



REPORT

A DANGEROUS DISTORTION OF OUR FAMILIES

**REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILIES, BY RACE,
IN NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA**

DECEMBER 2017

**A STUDY BY
DR. TRAVIS L. DIXON**

PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION AND THE
COMMUNICATION ALUMNI PROFESSORIAL SCHOLAR
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

CO-COMMISSIONED BY

FAMILY STORY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT FOR THE STUDY	3
FOREWORD BY RASHAD ROBINSON, COLOR OF CHANGE	4
FOREWORD BY NICOLE RODGERS, FAMILY STORY	9
RECOMMENDATIONS	13
STUDY BACKGROUND & APPROACH	15
SUMMARY FINDINGS	22
DETAILED FINDINGS	25
CONCLUSIONS	50
METHODS	53
APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE AUTHOR, COLOR OF CHANGE & FAMILY STORY	63
APPENDIX B: SEARCH TERMS	68
APPENDIX C: REFERENCES	69

ABSTRACT

THIS STUDY EXAMINED REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILIES, BY RACE, IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA COVERAGE—ON TELEVISION, IN PRINT AND ONLINE.

The study analyzed relevant stories published or aired in the two-year period of January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2016. Specifically, it investigated the extent to which national and local news and opinion media outlets present distorted representations of Black families and engage in inaccurate and racially biased coverage, both in word and image. The study involved a systematic content analysis of a recent two-year sample of cable and network news shows, national and local newspaper articles, and online opinion site content. The findings of the study indicate that news and opinion media do, in fact, perpetuate inaccurate representations of Black families across several different areas of coverage. Overall, the findings show that news and opinion media outlets routinely and inaccurately portray Black families as sources of social *instability* in society and portray white families as sources of social *stability* in society, irrespective of facts to the contrary.

Several more specific key findings support the overall finding. **First**, news and opinion media overwhelmingly portray families living in poverty as being Black families rather than White families, contrary to fact. **Second**, news and opinion media exaggerate the proportion of families receiving welfare who are Black while also wrongly attributing the use of (and need for) government programs to laziness, dependency or dysfunction, contrary to fact. **Third**, news and opinion media incorrectly depict Black fathers as uninvolved or not present in the lives of their children, inaccurately suggesting that Black fathers abandon their children and that Black mothers make bad decisions about family structures and/or relationships. **Fourth**, news and opinion media significantly overrepresent the association between Black families and criminality while significantly underrepresenting White families' association with criminality, distorting the overall picture of crime and those who commit crime.

Across all of these points, the study findings indicate that certain sources (i.e., specific TV networks, TV shows, national newspapers and online news sites) perpetuate these reporting patterns more than others.

FOREWORD BY RASHAD ROBINSON, COLOR OF CHANGE

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS FORM THEIR OPINIONS OF BLACK FAMILIES PREDOMINANTLY BASED ON HOLLYWOOD FILMS AND TELEVISION SHOWS, INCLUDING DEHUMANIZING REALITY PROGRAMMING AND SENSATIONALIZED CRIME REPORTING IN THE NEWS.

The current news media landscape is shaped by news industry decision makers who continue to inaccurately depict Black fathers as absent, Black mothers as bad decision makers and Black families as destabilizing forces in society. As a result of their persistent distortions and inaccuracies, news media are gravely failing to present evenhanded, true-to-life and multidimensional portrayals of what it means to be a family in this country. By doing so, they not only fail those who rely on the news for accurate reporting, but they also fail families by reinforcing unfounded assumptions about them, helping to justify bad federal and state economic policies that will doom American families for generations to come.

From its start, Color Of Change has worked to highlight how local and national news outlets both intentionally and incidentally inject harmful bias into public opinion. We have taken on Fox News, working to force misinformation zealots like Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly off the air, and challenged practices in local television news rooms in New York City, which were found to inaccurately over-associate Black people with crime by 75%.

This latest report contains an important snapshot of the two years of media coverage of Black families

during the last election cycle, across various news outlets on television, in print and online. It is an important canon to reference, as we continue to unpack the various elements and cultural conditions that enabled the election of politicians—from the presidency to governors and others—who exploit racist dog whistle rhetoric masquerading as economic populism.

There is no question that the right wing has exploited the unwritten rules of media reporting and coverage to change the written rules of policy. With widespread and harmful effect, they have done so not only through their own media platforms but also through their influence over purportedly neutral and evenhanded news outlets across the country.

From a historical standpoint, it is no accident that we continue to see a distortion in representations of poverty. These portrayals paint pictures of poor Black families as a drain on the system, while also systematically failing to provide context on the resiliency of these families in the face of the unjust tides they are swimming against. Widening the lens would show that they are floundering mostly because corporate and conservative decision makers put them in harm's way, using them as leverage for profit and politics.

There was once a time where the country felt a duty to end poverty, with President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal reshaping the economy and policy structure of the United States to that end.

(We must remember that welfare was never stigmatized when White people were perceived to be the main beneficiaries of it.) The rhetorical move away from that commitment—in fact, to undermine it—is the direct result of politicians and dark money working together to undo The New Deal and help the rich get richer.

The best way to do that? Misdirecting the blame for poverty to focus on poor people's behaviors,

THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE RIGHT WING HAS EXPLOITED THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF NEWS MEDIA REPORTING TO CHANGE THE WRITTEN RULES OF POLICY. THEY HAVE DONE SO NOT ONLY THROUGH THEIR OWN MEDIA PLATFORMS BUT ALSO THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE OVER PURPORTEDLY NEUTRAL AND EVENHANDED NEWS OUTLETS.

while also “othering” the poor by putting a Black face on them. Taxes to support social safety net structures were not perceived as a drain when White people in rural communities were understood to be their overwhelming recipients. That quickly changed. As advisor to Presidents Reagan and Bush Sr., and eventual Republican National Committee Chairman, Lee Atwater, more bluntly put it:

You start out in 1954 by saying, “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968 you can’t say “nigger”—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states’ rights and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract. Now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.... “We want to cut this” is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than “Nigger, nigger.”

Those ideas have spread far beyond the realm of conservative politics and media alone. They are now thoroughly mainstreamed, as this report demonstrates.

The biggest challenge in social change narrative work continues to be shifting the assumptions undergirding the barriers to the solutions we aim to advance and protect. According to research from Pew, more than half the country believes that “lack of effort,” instead of circumstances beyond one’s control, is to blame for poverty. The lack of effective policies and commitments from the most privileged and wealthiest is not part of the conversation. Infected by this mindset, news media outlets participate in blaming Black and Brown people—the very people harmed most by poverty—for the deeply flawed decision making and structures that cause it. All while those truly responsible for poverty remain invisible.

News media reinforce that thinking through programming built on debunked narratives about Black families. Research shows there are dire consequences for Black people when these outlandish archetypes rule the day: abusive treatment by police, less attention from doctors, harsher sentences

from judges, just to name a few. And the reality is that even for people who consider themselves “progressive,” they’re still trained to see poverty as an “unfortunate condition,” one that can be remedied by cutting a check or contributing a volunteer “day of service.” We must shift our understanding of poverty from that mindset to seeing it for what it is—a manufactured and unjust system built on a failed trickle-down economics framework and painted in White identity politics.

This reports helps lift the veil on how that played out during the 2015-2016 election cycle, which marked a dramatic resurgence of the Lee Atwater style of rhetoric. You will of course see some of the usual suspects in here. During the two plus years that led up to the election, *The O’Reilly Factor* remained one of the most viewed “news” shows on television and pumped out one sensationalistic segment after another, attacking Black families in order to advance its far right-wing agenda and smear Obama-era policies (even though those policies were directly linked to declining crime and imprisonment rates and increasing employment rates and pathways out of poverty). While this year saw the O’Reilly empire crumble—fueled, in part, by relentless pressure levied by groups like our organization, Color Of Change—the removal of O’Reilly from millions of televisions across the country does not significantly change media conditions or topple Fox News as one of the worst pushers of degrading programming.

But you may also see some surprises here. *The New York Times*—which in the aftermath of Trump has endeavored to become the proverbial knight in shining armor, saving the country one Trump exposé at a time—is shown to be a particularly bad actor when it comes to distorting images of Black families. So, too, is *Meet the Press*, which over the course of this period gave a national media platform to Pat Buchanan, who has long tried to pass off White supremacist ideology as legitimate mainstream political commentary. *Meet the Press* also aired a stunningly tone-deaf gun violence segment pushing an explicit “Black on Black” crime frame in the immediate aftermath of the Charleston Massacre, a well-debunked trope.

What this tells us is that, while we certainly cannot exonerate the far right, mainstream media outlets

FOREWORD BY NICOLE RODGERS, FAMILY STORY

NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA SET THE AGENDA FOR WHAT WE KNOW AND INFLUENCE HOW WE MAKE MEANING OF WHAT WE SEE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD AROUND US.

For decades, scholars have documented how racialized and gendered stereotypes reinforced by news media shape our perceptions and, therefore, the decisions we make. The power of the news media to shape what millions of people feel is normal or abnormal is incredibly strong. There are few checks on that power.

As with all media, news media focus a lot of attention on one of the big themes in our lives: family. The dominant metaphor for the nation is family: founding fathers, motherland, Uncle Sam. Families are assumed to be the basic building blocks of society and personal success, and their perceived strength or weakness is a key indicator of our nation's health. Strong families are referred to as "the backbone" of a thriving society. Societal decline is often blamed on the "breakdown" of the family. And, as this report suggests, no one seems to be indicted more unjustly, inaccurately or relentlessly by the "broken family" narrative than members of Black families.

Until now, no research has systematically explored racialized differences in how news and opinion media represent families. Of course, we know intuitively that disparities exist. After all, what's the difference between having a "blended family" (hail! the future of family) and having multiple "baby daddies" (ack! the downfall of society)? It's not just the structure of the family; it's the race of the family. We often measure "good families" in colors.

Imagine how far President Obama would have made it in politics if he fathered children with three different partners like President Trump has. The problem is not that this particular aspect of Trump's family life is problematic, however. It isn't. The problem is that a Black family in a similar situation is judged harshly—demonized for transgressing family norms, and even disciplined for it. White families are seen as trendsetters for creating new family norms (i.e., seen as “redefining norms” rather than violating them), and taking advantage of the opportunities those new norms offer. Black families are maligned and punished for it.

This isn't new. Throughout history, political leaders, power brokers and the media have worked to pathologize Black families in the American imagination in order to justify slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, widespread economic inequity and urban disinvestment—as well as to gain and maintain political and social power. It resulted in the forceful separation and enslavement of Black family members and in the sterilization of Black women. Today, it results in criminalizing Black mothers and a wide range of other systemic injustices.

News and opinion media have played an important role in reinforcing racist myths, thereby laying the groundwork for the political outcomes that follow. Take, for instance, the media's hype of the Moynihan report's specious 1965 warning that Black families were “crumbling” thanks to single mother-led homes and absent fathers. Three decades later, the media's collaboration in the 1996 push for welfare reform effectively maligned social insurance programs for rewarding mythical “welfare queens” for out-of-wedlock births and irresponsible fatherhood. Today, unchecked right-wing commentators blame police violence on mythical “absent” Black fathers. In each case, the underlying, racially distorted narrative is the same: White families are superior and should be free of government interference, and everyone else's families are morally corrupt and should be disciplined.

IT IS NOT JUST THE GLUT OF NEGATIVE REPRESENTATIONS THAT HURT BLACK FAMILIES; IT IS ALSO THE ABSENCE OF POSITIVE ONES. THIS IS EVEN MORE STRIKING IF YOU CONSIDER HOW CONSISTENTLY NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA ADVANCE WHITE FAMILIES AS MODELS OF SOCIAL STABILITY.

This study shows that news and opinion media continue to reinforce the unfounded and unfair idea that Black families are sources of personal, cultural and societal instability and that *they* are responsible for poverty, welfare and crime, rather than those who shape the economic and social environment families live in. It is not just the glut of negative representations that hurt Black families; it is also the absence of positive ones. This is even more striking if you consider how consistently news and opinion media advance White families as models of social stability. These portrayals reinforce the implicit bias people already have about racial difference, which inform behaviors and attitudes that show up in all aspects of our lives, including at the voting booth.

Why do news producers, editors and reporters still perpetuate these fictions, even as they evolve their practices with respect to other issues? Part of the problem is due to the systematized conventional wisdom reporters rely on (no matter how often debunked) and part of it is due to political opportunism (no matter how often exposed).

Examples of the way these racialized myths manifest are egregious and plentiful. When a four-year-old Black boy fell into the gorilla habitat at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2016, media outlets were quick to focus attention on the criminal history of the boy's Black father, an unrelated detail that served no discernible purpose other than to invoke a stereotype that would criminalize the whole family and thereby justify blaming them for the tragic event.

When a two-year-old White boy was snatched up by an alligator in front of his parents just a week later at a Disney resort, there was no media scrutiny of the parents and a vastly more empathic response overall. This is typical of a widespread pattern of racially biased reporting and racially biased norm-setting, which this report expands on in detail.

Family life and family structure are changing, as they always have. These changes, however, are characterized differently depending on the race of the family. This steady pattern of pathologizing

Black families and normalizing White families is an unjust and unacceptable status quo. News standards must change to humanize the struggles and successes of all families and prize accuracy over debunked, default and lazy conventional wisdom.

Fears about changing family structures—family breakdown! family instability!—have re-emerged as political and racialized dog whistles. (It is a dog-whistle that has targeted LGBT families for the last decades toward similar ends, requiring a steady campaign to counteract and diffuse its effects.)

They are founded on misinformed beliefs about the superiority of married nuclear families that have been mainstreamed through a vast network of well-funded organizations, including Christian ministries, South Poverty Law Center-designated hate groups, right-wing think tanks and pseudo-academic research institutes that push a series of interrelated, dangerous and dubious claims: that marriage is a valid “solution” to poverty; that married parenthood is the key to a child’s wellbeing; and that the so-called success sequence—getting at least a high school degree, working full-time and marrying before having any children, in that order—is a foolproof path to poverty avoidance. The groups behind the myth-making are fully aware these norms perpetuate anti-Black fervor; they use that fervor to win elections for conservatives and to advance both a religious and corporate policy agenda.

News media cannot continue to serve as a platform for these methodologically flawed, morally misguided and racist narratives that cause so much harm while allowing the truth of the economic and social forces that drive shifting family dynamics to remain invisible. They must help the public understand the very real systemic barriers that impede wellbeing for so many families. That knowledge is what leads to effective, viable solutions.

When news media fail at their basic responsibility—to tell the truth and challenge falsehoods—they fail all our families.



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE NEWS INDUSTRY CAN AND MUST DO BETTER.

01

END THE PRACTICES OF MISREPRESENTING & STEREOTYPING BLACK FAMILIES

News outlet editors, producers, reporters and pundits must work to end the pattern of explicitly and implicitly suggesting more Black people live in poverty and receive welfare than White people.

02

END THE PRACTICES OF MISREPRESENTING & STEREOTYPING BLACK FATHERS

News outlet editors, producers, reporters and pundits must work to end the pattern of explicitly and implicitly propagating the right wing-sponsored fiction singling out Black fathers as irresponsible and uninvolved in their children's lives, contrary to the lack of evidence supporting those claims, and despite some evidence to the contrary.

03

END THE PRACTICES OF MISREPRESENTING WHO COMMITS CRIME

News outlet editors, producers, reporters and pundits must work to end the pattern of explicitly and implicitly overrepresenting Black people as criminal, contrary to fact, and furthering inaccurate and dehumanizing stereotypes that suggest inherent or disproportionate association with criminality.



FAMILY STORY

COLOR
OF
CHANGE

04

REVISE STANDARDS & PROTOCOLS FOR REPORTING ON FAMILIES

As part of addressing the mandates above, news outlets that purport to be unbiased, both locally and nationally, must revise their overall editorial practices related to racial representation in order to ensure accuracy and fairness in reporting:

- They must revise their overall standards and protocols for reporting on families and related issues, including a) setting stronger standards for sourcing information and experts, b) setting protocols for re-evaluating “conventional wisdom” assumptions, and c) integrating stronger social context and research in sourcing stories to inform reporting.
- They must educate editorial decision makers and reporters about commonly spread misinformation and stereotyping in reporting as well as the impact of it.
- They must include people of color in setting editorial standards, which means including people of color in meaningful ways through hiring and across every level and role in the news production process.

05

END ADVERTISING SUPPORT FOR WILLFUL PROPAGATORS OF MISINFORMATION & STEREOTYPING

Corporate advertisers must take responsibility for sponsoring the steady campaign of misinformation and inaccurate representation led by right wing media outlets and revise their media buying protocols to incorporate standards of accuracy in assessing news platforms.

Save

FAMILY STORY

COLOR
OF
CHANGE

STUDY BACKGROUND & APPROACH

THE STUDY LOOKED AT REPRESENTATION OF FAMILIES BY NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA OUTLETS AND EXAMINED THE EXTENT TO WHICH NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA CONTENT MAY REINFORCE INACCURACIES AND RACIAL STEREOTYPING OF BLACK FAMILIES IN COMPARISON TO WHITE FAMILIES. THE STUDY USED A COMPREHENSIVE QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS TO DETERMINE THE PATTERNS, PREVALENCE AND ACCURACY IN THE NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA OUTLETS' FRAMING AND PRESENTATION OF BLACK FAMILIES.



OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS, COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS, POLITICAL SCIENTISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE DOCUMENTED RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN NEWS MEDIA AND DEMONSTRATED THAT THESE STEREOTYPES SHAPE OUR PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL GROUPS.

Media frames offer audience members a stereotypical explanation for a given state of affairs (Entman, 1993). Media framing has been advanced by communication scholars to explain how the media “blame” people of color for negative social outcomes such as poverty rates (Iyengar, 1990). However, no studies have systematically examined whether media representations of Black families are accurate. In addition, no studies have examined whether, through inaccurate framing, news and opinion media wrongly and unfairly place blame for America’s social ills, such as poverty, on Black family structure or other aspects of Black family life. If this is the case, then it stands to reason that those racialized frames perpetuate negative stereotypes against Black families, creating a widespread assumption among consumers of news and opinion media that they are uniquely and irrevocably pathological and undeserving. (We will address the larger concept of the “deserving poor” vs. “undeserving poor” below.)

The study had three parts. First, the study tracked the extent to which news and opinion media propagate inaccurate and racially biased information about families (e.g., Black family members commit more crime or are more involved in criminal behaviors than White family members). We utilized intergroup comparisons (e.g., Black families compared to White families as an attribute) and inter-reality comparisons (e.g., news reports compared to other indicators of social reality such as official government crime reports) to fact check media coverage of families.

Second, the study tracked the extent to which news and opinion media create a causal link between social problems and the structures (or other attributes) of Black families, using stereotypes as the causal explanation for the social challenges faced by Black families (e.g., the idea that family poverty is caused by so-called “absentee” fathers rather than poverty-driving factors in the economy or structural racism in the economy and society). In this case, we tracked whether news and opinion media are inaccurately perpetuating stereotypes that lead to inaccurate conclusions about Black people, families and communities and also how social problems actually work (e.g., what causes poverty, who is responsible for it, what can solve it, what motivates crime and what makes communities safe or unsafe).

Third, this study investigated whether news and opinion media perpetuate a distorted picture of Black families through selective use of facts, lack of balance and lack of context. In this case, we tracked whether news media presented either data or human stories in misleading ways. For example, when issues of race, racism and structural bias are raised explicitly, do journalists or pundits provide the context and nuance to address the issues responsibly or do they invoke racist notions of Black family dysfunction or absentee Black fatherhood in order to justify the struggles faced by Black families without balance in their argumentation or analysis?

THREE AREAS OF FOCUS

Our study included three issues of focus: 1) family poverty and welfare use/dependency, 2) father involvement and 3) family member involvement with crime. Below, we provide some background on each of these issues. Later, we provide information on the specific methods we employed to analyze media representations related to them.

The racialization of poverty. Prior work suggests that the issue of poverty has become racialized within news coverage (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilens, 1996a, 1999; Iyengar, 1990). Anti-poverty programs in the 1920s and 1930s were primarily associated with White males who had run into “hard luck” and needed support to help them through the tough times. Following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Johnson began focusing on the entrenched poverty within Black communities—both in cities and in rural areas. Reporters changed their coverage of poverty as a result, decreasing their attention on the White poor and increasing their reporting on the Black poor. Over time, the news media began to focus on the Black poor’s supposed cultural flaws, which were depicted as leading to welfare dependence. In turn, the welfare programs that were linked to Black family use developed pejorative associations in the public consciousness, such that programs were deemed good or bad based on who was perceived to be using or benefiting from them. Scholars such as Gilens (1999) found that the news media tended to overrepresent the number of Black individuals who were on welfare programs that offered money and food stamps while underrepresenting the number of Black individuals who took part in other anti-poverty programs such as job training and energy assistance programs.

By the 1980s, President Reagan and other influencers began attacking “welfare queens,” stereotypes of poor Black mothers unwilling to work whose babies are also supported by anti-poverty programs. In fact, this stereotype presupposed that Black women would attempt to have babies order to receive more welfare assistance from the government. Gilens concluded that such portrayals led

THE NEW YORK
TIMES, WASHINGTON
POST, USA TODAY
WALL STREET
JOURNAL, LA TIMES
BREITBART, NEWS
YORK POST, THE
CHICAGO TRIBUNE
CHRISTIAN TODAY
MSNBC, CNN, ABC
NEWS, FOX NEWS
CBS NEWS, THE
NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON
POST, USA TODAY
WALL STREET
JOURNAL, LA TIMES
BREITBART, NEWS

consumers of content in which these ideas were pervasive to believe that Black people were lazier than White people and that Black people were much more likely to exploit the system compared to White people.

These images helped create a stereotype of poor people who are Black as part of the underserving poor (i.e., those who take advantage of the system) versus the deserving poor (i.e., those who have no choice but to utilize government assistance but only as a temporary measure). Iyengar (1990) similarly found that exposure to news media portraying Black welfare recipients discouraged support for anti-poverty programs. At some point, welfare programs that became associated with benefits enjoyed by White people were not even included in the public discourse about welfare at all; only programs perceived to be used by Black people were part of the welfare discussion, largely within an “undeserving” framework. Many scholars argue that the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which introduced limits for welfare recipients and instituted new work requirements, became law due in part to such biased media coverage. What we do not know is how often this “undeserving” frame of poverty is attributed to Black families today and the effect it may have on news and opinion media consumers now.

Proportionate representation. Similar to Gilens (1999), we measured whether or not Black families are overrepresented within the overall population of poor people and whether White families are underrepresented as part of that same set. In addition, we assessed whether Black families are overrepresented as part of the undeserving poor as represented by how often they are portrayed as welfare recipients.

Black father involvement. We also aimed to examine ubiquitous stereotypes associated with Black families. One of these is the supposed lack of involvement by Black fathers in the lives of their children. A common stereotype portrays Black men engaging in womanizing yet seldom caring for the children they produce as a result of their sexual conquests (Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Lippman, 2016). However, current data suggest that Black fathers

play a significant role in their children’s lives. Entertainment television has often portrayed this involvement (Greenberg & Neuendorf, 1980; National Health Statistics Reports, 2013), but news and opinion media portrayals repeat negative stereotypes about Black people in ways distinct from entertainment television (Dixon, 2006). Thus, our current study explored stereotypical portrayals of Black fathers as uninvolved dads in news and opinion media.

Black family members as criminals. One of the more consistent findings in the literature of media effects is that Black people have been overrepresented as criminal suspects compared to crime reports in the context of local news broadcasts (Dixon, 2011; Dixon & Josey, 2013; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b, 2002). Researchers have found an over-association between criminal behavior and Black people in local news coverage aired in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Los Angeles (Entman, 1992; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Sorenson, Manz, & Berk, 1998). However, one context that has been seldom analyzed by media scholars in national news discourse involves the intersection of representations of race with respect to families and stereotypes about criminality. The current study seeks to remedy this. It is possible that in order to create interest in what might otherwise be mundane stories about family structure, news outlets might rely on stereotypes of Black criminality and therefore overrepresent Black family members as criminals. We explored that possibility in this study.

WHAT WE DID NOT KNOW IS HOW OFTEN THIS “UNDESERVING” FRAME OF POVERTY IS ATTRIBUTED TO BLACK FAMILIES AND THE EFFECT IT MAY HAVE ON NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA CONSUMERS.

Below, we provide information on the specific methods we employed. Later, we provide an overview of the major findings uncovered in our analysis.

FINDINGS

WHEN WE ANALYZED EACH FAMILY REPRESENTATION IN THE DATA SET AND ASSESSED EACH OF OUR FOUR MAIN VARIABLES, WE FOUND THAT OVERALL, NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA PAINT BLACK FAMILIES AS SOURCES OF SOCIAL INSTABILITY IN SOCIETY AND WHITE FAMILIES AS SOURCES OF SOCIAL STABILITY IN SOCIETY. SPECIFICALLY, NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA ARE ALMOST 1.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO REPRESENT A WHITE FAMILY AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF SOCIAL STABILITY THAN A BLACK FAMILY.



SUMMARY FINDINGS

FROM A GENERAL AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE, WHITE FAMILIES ARE SEEN AS FOSTERING SOCIAL STABILITY (E.G., STRONG EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND UPWARD MOBILITY) MORE OFTEN THAN INSTABILITY (E.G., COMMITTING CRIME AND RELYING ON WELFARE). BLACK FAMILIES ARE SEEN AS PROMOTING SOCIAL INSTABILITY (E.G., RELYING ON WELFARE) MORE OFTEN THAN SOCIAL STABILITY (E.G., STARTING SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES).

Our study uncovered four key ways this media narrative of Black family instability and White family stability advances through racially biased coverage in both word and image.

First, we found that families living in poverty are overwhelmingly portrayed in news and opinion media as being Black families rather than White families. In particular, news media overrepresent the incidence of Black family poverty by 32 percentage points (viz., Black families represent 59% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up just 27% of the poor, according to official reports). At the same time, news media underrepresent White family poverty by 49 percentage points (viz., White families represent 17% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up 66% of the poor, according to official reports).

Second, we found that news and opinion media both exaggerate the proportion of Black families receiving welfare and imply that reliance on government aid programs results from laziness, dependency or dysfunction. The media accomplish this by concentrating their focus on Black families when discussing welfare policies. Specifically, news and opinion media overrepresent Black families

receiving welfare by 18 percentage points (viz., Black families represent 60% of welfare recipients in news and opinion media but make up just 42% of welfare recipients, according to official government reports). They also do so while rarely citing the many systemic, historical, structural and economic barriers Black families face. As discussed above, this reinforces the racialized myth of Black families as being part of what academics refer to as the “undeserving” poor, a term used to explain the false distinction between those in poverty because they choose not to work, or due to some other supposed character flaw, and those in poverty due to circumstances deemed outside of their control (i.e., the “deserving poor”). In many instances, the deserving poor includes those who are depicted as elderly or those who take part in jobs programs (Gilens, 1999). Poor White families are rarely characterized as part of the undeserving poor while people of color are often associated with the undeserving poor, as seen in our data.

Third, news and opinion media depict Black fathers as absent in the lives of their children, often suggesting that Black fathers abandon their children and that Black mothers make poor decisions about their relationships with Black men. This representation is inaccurate, however, in two ways. There is no evidence to suggest that Black fathers “abandon” their children, whether in general or in comparison to White fathers. Even in cases in which Black fathers are living separately from their children, they are actually more likely to be involved in their children’s lives than White fathers, according to a recent CDC study (National Health Statistics Reports, 2013). Moreover, this representation is based on a false premise about families that has become part of the “conventional wisdom” reporters rely on for their thinking and reporting. The misrepresentation of Black fathers as “absentee” stems, in part, from the common but incorrect use of non-marital birthrates as a proxy for parental involvement, falsely leading to the assumption that Black fathers who are not married to the mothers of their children must not be involved parents, an assumption also undermined by the CDC data. We found, however, that almost all news and opinion media implicitly or explicitly encourage these false assumptions and the

THE STUDY FINDINGS INDICATE THAT CERTAIN SOURCES PERPETUATE THESE REPORTING PATTERNS MORE THAN OTHERS. IT IS NOT ONLY THE IDEOLOGICALLY-DRIVEN NEWS SOURCES THAT DO SO.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1) NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA OVERREPRESENT POOR FAMILIES AS BEING BLACK AND UNDERREPRESENT POOR FAMILIES AS BEING WHITE.

Prior research has suggested that the news media in the past have overrepresented poor people as being Black. Our research confirms this: news and opinion media overrepresent Black family poverty by 32 percentage points while White family poverty is underrepresented by 49 percentage points. That is, Black families represent 59% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up just 27% of the poor, according to official reports, while White families represent 17% of the poor in news and opinion media but make up 66% of the poor, according to official reports.

The prior theorizing in this area suggests that these depictions lead to a perception of Black people as representing the *undeserving poor*—those who would rather receive various forms of cash assistance from the government than work (Gilens, 1999). This has serious implications because political scientists have been able to demonstrate that these distorted portrayals reinforce various stereotypes of Black people and encourage the belief that Black people are less worthy than White people of receiving government help (Iyengar, 1990, 1991).

In order to determine whether these depictions continue today in broadcast news, cable news, newspapers and online blogs, we measured whether poor families were overrepresented as being Black. First, we calculated the frequency and percentage of poor families depicted as Black, White and Other Families of Color in news media. Second, we compared these percentages to the distribution of poor families identified in census data to determine whether Black families are

overrepresented among depictions of poor families while White families are underrepresented.

As displayed in Table 1, we found that 59% of poor families were depicted as Black while 17% of poor families were depicted as White, $\chi^2 = 48.36$ (2, N = 157), $p < .001$.

TABLE 1

Frequency And Percentage Of Poor Family Representations By Race

RACE OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS POOR	FREQUENCY OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS POOR	PERCENT OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS POOR
BLACK	93	59%
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR	37	24%
WHITE	27	17%
TOTAL	157	100%

According to a recent U.S. Census Bureau study, approximately 27% of families in the United States living below the poverty line are Black families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The difference between the reality (27% of poor families are Black) and the news media portrayal (59% of poor families are Black) is larger than the confidence interval of eight percentage points, meaning that the difference between the families is statistically significant. This finding suggests that news and opinion media overrepresent Black family poverty by a factor of 2 to 1 (32 percentage points). Conversely, White families compose approximately 66% of the poor in the United States but make up only 17% of the poor in news and opinion media. White families are underrepresented by the media as being poor by a factor of more than 3 to 1 (49 percentage points).

Source variation in descriptions of family poverty. We also note that some news and opinion outlets drive this false narrative more than others. Table 2 shows how each network contributes to this

exaggeration by comparing the ratio of poor Black families portrayed on each network to the ratio of poor White families portrayed. The higher the ratio, the greater the distortion. The top two distorting networks were Fox News and CNN. In terms of news and opinion network television shows driving this narrative, Table 3 indicates that CNN Tonight and The O'Reilly Factor are the greatest distorters.

Similar to network television, there are variations in national digital/print media sources in their distortion of this phenomena. These results are displayed in Table 4. Of particular note, the worst offender, Breitbart, portrayed seven poor Black families compared to zero White poor families in stories we considered in this analysis. Overall, the top distorters include Breitbart, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal.

TABLE 2
Ratio Of Poor Family Representations—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Network

RANKING OF NETWORKS (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK RATHER THAN WHITE POVERTY)	NETWORK	RATIO OF POOR FAMILIES PORTRAYED (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	Fox News	8 to 1
2	CNN	7 to 0
3	MSNBC	2 to 1
4	CBS	3 to 2

TABLE 3**Ratio Of Poor Family Representations—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Program**

RANKING OF TV SHOWS (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK RATHER THAN WHITE POVERTY)	PROGRAM	RATIO OF POOR FAMILIES PORTRAYED (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	CNN Tonight (CNN)	6 to 0
2	The O'Reilly Factor (FNC)	3 to 0
3, 4	Hannity (FNC)	3 to 1
3, 4	Face the Nation (CBS)	3 to 1
5	The Kelly File (FNC)	2 to 0
6	Lawrence O'Donnell (MSNBC)	2 to 1

TABLE 4**Ratio Of Poor Family Representations—Black Families Compared To White Families—By National Newspaper/Digital Source**

RANKING OF NATIONAL NEWS SOURCE (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK RATHER THAN WHITE POVERTY)	NATIONAL NEWS SOURCE	RATIO OF POOR FAMILIES PORTRAYED (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	Breitbart	7 to 0
2	New York Times	5 to 0
3	Wall Street Journal	5 to 1
4, 5	Christian Today	4 to 0
4, 5	Chicago Tribune	4 to 0
6, 7	Christianity Today	2 to 0
6, 7	One News Now	2 to 0
8	Sojourners (Sojo)	5 to 2

2) NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA OVERREPRESENT WELFARE RECIPIENT FAMILIES AS BLACK AND UNDERREPRESENT WELFARE RECIPIENTS AS WHITE.

News and opinion media overrepresent the proportion of Black families receiving welfare by 18 percentage points. That is, Black families represent 60% of welfare recipients in news and opinion media but make up just 42% of welfare recipients, according to official government reports. Moreover, fewer than 10% of the news stories we coded cited any data referencing structural, historic or systemic barriers to Black wealth acquisition. Instead, Black people tended to be depicted as lazy and inept welfare recipients in news broadcasts. Corroborating data is evident in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Racial Distribution of Welfare Family Portrayals

IDENTIFIABLE RACE OF EACH FAMILY	FREQUENCY OF FAMILIES PORTRAYED AS RELYING ON WELFARE	PERCENT FAMILIES PORTRAYED AS RELYING ON WELFARE
BLACK	59	60%
WHITE	22	23%
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR	17	17%
TOTAL	98	100%

The news and opinion media depict Black families as welfare families (e.g., enrolling in SNAP/cash assistance to pay for basic needs) more than any other group (60%), including White families (23%), $\chi^2 = 32.22$ (2, N = 98), $p < .001$. In other words, news media forge associations between Black families and welfare dependency over White families by a factor of nearly 3 to 1. This is an overrepresentation of Black family welfare dependence that is consistent with prior research demonstrating that Black people are overrepresented as welfare recipients in broadcast news and magazines (Gilens, 1999). The

latest report from the U.S. Census bureau suggests that about 42% of families seeking government assistance (i.e. welfare) are Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The difference between the census report and this study's finding is 18 percentage points, which is larger than the calculated confidence interval of nine percentage points. Since this difference is larger than the confidence interval, we can conclude that news media exaggerate the proportion of Black families that receive welfare in the United States. Prior research suggests that this exaggeration of welfare dependency (e.g., Black family reliance on programs that offer cash assistance) helps to reinforce a stereotype of Black laziness that is inconsistent with social reality (Gilens, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). It feeds the false narrative that Black families compose a large segment of the *undeserving poor*—a group of people who would rather live off of government assistance than become gainfully employed.

In particular, commentators and other media representatives concentrate their focus on Black families when welfare policies are being discussed. For instance, in many cases, commentators push welfare and government assistance as a left-wing trap designed to tear Black families apart and keep them lazy/apathetic. As an example, Larry Elder, a conservative radio talk show host, stated on Fox News's *Hannity* show on April 8, 2016:



“

There's a real problem and the problem has to do with the breakdown of the Black family. If you want to argue and blame somebody, blame left wing policies that have encouraged women to marry the government and men to abandon their financial and moral responsibility.

— Larry Elder

”

Source variation in descriptions of welfare families. Similar to the findings for family poverty, there is network variation in the presentation of those who use welfare programs. Table 6 lists the television station ratios of Black families portrayed as seeking or dependent on government assistance versus White families. Similar to the findings for poverty depictions, Fox News and CNN

TABLE 7**Ratio of Representations of Family Welfare Use—Black Families Compared to White Families—by Television Program**

RANKING OF TV SHOW (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK WELFARE USE COMPARED TO WHITE WELFARE USE)	PROGRAM	RATIO OF WELFARE FAMILIES PORTRAYED (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	Hannity (FNC)	4 to 1
2, 3, 4	The Kelly File (FNC)	2 to 0
2, 3, 4	The O'Reilly Factor (FNC)	2 to 0
2, 3, 4	CNN Tonight (CNN)	2 to 0
5	Face the Nation (CBS)	2 to 1

TABLE 8**Ratio of Representations of Family Welfare Use—Black Families Compared to White Families—by National Newspaper/Digital Source**

RANKING OF NATIONAL NEWS SOURCE (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK WELFARE USE COMPARED TO WHITE WELFARE USE)	NATIONAL NEWS SOURCE	RATIO OF WELFARE FAMILIES PORTRAYED (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	Sojourners (Sojo)	4 to 1
2	Breitbart	3 to 0
3	Wall Street Journal	3 to 1
4	Christian Today	2 to 0
5	NY Post	2 to 1

3) NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA INACCURATELY DEPICT BLACK FATHERS AS ABANDONING THEIR CHILDREN OR AS UNINVOLVED IN THEIR LIVES.

News and opinion media are more likely to identify Black fathers as uninvolved and generally not present for their families compared to White fathers. In reality, evidence shows that Black fathers are actually more involved in parenting than White fathers, both when comparing Black and White fathers who live with their children and when comparing Black and White fathers who live separately from their children. Often embedded in media reporting and punditry is an assumption that fathers who live separately from their children are not involved in their lives, for which there is no evidence. There is evidence, however, contradicting the assumption that Black fathers live separately from the mothers of their children for reasons of cultural dysfunction or irresponsibility, rather than structural factors related to social and economic inequality.

The absent Black father myth is a media trope traditionally used to scapegoat Black “single” mothers and unmarried Black fathers for various problems like poverty, crime and police shootings in Black communities. The false narrative often relies on a misinterpretation of a controversial 1965 report commissioned by the Lyndon Johnson Administration and written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who at the time was serving as an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Labor. The report, along with other research that has been criticized for problematic methodology, suggests that a culture of poverty and family dysfunction plague the African American community (Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995). Central to this “culture of poverty” hypothesis is assessing “absence” based on non-marital birth rates (which are often inaccurately used as a stand-in for the relationship status between parents) and rates of fathers living separately from their children (which are inaccurately used as a stand-in for parental involvement). There is also no evidence for substantiating the claim that Black fathers “abandon” their children. In fact, a recent CDC study found that Black fathers who do not live with their children are actually slightly more involved in raising their children than fathers of other races who do not live with their children, including White

THE NEW YORK
TIMES, WASHINGTON
POST, USA TODAY
WALL STREET
JOURNAL, LA TIMES
BREITBART, NEW
YORK POST, THE
CHICAGO TRIBUNE
CHRISTIAN TODAY
MSNBC, CNN, ABC
NEWS, FOX NEWS
CBS NEWS, THE
NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON
POST, USA TODAY
WALL STREET
JOURNAL, LA TIMES
BREITBART, NEW

fathers, based on a series of more accurate parental engagement metrics. In essence, the perpetuation of the absent Black father myth relies on cherry-picked data that distorts the reality of Black father involvement, which even non-ideologically driven news and opinion media rely on as “conventional wisdom” in their coverage of families.

News imagery perpetuates the myth of Black father abandonment. News media often misrepresent Black fatherhood through imagery. Images are powerful because the brain processes them at a deeper, below-conscious level compared to narration (Sparks, 2013). We investigated imagery by identifying depictions of fathers playing active or involved roles in their children’s lives. Feeding, playing, helping with homework, and leading or assisting children with hobbies were the most common examples of fatherly activity (National Health Statistics Reports, 2013). We then calculated and compared the percentage of White and Black fathers represented in the data set as engaging in this activity. Black fathers (14%) were shown spending time with their kids in news images almost half as often as White fathers (26%). We made a similar comparison between White mothers (24%) and Black mothers (24%) and found no differences in representation with respect to the depiction of parental involvement. Hence, only involved Black fathers were significantly less present in media depictions of family life. That is, they were less frequently depicted spending time with their children compared to the other groups, contrary to the facts available on this subject.

News commentators reinforce the myth of Black father abandonment. In addition, we again analyzed the characterizations of news commentators and compared this to other indicators of reality. These findings are displayed in Table 9.

TABLE 9**Frequency And Percent Of Fathers Described In News Media As Unavailable For Their Children, By Fathers' Race**

IDENTIFIABLE RACE OF FATHERS DEPICTED AS UNAVAILABLE	FREQUENCY OF FATHERS DEPICTED AS UNAVAILABLE	PERCENT OF FATHERS DEPICTED AS UNAVAILABLE
BLACK	20	60%
WHITE	7	20%
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR	7	20%
TOTAL	34	100%

When news commentators suggested that fathers were unavailable for their children, they singled out Black fathers 60% of the time and White fathers 20% of the time, $\chi^2 = 9.94$ (2, N=34), $p < .01$. In other words, for every White father described as unavailable for his children, there were three Black fathers described as unavailable for their children. This indicates a significant misrepresentation by the news media of Black fathers being uninvolved with their children. However, according to recent data provided by the CDC (National Health Statistics Reports, 2013), in many cases Black father involvement with their children matched or exceeded that of other racial groups, including White fathers. For example, almost 27% of Black fathers regularly took their children to school or extra-curricular activities compared with 20% of White fathers. Nevertheless, the supposed “epidemic” of fatherlessness in Black communities is frequently discussed in news and opinion media. Here is one example from Laura Ingram on The Kelly File on March 16, 2015:



“

But listen, what do you make of the fact, obviously, there may have been a racial element given what we heard on the tape or what has been reported on the tape. But I mean, is this a fatherless issue?

— Laura Ingraham

”

Source variation in the portrayal of Black fathers versus White fathers. Similar to our findings above, we again see Fox News and CNN leading the way in distorting the difference between Black and White father unavailability. As shown in Table 10, Fox News shows a seven (Black fathers unavailable) to zero (White fathers unavailable) ratio while CNN shows a two (Black fathers unavailable) to one (White father unavailable) ratio. Table 11 indicates that the top three distorters are Hannity (Fox News), The Kelly File (Fox News) and CNN Tonight (CNN). In terms of national news sources reproducing this distorted view, Breitbart and Atlanta Journal Constitution lead the way.

TABLE 10
Ratio Of Fathers Portrayed As Unavailable For Their Children—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Network

RANKING OF NETWORKS (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK ABSENTEE FATHERS COMPARED TO WHITE ABSENTEE FATHERS)	NETWORK	RATIO OF FATHERS DESCRIBED AS UNAVAILABLE (BLACK FAMILIES TO WHITE FAMILIES)
1	FOX NEWS	7 to 0
2	CNN	2 to 1

TABLE 11
Ratio Of Fathers Portrayed As Unavailable For Their Children—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Program

RANKING OF TV SHOW (FROM MOST LIKELY TO LEAST LIKELY TO EXAGGERATE BLACK ABSENTEE FATHERS COMPARED TO WHITE ABSENTEE FATHERS)	PROGRAM	RATIO OF FATHERS DESCRIBED AS UNAVAILABLE (BLACK FATHERS TO WHITE FATHERS)
1	Hannity (FNC)	4 to 0
2, 3	The Kelly File (FNC)	2 to 0
2, 3	CNN Tonight (CNN)	2 to 0

4) NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA OVERREPRESENT BLACK FAMILIES AS ASSOCIATED WITH CRIMINALITY AND UNDERREPRESENT WHITE FAMILIES AS ASSOCIATED WITH CRIMINALITY.

News and opinion media are 1.32 times more likely to associate Black family members with criminality compared to White family members. In addition, news media overrepresent Black family members as criminals by 11 percentage points while underrepresenting White family members as criminals by 39 percentage points. That is, 37% of those represented as criminal in news and opinion media are Black family members, though Black family members constitute only 26% of family members arrested for criminal activity, according to crime reports, while 28% of those represented as criminal are White family members, though White family member constitute 77% of those arrested for criminal activity, according to crime reports.

We examined whether Black families are inaccurately over associated with crime; the results are displayed in Table 12. When we examined whether a family member was associated with criminal behavior, we discovered that Black family members were associated with crime 37% of the time while White family members were associated with crime 28% of the time, $\chi^2 = 46.40$ (4, N = 407), $p < .001$. We calculated a nine percentage point confidence interval, leading us to determine that there is a significant overrepresentation of Black families' association with criminality and an underrepresentation of White families' association with criminality. Based on the most recent available Uniform Crime reports, Black family members are overrepresented as criminals by 11 percentage points and White family members are underrepresented as criminals by 39 percentage points, (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). This analysis does not take into account the over-targeting of Black people for arrest compared to White people or and the over-sentencing of Black people for the same crimes compared White people. The underrepresentation of White people as criminals is a major factor in our overall finding related to the representation of the causes and norms of social stability and instability (see below). One typical example of a criminal depiction of a Black family member aired on an episode

of World News Tonight on May 22, 2015. In it, we see a portrayal of Black criminality as an internal disposition of Black people instead of a systemic external problem with historic roots:

“

Ryan Smith (field reporter): He’s an angry, troubled man, relatives say.

Older Female Relative’s voice: He’s very hostile. He’s arrogant. He doesn’t listen.

Ryan Smith: Wint has a long rap sheet including arrests for assault and domestic violence. That criminal history led to his identification. ABC News obtaining exclusive details from this lab that tracked him down from DNA left on a pizza crust of that Domino’s pizza, ordered that fateful night.

”

Source variation in the depiction of Black family members as criminals. We examined the extent to which various networks, TV programs and national news sources might vary in this depiction of Black family perpetrators. Table 13 indicated that Fox News disproportionately depicts Black family members as criminals more than any other TV network, airing seven representations of Black criminal family members for every single representation of a White criminal family member. Table 14 indicates that the leading TV program over-portraying the number of Black criminal family members versus the number of White family members is The O’Reilly Factor. Among Christian and conservative websites, Breitbart is most likely to portray Black family members as perpetrators versus White family members as perpetrators.

5) NEWS AND OPINION MEDIA FRAME BLACK FAMILIES AS SOCIALLY DESTABILIZING AND WHITE FAMILIES AS SOCIALLY STABILIZING.

News and opinion media are almost 1.5 times more likely to represent a White family as an illustration of social stability than a Black family. White families are seen by news consumers as fostering social stability more often than instability while Black families are seen by those same consumers as inciting or maintaining social instability more often than social stability. Therefore, news and opinion media propagate racialized cause-effect explanations for social problems, cumulatively characterizing Black families, Black people and Black culture as presenting a fundamentally destabilizing force in their own communities and beyond while lessening the credibility of Black people as a stabilizing force.

As a summary of the above, we uncovered four major findings with regard to the portrayal of Black families in news and opinion media. First, poor families are overrepresented as Black families and portrayed as undeserving. Second, welfare families (i.e. those receiving targeted government assistance) are overrepresented as Black families and are also portrayed as weaker and less resilient, self-reliant or valuable in terms of their contributions to society. Third, Black fathers are inaccurately depicted as uninvolved with their children and blamed for the inequity of life conditions in Black communities. Fourth, Black family members are overrepresented as criminals and depicted as internally disposed to violence and lawbreaking. Moreover, all of these patterns exist relative to another set of patterns: in every area in which Black families or people are overrepresented, White people are underrepresented, thereby amplifying the gap between them.

Together, the inaccurate portrayals of both Black families and White families create an extreme imbalance in the perceptions of Black people that news and opinion consumers would naturally form over time. White families are underrepresented as poor welfare recipients and criminal suspects. Instead they are depicted as spending significant amounts of time with their families and promoting values of independence and morality.

There are many significant theoretical and policy implications of these findings. In the aggregate, however, there is one clear conclusion: news and opinion media systematically serve to create the impression that Black families are sources of social instability for themselves and for society while White families are sources of social stability and alone define the positive family norm. In other words, Black family instability leads to societal instability; White family stability leads to greater societal stability. We tested this empirically by assessing how Black families are depicted as unstable and how this narrative frames instability as an issue for Black families and society in general.

THE SOCIAL STABILITY & INSTABILITY TAKEAWAY

AS DISCUSSED ABOVE IN OUR METHODS SECTION, CODERS MADE OVERALL CONCLUSIONS ABOUT HOW EACH FAMILY WAS REPRESENTED USING A FAMILY LEVEL ANALYSIS OF EACH NEWS STORY.

They utilized all of the coded variables to help guide their decision including association with poverty, welfare, father involvement and crime. Coders achieved this by assessing all information presented about the given family and identifying relevant and prevalent frames. Representations of societal stability may be illustrated by a financially successful family or a happy nuclear family (e.g., high educational achievement). These families serve as the indicators of societal health. (Questioning the narrow and limiting construction of the “family stability” norm itself was beyond the scope of the present study.) Representations of instability may be illustrated through crime, poverty, disregard for accepted social values (e.g., not ensuring regular school attendance) or the “broken family” label which is often used to describe a family abandoned by the father, whether the absence or presence of the father is positive or negative in the life of that family. These families are framed as being causes, and sometimes origins, of societal problems. We first analyzed the racial breakdown of families that are depicted as unstable. This is displayed in Table 15.

TABLE 15

Frequency And Percentage Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Instability, By Race

IDENTIFIABLE RACE OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS UNSTABLE	FREQUENCY OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS UNSTABLE	PERCENT OF FAMILIES DEPICTED AS UNSTABLE
BLACK	137	34%
WHITE	127	31%
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR	143	35%
TOTAL	407	100%

When we examined unstable families only, Black families (34%) were more likely than White families (31%) to appear in this category, $\chi^2 = 175.11$ (2, N = 407), $p < .001$. This is illustrated by an article posted by Breitbart's Ian Hanchett on May 14, 2015. The article quotes Tavis Smiley, host of PBS's The Tavis Smiley Show:



“

Two parents are better than one. Let me underscore, the right two parents. But you all talk about the Black family as if it just collapsed like a sort of soufflé. There are reasons for the dissolution of the Black family. Clearly, some folk make bad choices....

— Tavis Smiley

”

We also found that there were many instances when news commentators blamed community/societal issues such as poverty on internal Black family “dysfunction.” For example, Bill O'Reilly on Fox News's The O'Reilly Factor claimed on June 24, 2015:



“

The real racism is looking away from what is really harming Black Americans, the root cause of poverty. And as Talking Points has reported over and over and over again, that is the dissolution of the African American traditional family, chaos on the streets in poor neighborhoods....

— Bill O'Reilly

”

Source variation in the portrayal of instability. We again examined the networks, TV shows and national print/web sources that contributed to this finding. We found that few networks and TV shows contributed to this pattern. In fact, Fox News was the only major TV network to show this pattern. As displayed in Table 16, for every White family described as socially unstable on Fox News, there were 144 Black families described as socially unstable. As displayed in Table 17, the TV show most likely to frame Black families as socially unstable was The O'Reilly Factor. Disparities were more apparent in newspaper and web sources than network television sources as displayed in Table 18. This table indicates that the national news sources that tended to portray Black families as more socially unstable compared to White families are Atlanta Journal Constitution, One News Now and Sojourners (Sojo).

TABLE 16
Ratio Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Instability—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Network

RANKING OF NETWORKS (FROM MOST TO LEAST LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE BLACK FAMILY INSTABILITY COMPARED TO WHITE FAMILY INSTABILITY, AMONG THOSE FOR WHICH THE PATTERN WAS PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE SAMPLE)	NETWORK	RATIO OF UNSTABLE BLACK FAMILIES TO UNSTABLE WHITE FAMILIES
1	Fox News	13 to 9

TABLE 17
Ratio Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Instability—Black Families Compared To White Families—By Television Program

RANKING OF TV SHOW (FROM MOST TO LEAST LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE BLACK FAMILY INSTABILITY COMPARED TO WHITE FAMILY INSTABILITY, AMONG THOSE FOR WHICH THE PATTERN WAS PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE SAMPLE)	PROGRAM	RATIO OF UNSTABLE BLACK FAMILIES TO UNSTABLE WHITE FAMILIES
1	The O'Reilly Factor (FNC)	7 to 1
2	Anderson Cooper (CNN)	7 to 6
3	Hannity (FNC)	4 to 4

TABLE 18**Ratio Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Instability—Black Families Compared To White Families—By National Newspaper/Digital Source**

RANKING OF NATIONAL NEWS SOURCES <small>(FROM MOST TO LEAST LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE BLACK FAMILY INSTABILITY COMPARED TO WHITE FAMILY INSTABILITY, AMONG THOSE FOR WHICH THE PATTERN WAS PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE SAMPLE)</small>	NATIONAL NEWS SOURCE	RATIO OF UNSTABLE BLACK FAMILIES TO UNSTABLE WHITE FAMILIES
1, 2	Atlanta Journal Constitution	4 to 0
1, 2	One News Now	4 to 0
3	Sojourners (Sojo)	4 to 1
4	New York Times	3 to 0
5	Christian Today	7 to 2
6	Chicago Tribune	3 to 1
7	USA Today	2 to 0
8	Breitbart	9 to 4
9	Christian Post	2 to 1
10	Wall Street Journal	5 to 3
11, 12	LA Times	3 to 2
11, 12	Christianity Today	3 to 2
13	The Blaze	4 to 3

Source variation in the portrayal of stability. Although the difference between Black and White family depictions of social instability does not appear to be large, an examination of those families identified exclusively as socially stable provides enlightening context, as illustrated in Table 19. Our investigation shows the racial distribution of families depicted as socially stable, with White families (44%) being much more likely than Black families (30%) to be described as such (30%), $\chi^2 = 23.14$ (2, $N = 407$), $p < .001$. In other words, news media are almost 1.5 times more likely to represent a White family as an illustration of social stability than a Black family. From a general audience perspective, White families are seen as fostering social stability more often than instability. Black families are seen as inciting or maintaining social instability more often than social stability. As this example taken from a Wall Street Journal interview with Jimmy Carter on August 24, 2015 illustrates, White families are often depicted as sources of strength and independence:



“

My daddy taught me to read in front of our living-room fireplace. He'd peel oranges and reward my younger sister and me with slices when we were able to read a whole page. Our farm was physically challenging, but you learned pretty much all you needed to know there about life and people. We lived in Archery, Ga., a rural area back then about two miles outside of Plains. My father, Earl, bought 360 acres there in 1928, and we were the only White family in a community of about 150 people.

— Jimmy Carter

”

This excerpt also dramatizes the very nature of imbalances in representation, wherein stories of Black families and their realities are often being talked about by others and the stories of White families are often voiced by White people themselves in which they choose to invoke and frame family life as a stabilizing factor that serves as a norm or ideal. This kind of narrative reinforces the notion of White families as “naturally” contributing to societal stability. Conversely, Black families contribute to their own dysfunction and greater social instability.

TABLE 19**Frequency And Percentage Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Stability, By Race**

IDENTIFIABLE RACE OF FAMILIES PORTRAYED AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL STABILITY	FREQUENCY OF FAMILIES DESCRIBED AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL STABILITY	PERCENT OF FAMILIES PORTRAYED AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL STABILITY
WHITE	181	44%
BLACK	123	30%
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR	105	26%
TOTAL	409	1000

These differences vary by network, TV show and national news source, as well. Table 20 illustrates that ABC, NBC and Fox News are most likely to portray White families as socially stable. Two ABC network news programs, This Week and World News Tonight, push this narrative the most according to Table 21. Finally, as displayed in Table 22, Christian and conservative news sources including Christian Post, Christianity Today and the Blaze were the top national news outlets that supported the view of Whites promoting social stability

TABLE 20**Ratio Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Stability—White Families Compared To Black Families—By Television Network**

RANKING OF NETWORKS (FROM MOST TO LEAST LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE WHITE FAMILY STABILITY COMPARED TO BLACK FAMILY STABILITY, AMONG THOSE FOR WHICH THE PATTERN WAS PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE SAMPLE)	NETWORK	RATIO OF STABLE WHITE FAMILIES TO STABLE BLACK FAMILIES
1	ABC	16 to 2
2	NBC	9 to 4
3	Fox News	19 to 11
4	MSNBC	14 to 9
5	CBS	17 to 11

TABLE 21**Ratio Of Families Described As A Source Of Social Stability—White Families Compared To Black Families—By Television Program**

RANKING OF PROGRAM (FROM MOST TO LEAST LIKELY TO EMPHASIZE WHITE FAMILY STABILITY COMPARED TO BLACK FAMILY STABILITY, AMONG THOSE FOR WHICH THE PATTERN WAS PRONOUNCED WITHIN THE SAMPLE)	PROGRAM	RATIO OF STABLE WHITE FAMILIES TO STABLE BLACK FAMILIES
1	This Week (ABC)	7 to 0
2	World News Tonight (ABC)	9 to 2
3, 4	Anderson Cooper (CNN)	8 to 2
3, 4	Nightly News (NBC)	8 to 2
5	Hannity (FNC)	4 to 1
6	Evening News (CBS)	12 to 6
7, 8	The O'Reilly Factor (FNC)	6 to 3
7, 8	Meet the Press (NBC)	6 to 3

CONCLUSIONS

ONE OF THE MAJOR THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT LINE OF RESEARCH IS ROOTED IN SOCIAL PERCEPTION, SOCIAL COGNITION AND CULTIVATION THEORY (DIXON, 2001, 2011, 2017). THESE THEORIES SUGGEST THAT INCREASED EXPOSURE TO MEDIATED STIMULI MAY COME TO SHAPE AN INDIVIDUAL'S WORLDVIEW BY MAKING HIM OR HER BELIEVE THAT THE REAL WORLD LOOKS A LOT LIKE THE TELEVISION WORLD. THESE EFFECTS HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATED TO BE POTENTIALLY MORE PRONOUNCED WITH TELEVISION NEWS (SHRUM, 2009).

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

One of the major theoretical implications of the current line of research is rooted in social perception, social cognition and cultivation theory (Dixon, 2001, 2011, 2017). These theories suggest that increased exposure to mediated stimuli may come to shape an individual's worldview by making him or her believe that the real world looks a lot like the television world. These effects have been demonstrated to be potentially more pronounced with television news (Shrum, 2009). Given our findings about Black family instability and White family stability, these theories suggest that news and opinion viewers would come to see Black and White families in ways that align with these distorted portrayals. In general, news and opinion consumers would come to see a false world populated with Black family dysfunction, poverty, welfare dependence, criminal behavior and absentee fathers.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

If the above theories can be supported through future research in the current family context, there are major policy implications for society. Scholars have demonstrated that news media portrayals of Black poverty and welfare dependence fueled support for the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (Gilens, 1999). Those who seek to further demonize Black families will have plenty of fuel from the news and opinion media. For instance, President Trump's discussion of American carnage and support for police officers are seen as counterpoints to the rampant crime that plagues Black families. Attorney General Jeff Sessions's reinvigoration of the school to prison pipeline likely receives support from a public that sees (through a distorted media) Black parents as unwilling to raise their kids outside of dependence on government assistance. Enhanced work requirements, drug testing and other restrictions on welfare most likely are supported by a public exposed to inaccurate portrayals of Black family dependence on welfare.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE STUDIES, CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We are unfamiliar with any prior work that has examined the racial disparities in news and media opinion coverage of families. This study contributes to this literature and provides an update of some

METHODS

UNDERTAKING A SYSTEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS REQUIRES: 1) THE EXTRACTION OF A BROAD SAMPLE OF CONTENT FOR ANALYSIS, 2) RIGOROUS ASSESSMENT OF RELIABILITY AND 3) THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE CODING SCHEME. BELOW, WE DISCUSS HOW WE UNDERTOOK EACH OF THESE EFFORTS.



IDENTIFICATION OF AND EXTRACTION OF SOURCES

THE STUDY ANALYZED RELEVANT STORIES PUBLISHED OR AIRED IN THE TWO-YEAR PERIOD OF JANUARY 1, 2015 - DECEMBER 31, 2016.

We began our extraction process by identifying all of the standard mainstream news sources, including national broadcast news outlets (e.g., ABC News), cable news outlets (e.g., Fox News) and national mainstream newspapers (e.g., The New York Times). In light of the 2016 election, which resulted in more public and political commentary from alternative media sources, we expanded our targeted sample to also include Christian websites and conservative blog sites. Many of these sites have gained traction as news sources, and they largely informed the opinions of conservative voters and interest groups (Pew Research Center, 2014). In addition, most of them are distributed over the Internet, which is increasing in popularity as the news distribution source of choice for many Americans (Pew Research Center, 2013). Given the increasingly polarized opinions of our electorate in terms of what constitutes legitimate news, “fake news” or accurate news, we thought it was important to add these sources to our analysis. In order to gather the samples, we relied on four primary sources: 1) news’ outlets own web sites, 2) the University of Illinois Cline Center newspaper database, 3) Lexis-Nexis newspaper archives and 4) the University of California, Los Angeles NewsScape database of television news content. We extracted enough potential content that we could make meaningful comparisons among sources in terms of how they covered Black and White families.

SEARCH TERM EXTRACTION.

We used a two-prong process to gather the study sample. The first process involved the development and execution of relevant search terms to increase the number of useful stories we could analyze.

These search terms included both family role words (e.g., mother, father, aunt) and descriptive words related to family formation and behavior (e.g., deadbeat, divorced, adoption, out-of-wedlock) that we suspected might be racialized or otherwise relevant. The search terms utilized are included in Appendix A.

The second process involved constructing a randomized sample of sources. We drew this portion of the sample by relying on a number of procedures developed by content analysis experts (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Potter et al., 1998). The equal probability of selection method (EPSEM) was the foundation of this approach. This method allows one to argue that the sample drawn is representative because every program has an approximately equal chance of being included. This increases the odds that the news programs approximate the features of the population of news and opinion stations under study. This process yielded 630 news stories.

COMPOSITE WEEK EXTRACTION.

Using the EPSEM method, we drew a composite week of programming. We chose this method to systematically increase our chances of capturing family-related stories. Within the two-year time frame we sampled, for each source, we randomly selected seven days to capture data. Within the seven-day sample, each day of the standard week was represented (i.e., Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc.). This allowed us to account for any systematic variation due to the time of year or day of the week. Afterward, for each source, we captured the first family-related news story we encountered. This methodology yielded 200 news stories for analysis.

TELEVISION SOURCES.

Our goal was to capture sources from television news/opinion national news sources (including newspapers and web sources) and local newspapers. For television news, we sampled the most highly rated news programs for each of the major broadcast and cable networks. The television news networks included: 1) ABC, 2) CBS, 3) NBC, 4) CNN, 5) Fox News and 6) MSNBC.

NATIONAL NEWS SOURCES.

For national news sources, we included three kinds of content: 1) Christian online news sites, 2) Newspapers of national influence and 3) Conservative websites. The Christian Online News sites included: a) Christianity Today, b) Christian Post, c) Christian Today, d) Sojourners (Sojo), e) First Things and f) One News Now. The Newspapers of National Influence included: a) The Wall Street Journal, b) The New York Times, c) USA Today, d) Los Angeles Times, e) San Jose Mercury News, f) New York Post, g) Washington Post, h) Chicago Tribune, i) Telegram & Gazette (Worcester, MA) and j) Atlanta Journal Constitution. The Conservative Websites included: a) The Blaze and b) Breitbart.

LOCAL NEWS SOURCES.

For the local news sources, we divided our potential sample of newspapers and online sources into four regions (i.e. Northeast, South, Midwest and West) and then randomly sampled four of the highest circulation sources for each region. In the final sample, the Northeast news sources included: a) Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, b) Baltimore Sun, c) Hartford Courant and d) Brattleboro Reformer. The South region included: a) Tampa Tribune, b) Austin American-Statesman, c) St. Louis Dispatch and d) Charleston Gazette-Mail. The Midwest Region included: a) Minneapolis Star Tribune, b) Dayton Daily Mail, c) Topeka Capital and d) Capital Times (Madison, WI). Finally, the West region included: a) Orange County Register, b) The Columbian, c) Denver Post and d) Salt Lake Tribune. We believe that the inclusion of local sources adds breadth to our analysis. However, we did not conduct any inter-media comparisons for the local sources; column syndication patterns, circulation patterns (i.e., how and when the newspaper is distributed) and location diversity (i.e., the population rates of different races within a given locality) would need to be accounted for in order for any comparison to be meaningful.¹

¹ We undertake comparisons with national trend data. We also include local sources. Though these local sources were sampled randomly accounting for region in a way that they mimic a representative sample, it is possible that their content might be influenced by local demographics. We checked to see whether the pattern of findings would remain when they were excluded, and found all of our significant results remained unchanged.

KEY VARIABLES AND RELIABILITY

APPROXIMATELY 30 NEWS ARTICLES/REPORTS WERE CODED TO TEST THE CODEBOOK THROUGHOUT ITS DEVELOPMENT. IN THE END, WE DETERMINED OUR RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT WAS STRONG.

To determine this, we used Krippendorff's alpha, a conservative (or strict) measure of reliability. For this kind of study, an acceptable reliability coefficient average is .70 and we produced an average of .84.

Below, we thoroughly describe the key variables utilized in this analysis. In addition, we note a few that did not make our minimum cut-off coefficient of .60 and therefore were not fully analyzed in this report.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTATOR STATEMENT VARIABLES.

A key portion of our analysis focused on what news commentators (e.g., journalists, pundits, expert interviewees or other "speakers" within the reporting) say that may reinforce stereotypes and/or inaccuracies about Black families. The following variables measure the characteristics and statements of individuals within stories. First, we assessed whether *the individual made comments that perpetuate the notion that fathers are unavailable for their children* (alpha = .70). To measure this, we asked questions such as: Does the individual suggest that these fathers abandon or neglect their children? Does the individual imply that these fathers do not properly fulfill a supervisory role? Does the individual state that these fathers do not pay child support or visit their children? Unfortunately, we were unable to assess comments about the availability of mothers for their children because the reliability coefficient was too low (alpha = .20).

Second, we measured whether *the individual cites at least one statistic regarding the existence or worsening of the issues related to family* (alpha = .80). For example, does the individual provide data

from a reputable source to back up his or her various claims about families' abilities to function? Does he or she mention recent studies that provide objective data regarding social phenomena?

Third, using the direct statements of the commentators and any video evidence, coders then made judgments about the *race being commented on by the individual* (alpha = .70) using three categories of family: Black, White or Other People of Color.

IMAGE VARIABLES.

The image variables were used to measure relevant attributes of images that were displayed on websites and on television. If there were people in the foreground and background (i.e. smaller, blurred, obscured), we only considered people in the foreground. For websites/newspapers, we counted only the first two images (top to bottom, left to right) that contained a depiction of family and were not advertisements or links to other stories. For television news segments, we counted the first two images that appeared in the news segment that contained a depiction of family. We counted only pictures that were related to the narrative of family at the time they were shown. The following variables were part of the image variables that we assessed. First, we counted *how many Black people are pictured as being in a family* (alpha = 1.00). Second, we counted *how many White people are pictured as being in a family* (alpha = .90). For these first two variables, coders assessed the number of Black family members or White family members depicted. Third, we measured *whether the mother is depicted in the photo as spending time with her children* (alpha = 1.00). For instance, does she take her child to school? Does she read to her child or help her child with homework? Fourth, we measured *whether the father is depicted in the photo as spending time with his children* (alpha = 1.00). For instance, does he play with his kids, teach his kids or eat with his kids? These kinds of activities would count as time spent with children.

OVERALL FAMILY DEPICTION VARIABLES.

The following variables were used to capture data about specific families and mentions of family in general, including mentions of family structure, the social and economic status (SES) of families,

and portrayals of specific family members (e.g., parents helping with homework, family member incarceration). First, to obtain an indication of how poverty was portrayed, we assessed *the socioeconomic status of the primary family* depicted in the news story (alpha = .82). Coders considered occupation, place of residence and narrative of life experiences to determine the SES of a given family as being either poor, middle class or upper class. If a head of household was described as working in a job requiring little education that paid little money, the primary family would be coded as poor. For example, “Karen’s mom works at Starbucks as a barista and brings home little pay.” Parents described as educated professionals making a good salary would be coded as middle class.

Second, coders determined whether the family was described as utilizing government welfare programs (alpha = .70). Families described as primarily relying on government assistance (i.e., some form of cash assistance, not jobs programs) would be coded as dependent on welfare. Third, we assessed the *race of the families mentioned* using three categories of family: Black, White or Other People of Color (with mixed race families included in the Other People of Color category) (alpha = .85). Fourth, we assessed the *race of family members accused of committing a crime* (alpha = 1.0). Coders used all information contained in a news story to determine whether family members were identified as criminal suspects using the same three categories mentioned above: Black, White or Other People of Color.

Fifth, as a concluding overall variable, we measured whether the depicted family was a *representation/illustration of societal stability or instability* (alpha = .60). Coders considered all information presented about the given family based on American mainstream norms of family. Analysis of this variable required examining each family discussed in each news story in order to detect whether it was described as contributing to societal stability or instability. Stories emphasizing stable families would represent them as the backbone of America (e.g., rags to riches, social mobility, prosocial values and education). Stories that at any point negatively invoked one of the above described variables (e.g., a story about a single teen welfare mom with many children) would be

coded as an illustration of social instability. Conversely, an illustration of societal stability might include a successful family, a happy nuclear family or a family that practices generally accepted social values (e.g., education). Stable families reinforce the common narratives of American success and exceptionalism, which posit that strong families are the backbone of a healthy society. A story that discusses how a family pulls together to help one of the children take home a spelling bee championship would offer such a narrative, for example. However, a representation of instability might include crime and poverty negatively affecting the family. For example, a discussion of an absentee father who has spent a significant amount of time in prison or a discussion of a drug-addicted mother recently convicted of a crime would serve as examples of instability. Coders had to decide whether each family was *only* depicted as socially stable or was *at some point* depicted as socially unstable. Even if there were positive aspects to the family's story, if at any point crime, poverty or paternal absenteeism was invoked, the family was coded as contributing to social instability rather than social stability.

APPENDIX A / B / C

**APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE AUTHOR,
COLOR OF CHANGE & FAMILY STORY**

APPENDIX B: SEARCH TERMS

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES



APPENDIX A

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. TRAVIS L. DIXON IS PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION AND THE COMMUNICATION ALUMNI PROFESSORIAL SCHOLAR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN.

Professor Dixon is a media effects scholar who specializes in investigating the prevalence of stereotypes in the mass media and the impact of stereotypical imagery on audience members. He has written dozens of academic papers that systematically assess the content of racialized media imagery and the impact of these biased depictions on viewers. In addition to the University of Illinois, Dr. Dixon has held faculty positions at the University of Michigan and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Over the past two decades, Professor Dixon has undertaken research that incorporates psychological theories of stereotyping, critical theories of race and communication theories of media effects. During this time, Dr. Dixon has examined the content and effects of stereotypical depictions across various media including news, television, the internet and music. His research investigates the linkage between stereotypic content and social judgments using a variety of methodological approaches including quantitative content analyses, experiments and surveys. His research has been cited thousands of times and his methodological innovations have been promoted in popular Communication methods textbooks. He has served as a principle investigator in cooperation with the RAND corporation to investigate police-community relations in the city of Cincinnati by systematically analyzing police dash cam footage. Dr. Dixon also served as the 2013 Visiting Philanthropy Faculty Scholar at the Clinton School of Public Service.

Dr. Dixon has been a frequent commenter on issues of racial stereotyping within the mass media. His work has been profiled in USA Today, the Chicago Sun-Times, WGN Radio, the Los Angeles Times, the Guardian newspaper, and NPR. Dr. Dixon has received seven top paper awards from the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association. He has also received a top article award from the National Communication Association. Dr. Dixon has also received a mentorship award from the Communication Leaders organization. He was also the first recipient of the Graduate Student Service award at the University of California, Santa Barbara, named in his honor. He has also been honored as a top instructor on the University of Illinois List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent. Dr. Dixon serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, *Media Psychology* and the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*.

ABOUT COLOR OF CHANGE

COLOR OF CHANGE IS THE NATION'S LARGEST ONLINE RACIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION.

As a national force driven by more than one million members, Color Of Change moves decision makers to implement changes in policy and practice that will ultimately create a more human and less hostile world for Black people in America. Color Of Change leads winning campaigns and initiatives across industries and government sectors related to criminal justice, the economy and work, politics, the environment, media and technology.

Color Of Change has a strong record of working to change practices that lead to inaccurate and dehumanizing portrayals of Black people and people of color across the media landscape while also working to promote content and implement practices, systems and incentives that lead to accurate, authentic, diverse and humanizing representations. Research has consistently shown the widespread, real-life, everyday harm of inaccurate media representations of Black people—unfair, unjust and harmful treatment by employers, judges, teachers, doctors, lawmakers, voters and police. Creating a more inclusive and fairer industry is a critical organizational mandate.

Color Of Change regularly works with news directors, journalists and others throughout the national and local news landscape. The aim of this work is to promote greater understanding of the effects of inaccurate reporting, the practices that lead to it and how to change those practices to ensure accuracy and fairness in reporting with respect to portrayals of Black people and issues affecting Black people. Color Of Change also released an earlier report, [Not To Be Trusted](#), which exposed and challenged local TV news reporting in New York City—network by network—that was drastically, inaccurately and dangerously overrepresenting Black people as criminals.

Color Of Change also maintains a presence in Hollywood, working across the entertainment industry

to end the practices that lead to the systemic, inaccurate and dehumanizing portrayals of Black people and all marginalized groups in popular media. A recent Color Of Change report, [Race in the Writers' Room](#), exposed how hiring and content development for scripted television series in Hollywood is systematically whitewashing the stories that shape American culture and politics and also identified the worst offenders.

Color Of Change welcomes partnerships with all those who share its goals and values.

ABOUT FAMILY STORY

FAMILY STORY IS A COMMUNICATIONS, RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING ORGANIZATION.

Our mission is to change the conversation about “good” families by challenging unfounded norms about family life and structure and promoting the fundamental dignity, value and soundness of a wider range of family arrangements and models than current norms embrace.

We do that by promoting new ideas, fresh analysis and original research about the evolution of families, by collecting and sharing stories that counter the disproven conventional wisdom about families and demonstrating the strength, beauty and resilience of the real families of today.

Our research agenda is designed to investigate emerging trends, public attitudes and media representations relevant to our collective thinking about families as well as to expose those responsible for the highly racialized and inaccurate stream of misinformation about families that the public regularly receives, both implicitly and explicitly, through our media environment. Most recently, Family Story completed a nationally representative online survey on unmarried women’s attitudes towards marriage, partnership and parenting.

APPENDIX B

SEARCH TERMS

BLACK FAMILIES	WHITE FAMILIES	FAMILY ROLE SEARCH TERMS	DESCRIPTIVE TERMS
BLACK FAMILY BLACK FAMILIES AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILY AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES	WHITE FAMILY WHITE FAMILIES CAUCASIAN FAMILY CAUCASIAN FAMILIES	FAMILY MOTHER FATHER MOM DAD PARENT PARENTAL SPOUSE HUSBAND WIFE MARRIED SISTER BROTHER CHILD DAUGHTER SON SIBLING RELATIVES UNCLE AUNT COUSIN NEPHEW NIECE GRANDPARENT GRANDMOTHER GRANDFATHER ADOPTED SON ADOPTED DAUGHTER ADOPTED CHILD ORPHAN GODMOTHER GODFATHER GODPARENTS STEPFAMILY FOSTER NUCLEAR FAMILY MAMA DADDY MOMMA PATERNAL MATERNAL STEPPARENTS STEPMOTHER STEPFATHER	OUT-OF-WEDLOCK TEEN PREGNANCY LATCH-KEY KID PREGNANCY BROKEN HOME HAPPY HOME ABANDONED CHILD WELFARE QUEEN BABY DADDY BABY MAMA BABY MOMMA DEADBEAT TOO MANY CHILDREN BABY DADDY ABSENTEE PARENT ABSENTEE MOTHER ABSENTEE FATHER SINGLE PARENT SINGLE MOM SINGLE MOTHER SINGLE FATHER SINGLE DAD UNMARRIED TEEN PREGNANCY PATERNITY MATERNITY DIVORCE ADOPTION ADOPTION AGENCY CHILD SUPPORT CHILD CARE INDEPENDENT MOTHER INDEPENDENT FATHER TRIMESTER ABORTION FAMILY PLANNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ABSENTEE PARENT ABSENTEE MOTHER ABSENTEE FATHER ABSENT PARENT ABSENT MOTHER ABSENT FATHER FATHERLESS

APPENDIX C

References

- Dixon, T. L. (2001). Social cognition and racial stereotyping in television: Consequences for transculturalism. In M. Asante, V. Milhouse, & P. Nwosu (Eds.), *Transcultural Realities* (pp. 215-224). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dixon, T. L. (2006). Psychological reactions to crime news portrayals of Black criminals: Understanding the moderating roles of prior news viewing and stereotype endorsement. *Communication Monographs*, 73, 162-187. doi:10.1080/03637750600690643
- Dixon, T. L. (2008). Crime news and racialized beliefs: Understanding the relationship between local news viewing and perceptions of African Americans and crime. *Journal of Communication*, 58, 106-125. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00376.x
- Dixon, T. L. (2011). Teaching you to love fear: Television news and racial stereotypes in a punishing democracy. In S. J. Hartnett (Ed.), *Challenging the prison Industrial complex: Activism, arts & educational alternatives* (pp. 106-123). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Dixon, T. L. (2017). How the Internet and social media accelerate racial stereotyping and social division: The Socially Mediated Stereotyping Model. In R. A. Lind (Ed.), *Race and Gender in Electronic Media: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 161-178). New York: Routledge.
- Dixon, T. L., Azocar, C., & Casas, M. (2003). The portrayal of race and crime on television network news. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47, 495-520. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4704_2
- Dixon, T. L., & Josey, C. L. (2013). Race and news revisited: The content and effects of problematically framing the news. In E. Scharrer (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies: Media Effects/Media Psychology* (Vol. 5, pp. 1-23). Boston, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dixon, T. L., & Linz, D. G. (2000a). Overrepresentation and underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as lawbreakers on television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 131-154. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02845.x
- Dixon, T. L., & Linz, D. G. (2000b). Race and the misrepresentation of victimization on local television news. *Communication Research*, 27, 547-573. doi:10.1177/009365000027005001
- Dixon, T. L., & Linz, D. G. (2002). Television news, prejudicial pretrial publicity, and the depiction of race. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 46, 112-136. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4601_7
- Dixon, T. L., & Williams, C. L. (2015). The changing misrepresentation of race and crime on network and cable news. *Journal of Communication*, 65, 24-39. doi:10.1111/jcom.12133
- Entman, R. (1992). Blacks in the news: Television, modern racism, and cultural change. *Journalism Quarterly*, 69, 341-361. doi:10.1177/107769909206900209
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x
- Entman, R., & Rojecki, A. (2000). *The Black image in the white mind: Media and race in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giaccardi, S., Ward, L. M., Seabrook, R. C., Manago, A., & Lippman, J. (2016). Media and modern manhood: testing associations between media consumption and young men's acceptance of traditional gender ideologies. *Sex Roles*, 75(3), 151-163. doi:10.1007/s11199-016-0588-z
- Gilens, M. (1996a). Race and poverty in America: Public misperceptions and the American news media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 60, 515-541. doi:10.1086/297771
- Gilens, M. (1996b). "Race coding" and white opposition to welfare. *The American Political Science*

- Review, 90, 593-604. doi:10.2307/2082611
- Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media and the politics of antipoverty policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilliam, F. D., & Iyengar, S. (2000). Prime suspects: The influence of local television news on the viewing public. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44, 560-573. doi:10.2307/2669264
- Greenberg, B. S., & Neuendorf, K. A. (1980). Black family interactions on television. In B. S. Greenberg (Ed.), *Life on television* (pp. 173-181). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Iyengar, S. (1990). Framing responsibility for political issues: The case of poverty. *Political Behavior*, 12, 19-40. doi:10.1007/BF00992330
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible?: How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, J. D., Jackson, L. A., & Gatto, L. (1995). Violent attitudes and deferred academic aspirations: Deleterious effects of exposure to rap music. *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, 16(1-2), 27-41. doi:10.1207/s15324834basp1601&2_2
- National Health Statistics Reports. (2013). Fathers' Involvement With Their Children: United States, 2006–2010. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr071.pdf>
- Pew Research Center. (2013). In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable: Trends in News Consumption-1991-2012. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014). Stark racial divisions in reactions to Ferguson police shooting. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/18/stark-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-ferguson-police-shooting/>
- Potter, J., Linz, D., Wilson, B., Donnerstein, E., Kunkel, D., Smith, S., . . . Grey, T. (1998). Content analysis of entertainment television: New methodological developments. In J. Hamilton (Ed.), *Television violence and public policy* (pp. 55-104). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Romer, D., Jamieson, K. H., & Aday, S. (2003). Television news and the cultivation of fear of crime. *Journal of Communication*, 53, 88-104.
- Shrum, L. J. (2009). Media consumption and perceptions of social reality: Effects and underlying processes. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 50-73). New York: Routledge.
- Sorenson, S. B., Manz, J. G., & Berk, R. A. (1998). News media coverage and the epidemiology of homicide. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88, 1510-1514. doi:10.2105/AJPH.88.10.1510
- Sparks, G. (2013). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth-Thomson Learning.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). 21.3 Percent of U.S. Population Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-97.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2015). Uniform crime reports for the United States. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/persons-arrested/persons-arrested>

