

## **Topic: CRIME ALERT**

### Abstract and Figures

Crime alerts are meant to raise community awareness and identify individual criminal suspects; they are not expected to affect attitudes and beliefs toward the social group to which an individual suspect belongs. However, psychological principles of learning, categorization, and memory predict that what is learned about an instance can color perception of an entire category. At the intersection of psychology, criminal justice, sociology, and media studies, two experiments were conducted to test the effect that providing individual racial identity in crime alerts has on racial group stereotypes. In Experiment 1, participants visualized four scenarios involving Black or White would-be criminals. Results revealed that in the case where Black would-be criminals were made salient in memory, participants demonstrated significantly more negative implicit stereotypes toward Blacks as a group compared with a condition in which White would-be criminals were more salient in memory. In Experiment 2, participants read a written description of a crime scene with a suspect who was either depicted as White or Black, and then imagined the suspect. On both implicit and explicit measures of group stereotypes obtained afterward, participants who read about a Black criminal reported and revealed more anti-Black/pro-White stereotypes than did those who read about a White criminal. Crime alerts that mention racial identity, whatever their benefit, come with the burden of shifting stereotypes of social groups. In this context, the value of racial identification in crime alerts warrants reconsideration.