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MOCK JUROR PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE SHOOTINGS: THE EFFECTS OF VICTIM RACE AND SHOOTING JUSTIFIABILITY

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Recent police shootings of African Americans have led citizens to question police officers' use of force. Thus, it is important to determine whether mock jurors can distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable police shootings—and whether their judgements depend on victim race. Media attention could lead jurors to be more punitive in cases in which an officer shoots an African American (compared to Caucasian) victim. A punitive verdict would reflect society's opposition to such shootings, as suggested by the bandwagon effect. In a 2 (Shooting: Justified/Unjustified) x 2 (Victim's race: African American/ Caucasian) experiment, mock jurors read a trial summary involving a fatal police shooting and indicated verdicts. Unjustifiable shootings resulted in less positive perceptions of the officer and perceptions that the shooting was less justified. When the victim was African American, participants had more positive perceptions of the victim, were more certain in a guilty verdict, and perceived the shooting as less justified. The interaction indicated that victim race affected verdicts, but only when the shooting was unjustified. Results suggest there is bias against officers who unjustifiably shoot African Americans, supporting the bandwagon effect. Implications for the role of media effects, psychology, and the legal system are discussed.

Keywords: jury decision making, police use of force, victim race, public opinion, bandwagon effect

Recent high profile police shootings have led many Americans to question what constitutes justifiable police use of force and what role a victim's race plays in these encounters. Protests have occurred across the country in response to what is perceived as Caucasian police officers using unjustifiable force resulting in the deaths of African Americans; such protests commonly use the slogan "Black Lives Matter." Further fueling this unrest is the rarity with which officers involved in these incidents are charged or indicted.

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A long line of research indicates that victim race influences jurors, typically finding that defendants accused of harming minorities are treated more leniently than those accused of harming Caucasians (Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Lynch & Haney, 2011). In light of recent events, however, police officers might instead receive harsher treatment for killing African Americans (as opposed to Caucasians). The nature of police shootings further complicates juror decision making, as these cases involve complex police policies delineating whether or not force is justified. Thus, the current study evaluates how mock jurors' verdicts might be affected by two factors, 1) the justifiability of a police shooting and 2) the race of the victim who is shot. This study contributes to the jury decision making and victim race literature through examining the impact of victim race in police shootings. The findings also have practical implications for the justice system.

POLICE PRACTICES AND CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS

Police use of force is legally justifiable and necessary in some instances for officers to protect themselves and others. However, increased public scrutiny highlights the need to understand how juries evaluate these cases, especially in relation to the role of victim race. African Americans are more likely to self-report police using force against them than other racial/ethnic groups (Hickman, Piquero, & Garner, 2008). Scholars using administrative data also find police are more likely to use force against minorities, even controlling for situational and neighborhood context (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Other research finds that suspect behavior (not race) is the strongest predictor of police use of force (Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003). Though researchers have evaluated the role of race in use of force incidents, it is challenging to disentangle the complex factors leading to police use of force and attribute outcomes to race (of the officer or suspect) specifically. For instance, shootings in Philadelphia between 1970 and 1978 were more likely to involve both minority officers and minority suspects, which could be due to minority officers being assigned to patrol minority neighborhoods (White, 2002). Other research found Caucasian officers to be more likely to use force than minority officers (Paoline, Gau, & Terrill, 2018); however, minority officers made fewer arrests, which could reduce their likelihood of using force (Brandl & Stroshine, 2012).

It is further likely that citizens (and jurors) do not fully understand police procedure (or the law more broadly), which could make decision making in these cases challenging. Policing as a profession is often misunderstood, in part because officers do not discuss the difficulties and dangers associated with their jobs with citizens (Engel & Smith, 2009). People who believe Caucasian officers are racist often argue that police are too quick to use force; conversely, some might have inflated perceptions of the dangers officers face (Harmon, 2008). This is problematic, as jurors who might have never spoken with an officer about the nature of policework could have misconceptions about the situations that warrant force. This could render them ill-equipped to address these cases as jurors, as there are often complex legal and occupational issues at work (see Terrill & Paoline, 2010).

Prior research evaluating jury decision making in relation to police practices has generally found that jurors are more concerned with the guilt of the suspect than the ac-

tions of the officer. Mock jurors in a case involving police coercion during an interrogation were less concerned about the questionable practices used by the police than the believability of the confession (Woody, Forrest, & Yendra, 2014). Similarly, mock juror verdicts in a case involving entrapment in an online sex sting trial indicated that jurors were more likely to convict than acquit defendants, though this finding was less strong if the police initiated contact—a questionable practice (Peters, Lampinen, & Malesky, 2013). Though these studies did not evaluate police use of force specifically, their findings do suggest that jurors tend to side with police officers, even in cases involving questionable police practices. However, this tendency might not occur in cases involving police shootings due to the media attention given to these cases.

RACE, JURIES, AND THE POLICE

A large body of literature has addressed how victim race relates to jury verdicts and sentencing outcomes. Generally, jurors in cases involving a Caucasian killing an African American are less punitive than jurors in a trial with any other racial combination (Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Lynch & Haney, 2011; Williams & Holcomb, 2001). For example, defendants in capital cases involving African American victims were less likely to receive the death penalty than defendants in cases with victims from other demographic backgrounds (Lynch & Haney, 2011). Other research has found that defendants in cases involving African American victims are less likely to be convicted on the most serious indictment charge (Baumer, Messner, & Felson, 2000), again suggesting leniency for those who kill African Americans.

Race also influences how defendants and victims are perceived: jurors generally perceive Caucasian defendants more positively than African American defendants, and this positive perception is related to increased likelihood of a not guilty verdict (Rector, Bagby, & Nicholson, 1993). Similarly, more positive perceptions of victims are related to a greater likelihood of a guilty verdict (Rector et al., 1993). Given these findings, it is important to assess how victim race relates to both perceptions of the defendant, the victim, and the final verdict.

Although past research suggests that jurors are likely to be less punitive when the victim is African American (as opposed to Caucasian), this might not be the case for jurors in police shooting trials due to recent highly publicized police shootings involving African Americans. Thus, mock jurors might be more punitive toward Caucasian police officers in cases involving African American (as opposed to Caucasian) victims as a result of increased awareness of unjustified police use of force, or a sense of frustration with the sheer number of these cases that have been recently publicized. For instance, a national study indicated that respondents who reported high exposure to media accounts of police misconduct were more likely to believe that police use of excessive force was prevalent (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006).

Evaluations of citizen perceptions of police use of force have found that Caucasians support police use of force against Caucasian and African American victims equally;

though African Americans are more supportive of force used against Caucasian victims than African American victims (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). There is currently a gap in the literature relating to how publicity impacts jurors' opinions about police use of lethal force. Thus, we expect findings that diverge from Johnson and Kuhns (2009) in the current study, as we anticipate all jurors to be more punitive toward officers accused of shooting African American victims based on the role of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, which was not present at the time of the Johnson and Kuhns (2009) study.

THE BANDWAGON EFFECT

The bandwagon effect posits that strongly held *public or peer* attitudes toward a particular topic result in more strongly held *individual* attitudes (Myers, Wojcicki, & Aardema, 1977). Due to high levels of media attention given to police shootings involving African American victims and the subsequent "Black Lives Matter" movement, it is likely that the bandgwagon effect could impact jury decision making in cases involving police shootings. Specifically, this effect could lead to a belief among jurors that they need to punish Caucasian police offficers for shooting African American victims—perhaps even regardless of whether the shooting was justified—due to their peers' support for holding the police accountable in these cases. Thus, we predict that jurors will be able to distinguish between justified and unjustified police shootings involving Caucasian victims, but not in shootings involving African American victims. We hypothesize that their ability to distinguish between cases will be clouded by their desire to punish officers for shooting African Americans, resulting in a higher level of convictions in all police shootings of African American victims.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

The purposes of this study were 1) to determine whether mock jurors can distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable police shootings and 2) to evaluate how victim race impacts this process. This study operationalizes a justifiable shooting as one in response to a clear and present threat of danger posed by a victim (i.e., the victim was armed and threatening the lives of others when the officer shot him). In the unjustified condition, the officer could not be sure the victim was a threat. The officer's race was Caucasian and the victim's race was either African American or Caucasian.

Jurors in cases involving Caucasian victims typically are more punitive than those in cases involving African American victims (Lynch & Haney, 2011). However, based on media coverage of police shootings of African American victims and the bandwagon effect, we expect the opposite outcome: mock jurors will be more punitive toward officers who shoot African American (compared to Caucasian) victims. Additionally, the ability to distinguish between justified and unjustified shootings will be stronger (or only occur) in the Caucasian victim condition (likely because mock jurors want to punish the Caucasian officer for shooting an African American—regardless of the justification).

Given evidence that perceptions of defendants and victims are related to mock jurors' verdicts (see, e.g., Rector et al., 1993), we also expected these perceptions to mediate the effects described above. In other words, we expect that the effects of victim race and justifiability of the shooting will affect perceptions of the defendant and the victim, which will in turn affect mock jurors' verdict certainty.

Verdict Certainty Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There will be an interaction between the justification manipulation and victim race manipulation on participants' verdict certainty. In the Caucasian victim conditions, participants will be more certain in a guilty verdict in conditions in which the shooting was unjustified compared to conditions in which the shooting was justified. In the African American victim condition, jurors will be unable to differentiate between justified and unjustified conditions.

Perceptions of the Shooting Hypotheses

Hypothesis 2a: There will be a main effect of justification manipulation on participants' perception of the shooting, such that participants will perceive the shooting to be more justifiable in the justified conditions, compared to conditions in which the shooting was unjustified.

Hypothesis 2b: There will be an interaction between justification manipulation and victim race on participants' perceptions of the shooting. The main effect for the justification manipulation will only occur in the Caucasian victim condition. In the African American victim condition, jurors will be unable to differentiate between the justified and unjustified conditions.

Perceptions of the Police Officer Hypothesis

Hypothesis 3: There will be an interaction effect of justification manipulation and victim race on participants' perceptions of the defendant, such that, participants will perceive the defendant most negatively in conditions in which the shooting was unjustified and the victim was African American, and most positively in conditions in which the shooting was justified and the victim was Caucasian. Participants' scores on perceptions of the defendant in the remaining conditions will fall between these two extremes.

Perceptions of the Victim Hypothesis

Hypothesis 4: There will be an interaction between justification manipulation and victim race on participants' perceptions of the victim, such that participants will perceive the victim most positively in conditions in which the shooting was unjustified and the victim was African American, and most negatively in conditions in which the shooting was justified and the victim was Caucasian. Participants' scores on perceptions of the victim in the remaining conditions will fall between these two extremes.

Mediation Hypothesis

Hypothesis 5: The effect of the predictor variables (justification manipulation and victim race) on the outcome variable (verdict certainty) will be mediated by perceptions of the defendant and the victim.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants (M_{age}=21.94; range=18-75) were 175 jury eligible (i.e., U.S. citizens, eighteen years or older) undergraduate and graduate students in a western U.S. university who received course credit. The sample had slightly more male participants (50.9%) and was predominantly Caucasian (72.6%), Hispanic (17.1%) and African American (4%). Five participants who failed the manipulation check question were excluded from the analyses.

Procedure

The survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey.com. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four possible conditions based on a 2 (Shooting: Justified/Unjustified) x 2 (Victim's race: African American/Caucasian) factorial design. Participants served as mock jurors on a trial in which a police officer was charged with second-degree murder of a victim. Participants read case facts (approximately 500 words), and then indicated their verdict certainty and their perceptions of the police officer, victim, and the shooting. Afterwards, participants completed a manipulation check question and provided demographic information.

Materials

Supreme Court rulings on clear and present danger standards (*Scott v. Harris*, 2007) were used as a guideline for the justifiability manipulation in the police shooting scenarios. We created one justified and one unjustified scenario which were then discussed with police officers from multiple agencies. Officers indicated that they could distinguish between the justified and unjustified shooting scenarios. Further pilot-testing (in which both the police officer and victim were Caucasian) indicated that community participants were also able to distinguish between the justified and unjustified scenarios.

In both scenarios, a police officer responded to a sighting of a potential kidnapper and missing child. Participants viewed pictures of the officer (a Caucasian male) and the victim (either a Caucasian or African American male) as a manipulation of the victim's race (pictures obtained from Minear & Park, 2004). In the justified shooting scenario, the officer testified that the victim was agitated, pulled a weapon on the child, and ignored several verbal commands by the officer to put the weapon down. In the unjustified scenario, the officer testified that the victim was calm, the officer could not be sure that the victim was holding a weapon, and the officer did not issue any verbal warnings before shooting the victim. Case facts also described the victim as either "Black" or "White" depending on the race condition. Participants read closing arguments by prosecution and defense attorneys and judicial instructions adopted from the state of Florida (Florida Supreme Court, 2014).

Participants indicated their verdict certainty using a six-point Likert item (1 = Very Certain, Not Guilty; 6 = Very Certain, Guilty). Participants rated their perceptions of the officer and the victim using three 6-point Likert items measuring the officer/victims' likeability, honesty, and credibility (1 = Very Unlikeable/Dishonest/Not Very Credible; 6 = Very Likeable/Honest/Credible). Due to the high reliability of the three items measuring participants' perceptions of the police officer and the three items measuring perceptions

of the victim (α = .86 and α = .85, respectively), participants' answers were averaged into overall scores for perceptions of the police officer and of the victim. Next, participants indicated their perceptions of the shooting using one 6-point Likert item (1 = Very Unjustified; 6 = Very Justified). After these questions, participants completed a manipulation check question asking about the case facts with four possible answers (A White/Black police officer shot a White/Black man; A White/Black man shot a White/Black police officer). Participants then provided their age, gender, and race.

RESULTS

Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 were evaluated using OLS regression models. For all models, the predictor variables were the justification condition (dummy coded 1 = justified; 0 = unjustified shooting condition), and the victim race condition (dummy coded 1 = African American; 0 = Caucasian victim), and the interaction term between these variables. [1] The outcome variables were mock jurors' verdict certainty (Hypothesis 1), perceptions of the shooting (Hypothesis 2), perceptions of the defendant (Hypothesis 3) and perceptions of the victim (Hypothesis 4). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics on these variables.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for the four outcome variables used in the study.*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Verdict certainty	2.46	1.32	1	6
Perception of shooting	4.15	1.30	1	6
Perception of defendant	4.32	0.88	1	6
Perception of victim	2.84	0.93	1	5

Note: All variables were scored using 6-point Likert scales (6=Very Certain, Guilty; Very Justified; Very Likeable/Honest/Credible

Hypothesis 5 was evaluated using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). In this model, the predictor variables were the justification condition, the victim race condition, and their interaction term. The mediator variables were participants' scores on perceptions of the police officer and perceptions of the victim scales. The outcome variable was participants' verdict certainty score.

Verdict Certainty

The overall regression model was significant, R^2 = .16, $F(3,158)$ = 9.94, $p < .001$. The interaction effect between justification condition and victim race condition was significant, $b(SE)$ = -0.86(0.33), $t(158)$ = -2.63, p = .01. This partially supported Hypothesis 1: simple slope analyses show that when the victim was African American, participants reported higher certainty in a guilty verdict in unjustifiable circumstances, b = -1.09, $p < .001$ compared to justifiable circumstances. However, whether the shooting was justified or unjustified did not affect verdict certainty when the victim was Caucasian, b = -0.23, p = .35 (see Figure 1). Notably, the condition with the highest (i.e., most guilty) verdict

certainty score was the African American/unjustified condition. See Table 2 for all regression coefficients.

Simple slope analyses indicate that the interaction is also significant when interpreted the other way. In the unjustified shooting condition, participants reported higher certainty on a guilty verdict when the victim was African American as compared to Caucasian, $b = .82$, $p = .001$. But, in the justified shooting condition, there were no differences based on race, $b = -0.04$, $p = .86$.
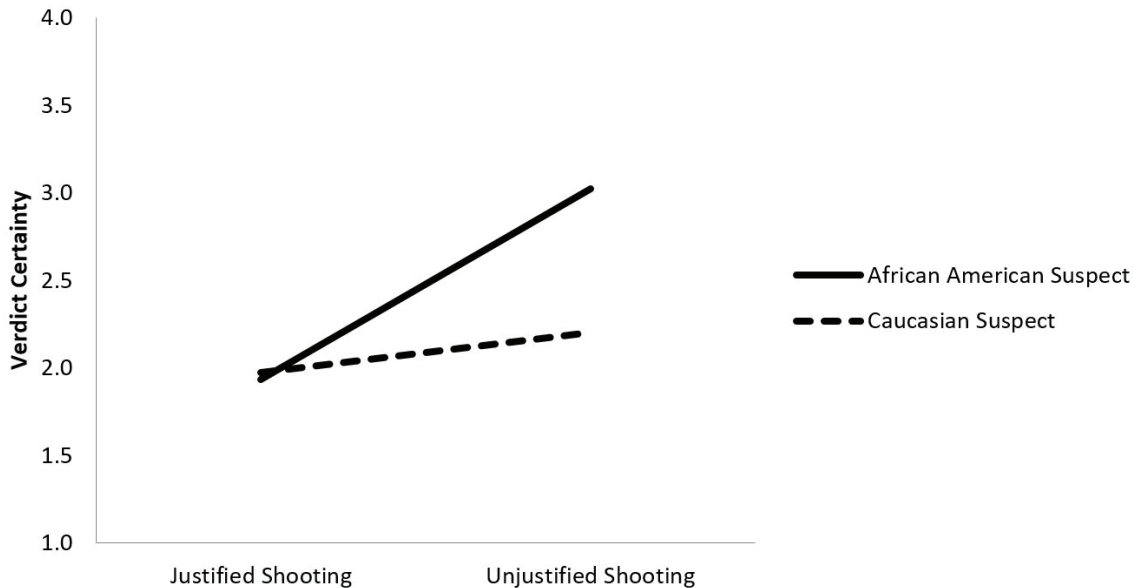

Figure 1. *Mean values for participants' verdict certainty scores based on experimental conditions (Justified vs. Unjustified shooting and African American suspect vs. Caucasian suspect).*

Perception of the Shooting

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .16$, $F(3,156) = 10.00$, $p < .001$. Results supported Hypothesis 2a: participants perceived the shooting as more justifiable in the justified shooting condition compared to the unjustified shooting condition, $b(SE) = 0.68(0.24)$, $t(156) = 2.90$, $p = .004$. Hypothesis 2b, however, was not supported, as the interaction effect between justification condition and victim race condition was not significant, $p = .40$. See Table 2 for all regression coefficients.

Perceptions of the Police Officer

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .07$, $F(3.166) = 4.05$, $p = .008$. Hypothesis 3 was not supported, as the interaction effect between justification condition and victim race condition was not significant, $p = .95$. See Table 2 for all regression coefficients.

Perceptions of the Victim

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .08$, $F(3, 168) = 4.85$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 4 was not supported, as the interaction between justification condition and victim's race was not significant, $p = .45$. See Table 2 for all regression coefficients.

Table 2. *Regression models evaluating influence of justification condition, victim race, and its interaction on verdict certainty, perceptions of shooting, perceptions of defendant, and perceptions of victim.*

	Verdict certainty			Perceptions of shooting		
	b(SE)	t^1	p	b(SE)	t^2	p
Constant	2.20(0.18)	12.53	<.001	4.11(0.17)	24.63	<.001
Justification condition	-0.23(0.24)	-0.93	.352	0.68(0.24)	2.90	.004
Victim race	0.82(0.24)	3.45	.001	-0.53(0.24)	-2.22	.028
Justification * Victim race	-0.86(0.33)	-2.63	.009	0.28(0.33)	0.84	.402
R^2	0.16**			0.16**		
F	9.94**			10.00**		

	Perceptions of defendant			Perceptions of victim		
	b(SE)	t^3	p	b(SE)	t^4	p
Constant	4.29(0.13)	33.85	<.001	2.60(0.14)	18.20	<.001
Justification condition	0.37(0.18)	2.02	.045	-0.05(0.20)	-0.25	.805
Victim race	-0.24(0.18)	-1.36	.177	0.61(0.20)	3.04	.003
Justification * Victim race	0.02(0.25)	0.06	.950	-0.21(0.28)	-0.76	.450
R^2	0.07*			0.08*		
F	4.05*			4.85*		

Note: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$ [1] $df = 158$, [2] $df = 156$, [3] $df = 166$, [4] $df = 169$.

Mediation

For Hypothesis 5, the overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .31$, $F(5,169) = 4.76$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 5, however, was not supported. Participants' perceptions of the police officer did not mediate the effect of justification manipulation or victim race manipulation on participants' verdict certainty, $b(SE) = -0.10(0.12)$, [95%CI = -0.33; 0.12]. Similarly, participants' perceptions of the victim was not a mediator, $b(SE) = -0.03(0.06)$, [95%CI = -0.21; 0.06]. Perceptions of the officer (mediator), however, were related to verdict certainty, $b(SE) = -0.43(0.10)$, $t(169) = -4.51$, $p < .001$, such that more positive perceptions of the defendant were related to greater certainty in a not guilty verdict. Perceptions of the victim (mediator) were also related to verdict certainty, $b(SE) = 0.19(0.09)$, $t(169) = 2.24$, $p = .03$, such that more positive perceptions of the victim were related to greater certainty in a guilty verdict.

DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were 1) to determine whether mock jurors can distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable police shootings and 2) to evaluate the impact of victim race on juror perceptions. Jury decision making errors in these cases could be detrimental if jurors acquit legally guilty officers or convict officers who are legally not guilty because they were justified in their actions.

As a whole, results indicate that the nature of the shooting (justified or unjustified) only affects perceptions of whether the shooting was justified (hypothesis 2a) and perceptions of the officer (hypothesis 3). This differs from prior research finding that jurors cannot distinguish between good and bad police practices (e.g., coerced confessions; Woody et al., 2014), which could be due to the higher stakes involved in police shootings compared to coerced confession cases. The finding that mock jurors' perceptions of justifiability differed between the justified and unjustified scenarios has implications for recent indictment decisions. If this finding carries over to real jurors, it might suggest that perceptions of justifiability would lead to appropriately decided indictments (or lack thereof) of police officers involved in shootings.

Collectively, the results for the main effects of race indicate that there is a bandwagon effect, for most variables. Participants who read about African American victims were more certain in guilty verdicts, saw the shooting as less justified, and had more positive perceptions of the victim. These findings indicate a pro-African American victim bias, consistent with the bandwagon effect. Perhaps the recent media attention has led mock jurors to be more supportive of African American victims who are shot by police. This finding contradicts previous research (Devine & Caughlin, 2014) which found an anti-African American bias; for instance, defendants accused of killing African Americans are treated more leniently than those accused of killing Caucasians (Lynch & Haney, 2011).

The interactions are less supportive of the bandwagon effect than the main effects of the race manipulation. Interpreted one way, we found that race matters—but only when the shooting was unjustified. Interpreted the other way, we found that justification matters—but only when the victim was African American. Both interpretations have important implications. However, the interaction only occurred in one dependent variable (verdict certainty) so the conclusion should be taken with caution.

We anticipated that the bandwagon effect would lead jurors to convict officers charged with shooting African Americans—no matter whether the shooting was justified or unjustified. This effect would reflect an influence of the rhetoric of the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Instead, we found that jurors were not sensitive to justification when the victim is Caucasian; but, when the victim was African American, jurors paid attention to the case facts and properly distinguished between the justification manipulations. These findings are similar to studies testing the race salience effect (i.e., a crime committed *because of race* results in jurors hiding their prejudice, but when race is *not the cause* of the crime, racial prejudice is expressed; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Although not analogous, we find that when race is a salient issue in police shootings (i.e., Caucasian officer

shoots an African American victim), participants pay closer attention to the case facts (perhaps to avoid making a mistake and appearing biased), but when race is not an issue in the shooting, participants do not pay close attention to case facts and are less able to determine whether the shooting was justifiable. Thus, both race salience studies and the current study find that making race a major component of the crime changes jurors' decisions.

The other interpretation of the interaction is that race does affect jurors' verdicts—but only when the shooting was unjustified. Interestingly, the condition in which the officer is most likely to be convicted is the "unjustified shooting/African American victim" condition. This indicates that the shooting triggers a pro-African American bias, but only when a shooting is unjustified. This bias is possibly derived from the media messages and social outcry against such shootings. If so, this would be a prime example of the bandwagon effect.

Other findings relate specifically to the defendant and victim perceptions variables. The race manipulation affected all variables except perceptions of the officer, which might simply be a function of the generic perception measures used (i.e., likeability, honesty, credibility). Perhaps measures tailored more closely to the study such as "is the officer prejudiced" or "does the officer use good judgement" might have found different results. Similarly, the nature of the shooting (i.e., justification) affects perceptions of the officer, but not the victim, which is good news: Perceptions of the victim are not biased by the officer's actions. But, this too might be a function of the measures used. Perhaps if we would have used measures more closely tailored to the study, such as "was the victim dangerous," we might have found effects. These general perceptions were influential, however, as both perceptions of the victim and officer relate to verdicts, and perceptions of the officer relate to perceptions of justification. Thus, general perceptions do play a role in juror decision making.

In terms of the mediating hypotheses, neither perceptions of the officer nor perceptions of the victim mediated the relationship between verdict certainty and shooting justification. This suggests that the manipulated variables (i.e., race, justification) have a direct effect on the outcome variables, independent of participants' perceptions of the defendant and the victim.

In sum, we found some support for the bandwagon effect, which manifested itself in a pro-African American bias—in most circumstances and most variables. Thus, the potential influence of the media on jurors in police shooting cases is more nuanced than anticipated.

Implications
Results of this study have implications for media effects, psychology, and the legal system. First, our findings have implications for how the media and current events can shape perceptions. Participants had more positive perceptions of the victim, thought the shooting was less justifiable, and were more likely to convict the officer when the victim was African American (compared to Caucasian). This runs contrary to prior research finding that jurors were least punitive toward defendants who harm African Americans (Devine

& Caughlin, 2014; Lynch & Haney, 2011). Results could be due to recent media coverage of officer involved shootings of unarmed African American victims, indicating the media might be affecting citizens' perceptions of shootings. Pro-African American bias could be due to participants' perceptions that African Americans are disproportionately targeted by police based on extensive media coverage of the issue of police violence against African Americans. Thus, more research in this area is needed.

The second implication, which is derived from the first, is that the study is a novel expansion of psychological theory. Findings described above indicate a pro-African American bias. Jurors could be reacting to the media coverage of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, which could affect participants' responses. Findings suggest that mock jurors are 'jumping on the bandwagon' and adjusting their perceptions of the shooting and the defendant—and even their verdicts—based on the race of the victim. As such, this study represents an addition to the literature on the bandwagon effect.

Finally, findings have implications for the legal system. As jurors can tell the difference between justified and unjustified police shootings when the victim is African American, they are making the "right" decisions. However, when the victim is Caucasian, jurors cannot tell the difference between justified and unjustified shootings. Thus, to correct for these errors, courts must ensure that jurors pay close attention to case facts regardless of victim race. One potential method for addressing this issue is to educate jurors about proper police practices. The use of jury instructions regarding the entrapment defense, for example, has improved jury decision making (Peters et al., 2013); thus, the use of instructions relating to officer involved shootings could result in fewer jury decision making errors in these cases.

Other legal implications relate to jury selection and case presentation. Perceptions of the police officer and victim relate to participants' verdict certainty, and perceptions of the police officer relate to perceptions of whether shooting was justified. As such, trial consultants should help defense attorneys identify and remove potential jurors who have positive perceptions of African American victims in general or negative perceptions of police officers in general; the opposite would be true for prosecutors. Trial consultants can also help influence jurors' perceptions of the officer and victim through coaching their behavior, speech, and appearance. Though lawyers might already do this, it is particularly important in an officer involved shooting case as these are subject to high levels of publicity and emotion.

A final implication is that judges need to spend time during voir dire to identify jurors who are prone to the bandwagon effect. Perhaps jurors who watch more television or pre-trial publicity are more prone to the pro-African American victim bias effect we found. Thus, an expanded voir dire will help judges identify and exclude such jurors.

Limitations and Future Directions

Using jury eligible university students as participants affects the generalizability of this study, as students might not be representative of 'real' jurors (e.g. Wiener, Krauss, & Lieberman, 2011, but see Bornstein et al., 2016 for a counterpoint). A second limitation is

that the trial was low in verisimilitude; it was not a real trial with a real defendant or real consequences. Though this is generally not a major issue in mock jury studies (Bornstein & McCabe, 2005), future studies should use more realistic materials. A third limitation is that participants did not deliberate. As deliberation can change mock jurors' verdicts (Miller, Maskaly, Green, & Peoples, 2011), future studies should include deliberation.

Another limitation relates to measures that were not taken in the current study. Findings suggest that making race a major part of the crime changes jurors' processing of information and possibly their emotions by triggering memories of these events in the media. However, we did not measure participants' emotions or cognitive processing, which should be done in future studies. Similarly, it is possible that jurors who consume more media are more prone to the pro-African American victim bias effect we found. Future studies should measure participants' media consumption, awareness and beliefs about the "Black Lives Matter" movement, and perceptions of police treatment of African Americans to fully test the bandwagon effect. Further, we cannot be certain that recent media attention is the underlying cause of our findings because we did not have any comparable measures taken prior to these high-profile shootings. Future pretest-posttest studies could determine more specifically if media exposure affects perceptions.

Though we found no differences in outcomes when juror race was dichotomized into White/Non-White groups, we were unable to evaluate any interactions between disaggregated measures of juror race and victim race due to the limited number of African American participants in our study. This is an important shortcoming that should be addressed in future research as prior work has found that satisfaction with the police decreases more substantially for African Americans exposed to media coverage of police misconduct, as compared to Caucasians and Hispanics (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Future research should also consider manipulating the race and/or gender of the police officer, in addition to the race/gender of the victim. These additions would provide further insight on how demographic characteristics impact individuals' perceptions of police shooting cases. Similarly, it is important to examine other types of police force, as verdicts could have differed if non-lethal force had been used. This would enable a comparison to between non-lethal force cases and lethal force cases, which are more widely publicized. Finally, it would be interesting to see if these same effects hold when the defendant is not a police officer. This could enable future projects to disentangle any effects that could be due to the defendants' status as a police officer in these shootings, as compared to 'stand your ground' or other laws in which shootings can be highly contested.

CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that mock jurors express bias in favor of African American victims in police shooting cases. Participants were more certain in a guilty verdict, perceived the shooting incident as less justifiable, and perceived the victim more positively when the victim shot by the police officer was African American (compared to Caucasian). Such findings were predicted by the bandwagon effect, which suggests that

recent media attention to police shootings of African American victims might have influenced participants' perceptions and decisions.

This is one of the few studies to specifically address the impact of officer involved shootings on juror decision making. Due to current media attention and citizen awareness of these issues as a result of high profile police shootings (many of which have not led to officer indictment), it is important to understand how these cases are evaluated by jurors. This study also contributes to literature on the bandwagon effect and suggests that the justifiability of the shooting and race of the victim are both important considerations in juror decision making. Finally, findings suggest practical implications in the realms of media effects, psychology, and the legal system. Future research related to jury decision making in police shootings should be conducted in order to inform legal change aimed toward error reduction in trial outcomes.

ENDNOTES

[1] In an alternative set of analyses, mock jurors' race (dichotomized as White or Non-White) had no effect on the outcome variable, or on the relationships between other predictor variables and the outcome variables. As a result, we did not include mock jurors' race in the reported analyses.

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