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From Print to Podcasts: The Impact of News Consumption on Bias Toward Forensic Evidence

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FROM PRINT TO PODCASTS: THE IMPACT OF NEWS CONSUMPTION ON BIAS TOWARD FORENSIC EVIDENCE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT


Building on previous legal psychology research in the areas of the CSI Effect and cultivation theory, this study explored variables related to news consumption habits and their possible impact on survey respondents’ valuation of forensic evidence. Regression models were analyzed using both sociodemographic controls and news consumption habits and preferences. Several sociodemographic controls were found to impact reliance on forensic evidence at a level of statistical significance including university affiliation category, gender identification, and experience working or interning in a criminal justice setting. Additionally, the model considering sources of news was found to relate to reliance on forensic evidence. Analysis of the correlation coefficients provided further insight into the possible relationship between variables that could be explored in future research on juror bias. Theoretical comparisons and policy implications were also discussed.
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Introduction

The nascent field of legal psychology, becoming increasingly utilized since the 1970s, aims to apply social science research, methods, and theory to the criminal justice system (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Practitioners in this field can assist attorneys throughout all phases of trial and mediation, both civil and criminal (Wingrove, Korpas, & Belli, 2011; Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Through means such as questionnaires and mock juries, consultants and researchers in the field of legal psychology can provide attorneys with research findings and strategies in such areas as pretrial publicity, plea bargains and settlements, witness preparation, and jury selection (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Although most cases are arbitrated without going to trial, juries remain important to the justice system as they are faced with the task of deciding guilt or innocence in criminal trials (Daftary-Kapur, Dumas, & Penrod, 2010). Unfortunately, the jury system is imperfect, operating under the assumption that jurors can wade through all of the evidence presented while setting aside any preconceptions they may have about the case in order to arrive at a fair and impartial decision of guilt or innocence.

The process of jury selection, known as voir dire, varies greatly by jurisdiction. In many cases the judge moderates a question-and-answer session while, in other instances, the attorneys can issue surveys or perform their own questioning (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). During voir dire, each side is permitted to dismiss a certain number of potential jurors, which varies by jurisdiction, either for cause or as a peremptory challenge (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Challenges for cause are predicated by factors
such as a potential juror knowing someone involved in the trial or having already formed an opinion of the case, rendering the individual unable to keep an open mind (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Because the standard is high to remove a juror for cause, these challenges are used sparingly (Wingrove et al., 2011).

In contrast, peremptory challenges allow each side to excuse potential jurors for any reason or no reason, and this is where a jury consultant’s research and expertise can contribute to an attorney’s strategy (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Attorneys can consider juror demographics and attitudes but generally may not dismiss jurors based solely on race or ethnicity (Batson v. Kentucky (1986); United States v. Biaggi (1988)), gender (J.E.B. v. Alabama, 1994), or other characteristics defined by individual states (Wingrove et al., 2011; Winter & Robicheaux, 2011). Jury consultants can provide counsel with strategies and research findings to identify attributes, biases, and personal experiences of those who are likely to view their side of the case favorably, allowing attorneys to use peremptory challenges to exclude potential jurors who are likely to identify with the opposing side’s case (Wingrove et al., 2011; Lieberman & Sales, 2007). In this way, scientific jury selection can be thought of as juror de-selection rather than jury selection (Lieberman & Sales, 2007).

For state-level trials in Ohio where there is one defendant, each side in a misdemeanor trial is allowed three peremptory challenges, four in felony trials that are not capital cases, and 12 in capital trials (2945 ORC §21). In federal cases where there is one defendant, each side is allowed three peremptory challenges for misdemeanor trials and six peremptory challenges for felony trials. Federal capital offenses carry 20 peremptory challenges for each side (Fed. R. Crim. P. 24(b)).
In its infancy, scientific jury selection was used in cases related to social justice concerns and oppression by the government, including such cases as the Harrisburg Seven trial (Lieberman & Sales, 2007). Today, recognizing jurors’ biases is critical in voir dire and is an undertaking for which jury consultants can offer research, methodology, and expertise (Posey & Wrightsman, 2005). Through the use of an electronic survey inspired by existing measures, this paper aimed to identify a relationship between participants' biases toward the criminal justice system and their patterns of news consumption. More specifically, this study employed a survey to examine correlations between respondents’ demographic characteristics, patterns of news consumption, biases, and attitudes toward the criminal justice system and evidentiary variables. These findings aim to provide invaluable information to jury consultants and other stakeholders in the legal and criminal justice communities in that they will offer insight into another variable to consider when selecting jurors – patterns of news consumption.

News consumption habits have become increasingly relevant for several reasons. First, news outlets have recently come under attack for their bias and slant favoring a particular side of the political spectrum. In a more extreme situation, the 2016 U.S. presidential election was arguably affected by disinformation and propaganda perpetuated by social media posts created by those with political agendas (Swaine, 2018). The increasing role of social media in news consumption was explored in the present study. In addition, this research drew a contrast between the more traditional sources of news and the changing face of politically-slanted news such as cable news and podcasts. Identifying how one’s news consumption affects biases toward the criminal justice
system will provide stakeholders with insights allowing them to inquire into potential jurors’ news preferences and excuse those whose tendencies are not likely to favor their side of the case or are likely too extreme to be overcome. As avenues for news consumption continue to grow along with the reach and availability of social media across the globe, research on these will be applicable to a range of fields from criminal justice and political science to marketing and computer engineering.

Recent world events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and presidential elections in the United States have led some news organizations, podcasts, and social media reporting to cast doubt on the validity of science as well as facts themselves. While many Americans rely on news for information and guidance, some merely seek to confirm their own opinions and biases. Attorneys and practitioners in the field of legal psychology could look to such tendencies to identify those jurors who would be open information-seekers versus those who rely on such confirmation bias and heuristic shortcuts to come to a judicial decision. Although the present research was exploratory in nature, it aims to provide stakeholders with an avenue through which potential jurors’ news preferences can be identified. With additional research, these traits may provide a glimpse into how receptive jurors might be to forensic evidence and case presentation strategy.
Literature Review

Previous research has examined a variety of topics germane to jury decision-making, including mock jurors’ assessment of evidentiary strength and extra-evidentiary aspects such as case complexity (Devine, Buddenbaum, Houp, Studebaker, & Stolle, 2009). Devine et al. (2009) found a positive correlation between the strength and variety of prosecutors’ evidence and jurors’ conviction rates but noted that convictions in trials with complex evidence might be based in part on biased assumptions such as ‘most defendants are probably guilty’. Smith, Bull, and Holliday (2011) found that, even without being informed of case context, mock jurors demonstrated evaluations of the probative qualities of evidence similar to mock jurors who had been informed of case context, rating the evidentiary strength on whether it could be explained plausibly in another way. The findings of these two studies indicate that biases play a role and that mock jurors have expectations about the quality and quantity of evidence that will be presented in a case, even without familiarity with the case specifics.

While the literature to date has addressed many issues related to juror bias and decision-making, jurors’ demographic characteristics have generally been found to lack credence in predicting verdicts and prejudicial leanings in cases, with inconsistent results across a range of traits including socioeconomic status, education, gender, religion, race and ethnicity, and marital status (Winter & Robicheaux, 2011; Liberman & Sales, 2007). For the purposes of brevity, however, the present research included only a few traditional demographic variables – age, race or ethnicity, and gender expression. Even though
these characteristics have been shown to lack predictive value in case decisions overall, this study chose to include a few broad demographics as control variables to supplement or put into context any findings related to news consumption and opinions of forensic evidence.

Another area in which research has yielded uncertain results explores how viewership of crime-related television, both fiction and non-fiction, might bias jurors’ expectations of case evidence and the criminal justice system at large. Public interest in the legal system is evident in the variety and popularity of programming in both the fiction and non-fiction genres, from media coverage of the Lindbergh baby case and the O.J. Simpson trial to the CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Law and Order franchises (Hawkins & Scherr, 2017). Indeed, the general public’s fascination with crime is widespread (Intravia, Wolff, Paez, & Gibbs, 2017). The present research drew from previous studies of crime drama viewing and television and print news consumption but extended the focus to incorporate the consumption of news from the wider range of platforms available today. Undeniably, the landscape of modern sources of news and television consumption only continues to grow with advances in mobile applications, streaming services, and social networks. As a preliminary study, the researcher chose to focus on news platforms, both traditional and modern, and social media networks included in a Pew Research Center (2017) report on news consumption across a range of nine popular networks and will be detailed further in a subsequent section.
Juror Attributes, Attitudes, and Biases

A key aspect that has been explored in the literature is that of the criminal burden of proof. In the United States, the side bringing the charges against the defendant, known as the prosecution, must present evidence to convince the trier of fact that the defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. If the trier of fact does not feel that the prosecution has met this burden of proof, he or she must acquit the defendant, finding him or her not guilty. Although the defense need not present any evidence, generally it will present evidence and testimony that calls into question that of the prosecution, thus creating reasonable doubt in the mind of the trier of fact. It is important to note that a trier of fact might be a judge, in the case of a bench trial, or a jury. For the purposes of the relevant literature and the scope of this study, the present study considered a group of participants that could be thought of as a mock jury pool in the same way that legal psychology consultants utilize community surveys to gauge public opinion.

Lundrigan, Dhami, and Mueller-Johnson (2016) found that jurors’ pretrial attitudes and the way jurors interpreted the burden of proof standard can predict verdicts. For example, a juror with a pro-prosecution bias is more likely to have a lower threshold of standard of proof so, in turn, is more likely to render a guilty verdict than is a juror with a pro-defense leaning (Lundrigan et al., 2016). Lundrigan et al. also discussed several measures of pretrial attitudes: the Legal Attitudes Questionnaire and its revisions, the RLAQ and RLAQ-23 (Kravitz et al., 1993), the Juror Bias Scale (Kassin & Wrightsman, 1983), and the Pretrial Juror Attitude Questionnaire (PJAQ) (Lecci & Myers, 2008).
The most relevant of these to the present study was the PJAQ because it measured attitudes favoring one side over the other as well as general beliefs about criminal and social justice (Lundrigan et al., 2016). The present research included an original survey modeled, in part, after the PJAQ as well as the Forensic Evidence Evaluation Bias Scale (FEEBS) developed by Smith and Bull (2012). The FEEBS was developed to test jurors’ biases toward weak or ambiguous forensic evidence and the creators found that jurors with pro-prosecution leanings accepted relatively weak forensic evidence to be more probative as compared to jurors with pro-defense leanings (Smith & Bull, 2012). The present study considered the attitudes toward forensic evidence that these two scales took into account. Participants’ responses on the questionnaire section modeled after the PJAQ and FEEBS made up the dependent variable component of this study, and are discussed further in the methodology section. Copies of the PJAQ and FEEBS are included in Appendices A and B, respectively.
The 24-Hour News Cycle and Changing Modes of News Consumption

The availability of news coverage has grown over the last few decades, as has diversity among platforms of news consumption. Deemed the ‘24-hour news cycle’, Americans can now follow endless coverage of high-profile cases in addition to accessing news from a variety of sources. The most notable of these changes is the rise of social media and the accessibility of news stories on a number of devices and through various applications. An American Press Institute study (2015b) found that most respondents got their news from television, newspapers, radio, search engines, social media, and word of mouth (Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, & Kjarval). The authors posited, then, that the rise of social networking had become an additional way that consumers got their news, rather than detracting from the more traditional avenues (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b).

These trends have led legal and criminal justice professionals to question the impact of such consumption on views of crime in general, but research has yet to focus on juror biases and case outcomes. With the rise in use of internet-capable devices such as mobile phones and tablets, more Americans access the internet than ever before. The Pew Research Center (2018) reported that 77% of Americans use the internet daily, with 26% of the sample reporting using the internet ‘constantly’ (Perrin & Jiang, 2018). As compared to other forms of media, minimal research exists on how internet news and social media shape public opinions (Roche, Pickett, & Gertz, 2016).

Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, and Kjarval (2015a) reported that a significant number of social media users accessed news at least once per day or several times per week: 77% and 16%, respectively. In 2017, the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds of Americans reported using social media to get at least some of their
news, a roughly 5% increase from 2016 (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Although this is a modest increase overall, Shearer and Gottfried (2017) pointed out that more substantial growth was seen in groups of Americans who were older, non-white, and less educated. Unchanged as compared to 2016, 78% of the sample of Americans under age 50 reported using social media to get their news (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Further, 74% of non-whites in the sample used social media for news, and use increased among those with less than a bachelor’s degree and decreased slightly for those holding at least a bachelor’s degree (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). The 2017 Pew Research study included the social media platforms Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr, and WhatsApp in its statistics, with Facebook and YouTube providing the top two sources of news among participants (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). For the purposes of brevity, the present literature review will concentrate only on the statistics of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Roche et al. (2016) examined internet news specifically and noted, importantly, that internet news lacks censorship and, often, fact-checking. Internet news in its many incarnations from news organizations’ websites to YouTube channels, therefore, is often biased in its reporting. While the recent controversy surrounding media bias is centered around political reporting, bias is often seen in other types of news stories including those on crime and punishment (Roche et al., 2016). The present study aimed to explore the sources that participants use to get their news and whether different sources’ propensities for partiality and level of fact-checking might contribute to biases in their consumers.

Internet pages allow for endless sources of additional information through links to other websites, as well as biased content in the form of user comments. Social media
then allows users to share and repost news stories, in addition to discussing stories in the posts’ comments section (Roche et al., 2016). The Pew Research Center found that, as of 2014, 46% of social media users reported commenting on or reposting content found online (Roche et al., 2016). These aspects allow users to engage more actively in news consumption, perhaps increasing both its prominence in users’ attention and their time spent exploring news stories (Roche et al., 2016). Such discourse may ultimately enhance or alter a user’s perceptions and opinions (Intravia et al., 2017). Callanan (2012) notes that audiences become active receptors of information, as opposed to passive, when they engage with media to draw from personal experiences and construct objective meaning.

Social media sites provide users with an opportunity to actively engage in the content they see and share. As compared to more traditional forms of news media, the networks allow users to tailor their news consumption (Intravia et al., 2017). Stories often include a link to the original source, which also includes links to related stories. Many sites also allow users to share posts with connections, creating more ownership and identification with the content. Social media often allows users to see other users who ‘like’ or post similar content, allowing them to engage further in discourse (Intravia et al., 2017). An American Press Institute study noted that news consumption via social media was more participatory than getting news from more traditional sources, with 64% of respondents who used Twitter indicating that they both read about news and share news on the network (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). Thirty-four percent of respondents using Twitter to get their news reported referring to ‘trending’ topics to discover news information, while 94% of respondents reported that they found news by browsing or
scrolling (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). Ninety-two percent reported clicking to read the story rather than just relying on the condensed tweet or headline at least occasionally, with 39% doing so always or usually and 53% doing so sometimes (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b).

Indeed, social media and mobile usage have changed the ways in which news outlets and content developers can connect with viewers, readers, subscribers, and followers. Social media especially allows users to discover additional news content providers, such as bloggers, authors, and podcast hosts, with 73% of Twitter users surveyed reporting that they followed news commentators, writers, or journalists (Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, & Kjarval, 2015c). Additionally, users can download mobile applications (apps) from such providers as Fox News, the Huffington Post, National Public Radio, and CNN. The Google Play store shows that the New York Times app, Fox News app, and CNN app each have over 10 million downloads. The Huffington Post, a digital newspaper, and the National Public Radio News app each show over 1 million downloads. Locally, the Dayton Daily News app has been downloaded over 10 thousand times. These statistics represent only the portion of consumers with Android devices; the number of downloads by Apple iOS device users is not made available in the iStore, but would no doubt add to these figures significantly.

The eminent social media network today among Americans is Facebook, whose mission statement includes connecting family and friends, discovering current events, and expressing ideas, opinions, and anecdotes that are important to the user (Facebook Newsroom, n.d.). Facebook Newsroom’s section on company statistics boasts, as of September 2018, an average of 1.49 billion users who access Facebook daily, with the
number of monthly users adding over 750 million to that figure. By the end of the first quarter of 2021, Facebook’s reach grew to approximately 2.85 billion monthly users (Tankovska, 2021a). The CBS News Facebook page (@CBSNews) lists roughly 5.8 million followers and 5.5 million likes. The Facebook page of Fox News (@FoxNews) has over 16.2 million followers and over 16.8 million likes, and the New York Times (@nytimes) boasts similar figures. These figures are nearly doubled by the CNN Facebook page (@cnn). Locally, Dayton Daily News (@daytondailynews) has over 178,000 Facebook followers and 184,000 likes.

These news outlets also have a considerable number of followers on Twitter, a platform that allows users to ‘microblog’ with short posts, photographs, and videos. Twitter allows users to post, or ‘tweet’, ‘retweet’ and ‘like’ the posts of others. Rosenstiel et al. (2015a) reported that, as of 2015, 37% of the Twitter users who responded tweet or retweet multiple times per day, as opposed to simply reading others’ tweets. This study, published by the American Press Institute (2015a), looked at groups comprised of those who use Twitter, social media users who do not use Twitter, and overall users of social media. The percentage of daily news consumption was the highest for Twitter users, at 81% (Rosenstiel et al., 2015a). Further, 86% of respondents who use Twitter reported using it to get their news, and 74% reported doing so daily (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). The researchers also found that 61% of respondents reported getting more news since joining Twitter (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b).

Twitter users were also more likely than were non-Twitter users to believe that it is easier today to consume news as compared to five years ago, with 79% reporting so compared to 62% of respondents who do not use Twitter (Rosenstiel et al., 2015a). The
study also reported that 40% of respondents used Twitter to be notified of breaking news stories, with roughly the same number using it to follow the news more generally (Rosenstiel et al., 2015a). The American Press Institute study (2015b) also asked respondents which news topics, from a list of 28, that they followed in the past week, including such topics as politics, safety and crime, and human-interest stories. The researchers found that Twitter users followed an average of 14 of the topics, representing twice as many topics followed by non-Twitter social media users (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). The American Press Institute study (2015b) also noted that Twitter users were more likely to follow individual journalists, rather than or in addition to the journalists’ respective news organizations’ accounts (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). Twitter users were also less likely than non-Twitter users to consume their news through television, but more likely to use mobile apps, websites, social media, and search engines to get their news (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b).

Twitter’s earnings report listed 335 million active users monthly, as of the second quarter of 2018 (Shaban & Timberg, 2018). Beginning the first quarter of 2019, however, Twitter began reporting only the number of daily active users whose accounts were monetizable, adjusting the figure to just shy of 200 million by the end of the first quarter of 2021 (Tankovska, 2021b). CNN’s Twitter feed (@CNN) has over 53 million followers, and the CNN Breaking News feed (@cnnbrk) has approximately 61 million followers. The New York Times follows closely behind with its Twitter feed (@nytimes) of approximately 50 million followers, while Fox News (@FoxNews) has 20 million followers. WHIO (@whiotv), the local CBS affiliate in the greater Dayton region, has 139,000 Twitter followers while the local NBC affiliate, WDTN (@WDTN), has over
68,000 followers. The Dayton Daily News Twitter account (@daytondailynews) falls between those two with nearly 90,000 followers.

YouTube, a video streaming and sharing platform, has also created an avenue through which news outlets and content creators can gain viewership. Business Insider reported that, as of the second quarter of 2018, YouTube boasted over 1.8 billion users each month combined between its website and mobile application (Gilbert, 2018). YouTube has shown significant growth since the Pew Research Center surveyed Americans’ use in 2019; up from 73% to 81% of respondents reporting that they use the site (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). CNN’s YouTube channel has roughly 12 million subscribers and posts both breaking news and clips from its television shows. Fox News’ YouTube channel, with approximately 7.5 million subscribers, posts similar content. Late night satire has also found its way to YouTube, with shows reposting monologues and interviews from the night before to their respective YouTube channels. The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, for example, has over 8.5 million YouTube subscribers. Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, an HBO program, has about 8.75 million YouTube subscribers. Notably, this program’s YouTube account allows viewers without HBO subscriptions to access much of the content shown in each episode, which includes discussions of current events as well as ‘deep dives’ into topics such as crime and punishment, science, and politics.

Those who use social media for news consumption are able to customize the experience by identifying topics and sources that are of interest to them (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). The American Press Institute (2015b) suggested that this ability might cause users to narrow the scope of the material they consume, independent of the arguably
agenda-setting effect perpetuated by the news media (Rosenstiel et al., 2015b). Users can also tailor their internet news experiences by subscribing to RSS feeds or allowing breaking news push notifications from news applications. Search engines such as Google and Yahoo host news feeds; Twitter, too, has a news feed in addition to the accounts and tweets of news organizations, journalists, and commentators. The Pew Research Center reported that, among Americans who use the internet, over 25% have set up customized news pages; roughly the same percentage allow breaking news alerts from mobile news applications (Rainie, 2010; Roche et al., 2016). Though it is important to appreciate that these modern platforms allow for more active engagement with news, this preliminary study did not probe the extent to which respondents actively participated with news stories across various platforms, but focused on the number of times in the past month participants simply heard about news stories from a range of media sources, from traditional to emergent.
News Coverage and Pretrial Publicity

An additional nuance of news consumption relevant to its effects on bias is that of pretrial publicity (PTP). Daftary et al. (2010) noted that extralegal information, that which is not directly related to case presentation, is often available to prospective jurors through news media coverage. Though jurors are instructed to consider only the evidence presented in trial, PTP has the potential to create biases that might affect impartiality in a number of ways. Ruva, McEvoy, and Bryant (2007) found that mock juries exposed to PTP did not consider the defendant to be as credible as did non-exposed juries, and also misattributed information that was introduced only in the PTP as having been presented in trial as well. Ruva et al. (2007) noted that these factors likely contributed to the higher ratings of guilt and longer sentences imposed by exposed mock juries as compared to non-exposed mock juries. Even with jury instructions, mock jurors exposed to PTP often discussed evidence that was mentioned in the PTP in deliberations without confirming or correcting misattributions of whether the information was presented or refuted in trial (Ruva & Guenther, 2015; Ruva & LeVasseur, 2012). One possible explanation for this deviance is that considering information contained in PTP allows jurors who are not sufficiently convinced of guilt to supplement the prosecution’s ambiguous evidence (Ruva & Guenther, 2015; Ruva & LeVasseur, 2012).

Ruva and McEvoy (2008) found that jurors’ assessments of the attorneys can also be affected by the slant of PTP. Mock jurors exposed to negative PTP rated the prosecutor more favorably and the defense attorney less favorably than did jurors exposed to positive PTP or no PTP (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008). These biasing effects were also reflected in verdicts and jurors’ assessments of the defendant’s credibility. Jurors...
exposed to positive PTP rated the defendant’s credibility higher and rendered fewer guilty verdicts than did the negative PTP or no PTP jurors (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008).

Clearly, PTP can affect bias in several ways, including exposing potential jurors to information that might not be presented at trial and affecting jurors’ perceptions of defendants, witnesses, and attorneys (Ruva & Guenther, 2015). Particularly germane to the present study and its consideration of modern platforms for news consumption, is the accessibility of prejudicial material habitually made available on the internet. The internet often provides access to explicit content, such as recordings of 911 calls and footage of brutal attacks captured on video (Roche et al., 2016). This information is certainly capable of tainting the jury pool’s opinions of a case, despite whether the evidence is actually presented at trial.

While legal remedies such as continuances and changes of venue are available to mitigate the effects of PTP somewhat, these motions are often denied because the social science community and the courts have yet to agree on ways to define and recognize juror prejudice (Ruva et al., 2007). This disagreement is one example of ways in which legal psychology practitioners can contribute their expertise to the criminal justice community. Although a wealth of scholarship is available on the subject of PTP, much of the research is beyond the scope of the present study. Still, it bears mentioning as an aspect of the argument that news media can shape a jury pool’s opinions of case-related information and biases about the criminal justice and legal systems. It is important for stakeholders in the legal and criminal justice communities to recognize these biases and take measures to overcome them at trial in order to foster the most fair and impartial legal system. The current research took the initial steps to investigate and identify one possible
source of bias in potential jurors’ environment – how they get their news. Further research into this topic would develop a better understanding of the role that news plays in forming jurors’ opinions of the criminal justice and legal systems. This understanding would provide practitioners with an additional avenue to gauge the biases and attitudes of potential jurors, in order to structure the most impartial proceedings for both sides of a case.
The CSI Effect and News Consumption

It is clear that jurors hold expectations about the evidentiary strength and value that will be presented in a case, and television viewing has been found to affect this. In the last two decades, some attorneys, judges, and law enforcement officers have noticed a trend among jurors: an increased expectation of definitive forensic evidence (Franzen, 2002; Willing, 2004; Gonzales, 2005; Hooper, 2005; as cited in Wise, 2010). The prosecutors and the media have dubbed this phenomenon “the CSI Effect”, the namesake of the popular CBS show franchise depicting teams of forensic scientists who use advanced technology to solve the cases featured in each episode (Brewer & Ley, 2010; Wise, 2010).

CSI, its spin-offs, and similar shows often depict forensic evidence unrealistically; as readily obtained, expedient, infallible, and routinely used (Brewer & Ley, 2010; Wise, 2010). A number of legal practitioners, most notably prosecutors, believe that jurors who frequently watch forensics-based programming are more likely to acquit defendants if such scientific evidence is not presented, as compared to those jurors not exposed to forensics-based programming (Cooley, 2007; Podlas, 2006; Tyler, 2006; as cited in Kim, Barak, & Shelton, 2009). The CSI Effect can be characterized by explaining how crime shows and the television medium at large cultivate and affect the ways in which jurors perceive their social reality and, specifically, their expectations and evaluation of forensic evidence (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2011). A content analysis of CSI’s first six seasons provided valuable insight into the ways in which forensics are depicted in their investigations, specifically the use of DNA (Ley, Jankowski, & Brewer, 2009; as cited in Brewer & Ley, 2010). In 84% of episodes, the show’s scientists gathered DNA evidence,
using it to solve a case at a rate of 39% (Ley, Jankowski, & Brewer, 2009; as cited in Brewer & Ley, 2010).

Research on whether viewing crime-related television affects jurors’ expectations and interpretations of forensic evidence has produced uncertain results. Crime dramas and journalism often depict the field of forensic science as steadfast and objective, and the CSI Effect purportedly causes juries to perceive weakness in the prosecution’s case if it fails to provide conclusive forensic evidence pointing to a defendant’s guilt (Hayes-Smith and Levett, 2011; Brewer & Ley, 2010; Wise, 2010). Alternatively, when the prosecution does present forensic evidence, jurors who watch forensics-based programming may rely more heavily on it than on other types of evidence (Brewer & Ley, 2010).

Hayes-Smith and Levett (2011) found that mock jurors who viewed shows about crime were more likely to acquit defendants when the prosecution did not present forensic evidence than were mock jurors who did not watch crime shows. Kim et al. (2009) reasoned that watching crime shows based on forensic evidence raises jurors’ confidence in and expectations about forensic evidence while lowering the weight they give to indirect, circumstantial evidence. Smith and Bull (2012) developed a scale, the Forensic Evidence Evaluation Bias Scale, to test juror bias toward evidence and found that those mock jurors with pro-prosecution inclinations found weak forensic evidence to be more probative than did jurors with pro-defense leanings.

The present study adds to the current literature by examining whether and how the CSI Effect might translate from scripted television to news in many of its formats, from newsprint to podcasts. News coverage on DNA evidence has increased since forensics
was first introduced to the legal system in the late 1980s (Brewer & Ley, 2010). Newspapers have been found to shape readers’ general knowledge and perceptions of science and technology, and can lead to support for it (Nisbet et al., 2002; Brewer & Ley, 2010). However, little attention has been paid to the impact of television news (Brewer & Ley, 2010) or news from social media and other evolving platforms.

Brewer and Ley (2010) found that television viewing overall led research participants to find DNA evidence reliable. This is consistent with the findings of Nisbet et al. (2002). Brewer and Ley also found that watching television programming about crime and newspaper reading led participants to perceive themselves as more knowledgeable about DNA and to find it reliable. Their findings also supported the argument of Shelton, Kim, and Barak (2006) that research should explore news consumption in addition to crime-related television with regard to perceptions of DNA evidence. Building on the research of possible bias resulting from the viewership of crime dramas, the present study addressed whether and how this bias might translate instead to news consumption from various platforms, including emergent sources such as apps and social media. As the access to and reliance upon technology continues to grow, news consumers have round-the-clock information from news sources with varying levels of bias and fact-checking. With “fake news” and “alternative facts” present in both modern and traditional sources of news, examining the avenues through which potential jury pools get their news may be key to identifying how their worldviews are shaped and opinions are cultivated.
Cultivation Theory

While news topics vary from entertainment to business, local news tends to focus heavily on crime (Callanan, 2012). More and more, local news networks and law enforcement agencies use social networks to convey breaking news and information on other important stories. National news sources, on the other hand, only pick up stories that are particularly sensational, controversial, or involve a public figure. Theoretically, the ways in which these news sources report on forensics and other evidence would shape public opinions of the use and reliability of forensic evidence, in addition to views of the criminal justice system at large. This shaping is based on cultivation theory, first proposed by George Gerbner in the 1960s. Alitavoli and Kaveh (2018) suggested that the tenants of cultivation theory come together with the concepts of social constructive reality and agenda-setting to shape public opinions on issues such as crime.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) argued that television media is capable of influencing the public’s vision and conception of the world (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018). Their cultivation theory posits that regular viewing of television can influence how a person perceives social aspects of culture (Gerbner, 1972; as cited in Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2011). It aimed to explain how television viewers’ conceptions of the world and social reality are cultivated by their television viewing (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2011). The fundamental hypothesis of cultivation theory is that the beliefs, values, and assumptions of those who were heavy consumers of television differed from those of less regular viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986).

Gerbner and Gross were concerned with media messages across a macrosystems approach, exploring how messages gradually shaped perceptions through everyday
consumption (Potter, 2014). Gerbner explored the interplay between three aspects: the institution of media, widespread messaging, and the effect across the macrosystem (Potter, 2014). Alitovali and Kaveh (2018) proposed that public opinions were shaped by an interplay of cultivation theory and two complementary concepts: social constructive reality and agenda-setting theory. While scholars have begun to explore how social contexts, personal characteristics, and past experiences might impact the perceptions and attitudes of media consumers, little is known about the effect of social media (Intravia et al., 2017). Because the landscape of media messages has changed significantly since Gerbner first began to publish his work, the present study examined whether and how cultivation effects translate to sources of news consumption beyond television, such as social media.

Existing research showed that the public receives most of its information about crime from media accounts, and their perceptions and attitudes are also shaped by media consumption (Roberts & Stalans, 1997; Gross & Aday, 2003; Surette, 2007; as cited in Intravia et al., 2017). In addition, Callanan (2012) noted that minorities are disproportionately represented in the production of mass media, and that the target audience for messaging is the white middle class. With the rise of social networking allowing consumers to get news from a range of sources and having the ability to engage with it more actively, Intravia et al. (2017) pointed out that users were more readily able to cultivate their own news experiences, rather than relying solely on professional news outlets dictating their content. Even still, television remains the platform through which most of the American public gets its news (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018).
Much of the research on cultivation theory thus far has focused on fear of crime, but the present study examined general attitudes and biases about the evidentiary value of forensic science. While cultivation theory was originally intended to be studied using a macro-level approach, more recent research into cultivation theory, including the present study, has explored its effects in a micro-level setting (Potter, 2014). While Gerbner was concerned with television-viewing on the whole, subsequent researchers have explored genre-specific variables. Gerbner also suggested that cultivation effects accrue over time, but only two studies have explored the concept longitudinally (e.g., Morgan, 1982; Morgan, 1987; as cited in Potter, 2014). Extant research also has focused on television programming, while the present study explored the realms of news outlets in many forms. Research into the evolving environment of news and media platforms only continues to rise in importance as technology and mobile networks grow in reach across the globe.

Beckett and Sasson (2004) argued that the media systematically depicts crime with a bias toward presenting inadequacies in the legal and criminal justice systems and the threat of crime to society (as cited in Roche et al., 2016). In response, cultivation theorists suggested that exposure to media creates a world view that crime rates are rising and that the criminal justice system is too lenient (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Roche et al., 2016). Roche et al., (2016) cited several studies supporting cultivation theory, in that consumption of traditional media such as television news and newspapers is associated with more support for punitive policies, increased confidence in law enforcement officers, and elevated fear about becoming victimized (e.g. Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Goidel et al., 2006; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Kort-Butler & Sittner Hartshorn, 2011).
It is well established that consumption of media is correlated with increased fear of crime among viewers (Intravia et al., 2017). However, it is important to explore the specific types of content or genre consumed to fully understand cultivation effects (Intravia et al., 2017). The present study explored the cultivation effects researched in the topic of fear of crime in a broader scope. First, the current study explored beliefs and biases about the criminal justice system, rather than focusing on fear of crime. Second, the current study moved beyond television viewership to include other sources of media consumption, focusing on news outlets across various platforms. Including modern outlets is more important than ever because technology has become increasingly mobile, affecting how Americans receive, absorb, and interact more actively and consistently with content (Intravia et al., 2017). Additionally, the current study aimed to connect the cultivation effects observed in the CSI Effect with patterns of news consumption to identify whether sources of news with varying degrees of inherent bias correlated with respondents’ beliefs about forensic evidence and the criminal justice system at large.
Methodology

This research was comprised of an original survey modeled after existing measures, the Pretrial Juror Attitude Questionnaire (PJAQ) (Lecci & Myers, 2008) and the Forensic Evidence Evaluation Bias Scale (FEEBS) (Smith & Bull, 2012). The PJAQ includes subscales relating to such factors as confidence in the legal and criminal justice systems and cynicism toward the side of the defense (Lecci & Myers, 2008; Lundrigan et al., 2016). Conviction proneness is measured by a subscale relating to assessments of the beyond reasonable doubt standard (Lecci & Myers, 2008; Lundrigan et al., 2016).

However, the instrument used in the present research was created to focus primarily on the independent variable of modes of news consumption and the dependent variable of biases toward forensic evidence. The FEEBS was designed to test mock jurors’ confidence in convicting a defendant in a case with ambiguous forensic evidence (Smith & Bull, 2012). The FEEBS scale proved to be a useful guide after which to model the present survey, but allowed the researcher to measure faith in the value of forensic evidence as well as opinions about the criminal justice system at large.
Hypotheses

The aim of this study was to determine whether demographics and patterns of news consumption correlated with respondents’ biases toward the probative value they placed on forensic evidence. As an exploratory study, there was minimal research to guide the following hypotheses. However, the researcher reasoned that different news consumption habits across a range of variables would result in varying degrees of reliance on forensic evidence.

Controls/Sociodemographic Characteristics

- Older respondents would be less receptive toward the value of forensic evidence than would younger respondents.
- University students would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would faculty and staff.
- Female respondents would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would male respondents.
- Respondents identifying as white would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would those identifying as non-white.
- Respondents who had experience working or interning in a criminal justice setting would be less receptive to forensic evidence than would those with no such experience.
- Respondents who had served as jurors would be less receptive to the value of forensic evidence than would respondents with no experience serving on a jury.
Although demographic characteristics have not been shown to predict jurors’ judicial decision-making in the extant body of research, these variables were included in the regressions run in the present study to serve as controls.

**Relative Volume of News Consumption**

- Respondents who were more frequent news consumers would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would those who consumed less news. The relationship of the amount of news consumed and the respondents’ levels of reliance on forensic evidence could then be compared to both CSI Effect trends as well as cultivation theory research.

**Preference for News Sources with a High Propensity for Bias**

- Respondents who got their news from more objective sources, such as national newspapers or non-cable news, would be less receptive to forensic evidence. That is, recognize that forensic evidence is not as steadfast as it is portrayed in the media. Alternatively, respondents who got their news from sources with less fact-checking and, thus, more bias, such as social media and podcasts, would be more receptive to forensic evidence. The results of this study could then be applied to determine tendencies mirroring both the CSI Effect and cultivation theory.
**News Source Preferences**

- Respondents who read newspapers would be less receptive to forensic science as evidence than would those who reported getting their news from other sources.

- Those who reported getting their news from television sources would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would those who consumed news from other sources. The findings, then, of this study could be compared with studies on cultivation theory and resulting fear of crime research.

- Respondents who got their news from internet sources would be more receptive to forensic evidence than would those who consumed their news through more traditional sources. The findings on this variable would then have the potential to introduce a new avenue through which cultivation effects and the CSI Effect could be observed.

The hypothesized relationships between these variables are presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Hypothesized Relationship of Independent Variables to Dependent Variable

- **Sociodemographic Characteristics**
  - (age, university affiliation, gender, race, experience in criminal justice, jury service)

- Σ Amount of News Consumption

- Σ Degree of Bias in News Preferences

- Σ Sources of News Consumption
  - (television, newspaper, internet)

→ Degree of Reliance on Forensic Evidence
Procedures

This study utilized Qualtrics software to gather data with an electronic survey of faculty, staff, and students in the College of Liberal Arts at a mid-sized university in southwest Ohio. The email address list was provided by the university’s Institutional Research and Effectiveness office on February 24, 2020 and included approximately 2,400 email addresses.

The survey consisted of 21 non-demographic questions throughout several sections and the target response rate was a minimum of 210 participants. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix C. This research utilized this original scale to evaluate participants’ news consumption habits, both frequency and source, and expectations about the amount and probative value of forensic evidence that they would expect to be presented at a criminal trial. Institutional Research Board approval was conferred, and the survey was distributed electronically on February 27, 2020.

The survey began with two screening questions. First, the respondents were presented with consent language and asked whether to consent and begin the survey or decline and end the survey. Second, participants were asked whether they were 18 years of age or older to determine eligibility as governed by the secured IRB approval. A ‘no’ answer ended the survey while a ‘yes’ answer took respondents to the material survey questions.
Measures – Dependent Variable (DV)

The dependent variable, receptiveness to forensic evidence, was measured in section III of the survey. This research examined whether participants’ biases and attitudes about their evidentiary expectations of forensic science correlated with their patterns of news consumption and/or demographic characteristics. This study established respondents’ evidentiary receptiveness by asking about general attitudes toward the value of forensic evidence. That is, how respondents rated the reliability and steadfastness of forensic science as evidence in criminal cases. The survey defined forensics for participants as scientific evidence that is used to solve crimes, such as fingerprints and DNA.

Section III of the survey used a Likert scale wherein respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of 11 statements, included in Appendix C. Examples of these statements include: “Scientific evidence always provides a conclusive answer to who committed a crime” and “Every crime can be solved with forensic evidence.” Responses were recorded with, for most responses, 4 representing “Strongly agree,” 3 representing “Somewhat agree,” 2 representing “Somewhat disagree,” and 1 representing “Strongly disagree.” Due to the phrasing of three questions, however, the directionality of responses was categorized using reverse coding. That is, addressing the situation in which a response of 4 indicated a tendency to place high importance on forensic evidence in one question but indicated a tendency to place less importance on forensic evidence in another. The three items that were reverse coded were “Witness testimony is more convincing than forensic evidence,” “A confession is more convincing than forensic evidence,” and “Sometimes the police cannot find forensic
evidence at the scene of the crime.” Reverse coding was performed on these items because strong agreement indicated doubt in the merit or realistic availability of forensic evidence, rather than heavy reliance. The responses for items 1-9 were then added up for each participant to render their total score for the dependent variable. Items 10 and 11 were not included in the total due to the possibility of ambiguous interpretation.
Measures – Key Independent Variables (Key IVs)

The key independent variable this study considered was respondents’ modes of news consumption, included in section II of the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate how many days in the past month they had read or heard about news stories from a range of sources. A code of 0 represented 0 times, 1 represented 1-5 times, 2 represented 6-10 times, 3 represented 11-15 times, 4 represented 16-20 times, and 5 represented 21 times or more. Examples of modes of news consumption included local newspapers, cable news, friends’ and family’s social media, and podcasts. These figures were examined by categorizing respondents’ rates of news consumption and the tendency toward bias inherent in each source, as identified by the researcher according to the level of fact-checking characteristic of each source. A participant’s total coded score for section II was used to identify whether he or she would be considered a ‘heavy’ news consumer in the analysis. More specifically, respondents’ cumulative score was evaluated for eight sources (local television, local and national newspapers, non-cable television programming and websites, cable news television, late-night satire, and podcasts). These sources were coded using a scoring system ranging from zero times consumed in the last month (scored as 0) to 21 or more times consumed in the last month (scored as 5). Combined, these items produced a minimum possible score of 0 and a maximum of 40.

Next, those who favored news sources with less fact-checking and, hence, more bias were identified based on their frequency of consuming news through discussions, podcasts, friends’ and family’s social media accounts, late-night satire, and cable news.
Possible scores ranged from 0 to 25, with a higher score indicating proneness to heavier bias in a respondent’s news consumption.

Finally, the researcher considered overall categories of news sources accessed; television news, newspapers, and internet sources. Television was computed using scores for local television news, national non-cable news programming, cable television news, and late-night satire. Television viewership had a maximum possible score of 20. The variable of newspaper reading was computed using scores for local and national newspaper readership, with a possible maximum score of 10. Lastly, internet news consumption was computed using scores on three news sources: friends’ and family’s social media, podcasts, and non-cable news websites, creating a maximum possible score of 15. With all of these variables, a higher score indicated a preference for that particular source of news.
Measures – Sociodemographic Controls (Controls)

The independent variables in this study were addressed in section I of the survey and included age, affiliation with the university – i.e., student or faculty/staff - race or ethnicity, and gender identity. The survey items also asked for college major (for students), work experience in a legal or criminal justice setting, and prior experience as a juror. The researcher included these factors to control because those with direct experience or exposure to the criminal justice and legal systems might hold different evidentiary expectations than would those in other majors or fields.

Age was measured preliminarily and assessed as a nominal screening question to ensure that no minors participated in the survey, and later as an interval-ratio variable with respondents entering their age in years. Next, affiliation with the university was coded as 0 for students and 1 for faculty and staff. Gender was measured at the nominal level, with participants marking the gender with which they most closely identify. These were coded as 0 assigned to males and 1 assigned to females. Race or ethnicity was also measured on the nominal scale, with participants choosing whether they identified as white, coded as 0, or non-white, coded as 1.

Work experience in a legal or criminal justice setting was coded nominally, with 0 representing “no” and 1 representing “yes”. Respondents selecting “yes” were then asked to enter a brief description of the setting, their title, and their responsibilities. Prior experience as a juror was also coded nominally, with “no” represented by 0 and “yes” represented by 1. Those responding “yes” were then prompted with another nominal variable describing the type(s) of cases for which this study intended to control as
needed. Because only 13 respondents indicated prior jury service, the case specification was not explored further in this study.
Results

The survey yielded 173 respondents with 151 completing questions beyond the consent and age verification screening questions and the demographics section. Only the respondents who answered questions beyond those preliminary questions were included for analysis. The results were coded and analyzed using IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program, or SPSS.
### Univariate Descriptive Statistics

#### Table 1: Variables, Metrics, and Descriptive Statistics\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Affiliation (0=student, 1=faculty/staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Expression (0=male, 1=female)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity (0=white, 1=non-white)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice Experience (0=no, 1=yes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jury Experience (0=no, 1=yes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key IV’s</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy News Consumption (Σ local tv, local newspapers, national newspapers, non-cable national news, non-cable news websites, cable tv, satire, and podcasts)</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for News Sources Prone to Bias (Σ discussions, podcasts, friends’/family’s social media, late night satire, and cable news)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television News Consumption (Σ local tv news, non-cable tv news, cable tv news, and late-night satire)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Reading (Σ local newspapers and national newspapers)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet News Consumption (Σ friends’ and family’s social media, podcasts, non-cable news sites)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DV</strong></td>
<td>Reliance Placed on Forensic Evidence (items 2 and 3 reverse-coded, and Σ items 1-9)</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The total sample is 151 adults enrolled or working at Wright State University, College of Liberal Arts
According to Table 1, in this sample, the age of respondents ranged from 18 to 69 years, with a mean age of 30.53 years. Students made up 78.8% of the sample but major was not explored in order to focus on the quantitative variables. Roughly one-third of respondents identified as male, with approximately two-thirds identifying as female. Respondents identified as white at a rate of approximately 82% and non-white at approximately 18%. The final demographic variables measured were experience working or interning in a criminal justice or legal setting and experience serving as a juror. Because the affirmative response rates of these variables numbered relatively few, approximately 11% and 9% respectively, setting of the experience and type of cases served on were not considered further in this study.

This research next examined the amount of news participants reported consuming. Heavy news consumers were identified by their cumulative score on eight sources: local television, local newspapers, national newspapers, televised non-cable news, non-cable news websites, cable television news programming, late-night satire, and podcasts. Using a scoring system of zero times consumed in the last month (scored as 0) to 21 or more times consumed in the last month (scored as 5) resulted in a minimum possible score of 0 and a maximum of 40. Scores ranged from 0 to 36, with a mean of approximately 13, meaning that the average respondent consumed news from those eight sources between one and ten days in the past month. The median score of 11 meant that half of respondents got their news from those eight sources on more than ten days in the last month, and half less often.

News consumption habits were then broken down further. This study first assessed the amount of news participants consumed from sources prone to less fact-
checking and, hence, more bias. These sources included discussions, podcasts, social media accounts of friends and family, late-night satire, and cable news sources. When the amount of news consumption from these sources was added together, it created a maximum score of 25, which would indicate a preference for more bias-prone news sources. The researcher predicted that those with a high score on this variable would be more likely to rank forensic evidence as more probative than would those who got their news from more traditionally objective sources. Scores ranged from 1 to 24, with a mean score of approximately 9 and a median score of 8, meaning that the average respondent got the majority of his or her news from fairly objective sources with more fact-checking.

Next, overall categories of news sources were considered. The variable of television was computed using scores for local television news, national non-cable news programming, cable television news, and late-night satire. Television viewership had a maximum possible score of 20, which would mean a participant has heard about news from those four television sources 21 times or more in the last month. Recorded scores ranged from zero to 20, with a mean of approximately 5.89 and a median of 5. This meant that, on the majority of days, the average respondent got most of his or her news from non-television sources. The variable of newspaper reading was computed using scores for local and national newspaper readership. With a possible maximum score of 10, recorded scores ranged from zero to 10. A mean of approximately 3.77 and a median of 3 resulted, indicating that the average respondent only got his or her news from newspapers three or four times per month. Internet news consumption was the final source variable considered. It was computed using scores for friends’ and family’s social media accounts, podcasts, and non-cable news websites, creating a maximum possible
score of 15. Scores ranged from zero to 15, with an average of approximately 5.11 and a median of 5. This meant that the average respondent only got his or her news from internet sources a few times in the past month.

Finally, this research explored the dependent variable studied, reliance on and perceived probative value of forensic evidence. Using a Likert scale, participants rated the extent to which they agreed on 11 items. However, the final two questions were not included in the analysis due to the potential for ambiguous interpretation, not necessarily indicating specific valuation of forensic evidence. On seven of the items, a response of “strongly disagree” was scored as 1, “somewhat disagree” as 2, “somewhat agree” as 3, and “strongly agree” as 4. Two items were reverse-coded due to the language presented in the question. Using this system, scores could range from 9 to 36 with a higher score representing higher reliance on the value of forensic evidence. Respondents’ scores ranged from 13 to 34, with a mean of approximately 23 and a median of 23, meaning that the average respondent answered between “somewhat agree” and “somewhat disagree” and that half of the respondents agreed more strongly with the statements and half less strongly. The observed mean and median indicated that the sample was split on its reliance on forensic evidence, meaning that about half respondents placed more importance on forensic evidence while approximately half were less reliant.
Multivariate Analysis

In order to compare several independent variables with the dependent variable of degree of reliance on forensic evidence, this study used the technique of multivariate linear regression. This method was chosen because the dependent variable of reliance on forensic evidence was an interval-ratio variable.
### Table 2: Regression Output of Reliance on Forensic Evidence by Age, University Status, Gender, Race, Criminal Justice Experience, and Jury Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University affiliation (0=student; 1=faculty/staff)</td>
<td>-1.702*</td>
<td>1.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (0=male; 1=female)</td>
<td>-0.817</td>
<td>0.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (0=white; 1=non-white)</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td>0.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-1.236</td>
<td>0.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juror experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-0.730</td>
<td>1.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>23.574</td>
<td>1.027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 151

*p < .10

Adj. $r^2 = 0.02$

The first model run consisted of the sociodemographic controls: age, gender, race, university affiliation, experience in a criminal justice or legal setting, and prior jury service regressed upon respondents’ degree of reliance on forensic evidence. The model in Table 2 had an overall adjusted R-square of .017 and a significance level of .223. The individual independent variables ranged from significance levels of .097 (university affiliation), indicating statistical significance at $p < .10$, to .541 (prior jury service). Age had a significance level of .401, while the significance level of gender was .210. Race had a significance level of .334, and experience in criminal justice had a significance level of .196. Regression coefficients ranged from -1.702 (university affiliation) to .780
(race). The regression coefficient of age was .027 while gender was -.817. Criminal justice experience had a regression coefficient of -1.236 and that of prior jury service was -.730.

Because five of the control variables were not found to be significant, the only hypothesis that could be evaluated based on Table 2 was university affiliation. This model showed that, based on sociodemographic variables alone, university faculty and staff members were less likely to place their faith in forensic evidence as compared to students. This confirms the researcher’s hypothesis. Students’ heavier reliance on forensic evidence could be caused by a number of factors, including age (as forensic science has become commonplace during much of their lifetimes), penchant for the use of social media and internet sources, or limited education as compared to faculty and staff.
Table 3: Regression Output of Reliance on Forensic Evidence by Amount of News Consumption and Preference for High Bias News Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University affiliation (0=student; 1=faculty/staff)</td>
<td>-1.845*</td>
<td>1.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (0=male; 1=female)</td>
<td>-1.115*</td>
<td>0.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (0=white; 1=non-white)</td>
<td>0.833</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-1.643*</td>
<td>0.976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juror experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-0.639</td>
<td>1.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of news consumption (Σ local tv, local newspapers, national newspapers, non-cable national news, non-cable news websites, cable tv, satire, and podcasts)</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy degree of bias in news preferences (Σ discussions, podcasts, friends’/family’s social media, late night satire, and cable news)</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>22.778</td>
<td>1.306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 151

*p < .10

Adj. \( r^2 = .029 \)

Next, Table 3 included the amount of news consumption and level of bias in news preferences added to the demographic model. This changed the significance of the model.
to .168, and the adjusted R-square was observed at .029. Significance levels for the individual variables ranged from .093 (gender) to .743 (heavy news consumption). The significance level of age was measured at .261 and that of criminal justice experience was .095. University affiliation remained relatively stable as compared to the previous model, decreasing in significance to .100, similarly to race, which changed slightly in significance to .311. The significance level of prior jury experience decreased to .596, and heavy bias in news preferences produced a significance level of .336. Regression coefficients ranged from -1.845 (university affiliation) to .833 (race). Age was calculated at a correlation of .040 and that of gender was -1.115. The regression coefficient of criminal justice experience was -1.643, while the correlation of prior jury experience was calculated at -.639. The new variables introduced to this model had regression coefficients of -.021 (heavy news consumption) and .101 (bias present in news consumption habits).

When the key independent variables of news consumption from sources prone to bias and amount of news consumption were added to the sociodemographic model, three variables emerged as significant. First, university affiliation remained both significant from the demographic model and negatively correlated with the dependent variable, degree of reliance on forensic evidence. This meant that university faculty and staff were found to weigh forensic evidence less heavily than were students. Again, this aligned with the researcher’s hypothesis. Next, gender was found to be negatively correlated with reliance on forensic science at a level of statistical significance. In other words, respondents identifying as female were found to place less confidence in forensic evidence than were those who identified as male. This outcome did not align with the
researcher’s hypothesis. Finally, experience working or interning in a criminal justice or legal setting was found to be negatively correlated with confidence in forensic science at a level of statistical significance. This meant that those with no such experience tended to weigh forensic evidence more heavily, as was the hypothesized direction of the relationship. The remaining sociodemographic variables and key independent variables were not found to be statistically significant so could not be evaluated in terms of the researcher’s hypotheses.
Table 4: Regression Output of Reliance on Forensic Evidence by Sources of News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University affiliation (0=student; 1=faculty/staff)</td>
<td>-1.794</td>
<td>1.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (0-male; 1=female)</td>
<td>-1.810*</td>
<td>0.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (0=white; 1=non-white)</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-1.280</td>
<td>0.975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juror experience (0=no; 1=yes)</td>
<td>-1.056</td>
<td>1.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news consumption (Σ local tv news, non-cable tv news, cable tv news, late-night satire)</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper consumption (local newspapers, national newspapers)</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet news consumption (Σ friends’ and family’s social media, podcasts, national cable news sites)</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>22.850</td>
<td>1.234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 151

*p < .10  
Adj. r² = .049

Finally, categorized sources of news consumption – television news, internet sources, and newspaper readership – were added to the demographic model while amount
of news consumption and level of bias in news preferences were removed. Table 4 shows this model had a significance level of .086, and the adjusted R-square was observed at .049. Significance levels for the individual variables ranged from .074 (gender) to .380 (prior jury service). The significance of age was observed at .210. That of university affiliation remained relatively stable at .107, as did that of race at .289. The significance level of criminal justice experience closely mirrored that of the first model run, reported at .191. Television news consumption had a significance level of .102, followed by internet sources at .155, and newspapers at .214. Regression coefficients ranged from -1.794 (university affiliation) to .865 (race). Variables with positive correlations included age, at .043; newspaper readership, at .142; and internet news consumption, with .147. Variables with negative correlations included gender, at -1.181; criminal justice experience, at -1.280; prior jury service, at -1.056; and television news viewership, at -.131.

The only variable included in this model that was statistically significant was gender, where females were found to rate forensic evidence as less probative than were males. This differed from the researcher’s hypothesis but was consistent with the previous model. The remaining sociodemographic variables and key independent variables could not be evaluated in terms of the researcher’s hypotheses as they were non-significant, but the model as a whole was observed at a level of statistical significance.
Discussion

Data Interpretation and Hypotheses

The model with the most optimal degree of significance was the final model run, with the demographic characteristics and categories of news sources accessed—television, newspapers, and internet. This regression produced a significance value of .086, considered to be significant at $p < .10$. However, the other two models produced significance levels for individual variables that fell under the $p = .10$ threshold of statistical significance. In the first model run, the demographic model, university affiliation—i.e., student or faculty/staff member—had a significance value of .097. When consideration was taken into bias level of news preferences and amount of news consumption, three variables emerged as significant at $p < .10$. These were university affiliation (.100), gender (.093), and experience in a criminal justice field (.095). In the final model, only gender remained statistically significant, at .074.

The final model run, which considered news consumption from television, newspapers, and internet sources, produced an adjusted R-square of .049. This meant that 4.9% of the variation in reliance on forensic evidence was attributable to the independent variables considered. While this seems modest, consideration of these independent variables produced a model that more reliably predicted the dependent variable than using the means alone. This final model improved upon the adjusted R-square values of the previous two models. The demographic model produced a score of
.017, while the model considering amount of news consumption and degree of bias in preferred news sources had an adjusted R-square of .029. In sum, source of news consumption appeared to play a bigger role in predicting the weight a respondent gave to forensic evidence than did demographics alone or demographics with consideration for level of bias in news sources accessed and amount of news consumption.

Although not significant, the directionality of the relationships between the variables also provided a peek into the ways in which demographics and patterns of news consumption might relate to the value that respondents placed on forensic evidence. In the first model, with demographics as the only independent variables, four had negative correlations with the dependent variable including university affiliation, gender, criminal justice experience, and prior jury service. Age and race were both positively correlated. With the addition of propensity for bias in news source preferences and amount of news consumption, the effects of university affiliation, gender, and criminal justice experience were magnified. These factors remained negatively correlated but the slope increased in magnitude. Similarly, the effects of age and race both increased in magnitude and remained positively correlated. In contrast, the effects of prior jury service decreased when the two independent variables were added to the model. When bias and amount of news consumed were removed from the model and categorized sources of news were included, amplification effects were seen in age, gender, race, and prior jury service with increased slope magnitude over the three models. University affiliation and experience in a criminal justice setting both decreased in slope magnitude from the second model to the third but increased between models one and three.
Each model provided an output of statistical significance for at least one variable. Although the researcher’s hypotheses could not be evaluated for all variables, the directionality of correlations did hint at variables that might be found to play a role in the pretrial attitudes of potential jurors and could be explored further in future research.
This study hypothesized that older respondents would examine forensic evidence more critically, placing less importance on its value than would younger respondents. While this variable could not be interpreted at a level of statistical significance, age was positively correlated with increased reliance on forensic evidence across all three regression models. This meant that older respondents tended to rely more heavily on forensic evidence than did younger respondents, differing from the researcher’s hypothesis. Perhaps this is due to differences in their preferred news sources or the amount of news they consume as compared to younger respondents.

The researcher hypothesized that university students would be more heavily swayed by forensic science than would staff and faculty. This variable was found to be significant in both the first regression (Table 2) and the second (Table 3). The regression coefficient on the first model was -1.702, with a significance level of .097. On the next table, university affiliation was observed at a regression coefficient of -1.845 and significance level of .100. These results indicated that faculty and staff tended to place less reliance on forensic evidence than did students, aligning with the researcher’s hypothesis. While the hypothesis for university affiliation could not be evaluated at a level of significance for Table 4, the variable remained negatively correlated with reliance on forensic evidence. This meant that faculty and staff at the university placed less reliance on forensic evidence than did students. Perhaps this is due to more years of schooling, how forensic evidence is presented in their preferred sources of news, or the amount of news they consume relative to students in the sample.
This study hypothesized that female respondents would place more emphasis on forensic evidence than would those identifying as male. The variable of gender identification did not emerge as significant for the first model (Table 2) but was observed at a level of significance for models two (Table 3) and three (Table 4). On all three tables, however, gender was negatively correlated with the dependent variable. This meant that those identifying as female were found to place less importance on forensic evidence than were males, disproving the researcher’s hypothesis for this variable. For model two (Table 3), significance was observed at .093 while that of Table 4 was .074. In sum, gender was found to play a more significant role in predicting reliance on forensic evidence when sources of news were considered, versus relative amount of news consumption or potential for bias in respondents’ preferred news media. This could be due to the sources of news that females prefer as compared to males, perhaps favoring sources with less fact-checking and, hence, more bias such as social media. An additional aspect that might offer insight is differences between how males and females are socialized in terms of degree of reliance on intuitive thought versus rational processing (Sladek, Bond, & Phillips, 2010).

This study hypothesized that white respondents would be more likely to view forensic evidence as probative than would non-whites. Though this variable was not observed at a level of significance for any model, its regression coefficient remained relatively stable across the tables, ranging from 0.780 (Table 2) to 0.865 (Table 4). This meant that non-whites tended to place more emphasis on forensic evidence than did whites across all three models, indicating that the researcher’s hypothesis for this variable could be incorrect. Perhaps this is due to variations in preferred news outlets or cultural
differences in news consumption habits. While the present study only categorized race by white or non-white, future research could examine more specific race identification.

The researcher hypothesized that those with work experience in a legal or criminal justice setting would be less swayed by forensic evidence than would those with no such experience. While this variable was shown to be negatively correlated with the dependent variable on all three tables, meaning that those with such experience tended to place less value on forensic evidence, it was only found to be statistically significant on the second model (Table 3). This meant that, when amount of news consumption and degree of bias characteristic therein were included in the model, those with experience working or interning in a criminal justice or legal setting placed less importance on forensic evidence at a level of statistical significance. These results indicated that the researcher’s hypothesis was correct. Therefore, respondents’ understanding of the intricacies of the criminal justice system did appear to play a role in the level of reliance they placed on forensic evidence.

This study hypothesized that those respondents who had served as jurors would have more critical expectations about the probative value of forensic evidence than would those who had never served as jurors. While this variable did not produce correlation coefficients at a level of statistical significance, it was found to be negatively correlated with degree of reliance on forensic evidence on all three models. This meant that, as the researcher predicted, those who had prior experience serving on a jury tended to find less value in forensic evidence than did those with no such experience. Perhaps, similarly to work experience in a criminal justice setting, exposure to the reality of forensic evidence,
as opposed to how it is portrayed on television, has an effect on how those respondents rated their faith in forensic evidence.
Relative Volume of News Consumption

The researcher hypothesized that respondents who consumed news more frequently would place more importance on the probative value of forensic evidence than would those who consumed less news. This variable was explored in the second regression model (Table 3) and was not found to show statistical significance. However, the negative correlation indicated that those who consumed relatively high amounts of news might be less reliant on forensic evidence than were lighter consumers of news. This stood in contrast to the researcher’s hypothesis that those who consume news more often would place more reliance on forensic evidence. Perhaps heavy news consumers access a variety of news sources, mitigating more biased sources with more objective ones.
Preference for News Sources with a High Propensity for Bias

This study hypothesized that respondents who got their news from more objective sources, such as non-cable news or national newspapers, would be more likely to critically examine the criminal justice system and the probative value of forensic evidence, recognizing that forensic evidence is not always as steadfast as is depicted in the media. On the other hand, the researcher predicted that respondents who preferred to get news from sources with less fact-checking and, thus, more propensity for bias, such as podcasts and social media, would be more likely to weigh the value of forensic evidence heavily. This variable was also included in the second regression model run (Table 3) and was not observed at a level of statistical significance but was positively correlated with the dependent variable. This indicated that those who got their news from sources more prone to bias might favor forensic evidence over those who preferred traditionally more objective news sources. This possibility aligned with the researcher’s hypothesis, but no conclusions could be drawn at a level of statistical significance. Even so, this relationship might prove to be a key area to explore in future research.
News Source Preferences

The researcher hypothesized that respondents who reported reading newspapers would be less likely to place heavy reliance on forensic science as evidence than would those who consumed news from other sources. This relationship was explored in the final regression model (Table 4). While no conclusions can be drawn at a level of statistical significance, results indicated that those who got their news from newspapers might place more reliance on forensic evidence than did those who preferred other sources, contrasting with the hypothesis for this variable. Thus, once this relationship is explored further in future research, an attorney or trial consultant might wish to select or deselect a potential juror who reads newspapers, depending on their side’s amount and quality of forensic evidence.

This study hypothesized that respondents who got their news from television sources would place more confidence in forensic evidence than would those who consumed news from other sources and was investigated in the final regression model (Table 4). While this variable could not be analyzed at a statistically significant level, the directionality of the observed relationship might suggest that those who watched television news placed less reliance on forensic evidence than did consumers of other news media. This, too, opposed the predicted relationship between type of preferred news source and weight given to forensic evidence. Such an association might be due to the way television news stations present the value of forensic evidence or the characteristics of an individual who prefers to get their news from television.

The researcher hypothesized that those who reported getting news from internet sources would be more swayed by forensic evidence than would those who consumed news
from more traditional sources. This relationship, too, was analyzed in the third regression model (Table 4). While the correlation was not observed at a level of statistical significance, the directionality of the relationship suggests that the researcher’s hypothesis might be correct. Perhaps this is due to cultivation effects, level of bias in internet news sources, or presentation of the reliability of forensic evidence. Internet news consumption also allows news consumers to tailor their experiences to their own views by favoring one particular news site over another, rather than watching a television news program where the content is decided by producers. Similarly, internet sites and social media allow for more interaction with news stories, for example by allowing consumers to “like” or “share” content. This engagement might affect each user’s experience with news consumption and result in magnified or minimized cultivation effects, resulting in how their social realities are constructed. Those who seek out news stories on crime and justice or follow true crime podcasts and social media influencers may have existing opinions about topics germane to trials such as the value of forensic evidence.
Theoretical Comparison

Cultivation theory posits that society’s social reality is constructed through that which is presented by the media. Early research into the merits of the theory focused on television news viewership and fear of crime. Gerbner (1976) and his research team found that those who consumed high amounts of television news had an increase in their fear of crime, which did not reflect their actual likelihood of victimization. The present research demonstrated that today’s commonly accessed sources of news can play a role in how participants view the probative value of forensic evidence, lending credence to cultivation theory. The source with the best significance rate was television news, yielding a score just on the cusp of statistical significance.

While demographic variables in previous research have been found to lack value in predicting verdicts, the regression models run by the present study produced several factors that did correlate with the value placed on forensic evidence at a level of statistical significance. In the first model, with demographics only, university affiliation was negatively correlated with reliance on forensic evidence. This meant that students were more likely to find forensic science to be probative than did faculty or staff members at the university. In the second model run, even more significant factors emerged. The negative correlation of university affiliation was magnified, and gender and criminal justice experience showed a negative correlation with reliance on forensic evidence. This meant that males and those without experience in criminal justice or legal settings were more likely to view forensic evidence as valuable in judicial decision-making. Finally, the significance of the negative correlation between gender decreased in
the last model. This meant that, when sources of news consumption were considered, males were increasingly likely to see value in forensic evidence presentation.

An additional concept addressed in this research was the proposed phenomenon that has come to be known as the CSI Effect, in which jurors’ ideas about forensic evidence are affected by watching television shows focused on criminal investigations. While the present research did not include a measure for respondents’ viewership of scripted dramas, its included measures may serve as a proxy for determining the merits of the CSI Effect. In other words, the influence of scripted crime dramas on viewers’ opinions of forensic evidence might be found to relate to those viewers’ valuation of forensic evidence, just as news consumption may play a role. Although the key independent variables studied – volume of news consumed, level of bias inherent to preferred sources, and modes of news consumption – were not found to be statistically significant, it is possible that a future study exploring these factors more deeply might find relationships.
Limitations

As a preliminary study, this research had inherent limitations. First, the response rate only yielded 173 participants. Of these 173, only 151 completed the dependent variable section questions and were included in the analysis. In addition, the sample was that of convenience, drawing only from the College of Liberal Arts at the researcher’s institution. Therefore, inferences to generalize the findings to the greater population must be weighed against the value of the convenience sample and the relatively limited response rate. Similarly, the respondents were made up primarily of college students, at a rate nearing 80%. Though faculty and staff were included in the survey distribution in hopes of bringing the diversity of age and experience, the mean age of respondents was only about 30.5 years. A survey of a pool of older adults could yield different results. Further, college students are taught to think critically, which could impact their reliance on both news stories and evidentiary variables. Perhaps a group of participants with less education would place more faith in the merits of news stories and forensic science.

In addition, as an exploratory study, no conclusions can be drawn as to the causation of news consumption’s impact on a person’s degree of reliance on forensic evidence. Nonetheless, the correlational directions of even the non-significant variables might indicate that such relationships are possible, which can be explored in subsequent research. Finally, the threshold for statistical significance used in this study was p < .10. While still used today in some publications in the fields of social science, the more common and preferable standards are lower, such as p < .05 or p < .01. However, as an exploratory study, the p < .10 level used in the present study does hint at the possibility of relationships between some variables that could be explored in subsequent research.
**Suggestions for Future Research**

There are many opportunities for future research in addition to the aforementioned factors of varying the sample size, convenience sampling technique, and considering the demographics of college students and personnel. First, the present survey asked respondents only about their general news consumption rather than crime-related news consumption specifically. Future research could build upon this study by examining avenues participants use to follow crime-related news and the propensity for bias inherent in those mediums. That is, taking into consideration the level of fact-checking typical of various news sources covering crime and justice stories. Next, while the present study used a quantitative approach, future research could benefit from a qualitative approach. For example, researchers aiming to build upon the present study could conduct focus groups about news consumption habits and perceptions of forensic evidence or perform a content analysis of crime-related news stories on various platforms to evaluate how those platforms cover crime and justice news. Next, future research could expand the news consumption variable to include scripted crime dramas, such as *CSI* or *NCIS*, as is the basis for the theoretical framework comprising the CSI Effect. Also, while the present research considered only a few demographic variables, future studies could examine additional factors such as socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, and political leaning. Considering such variables may shine an important light on pretrial attitudes, preferences for various avenues of news consumption, and proclivity for bias in different news sources; factors that were beyond the scope of this preliminary study. The present research could also be expanded to examine opinions about and news
coverage of other problems germane to the social sciences, such as homelessness or
human trafficking.
Policy Implications

Enhancing the understanding of jurors’ evaluations and perceptions of forensic evidence has become increasingly important due to the development of advanced technology for evidence analysis, in part because these techniques have led to more ambiguity in the interpretation of evidence (Duncan, 2008; as cited in Smith et al., 2010). As complex testimony is presented, jurors integrate it with their prior beliefs, experiences, and knowledge about forensic science and the legal and criminal justice systems, which stem from a number of sources and range in their accuracy (Pennington & Hastie, 1986; as cited in Smith et al., 2010). Identifying how news consumption plays a role will be key in identifying jurors’ evidentiary expectations as well as their biases toward the legal and criminal justice systems in general. This could improve, for both sides of a trial, voir dire strategy as well as case presentation.

Research on these topics will offer practitioners in the legal and criminal justice systems an enhanced understanding of jurors’ likely perceptions of evidence and case strengths and weaknesses. Attorneys and jury consultants might turn to this research to optimize their pretrial considerations such as structuring case presentations and voir dire in a more comprehensive, strategic way. This information on jurors’ biases and expectations of evidence could lead prosecutors, litigators, and defense teams to better evaluate how their side’s evidence might be perceived, affecting a range of outcomes from settlement decisions to evidence-presentation strategy.

The present study examined both sociodemographic controls and news source preferences broken down by level of news consumption: amount of news consumed, degree of fact-checking inherent to preferred sources, and whether participants favored
getting their news through television, print, or the internet. Several sociodemographic controls, including university affiliation, gender, and race, were found to impact reliance on forensic evidence at a level of statistical significance. However, the key independent variables were not found to affect participants’ degree of faith placed in the merits of forensic science as an evidentiary source. Nonetheless, the correlational direction of the key independent variables and reliance of forensic evidence did show some promise. Ultimately, the present study does indicate that both cultivation effects and the CSI Effect may be seen in the relationship between news consumption habits and confidence in forensic evidence. Pinpointing causational effects between news consumption preferences and belief in the value of forensic evidence could allow practitioners to structure jury selection in an increasingly effective way in order to identify jurors whose opinions of forensic evidence best align with their side’s evidence and trial strategy.
Conclusion

This study intended to determine correlations between survey respondents’ sociodemographic characteristics and news consumption habits with their opinions on the value of forensic evidence. Several sociodemographic variables were found to relate to the dependent variable across three regression models at a level of statistical significance. Although this research was exploratory in nature, the relationships observed did show promise for future research. Ultimately, research on jurors’ demographic characteristics and patterns of news consumption is just one avenue through which the social sciences can offer insight into a range of topics impacting the criminal justice and legal systems.
Appendix A

Pretrial Juror Attitude Questionnaire (PJAQ)

1. If a suspect runs from police, then he probably committed the crime.  (CON)
2. A defendant should be found guilty if 11 out of 12 jurors vote guilty.  (CP)
3. Too often jurors hesitate to convict someone who is guilty out of pure sympathy.  (CP)
4. In most cases where the accused presents a strong defense, it is only because of a good lawyer.  (CYN)
5. Out of every 100 people brought to trial, at least 75 are guilty of the crime with which they are charged.  (CON)
6. For serious crimes like murder, a defendant should be found guilty so long as there is a 90% chance that he committed the crime.  (CP)
7. Defense lawyers don’t really care about guilt or innocence; they are just in business to make money.  (CYN)
8. Generally, the police make an arrest only when they are sure about who committed the crime.  (CON)
9. Many accident claims filed against insurance companies are phony.  (CYN)
10. The defendant is often a victim of his own bad reputation.  (RB)*
11. Extenuating circumstances should not be considered; if a person commits a crime, then that person should be punished.  (CP)
12. If the defendant committed a victimless crime, like gambling or possession of marijuana, he should never be convicted. (SJ)*

13. Defense lawyers are too willing to defend individuals they know are guilty. (CYN)

14. Police routinely lie to protect other police officers. (CYN)

15. Once a criminal, always a criminal. (INNCR)

16. Lawyers will do whatever it takes, even lie, to win a case. (CYN)

17. Criminals should be caught and convicted by “any means necessary.” (CP)

18. A prior record of conviction is the best indicator of a person’s guilt in the present case. (CON; INNCR)

19. Rich individuals are almost never convicted of their crimes. (SJ)

20. If a defendant is a member of a gang, he/she is definitely guilty of the crime. (INNCR)

21. Minorities use the “race issue” only when they are guilty. (RB)

22. When it is the suspect’s word against the police officer’s, I believe the police. (CON)

23. Men are more likely to be guilty of crimes than women. (INNCR)

24. The large number of African Americans currently in prison is an example of the innate criminality of that subgroup. (RB)

25. A Black man on trial with a predominately White jury will always be found guilty. (SJ)

26. Minority suspects are likely to be guilty, more often than not. (RB)
27. If a witness refuses to take a lie detector test, it is because he/she is hiding something. (CON)

28. Defendants who change their story are almost always guilty. (CYN)

29. Famous people are often considered to be “above the law.” (SJ)

Note. CON = system confidence; CP = conviction proneness; CYN = cynicism toward the defense; RB = racial bias; SJ = social justice; INNCR = innate criminality. *Reverse-scored item.
Appendix B

Forensic Evidence Evaluation Bias Scale (FEEBS)

1. Every crime can be solved with forensic science.
2. Every criminal leaves some physical evidence behind at every crime scene.
3. If forensic evidence suggests a defendant is guilty, this should be enough to convict even if other evidence (e.g., eyewitness testimony, alibi) suggest otherwise.
4. Forensic evidence always eventually identifies the guilty person.
5. Forensic evidence always provides a conclusive answer.
6. Science is the most reliable way to identify the perpetrators of crimes.
7. If no forensic evidence is recovered from a crime scene, it means the investigators did not look hard enough.
8. If there is no forensic evidence presented in a particular case, then the jury should not convict.
9. Police should not charge someone with a serious crime unless forensic evidence is available to prove their guilt.
10. If no forensic evidence is recovered from a crime scene, the defendant is probably innocent of the crime.
Appendix C

News Consumption and Forensic Bias Survey

Section I

1. Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. I am currently enrolled in Wright State’s Applied Behavioral Science program and am in the process of writing my master’s thesis. The purpose of this research is to examine ways that consumers get their news and their opinions about the criminal justice system. Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You may decline altogether or leave blank any questions you don’t wish to answer. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. No names will be collected and your responses will remain confidential.

If you agree to participate in this project, please click the button labeled, “Click here to consent and proceed”. The survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact me at whitney.cleeton@wright.edu or my faculty advisor at karen.lahm@wright.edu. If you have general questions about giving consent or your rights as a research participant in this research study, you may call the Wright State University Institutional Review Board at (937) 775-2709. Information on the rights of human subjects in research is available through Wright State’s Institutional Review Board or the department of Research and Sponsored Programs. If you would like a summary copy of this study, you may contact me at the email address listed.

Whitney Cleeton
Principal Investigator
whitney.cleeton@wright.edu

( ) Click here to consent and proceed
( ) Click here to exit the survey

2. Are you 18 years of age or older?
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No

3. What is your age, in years?

_____________________________________________________

75
4. What is your primary affiliation with Wright State?
   ( ) Student
   ( ) Staff or Faculty

5. What is your major?
   ______________________________________________________

6. With which gender do you most closely identify?
   ( ) Male
   ( ) Female

7. With which race or ethnicity do you most closely identify?
   ( ) White (Caucasian)
   ( ) Non-White

8. Have you ever worked or done an internship in criminal justice, law, or a related field?
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No

9. Please briefly describe the setting of your work or internship and your title/position.
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

10. Have you ever served as a juror?
    ( ) Yes
     ( ) No

11. Have you ever served as a juror on any of the following types of trials? Please select any that apply.
    ( ) Homicide
    ( ) Manslaughter
    ( ) Wrongful Death
    ( ) Assault
    ( ) None of these
Section II

For the following questions, please consider how you read or heard about news in the past month. For this study, social media includes: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Reddit, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp.

In the past month, on about how many days on average did you read or hear about news stories from the following sources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21 or more</th>
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<tr>
<td>Local television news programs, their social media accounts, or their mobile apps (e.g., WHIO, WDTN, etc.)</td>
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<td>Local newspapers, their social media accounts, or their mobile apps (e.g., Dayton Daily News, Fairborn Daily Herald, etc.)</td>
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<td>National newspapers, their social media accounts, or their mobile apps (e.g., USA Today, The New York Times, etc.)</td>
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<td>Non-cable national television news programs (e.g., The CBS Evening News, Good Morning America, etc.)</td>
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<td>Non-cable news websites, their social media accounts, or their mobile apps (e.g., abcnews.com, cbsnews.com, etc.)</td>
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<td>Cable news channels, websites, their social media accounts, or their mobile apps (e.g., Fox News, MSNBC News, etc.)</td>
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<td>Source of Information</td>
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<td>11-15</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>21 or more</td>
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<td>Satirical or late-night television shows (e.g., The Daily Show, The Late Show, etc.)</td>
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<td>Friends' or family's social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.)</td>
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<td>Podcasts or corresponding videos of the podcast (e.g., on YouTube)</td>
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<td>Conversations or discussions with family, friends, co-workers, or classmates</td>
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(continued on next page)
Section III

For the following section, forensic evidence is considered to be scientific evidence that is used in solving crimes, like fingerprints and DNA. The prosecution (usually the state or county) is the side that has brought the defendant to trial and the defendant is the person who is accused of the crime and is on trial for it.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science is the most reliable way to identify criminals</td>
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<td>Witness testimony is more convincing than forensic evidence</td>
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<td>A confession is more convincing than forensic evidence</td>
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<td>Forensic evidence alone is enough to convict a defendant of a serious crime</td>
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<td>Scientific evidence always provides a conclusive answer to who committed a crime</td>
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<td>Police should not charge someone with a crime if they do not have forensic evidence</td>
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<td>If forensic evidence is not presented, juries should not convict defendants on trial for minor offenses, such as theft</td>
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<td>If forensic evidence is not presented, juries should not convict defendants on trial for serious offenses, such as murder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>Every crime can be solved with forensic evidence</td>
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<td>Forensic science is up to interpretation</td>
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<td>Sometimes the police cannot find forensic evidence at the scene of the crime</td>
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</table>
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publicity and deliberation affect mock jurors’ decisions, impressions, and


Ruva, C.L., McEvoy, C., & Bryant, J.B. (2007). Effects of pre-trial publicity and jury
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