part of citizens may limit framing effects. See Druckman (2001) for an overview.

⁸ Other work argues that emotional response precedes cognition (Zajonc, 1980). This work suggests that appraisals occur unconsciously and don't involve higher-level cognition. Subsequent cognition on this view may lead to more differentiated labeling of emotional response, but in doing so this processing may alter the initial affective response. This would suggest that my measures of emotional response, which ask subjects to report their emotional reaction, may not truly assess their emotional reaction. I would argue that how individuals come to explain and understand their emotional reactions may be quite relevant for understanding the effects of emotion on political behavior.

⁹ In the case of crime, Iyengar found that 89% of all network news stories on crime in the period 1981-1986 were episodic in nature (p. 27).

¹⁰ Iyengar also demonstrates in a separate analysis that causal attributions are associated with views on policy in systematic ways. For example, people who attribute causal responsibility for poverty to societal factors are particularly likely to support social welfare spending increases. He does not directly test the effect of these frames on emotion.

¹¹ Anger arises when someone perceives another as having transgressed a rule that functions to regulate social behavior (Oatley, 1992, p.211). Thus we would expect anger (and disgust) toward perpetrators. But it may be the case that the actions of black perpetrators are seen as more intentional. Participants in Iyengar's (1991) experiments were much more likely to provide causal attributions for crime that blame individual when they saw a black violent crime story. Over 60% of the casual attributions were directed at individuals responsibility in the condition where participants watched a story about black violent crime, 30% were directed at individual responsibility in the condition where participants watched a story about white violent crime (p. 43). This result would lead me to expect greater anger and disgust with black perpetrators because they are seen as intentionally violating the norms.

¹² The local Washington NBC affiliate has a one-hour broadcast beginning at 6 o'clock. Only the first half of the NBC broadcast was analyzed since the second half hour repeated many of the same stories and the other networks only had a half-hour newscast at this time. To ensure that the results for NBC were not anomalous, I also analyzed the 6 p.m. newscast of the local ABC affiliate for May only (249 stories). Crime stories in the two daily newspapers serving Washington D.C. (the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times*) were analyzed for two weeks in May 2005 (May 1-7 and 15-21) for comparison with local television coverage. Newspaper stories were retrieved from Factiva using the following search terms: "murder\$ or arson\$ or fire\$ or assault\$ or crime\$ or crimin\$ or arrest\$ or homicid\$ or shooting\$ or kill\$ or rape\$ or robber\$ or burglar\$ or theft\$ or thie\$ or carjacking\$". Coding of the local television news was done by a trained undergraduate, coding of the newspaper coverage was done by a trained graduate student. Due to problems with recording or preemption of the news for other programming, broadcasts were missing for the following dates: May 5, May 7, and June 11 from NBC; May 1, May 8, May 14, May 15, May 24, May 29, May 30 and May 31 from ABC.

¹³ Forty-nine percent of the news stories in the sample dealt with local, as opposed to national or international, issues. Because I was interested in local crime coverage, I did not code national or international stories dealing with crime. Thus, the amount of coverage dealing with any type of crime would be even higher. For example, in the period of analyzed there was a considerable amount of attention given to the Michael Jackson trial (what I would consider a national story dealing with crime).

¹⁴ Analysis of coverage on the local ABC affiliate for May 2005 suggests that the NBC coverage is not unrepresentative of local news coverage in the Washington metropolitan area. Nearly all crime stories on ABC nightly news at 6 p.m. were episodic (95%). Fifty-one percent of the stories were local and 44% dealt with crime; 70% of the local crime news dealt with violent crime and 38% dealt with homicide specifically. The slightly

lessened attention to crime on ABC compared to NBC may be explained by NBC's one hour broadcast in this time slot. The first half hour on NBC (which is coded here) included weather but not sports. This leaves a bit more time for local *news* coverage. In general, crime stories are not as prominent in local newspaper coverage. A smaller proportion of the total available space for coverage is devoted to crime in the daily paper compared with local television news (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). An analysis of two weeks of May 2005 crime coverage in the *Washington Post* and *Washington Times* yielded 263 crime stories of which 200 deal with local crime. When the newspapers covered crime they also focused on violent crime. Seventy-two percent of local crime stories featured violent crime or a mix of violent and non-violent crime. Because the average newspaper article was longer than the average television news report, the newspaper coverage was more likely to include greater depth even in episodic stories. This likely explains the greater number of articles that offered a mix of violent and nonviolent coverage in newspapers (51% of stories were about violent crime, 21% featured both violent and non-violent crime compared with 73% violent crime and 2% mixing violent and non violent crime in television news coverage).

¹⁵ The Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department provides monthly preliminary statistics that allow for a comparison between the crimes that occurred and the crimes reported in the news during this period. The preliminary crime data for the District of Columbia for May and June 2005 were available online from the Metropolitan Police Department and were downloaded April 27, 2006. The data are preliminary and do not represent the official statistics submitted to the FBI under the Uniform Crime Reporting program. Data are available at <http://mpdc.dc.gov/mpdc/cwp/view,a.1239,q.557252.asp> for May and <http://mpdc.dc.gov/mpdc/cwp/view,a.1239,q.557448.asp> for June. I was unable to obtain crime data for May/June 2005 from all the jurisdictions that might be considered part of the reporting and viewing areas covered by the local news (for some data was available by month, for some by year or part of the year for 2005, for some it was not yet available for 2005). For both Montgomery County and Prince George's County, the only other jurisdictions for which I have monthly statistics, violent crime was an even smaller proportion of reported crimes than in the District and murder was only 1-2% of the violent crimes that occur.

¹⁶ The District of Columbia and Prince George's County had the highest violent crime rates in the metropolitan area in 2004 according to statistics available from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. I examined the violent crime rate per 100,000 individuals for the various reporting agencies in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area for 2004 and in none does the violent crime rate exceed that of the District. (Data available at: <http://bjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/Search/Crime/Local/LocalCrime.cfm>, Bureau of Justice Statistics – Data Online, accessed May 9, 2006)

¹⁷ There were 24 crime stories that were partially cut off. For these stories, the coder was able to determine the type of crime (violent or non-violent) but did not have the full story so did not code for the presence of perpetrators and victims.

¹⁸ This is true for both perpetrators and victims. If an interview was conducted with parents, this information was used to code race. However, names and descriptions of a location of a crime, visuals that showed neighborhood or interviews with friends would not be used to determine race. Our coding thus likely underestimates the extent to which viewers may themselves be inferring the race of individuals involved in crime stories.

¹⁹ Nationally, in 2004 Whites, including white Hispanics, represented 60.5 % of the total arrests for violent crime and Blacks represented 37.2% of the total arrests for violent crime. Looking only at homicide, Whites account for 49.4% of the total arrests and Blacks account for 47.7% of the total arrests (2004, "Crime in the United States" http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04/persons_arrested/table_38-43.html). The Washington metropolitan area has a higher percentage of African-Americans than the nation as a whole and the District itself has a fairly high crime rate. Yet, the news covers the entire metropolitan area and the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Statistical Area has a violent crime rate similar to that for the nation as a whole. Taking account of the fact that television news coverage focuses so heavily on homicide helps to account (to some degree) for the nature of the television portrayal. In the city of Washington DC, 94% of the known homicide offenders between 2001 and 2004 were black (Metropolitan Police Department, "A Report on Homicide in the District of Columbia").

²⁰ Again I do not have data on victimization by race for the metropolitan area. The National Criminal Victimization Survey is the best source for information on victimization from crimes other than homicide. Results from 2003 (Catalano, 2005) suggest that men are more likely to be victims of violent crime than women (25 violent crimes per 1000 individuals compared with 18 per 1000 individuals). Whites are less likely to be victims of violent crime than blacks (21 violent crimes per 1000 individuals versus 26 violent crimes per 1000 individuals). The most recent data examining the race of homicide victims reported by the Washington Metropolitan Police Department is from 1997 and shows that 92% of victims were black and 5% were white. Across five suburban counties (Montgomery, Prince

George's, Ann Arundel, Fairfax and Prince William) in 2003, 69% of homicide victims were black. These numbers would suggest that the television portrayal underrepresents black murder victims by quite a bit. Nationally, most murder victims are male (78% in 2003), about half are black and half are white (Catalano, 2005).

²¹ The results for ABC news are similar with one exception: ABC was less likely to provide information on gender and race of both victims and perpetrators of non-violent crime. Local newspaper coverage provided a starker contrast although one must be careful in drawing any conclusions since the newspaper coverage was limited to two weeks. Fewer of the newspaper crime stories mentioned a victim or perpetrator (64% mentioned a victim compared with 78% of the television crime stories; 57% mentioned a perpetrator compared with 73% of television crime stories). The papers were more likely to name both the perpetrators and the victims that were mentioned but less likely to identify the race of the victims. Also, the newspapers were much less likely to feature black perpetrators (4% of perpetrators in newspaper coverage of violent crime were identified as black compared with 32% of the perpetrators in the television news coverage). By contrast, the newspaper coverage was more likely to feature Latino perpetrators (29% of perpetrators in newspaper coverage of violent crime were identified as Latino compared with 5% of perpetrators in television coverage.) This discrepancy was due to coverage of the trial of four members of a Latino gang for the murder of an informant who was working with police in early May. The stories about this particular case were often accompanied by information that identified relatives of the accused by their country of origin or that were explicit about this being a Latino gang. Because the sample was only two weeks of print coverage, this case was overrepresented in the sample. In general, newspaper stories are not likely to identify the race or ethnicity of the individuals featured in crime stories and photos do not often accompany crime stories. Thus, newspaper coverage does not provide explicit (or even implicit) racial information to the same degree as television, a medium that depends on visuals. Of course, newspaper coverage can also transmit racial information implicitly by providing a location for a crime or a name that is associated with a particular race or ethnicity. We did not code these implicit references.

²² The study was conducted in classes and with small groups of students so a class or group was randomly assigned to a treatment.

²³ Participants were told this was a study of how local television news covers local issues. The first story looked back at Watergate and the last story dealt with reforming the District's public schools. The stories were edited together to create the nine-minute segment. None of the study participants expressed any concern that the news coverage was altered in any way or that this was not an actual segment from the local television news. I selected crime stories that are representative of thematic and episodic coverage that appeared in the content analysis and that dealt with violent crime. The episodic crime stories were two minutes and 30 seconds long; the thematic story was two minutes and 50 seconds long.

²⁴ In other words I primed individuals with a picture of a black suspect or a white suspect, or they received no visual prime about the race of the suspect. Other than this variation, the episodic stories were identical. I have no direct measure of what participants assumed the race of the victim to be in the episodic stories or what they assumed the race of the perpetrator to be in the no mug shot condition. The thematic story dealt with the rising murder rate in Prince George's County, a majority black suburban county. Even if student participants did not know this was a majority black county, the visuals associated with this story may have suggested that these crimes involved black perpetrators and black victims (even though no perpetrators or victims were actually shown). Thus, one could interpret the thematic story as a thematic story that primes black crime for the participants. I have no direct measure of whether participants assume that this story deals mainly with black crime though it is likely they do.

²⁵ Thirty-nine students mentioned race, racial matters or a concern with minority issues or thought the study was focused on crime in response to the question "Please tell us what you think is the main purpose of this study". Different numbers of individuals were sensitive to race across the conditions, with those in the two conditions featuring blacks being more sensitive to race/crime as the focus. Five percent of those in the episodic condition with no mug shot mentioned race/crime; 18% of those in the episodic condition with a black mug shot mentioned race/crime; 11% of those in the episodic condition with a white mug shot and 15% of those in the thematic condition mentioned race/crime as a focus of the study. This differential attention to the crime/race aspect in the two conditions that feature "black crime" suggests that race is primed by these stories. By excluding these individuals, I may be excluding respondents who are systematically different in ways that might be relevant for the study so I present the results with the full sample. Excluding these individuals does not change the results presented here, except as noted. The demographics of the sample are not significantly different if one excludes these individuals.

²⁶ This student sample is more democratic, less supportive of limited government, more supportive of equality and less resentful than the general population. In the 2004 American National Election Study, representative national sample, 33% of respondents describe themselves as Democrats, 28% described themselves as Republicans and 39%

described themselves as Independents (30% of Independents lean Republican and 43% lean Democratic). The student sample is somewhat less supportive of limited government ($p < .10$, t-test on means), significantly more supportive of equality ($p < .01$, t-test on means) and significantly less racially resentful ($p < .01$, t-test on means) than participants in the 2004 ANES.

²⁷ I checked for differences by frame on a variety of background characteristics by looking for mean differences across the frames. In the full sample, ANOVA for ideology and reading a daily newspaper were significant. (Ideology: $F=2.93$, $p < .05$; Read daily newspaper: $F=3.56$, $p < .05$) The results do not change when I control for these background variables.

²⁸ When I examined mean differences in emotional experience by frame the results were the same: (anger $F=2.41$, $p < .10$; worry $F=8.86$, $p < .01$; disgust $F=3.25$, $p < .05$; fear $F=4.02$, $p < .01$; anger excluding anger at news coverage $F=5.23$, $p < .01$; disgust excluding disgust at news coverage $F=4.77$, $p < .01$). When I predicted emotional response from frame condition and a variety of predispositions that might affect emotional experience (gender, racial resentment, ideology, partisan identification, support for equality, media use and race) using a series of probit equations the results were again similar. Those in the episodic frames were significantly less likely to experience anger, worry, disgust, and fear. This series of probit runs reinforces the notion that frames independently influence emotional response.

²⁹ Those who viewed the white mug shot expressed greater levels of disgust than those who saw no mug shot. Those who viewed a visual of the perpetrator (black or white) were more likely to express anger than those who did not see the perpetrator (the difference on anger is significant when you drop those who express anger at the reporter or at how the news covered the event (See Anger 2 in Table 2).

³⁰ There were no significant differences in the types of responses offered across the three episodic conditions with one exception. Participants in the episodic condition who saw no mug shot were significantly more likely say they felt anger at the way the news covered the story or the manner of the reporter in the story (75% of anger responses compared with 25% and 18% in the other episodic frames). In the episodic frames where a mug shot is shown, participants are more likely to express anger over murder itself (people who commit murder, that people are killed etc.). The mug shot was cut in when the reporter was identifying the perpetrator as a person of interest so those in this condition see less of the reporter in addition to having an opportunity to see the mug shot. This may account for the difference in anger responses directed at the story reporter. Because there was little difference across episodic frames, I collapsed across these three conditions. I then compared the distribution of the first open-ended responses between those in the episodic and thematic conditions. The Pearson chi-square was significant in the cases of pity ($X^2=73.52$, $p < .01$), sympathy ($X^2=128.19$, $p < .01$), anger ($X^2=26.13$, $p < .01$), disgust ($X^2=62.74$, $p < .01$) and fear ($X^2=15.08$, $p < .01$). In each case the distribution of reasons offered for a particular emotion varied between the thematic and the pooled episodic frames.

³¹ In the thematic condition, 52% of disgust responses were directed at the broader situation and 40% were directed at murder and people who commit murder. Anger centers even more on the situation (83% of the responses). Across episodic frames, these responses were more narrowly directed at murder and those who commit murder (85% of disgust and 70% of anger responses).

³² Those who viewed the episodic story with a black mug shot reported greater interest than the other episodic frames (though less than in the thematic condition). They reported similar levels of distraction (ability) to those who viewed the thematic story. This pattern of results would suggest that the priming of race has something to do with how much participants feel like they were attentive. It is interesting that higher levels of attentiveness accompany both conditions that prime race even though the episodic black frame condition did not generate different expressions of emotional response. One possibility is that my measures of emotional response do not fully capture some differences in response to the visual prime of the perpetrator. My measure requires participants' conscious assessment of whether they felt a specific emotion and their explanation for it. It may be that in prompting greater attention than the other episodic frames, the black mug shot condition also leads participants in this sample (who tend to score low on racial resentment) to engage in active processing that might suppress any initial negative emotional response. It would be interesting to run a similar experiment using measures such as galvanic skin response that might detect physiological anxiety responses.

³³ I do not find direct effects of these different frames on crime policy views. Those who saw the different versions of the crime story did not differ significantly in their views on a variety of crime policies (death penalty, gun restrictions, putting more police on the street, jobs programs, three strikes legislation, crime policy scale). Nor did they differ in the extent to which they reported feeling comfortable walking within a few blocks of their home at night.

³⁴ The episodic frames generated emotions that were not associated with crime and violence more generally but were associated with the particular individuals portrayed in the story. These emotions may be less likely to be associated with opinion on crime policy.

³⁵ On average, thematic stories are longer than episodic stories. The episodic story used in the experiment was a longer piece that involved more interviews so that it would be approximately the same length as the thematic story. Thus, it was potentially more emotionally engaging than a more typical shorter crime report. Even so, participants found it less emotionally engaging.

³⁶ I found no significant differences across these frames in views on punitive crime policy. Gilliam and Iyengar find increased support for a punitive approach among whites after viewing a black mug shot. However, their effects are relative to a control condition in which subjects do not view a crime story (I have no such control condition) and they have both a larger number of participants and a more diverse sample drawn from the general population. It may be that my experiment does not have enough subjects to reliably distinguish these relatively small effects. Alternatively, it may be that my sample, which is more liberal and less racially resentful than the general population, produces different results. Also, recall that in the content analysis nearly 80% of the race identifiable perpetrators in homicide stories were black so the dominant image, shown over and over, is of black perpetrators. While these experimental results lend themselves to the interpretation that the race of the perpetrator is not a significant factor in emotional reactions to crime news – it should be remembered that this is a single experiment with a single exposure whereas over time and with repeated exposure one might see different effects.

³⁷ Open-ended items measuring emotion are used less than closed-ended items measuring emotion at least partly because of the demands they place on researchers (e.g. the time-consuming reading and coding that must be done to make them useful as data). However, such items allow me to more fully understand emotional reactions by helping me to get a better handle on their meaning. Individuals might report feeling the same emotion but for very different reasons. For example in the case at hand, one might express disgust with the nature of the coverage, with the fact that someone could hurt another human or with the inability to solve the problems facing Prince George's County. Support for very different types of policy could be associated with these different disgust responses.