Article

Seeing Blue in Black and White: Race and Perceptions of Officer-Involved Shootings

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Following racially charged events, individuals often diverge in perceptions of what happened and how justice should be served. Examining data gathered shortly after the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri alongside reactions to a novel officer-involved shooting, we unpack the processes by which racial divisions emerge. Even in a controlled information environment, white Americans preferred information that supported claims of a justified shooting. Conversely, Black Americans preferred information that implied that the officer behaved inappropriately. These differences stemmed from two distinct processes: we find some evidence for a form of race-based motivated reasoning and strong evidence for belief updating based on racially distinct priors. Differences in summary judgments were larger when individuals identified strongly with their racial group or when expectations about the typical behaviors of Black Americans and police diverged. The findings elucidate processes whereby individuals in different social groups come to accept differing narratives about contentious events.

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ecent incidents involving Black Americans' inter-actions with law enforcement officials have sparked racial controversy and garnered international atten-tion. At the time of writing, for example, unrest continued to unfold on the streets of American cities like Kenosha, Wisconsin, where Jacob Blake, a twenty-nine-year-old Black man was shot seven times in the back by a white police officer. Three months earlier, George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old Black man, was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, who held his knee on Floyd's neck for several minutes, sparking global protests against police brutality. And though public opinion regarding Floyd's death was unusually convergent, only 48% of white Americans agreed that the actions of protestors following Floyd's death were partially or fully justified, compared to 73% of Black Americans (Murray 2020).

This racial divide in Americans' reactions is by no means a new phenomenon. When Florida neighborhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman was acquitted after killing Trayvon Martin, 49% of white Americans reported being satisfied with the verdict compared to only 5% of Blacks (Dimock and Doherty 2013). When New York City police officers were not charged following the chokehold death of Eric Garner, 70% of Blacks reported decreased confidence in the legal system compared to only 35% of whites (Marist Poll 2014). And when Sandra Bland was found hanged in her jail cell following a controversial arrest, citizens debated the veracity of official claims that Bland had taken her own life. This debate, too, fell along racial lines.[1] As we demon-strate in the current project, these racial divides in opinion are not limited to summary or value judgments (e.g., should the officer be charged?), but manifest in response to a question central to the cause of justice: What, given the evidence, do individuals believe transpired in the interaction between an agent of the state and the citizen that agent is sworn to protect and serve?

Evidence that Americans diverge in their perceptions of contentious events calls out for an explanation. Why do individuals, simply because of their social identities, come to widely differing conclusions on matters that occupy such a central place in our political conversation? Two overarching sets of explanations present themselves. The first centers on the possibility that individuals receive qualitatively different information as a function of their social identities. The second contends that, despite similar information environ-ments, those who belong to distinct social groups process and evaluate the same information differently. Using responses to officer-involved shootings as a salient test case, we explore this latter possibility and examine two related, though theoretically distinct, processes by which identity—for our purposes, racial identity—biases information pro-cessing in response to contentious events.[2]

First, building on the theory of partisan motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2013), we assess whether Blacks and whites engage in a kind of *race-based*

motivated reasoning that reflects an emotional or affective commitment to their racial groups. Applied to the case at hand, this theory posits that Blacks and whites encounter event-relevant information as "racial partisans" who are motivated to achieve an outcome that reflects positively on their racial identities. For white Americans, this means concluding, on average, that the white officer—an in-group member—acted appropriately, thereby leaving intact a more positive image of the racial group. Likewise, this theory imagines that Black Americans, on average, are predisposed to defend their racial in-group member—the Black victim—and, thus, may discount information that acquits the officer of blame. This goal-oriented account assumes that identity biases processing chiefly through individuals' attachments to salient social groups and desires to have those groups regarded positively (Tajfel 1974).

We also test an alternative, and equally compelling, theoretical explanation that differences in responses are less about social goals, but instead reflect average differences in prior beliefs and expectations regarding police bias and the likely culpability of Black victims (Peffley and Hurwitz 2010). These priors, themselves informed by race, may guide how individuals process new information about law enforcement officers and citizens of color. Existing work on biased information processing fails to fully appreciate the differences between these explanations. To be sure, it is difficult to fully disentangle these accounts (see Bullock 2009), and we do not set out, *a priori*, to demonstrate that divides emanate solely from any singular mechanism. Instead, we lay out the theoretical expectations that follow from both approaches and develop a set of tests to examine where the balance of evidence lies.

Theoretically, this work makes at least two important contributions. First, it extends scholarship on biased infor-mation processing beyond partisan identification. In so doing, it provides a blueprint for examining why individuals who belong to distinct social groups may arrive at different conclusions, even when exposed to the same information. This work, thus, enriches our understanding of the mech-anisms whereby identities come to influence individuals' social and political judgments. For example, when men and women disagree about issues related to gender inequities or when political partisans react differently to novel informa-tion, what explains these divides? Do people arrive at divergent conclusions in service of their respective social groups, or because their experiences as members of those groups condition the beliefs and expectations they have about the world? As our results demonstrate, both processes are necessary to explain how people make sense of the world. And accounting for both processes has implications for the equitable provision of justice in diverse societies.

We set the stage for the current project by considering the racial differences that emerged following a high-profile officer-involved shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. We then discuss how these differences might come about, focusing

on the potential roles of 1) motivated reasoning shaped by racial identification[3] and 2) belief updating from distinct racial priors. Using a novel in-depth survey experimental design that presents information about a fictitious officer-involved shooting, we demonstrate first that the racial divide in individuals' summary judgments and beliefs about case facts emerges even when identical information is provided to Black and white participants. This indicates that the racial divide observed in the "real world" is not simply a consequence of Blacks and whites receiving different information about officer-involved shootings, but reflects the fact that individuals are engaged in biased information processing. As the evidence further demonstrates, this is not solely (or even chiefly) a story of Blacks and whites reflexively defending their racial groups in a manner consistent with a pure identity-protective motivated reasoning account. Instead, the persistent racial divide observed in responses to officer-involved shootings appears rooted in the markedly different beliefs and expectations Blacks and whites hold about the behavior of Black Americans and the fairness of the criminal justice system.

Ferguson: A Racial Divide

In August of 2014, Darren Wilson, a white police officer with the Ferguson, Missouri Police Department, fatally shot Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man. Just as they had following the 1995 acquittal of O.J. Simpson on murder charges (Newman et al. 1997), Black and white Americans diverged in their impressions of what happened and whether justice was served (Doherty, Motel, and Wiesel 2014). In original data collected three weeks after Brown's death, we found that Blacks and whites diverged in both the summary judgments they rendered and in beliefs about what transpired between the two men.[4] When asked whether Brown had a weapon, how likely it was that Brown attacked Wilson, how much of a role race played in the shooting, and whether Wilson should be charged, Blacks and whites answered differently. When these questions were recoded as binary outcome measures, Black and white respondents diverged by an average of 32.7 percentage points (refer to table 1).[5] Moreover, Black

and white respondents who reported having heard the most about Ferguson diverged most in these opinions (refer to figures C1 and C2 in online appendix C).

That individuals differed in their reactions to Ferguson is not surprising nor even normatively problematic; differences in opinion among citizens in a diverse society should be expected. Prior research has uncovered gaps between whites and Blacks in assessments of the fairness of the criminal justice system (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005), perceptions of biased policing practices (Weitzer and Tuch 2005), support for policies perceived to benefit African Americans (Kinder and Winter 2001), attitudes toward the death penalty (Bobo and Johnson 2004), reactions to racial profiling (Sirin, Villalobos, and Valentino 2016), and even evaluations of natural disasters that have a disparate racial impact (Huddy and Feldman 2006), among other issues. What makes this scenario important and distinct, however, is that the differences between Blacks and whites appeared organically, in real time, when most mainstream media outlets were presenting relatively similar information.[6]

Unpacking the Racial Divide: Two Possible Explanations

Race-based Motivating Reasoning Explanation

First, if differences in responses to officer-involved shootings emerge because of individuals' psychological attachments to racial in-groups, the existing literature on motivated reasoning offers a basis for understanding why Blacks and whites diverge both in their summary judgments and in their beliefs about the particulars of these events. Kunda (1990) argued that individuals' perceptions were influenced by both accuracy and directional goals. Scholars have since shown that group membership, in the form of partisan affiliation, is a principal source of directional motivation (Lodge and Taber 2013). That is, when presented with new information, partisans engage in defensive processing, discounting claims that contradict party orthodoxy (Lebo and Cassino 2007) by arguing against them (Eagly and Chaiken 1995), accepting inaccurate messages that bolster existing viewpoints (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016), and

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Table 1
Perceptions of Ferguson by racial self-categorization (%)

	Whites	Blacks	Difference
Wilson Should Be Charged (probably or definitely)	42.2	90.9	−48.7***
Brown Attacked Wilson (very or extremely likely)	37.3	11.5	25.8***
Brown Had Weapon (probably or definitely)	22.8	4.4	18.5***
Role of Race in Shooting (large or enormous)	35.9	73.6	−37.7***
Average Absolute Difference			32.7
N	2,939–2,946	250–252	

Note: Numbers represent the proportion of respondents selecting the top two response categories for each question. Variation in Ns is due to nonresponse. *** p<.001 differences, two-tailed t-test. See Online Appendix Table C1 for additional information and Table C2 for models including controls.

spontaneously generating positive or negative interpretations of new claims and processing those claims in line with those interpretations (Lodge and Taber 2005, 2013; Nyhan and Reifler 2010).

Recent scholarship also suggests that partisanship facilitates motivated reasoning in its role as a prominent social identity, rather than as a catchall for some set of political opinions (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Greene 2004; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Because individuals derive meaning from membership in salient social groups (Tajfel 1974), group memberships play an important role in shaping how individuals perceive and engage with the world (Abrams and Hogg 1990). This implies, as Lodge and Taber (2013) found, that the salience and strength of an identity in a given context should be key determinants of the extent to which individuals engage in motivated processing.

Despite a focus on partisan identity for the vast majority of the literature, similar differences in information processing should occur for all sorts of social identities (Kahan 2010a). Officer-involved shootings constitute issues we expect to divide chiefly not along partisan but racial lines. And though the racial divide in America is, as Kinder and Sanders argue, "a divide without peer" (1996, 27), studies of motivated reasoning on the basis of identities other than partisanship have been relatively rare (Kahan 2010b; Kunda and Sinclair 1999). This is, in our view, an unfortunate limitation of the existing literature that our current project seeks to address.

In the context of officer-involved shootings, race, like partisanship, might shape individuals' processing of event-relevant information. Such race-based motivated reasoning might be particularly prevalent when situational ambiguity allows individuals to privilege directional goals (i.e., identity bolstering) over accuracy-oriented ones (cf. Hodson, Dovidio, and Gaertner 2002; Lawrence 2000). Presented with competing claims about an officer-involved shooting that can be viewed as supporting the white officer or the Black victim, individuals may discount information that reflects poorly on their group while advantaging information that protects the group's image. Likewise, a theory of race-based motivated reasoning posits that, when given the opportunity to encounter new information, whites and Blacks will seek messages that favor in-group members (cf. Hart et al. 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall 2010; Stroud 2011). Importantly, if race-based motivated reasoning is responsible for racial differences in judgments, the tendency to engage in defensive processes should be especially pronounced when racial identities are made more salient and among highly identified Blacks and whites (cf. Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Lodge and Taber 2013).

Updating from Racially Distinct Priors Explanation

Much of what we think of as biased processing based on ego-protective considerations may instead result from differences in information updating (see Bullock 2009; Gerber and Green 1998). In work focused on partisan responses to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, Fischle (2000) acknowledges that "individuals may well arrive at 'congenial' conclusions *not* because they were motivated to do so, and selectively processed the evidence accordingly, but simply because those judgments are plausible given the individual's prior beliefs and expectations" (141). This alternative mechanism does not require that Blacks and whites are motivated to defend their respective social identities. Instead, it recognizes that individuals, as a function of their race, may encounter events with different expectations about the likelihood of competing accounts.

Race, arguably more than any other social category, structures and stratifies American life. Whites and Blacks live in different communities and occupy different social networks (Massey and Denton 1993); they also have distinct experiences, both personal and vicarious, that shape their worldviews and inform their interactions in the social world (Lee, Porter, and Comfort 2013; Mondak et al. 2017; Peffley and Hurwitz 2010). With respect to the criminal justice system, long-standing divides shape the experiences of Black and white Americans, and these divides have far-reaching consequences for our democracy (Burch 2014; Lerman and Weaver 2014; Walker 2014). Blacks receive harsher sentences for committing the same crimes as whites (Steffensmeier, Ulmer, and Kramer 1998), are stopped more frequently by police (Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2014), and are more likely to report that their interactions with the law enforcement community are negative (Browning et al. 1994; Theobald and Haider-Markel 2009). Compounding these factors, prominent cases of police brutality often involve Black victims (Lawrence 2000), suggesting a pattern of mistreatment toward Black Americans not experienced by whites. Moreover, the often opaque processes surrounding investigations into officer-involved shootings may ferment even greater distrust among some citizens toward the criminal justice system (Lind and Tyler 1988; Nunnally 2012). In this manner, racialized social experiences could result in different perceptions of police bias and assessments of the likelihood that a law enforcement officer would shoot a Black victim without justification.

Just as citizens may base their perceptions of an incident on what they expect from the police, they may also condition their responses on expectations of members of the purportedly victimized group. That is, people make inferences about missing information based in part on expectations derived from stereotypes about a target's social group (Hamilton, Sherman, and Ruvolo 1990). When evaluating an officer-involved shooting, racially prejudiced individuals may tend to identify fault in the Black victim's behavior, thereby justifying the use of force. Hence, to the extent that Blacks and whites differ both in their beliefs about the prevalence of police bias and in

beliefs and expectations about the likely culpability of the victims, they should also differ in the judgments rendered in response to these events. The central question explored here is whether and to what extent differences in these expectations—rather than more defensive processes associated with motivated reasoning—account for the racial divide (cf. Peffley and Hurwitz 2010).

In essence, we ask whether the racial divide in response to officer-involved shootings is mostly a consequence of individuals acting in defense of their racial group or whether it manifests from different expectations and experiences. We thus examine, for both Blacks and whites, whether the mechanism is more closely associated with the salience of in-group identification or key underlying beliefs and attitudes that distinguish Black and white Americans. To be sure, we are not suggesting that these prior beliefs are independent of racial identification, but that they are distinct and separate expressions of individuals' expectations about racialized encounters.

Hypotheses

Beyond their contemporary relevance, officer-involved shootings provide a straightforward case for examining how identity shapes information processing. To understand the racial gaps observed in response to officer-involved shootings, we focus primarily on individuals' treatment of event-relevant information regarding a novel incident. In the following section, we outline three sets of hypotheses derived from the theoretical accounts discussed previously.

Biased Processing Hypotheses

The first set of hypotheses is agnostic to the underlying mechanism and lays out the expectation that biased information processing will occur. Specifically, we expect that Black and white respondents will diverge in their summary judgments in response to the fictitious case we present, despite receiving identical information. On average, Black respondents should view the officer's actions as less appropriate than their white counterparts and, subsequently, should support punishing the officer. In addition, we expect similar divergence in response to questions about case facts. Compared to Black respondents, whites should be more likely to believe the victim was armed and to assert that he attacked the officer yet less willing to adopt the belief that race played a significant role in the shooting.[7]

H1(Biased Processing): Blacks and whites will differ in a) summary judgments about the shooting and b) beliefs about what happened.

In line with notions that race alters how individuals process this information, we expect that:

H2(Biased Processing): Whites will, on average, privilege information that defends the officer's actions, whereas Blacks will privilege information that supports claims of a wrongful death.

Collectively, support for these hypotheses would demonstrate that individuals are indeed engaging in biased processing. Recall, however, that both H1 and H2 are agnostic to the mechanism yielding attitude divergence. Differences between Blacks and whites—in summary judgments and assessments of event-related facts—could emerge as a function of either identity-based motivated reasoning or differing expectations about interactions between citizens and law enforcement. We probe these mechanisms with a series of hypotheses and independent tests that elucidate the role that each mechanism may play in eliciting biased processing.

Motivated Reasoning Hypotheses

If the racial divide in Americans' responses to officer-involved shootings stems from race-based motivated reasoning, wherein the goal is to protect or defend one's racial group, the following set of expectations should hold: First, the extent to which this process operates should depend on how salient racial identity is for those evaluating the incident. Racial identity salience could emerge either as a product of some external cue that primes individuals' racial identities (Steele and Aronson 1995) or as a function of individual-level differences in the strength of racial identification among Black and white Americans (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Jardina 2019; Miller et al. 1981). This latter expectation builds on prior evidence that motivated reasoning is moderated by attitude strength (Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Lodge and Taber 2013). A race-based motivated reasoning account thus expects:

H3(Motivated Reasoning): When racial identity is made more salient through priming, summary judgments will differ between Black and white respondents to a greater degree than when racial identity is not primed.

H4(Motivated Reasoning): Racial differences in perceptions will be similarly moderated by measures of racial group identification including identity strength, group closeness, and linked fate.

A motivated reasoning explanation further posits that individuals will selectively expose themselves to information that reinforces their existing views and helps maintain a positive image of their social group (cf. Garrett and Stroud 2014; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall 2010).

H5(Motivated Reasoning): Given the opportunity to seek further information about the event, Blacks and whites will prefer different, identity-consonant information.

Finally, the motivated reasoning framework suggests that additional information should have limited influence on summary judgments once an initial judgment has been rendered. In contrast to these hypotheses, evidence that individuals incorporate new information after rendering an initial judgment would provide some evidence that undermines a pure motivational account.

H6(Motivated Reasoning): Information provided after respondents have rendered an initial summary judgment will have limited influence on their final summary judgments.

Updating from Distinct Priors Hypothesis

If, in contrast, differences in summary judgments stem from differing expectations across groups, the role of race should diminish once these uncommon priors are accounted for. We focus on perceptions of police bias and perceptions that Blacks violate social norms as scaffolds for interpreting new information about encounters between members of these groups. This can also be understood in a mediation context, whereby the effect of race operates through differences in these underlying beliefs. Thus, the influence of racial self-categorization (i.e., the "race dummy") on summary judgments as well as on reactions to information would be expected to diminish when prior beliefs and expectations are controlled.

H7(Distinct Priors): Respondents' a) perceptions of police bias and b) racial attitudes should mediate the relationships linking racial self-categorization with summary judgments and evidence weights.

The various hypotheses detailed in this section will guide our empirical approach throughout the remainder of the article. Collectively, the results shed light onto what evidence supports either a motivated reasoning account or the possibility that Black and white Americans reach different conclusions by updating from distinct priors. We move now to a discussion of the current study that examines the evidence that emerges for each account.

Methods

Data

To test the expectations outlined above, we fielded a two-wave study using Qualtrics Panels.[8] Qualtrics recruited respondents to complete an online survey using targeted emails sent to members of the ROI Rocket online panel.[9] In the first wave, fielded between June 15 and June 20, 2016, 1,430 U.S. respondents completed a survey about demographics, perceptions of the criminal justice system, experiences with racial bias, racial attitudes, and recall of the 2014 Ferguson incident. Quotas were used to gather a sample that was approximately 50% Black and 50% white. Wave 1 respondents were re-contacted one week later to participate in a second study, which ran from June 27 to August 5, 2016. The vast majority of participants responded within one week, though the survey remained open with hopes of re-contacting 1,000 respondents. In total, 895 respondents completed the second wave of the study (62.6% recontact rate). For the current study, only data from respondents who completed the second wave before July 5, 2016, when Alton Sterling was shot by a police officer in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, are reported. This incident—along with subsequent widely publicized shootings—had the potential to alter attitudes on issues measured in the study.[10] Among the 726 respondents who completed both waves of the study before July 5, 370 identified as Black and 356 identified as white.[11] Beyond ensuring racial balance, no quotas were used for the current study.

Procedure

In the second wave of the study, which was designed to appear unrelated to the first, respondents were told that they were being contacted "on behalf of a local municipality where a police officer was recently involved in a controversial incident." They were asked to "put [themselves] in the role of a local citizen who may be selected to serve on a grand jury deciding whether the officer should be indicted for acting inappropriately or whether he acted in good faith." Unbeknownst to respondents, this was a fictitious scenario. To aid in deception, respondents were told that we had anonymized details of the event, including where the event had taken place, and provided pseudonyms for relevant actors and all witnesses (refer to online appendix E for the full language used in the study and to table E1 for an outline of the procedure).[12]

Scenario. The controlled information environment began when respondents were presented with seven statements related to the incident. To mirror the kind of information typically available to the public when these events occur, participants received statements that either supported or called into question the actions of Officer Silver, who was responsible for shooting Mr. Taylor. Collectively, the statements generate the sense of ambiguity that so often characterizes these events (see Lawrence 2000). All respondents encountered the same seven statements about the hypothetical event, and statements were always presented in the same order. The first statement, from the city's police chief, provided an overview and introduction to the events. In that statement, respondents were told that Mr. Taylor (the victim) was an "African-

American male in his mid-twenties." The races of the officer and other witnesses were never stated. As expected, open-ended responses confirmed that respondents viewed the officer as white.[13]

Across the statements, respondents learned that a neighbor, Mrs. Walker, called police when two men, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Davis, were arguing on the sidewalk. As a patrol car responded to the scene, Mr. Taylor ran and was pursued by Officer Silver. After a short distance, Mr. Taylor turned around and was shot by the officer. Following statements from the police chief, Mr. Davis, and Officer Silver, respondents read statements from four additional individuals, two of whom also witnessed the events: Mrs. Williams, who was walking her dog, and Mr. Anthony, who had been driving down the street. These eyewitnesses disagreed about the circumstances under which Mr. Taylor turned toward the officer. The other statements came from Mrs. Walker and also Mrs. Thomas—a character witness for Mr. Taylor.[14]

After the first three statements, half the respondents were asked to provide an initial assessment on two summary judgment variables described later. This manipulation is used to assess whether individuals incorporate new information after having rendered an initial judgment—a test of one aspect of motivated reasoning (H6).[15] Respondents then read each remaining statement. Collectively, the statements provided evidence that could be construed to support the notion that the officer's actions were either appropriate or inappropriate.

Upon reading all seven statements, respondents were presented with one-sentence excerpts from either four or eight additional statements (i.e., a selective exposure task used to assess H5).[16] They were then asked which additional statements they would be interested in reading, though the full statements were never provided. Finally, respondents were asked about their overall perceptions of the case.[17]

Priming Manipulation. One additional design element warrants discussion. In an article on partisan motivated reasoning, Leeper and Slothuus argue that "experiments where motivations are primed are the best—and perhaps only—way to clearly distinguish the effects and mechanisms of motivated reasoning" (2014, 149). Therefore, before reading the scenario described earlier, respondents were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. A third of respondents (Group A) were asked their racial identities and a series of questions that captured the strength of their attachment to their racial group immediately preceding the scenario (Identity Prime; refer to online appendix table E1). Another third of respondents (Group B) were asked these questions alongside questions that gauged their encounters with the criminal justice system (Identity and Experience Prime). The remaining third (Group C; control) proceeded directly to the scenario and answered identity and experience-related questions at the end of the study. This manipulation was aimed at heightening the salience of racial identification for respondents in Groups A and B, which should induce the kind of goal-oriented processing undergirding motivated reasoning. Thus, comparing respondents in Groups A and B with the control group provides a direct test of motivated reasoning (H3; see Steele and Aronson 1995).[18]

Key Measures

Statement evaluations. Respondents were asked a series of questions about each statement. First, they provided an open-ended reaction.[19] Second, they were asked how much weight they thought jurors should place on the statement, using a five-point scale ranging from "None at all" (coded 0) to "A great deal" (1). Respondents were then asked to assess both how accurate and how objective or biased they thought the statement was. Full question wordings, response options, coding for all measures, and reliability statistics for indices are provided in online appendix F.

Summary judgments. For half of respondents after the third statement and for all respondents following the seventh statement and the selective exposure task, respondents answered a series of questions evaluating the officer's actions. First, they were asked, "Given what you have read, how appropriate do you think Officer Silver's actions were?" Response options ranged from "Not at all appropriate" (0) to "Completely appropriate" (1) on a five-point scale. Next, respondents were asked, "Given what you have read, do you think that Officer Silver should be charged with a crime?" with response options ranging from "He definitely should NOT be charged" (0) to "He definitely should be charged" (1) on a four-point scale.

Summary beliefs. Respondents were also asked questions related to the facts of the case. Here, respondents were first asked, "Given what you have read, how likely do you think it is that Mr. Taylor attacked Officer Silver?" with response options ranging from "Not at all likely" (0) to "Extremely likely" (1) on a five-point scale. They were then asked, "Do you happen to recall whether Mr. Taylor had a weapon?" Response options ranged from "He definitely did NOT have a weapon" (0) to "He definitely did have a weapon" (1) on a four-point scale. And last, respondents were asked, "How much of a role do you think race played in the shooting?" Responses ranged from "No role at all" (0) to "An enormous role" (1) on a five-point scale.

Racial identification and prior beliefs. To assess whether the divide is a function of identity-based motivated reasoning, we assessed—as part of the racial salience manipulation—three measures that tap racial identification: group importance, group closeness, and linked fate. These measures were coded to range from 0, for the least racially identified, to 1 for the most strongly identified and were indexed to yield an overall level of racial salience.[20] To ascertain whether the divide emerges as a consequence of different prior beliefs and expectations, we use a battery of

five questions meant to capture beliefs about police bias[21] as well as the standard four-item measure of racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996), measured in wave 1 of the study. Descriptive information is included in table F1 in the online appendix.

Results

Evidence of Racially Biased Processing

Our first set of hypotheses posited the existence of a racial divide in response to our fictitious scenario. Evidence of such a divide would indicate that Black and white individuals were indeed processing information differently, not simply encountering different information. To assess this, we compared Black and white respondents in the answers they gave to the questions about summary judgments and beliefs (H1) as well as in the importance and accuracy they accorded to the various scenario statements (H2). Respondents' ratings of statements were also compared with their summary judgments and evaluations of the event.

Blacks and whites, who encountered identical information in our scenario, diverged significantly in their summary judgments about whether the officer's actions were appropriate and whether he should face criminal charges; they also differed in perceptions of what occurred during the encounter (H1; table 2). Whites were more likely than Blacks to believe that Officer Silver's actions were appropriate (dif.=.25, t=11.0, p<.001), that Mr. Taylor attacked Officer Silver (dif.=.16, t=7.8, p<.001), and that Mr. Taylor had been armed during the encounter (dif.=.14, t=7.6, p<.001). In contrast, Blacks were more likely than whites to think that Officer Silver should be charged (dif.=-.32, t=-13.9, p<.001) and that race played a role in the encounter (dif.=-.27, t=-11.4, p<.001). The average measure differed between Blacks and whites by .23 on a 0–1 scale. These results mirrored the discrepancies observed shortly after the events in Ferguson. Differences between Blacks and whites thus appear to be largely attributable to differential processing of the same information.

Black and white Americans also diverged in the value that they accorded to the various statements (H2; table 3). We focus here on respondents' assessment of how much weight they believed the jury should assign a given

Table 2
Perceptions of novel incident by racial self-categorization

	Whites	Blacks	Difference
Officer's Actions Appropriate	.52	.28	.25***
Officer Should Be Charged	.35	.67	−.32***
Taylor Attacked Silver	.31	.15	.16***
Taylor Had Weapon	.36	.22	.14***
Role of Race in Shooting	.32	.59	−.27***
Average Absolute Difference			.23
N	355-356	368-370	

Note: Numbers represent mean values for respondents on each outcome. Variation in Ns is due to nonresponse. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. *** p<.001 differences, two-tailed t-test. See Tables G1 and G2 in Online Appendix for adjusted p-values and models including controls, as well as Online Appendix J for analyses interacting race and partisanship.

Table 3
Statement weights by racial self-categorization (parentheses indicate statement valence)

	Whites	Blacks	Difference
Chief (Pro-Officer)	.62	.54	.08***
Mr. Davis (Pro-Victim)	.51	.66	−.15***
Officer Silver (Pro-Officer)	.61	.51	.10***
Mrs. Walker (Pro-Officer)	.41	.46	−.05
Mrs. Thomas (Pro-Victim)	.36	.55	−.19***
Mrs. Williams (Pro-Victim)	.62	.76	−.15***
Mr. Anthony (Pro-Officer)	.52	.43	.09***
All Pro-Officer	.54	.49	.06***
All Pro-Officer (Excluding Walker)	.58	.49	.09***
All Pro-Victim	.49	.66	−.16***
N	356	368-370	

Note: Numbers represent mean values for respondents on each outcome. Variation in Ns is due to nonresponse. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. *** p<.001 differences, two-tailed t-test. Refer to table G4 in the online appendix for models including controls.

statement. With the exception of Mrs. Walker's statement, which is arguably the most ambiguous of the seven, whites placed more weight on information suggesting that the officer's actions were appropriate than did Blacks.[22] In contrast, Blacks put more weight on statements supportive of the victim. For example, when Black and white respondents read a statement from the victim's neighbor suggesting he "was a good boy," Blacks accorded the statement the same amount of weight they gave the police chief's statement; whites thought it was the least relevant statement provided. These patterns maintain when we examine Black and white respondents' assessments of the statements' accuracy and objectivity (table G3 in online appendix G), as well as when the items are scaled together. Again, with the exception of Mrs. Walker's statement, the weight respondents associated with each statement predicted their summary judgments in the expected direction (refer to table G5 in online appendix G). This finding demonstrates the important role that biased information processing plays in structuring the racial divide in Americans' responses to officer-involved shootings. We turn now to the task of examining the two possible routes by which this biased processing might occur.

Evidence of Race-Based Motivated Reasoning

If respondents were behaving with the goal of bolstering or protecting their identities, priming racial identity should have exacerbated racial divides (H3). When racial identification is made more salient through priming, a motivated reasoning account expects that respondents will be more inclined to bolster or defend their racial groups, thus exacerbating racial divides. Column 1 of figure 1 shows the effect of priming racial identification on all outcomes.[23] In particular, we examine whether making race and racial identification more salient led to a greater divide between Black and white participants. Comparing the treatment conditions (i.e., Identity; Identity + Experiences) to the control, we found that, contrary to motivated reasoning expectations, answering additional questions about race before the scenario did not lead respondents to answer summary judgment or belief questions differently.[24]

Beyond the experimental manipulation, if racially biased processing results from race-based motivated reasoning, more strongly identified individuals would be expected to diverge the most in their responses (H4). Compared to low-identifying respondents, Blacks and whites who indicated that their racial identities were highly salient diverged more in their summary judgments (figure 1, column 2, rows 1–2), but not in their perceptions of what happened in the incident (rows 3–5). These results imply that more highly identified individuals were likely to reach different conclusions on subjective measures, but not more factual ones (Gaines et al. 2007). They therefore provide mixed evidence for a motivated reasoning account.

Selective exposure theory contends that motivated individuals seek additional information favorable to their in-group (H5). When presented with excerpts in the selective exposure task, Black and white respondents expressed interest in reading different accounts. Whites wanted to read the four additional statements that we coded as "pro-officer" 42% of the time compared to 33% for Blacks (t=3.6, p<.001 difference). In contrast, Blacks expressed interest in reading "pro-victim" statements 38% of the time, compared to 31% for whites (t=-3.0, p=.002; refer to table 4). These results provide some evidence of selective exposure by race, consistent with an identity-based motivated reasoning framework.[25]

Finally, a pure motivated reasoning account would suggest that, after rendering an initial judgment, subsequent information should have little to no additional influence on future judgments on the same question. That is, to the extent that respondents have reached their motivational goals, responses to questions about the weight of subsequent information should act as a form of "expressive responding" (Bullock et al. 2015) rather than a measure of informational importance, eliciting answers that serve as post-hoc rationalizations for already-rendered assessments. Indeed, once motivated reasoners have achieved their goal of reaching a particular conclusion, they are unlikely to modify that conclusion unless the new information is overwhelming (Redlawsk 2002). Alternatively, we could imagine that individuals continue to update their beliefs even after rendering an initial judgment. If this were the case, respondents should continue to attend to new information (even after rendering an initial judgment), and this new information should continue to explain unique variance in their final summary judgments over and above the explanatory power of their initial judgments.

When individuals were asked to render two sets of summary judgments – once partway through the statements and once at the end—information provided after their initial evaluations continued to influence their assessments (H6). We demonstrate this in three distinct ways. First, the second column of table 5 shows that respondents' ratings of statements presented after their partway assessment continued to have a strong and statistically significant influence on eventual judgments about whether the officer should be charged. This indicates that the partway judgments did not fully account for the relations between these later statement weights and respondents' final evaluations.[26] Second, comparing the coefficients of a weights-only model (column 1 of table 5) with the one that includes the partway judgment shows that almost half of the relation between later weights (after the partway judgment) and the final summary evaluations was independent of the partway judgment, furthering the case that the evidence in these statements made a difference. Third, an F-test comparing the model in column 2 of table 5 with one that only includes the partway evaluation (not shown)

Figure 1
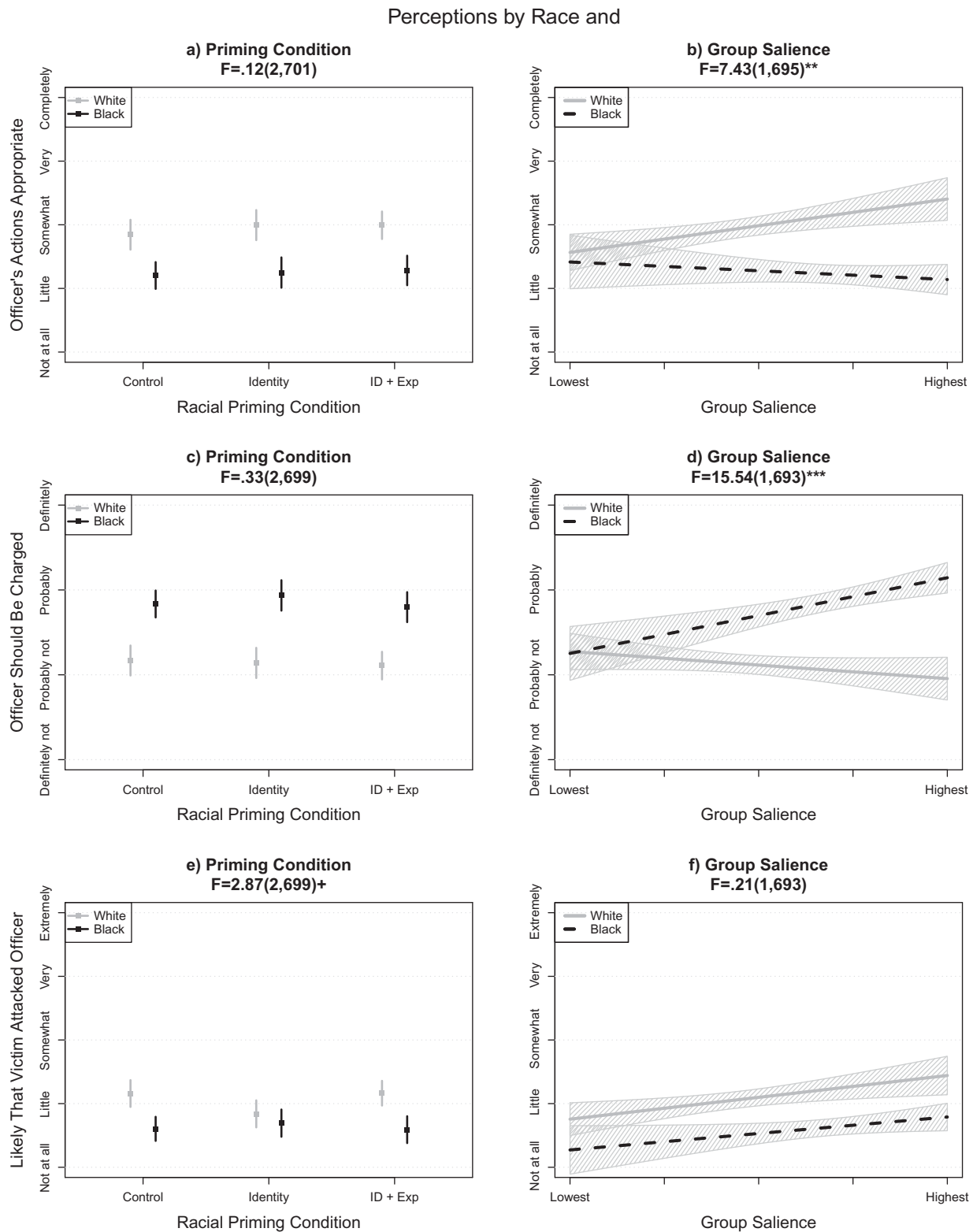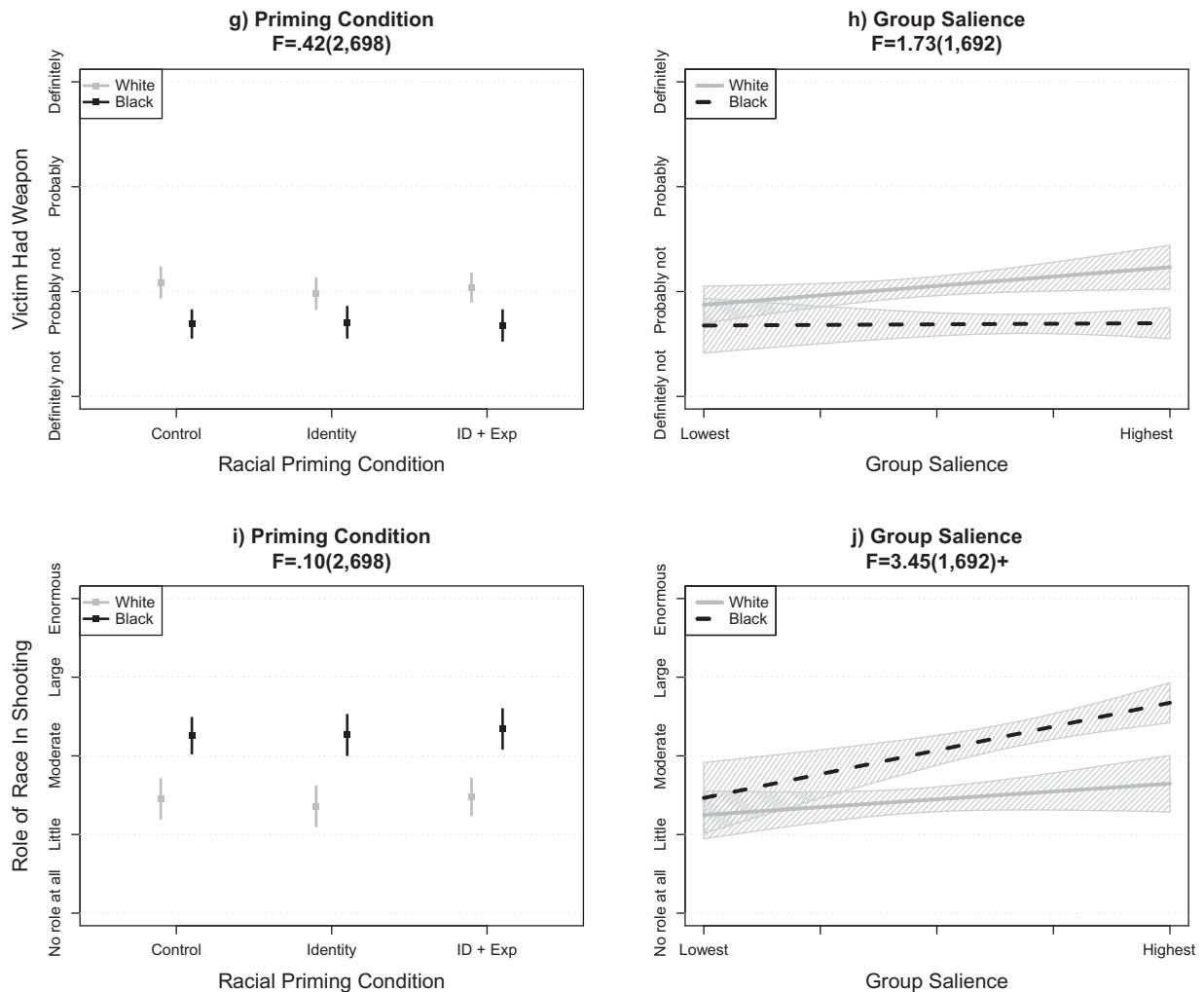**Summary judgments and beliefs by condition and racial identification**

Perceptions by Race and

Figure 1 Continued

g) Priming Condition
F=.42(2,698)

h) Group Salience
F=1.73(1,692)

i) Priming Condition
F=.10(2,698)

j) Group Salience
F=3.45(1,692)+

Note: + p<.10 | ** p<.01 | *** p<.001

Table 4
Desire to read additional excerpts by racial self-categorization

	Whites	Blacks	Difference
All Pro-Officer	.42	.33	.10***
All Pro-Victim	.31	.38	−.07**[a]
N	352-353	367-368	

Note: Numbers represent mean values for respondents across all statements seen. Difference column is calculated using an OLS regression controlling for whether respondents saw four or eight statements. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. ** p<.01 | *** p<.001 differences, two-tailed.
[a] When control variables were included (in table G8 of online appendix G), the difference between whites and Blacks in their evaluations of the pro-victim statements no longer reached statistical significance. Refer to table G7 for results by statement.

reveals significant improvements in model fit (F=5.6 (4,344), p<.001). This shows that assessments of these additional statements add to our ability to estimate respondents' final judgments.

In additional analyses, we also demonstrate that the influence of subsequent information on evaluations did not merely polarize respondents more. Instead, respondents' evaluations of subsequent statements were associated with shifts in both directions, irrespective of respondents' racial self-categorization and their partway judgments (refer to online appendix K). Collectively, then, this evidence implies that respondents were not merely rendering snap, affective-laden judgments and basing evaluations of the statements on those judgments. Instead, subsequent information still had a significant bearing on their views.

Table 5
Influence of statement weights on assessments that Officer Silver should be charged after partway evaluation

	All Weights Model		Partway Model	
Intercept	.44	(.05)***	.06	(.04)
Police Chief Weight (Pro-Officer)	−.09	(.06)	--	--
Mr. Davis Weight (Pro-Victim)	.35	(.07)***	--	--
Officer Silver Weight (Pro-Officer)	-.39	(.06)***	--	--
Partway Evaluation	--	--	.80	(.04)***
Mrs. Walker Weight (Pro-Officer)	.00	(.05)	−.03	(.04)
Mrs. Thomas Weight (Pro-Victim)	.29	(.06)***	.11	(.04)**a
Mrs. Williams Weight (Pro-Victim)	.21	(.06)***	.10	(.04)*a
Mr. Anthony Weight (Pro-Officer)	−.27	(.06)***	−.10	(.04)*a
N	349		350	
R2	.47		.70	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * p<.05 | ** p<.01 | *** p<.001 differences, two-tailed. Refer to table G10 in online appendix G for models including controls.
[a] Coefficients for statement weights in this model were not individually significant when adjusted p-values were used in table G9, but remained collectively significant in F-tests.

Overall, the evidence presented here provides mixed support for the claim that individuals diverge in their responses to officer-involved shootings because they are driven by identity protective or identity bolstering goals. Individuals whose identities were more salient were more likely to polarize in their subjective assessments, but not on more factual questions. Respondents also sought additional information that was more favorable to their racial in-group and less favorable to their racial out-group. Yet our experimental manipulation aimed at heightening the salience of racial identities had no significant effect on outcomes and individuals continued to respond to new information even after they had rendered a summary judgment.

Evidence of Updating from Distinct Priors

The evidence presented here suggests that the divides we observe in response to officer-involved shootings cannot be fully explained by a motivated reasoning account. We therefore directly probe the possibility that differences in responses between Blacks and whites result from a process that is not necessarily goal oriented or motivational in nature, but rather emanates from the fact that individuals encounter officer-involved shootings with differing expectations based on sets of uncommon priors (H7). Two sets of priors seemed likely to alter the weights that respondents accorded to the various statements as well as their summary judgments: their expectations about Black Americans and their expectations about police officers. These were measured using racial resentment and perceptions of police bias, respectively (refer to online appendix G for distributions of these measures by race). To assess whether these variables mediated the effect of racial self-categorization on outcomes and statement weights, we

first generated a series of regressions predicting (1) each outcome as a function of racial self-categorization, perceptions of police bias, and racial resentment, plus controls (column 3 in online appendix tables G6A-H); (2) each outcome as a function of racial self-categorization, plus controls (column 1 tables G6A-H); (3) perceptions of police bias as a function of racial self-categorization, plus controls (column 1 in online appendix table G12); and (4) racial resentment as a function of racial self-categorization, plus controls (column 2 in table G12). To test whether perceptions of police bias and racial resentment mediated the influence of racial self-categorization on our outcomes, we followed the strategy outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008) of running a parametric bootstrap and estimating mediation effects across 1000 resampled datasets.[27]

Results from these models were used to generate five coefficients for each outcome measure as well as three indirect effects.[28] These were (1) the total effect of racial category on each outcome without accounting for police bias and racial resentment (τ), (2) the direct effect of racial category on each outcome after accounting for police bias and racial resentment (τ'), (3) the influence of racial category on perceptions of police bias (α_1), (4) the influence of racial category on racial resentment (α_2), (5) the direct effect of perceived police bias on the outcome (β_1), and (6) the direct effect of racial resentment on the outcome (β_2). For each iteration of the bootstrap, we also calculated three indirect effects: (7) the influence of racial category on the outcome via perceived police bias ($\alpha_1 * \beta_1$), (8) the influence of racial category on the outcome via racial resentment ($\alpha_2 * \beta_2$), and (9) the total indirect effect via both of these pathways combined ($\alpha_1 * \beta_1 + \alpha_2 * \beta_2$). These are all presented in table 6, with standard errors estimated as the standard deviation of the bootstrapped

Table 6
Mediation Analyses of Racial Categorization on Outcomes via Perceptions of Police Bias and Racial Resentment

Perceptions of Police Bias

α_1 β_1

Racial Category (Black) τ τ' Outcome

α_2 β_2

Racial Resentment
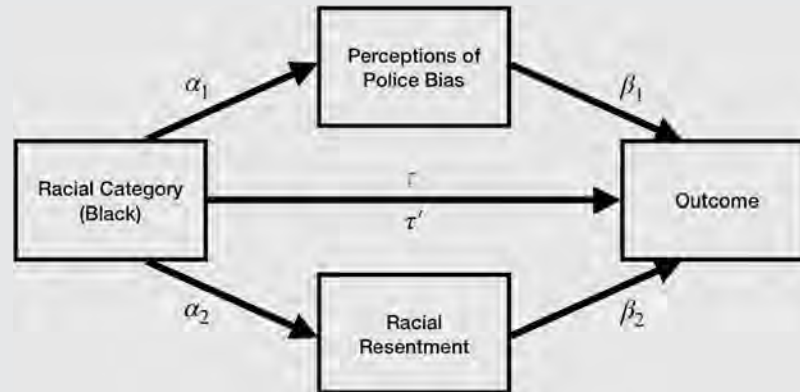
Outcome	Black -> Outcome Total Effect τ	Black -> Outcome Direct Effect τ'	Black -> Police Bias $\alpha1$	Black -> Racial Resentment $\alpha2$	Police Bias -> Outcome $\beta1$	Racial Resentment -> Outcome $\beta2$	Indirect Effect via Police Bias $\alpha1*\beta1$	Indirect Effect via Racial Resentment $\alpha2*\beta2$	Total Indirect Effect $(\alpha1*\beta1)+(\alpha2*\beta2)$
Officer's Actions Appropriate	−.71(.11)***	−.23(.12)	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	−2.37(.40)***	.78(.23)**	−.32(.06)***	−.16(.05)**	−.48(.07)***
Officer Should Be Charged	.72(.08)***	.41(.08)***	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	1.04(.29)**	−.80(.17)***	.14(.04)**	.16(.04)***	.30(.05)***
Victim Attacked Officer	−.43(.09)***	−.03(.10)	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	−2.26(.38)***	.49(.21)*	−.31(.05)***	−.10(.04)*	−.40(.06)***
Victim Had Weapon	−.34(.06)***	−.14(.07)	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	−1.16(.25)***	.20(.13)	−.16(.04)***	−.04(.03)	−.20(.04)***
Race Role in Shooting	.84(.11)***	.26(.12)*	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	2.63(.40)***	−1.09(.25)***	.36(.06)***	.22(.06)***	.58(.07)***
All Pro-Officer Statement Weights	−.03(.02)	.03(.02)	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	−.26(.07)***	.13(.04)**	−.04(.01)***	−.03(.01)**	−.06(.01)***
All Pro-Victim Statement Weights	.12(.02)***	.08(.02)***	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	.21(.07)**	−.09(.04)*	.03(.01)**	.02(.01)*	.05(.01)***
Pro-Officer Statement Weights (Excluding Walker)	−.07(.02)***	.003(.02)	.14(.01)***	−.21(.02)***	−.24(.07)***	.18(.04)***	−.03(.01)***	−.04(.01)***	−.07(.01)***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. All models control for sex, education, age, party identification, and liberal-conservative identification. $\alpha1$ and $\alpha2$ are consistent across all models by design. All direct and indirect effects estimated using parametric bootstrapping with N=1000 resamples. * p<.05 | ** p<.01 | *** p<.001.

results and p-values calculated as twice the proportion of resamples for which results were in the opposite direction.

Across the eight outcomes tested, we found evidence that the prior beliefs and expectations accounted for the bulk of racial differences. The indirect effect of racial category through both perceptions of police bias and racial resentment (column 9 of table 6) was always strongly statistically significant and was larger than the remaining direct effect (column 2) for seven of the eight outcomes. Further, the direct effect of racial category on the outcomes lost significance entirely for four of the seven outcomes for which it was present in the total effects (compare columns 1 and 2 of table 6). These results suggest that racial differences in perceptions stem from attitudes and expectations that themselves differ across racial lines.

In a series of additional analyses (in online appendix G), we find that prior beliefs and expectations were considerably stronger than measures of racial salience in explaining the divides between Blacks and whites on our outcome measures. In general, racial salience measures added only incrementally to our ability to account for racial differences whereas perceptions of police bias and racial resentment accounted for considerable additional variance. Compared to a model with just controls, including racial salience and an interaction between racial salience and racial category improved the goodness of fit (R^2) from .15 to .16 on average (see column 2 of online appendix tables G6A–H). In contrast, the inclusion of prior beliefs and expectations increased the average goodness of fit to .22. Notably, the influence of these two manifestations of race were largely distinct, with both sets collectively increasing the average R^2 to .23 when they were simultaneously included in models. Further, once both sets were included at the same time, the influence of the racial categorization dummy variable was no longer significant in any model. This result implies that the motivated reasoning and prior belief models collectively may fully explain the differences in information processing across racial groups.

Discussion

Why do members of different social groups diverge in their evaluations of contentious events? And why, in particular, is there a persistent racial divide in Americans' responses to officer-involved shootings? First, we show both in a study conducted shortly after Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri, as well as in a novel scenario that attitudes pertaining to these cases diverged along racial lines. That differences emerged in the second study, where all respondents encountered the same information, indicates that this divergence was not simply the result of Blacks and whites occupying different information environments. Instead, individuals in different racial groups perceived and processed the same evidence differently.

But what would make Black and white Americans process the same information differently? We tested two explanations. First, we examined the possibility that individuals were engaging in a form of race-based motivated reasoning, acting with the goal of bolstering their racial identity when evaluating information about a racialized incident. We found mixed evidence for this suggestion. In a process akin to partisan selective exposure (Stroud 2011) and in line with other work that documents a tendency to prefer information favorable to one's in-group (Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall 2010), individuals expressed an interest in acquiring new information likely to bolster their racial identities. Racial identification measures also moderated relations between racial self-categorization and some summary judgments. Yet making racial identity more salient through priming did not exacerbate racial divides (cf. Steele and Aronson 1995), strength of racial identification did not account for differences in factual beliefs about the incident (cf. Lodge and Taber 2013), and individuals continued to update their beliefs even after forming an initial judgment (cf. Redlawsk 2002). It therefore appears that racial identification *can* motivate processing, but that this is at best a partial explanation of the diverging perceptions observed.

In contrast, there was slightly stronger support for a second explanation, whereby individuals in different racial groups interpreted novel information in ways that were shaped by preexisting beliefs and expectations (Peffley and Hurwitz 2010). Here, differences in summary judgments and beliefs across racial groups corresponded with respondents' racial attitudes and perceptions of police bias. Combined with results suggesting that individuals were updating their beliefs in line with new evidence, this implies that some of the racial divide is a product of information updating from racially distinct priors (cf. Bullock 2009; Gerber and Green 2003). That is, insofar as there are racial differences in responses to officer-involved shootings, these differences reflect average differences in prior beliefs and expectations related to the fairness of policing and the culpability of Black victims.

Our conclusion that the racial divide is shaped heavily by beliefs and expectations is perhaps unsurprising given the power of race to shape how Americans encounter daily life. But it also contradicts a tendency in much recent literature to ascribe similar partisan differences to goal-oriented processes without examining the specific mechanisms at play (Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Effective interventions for mitigating racial differences in perceptions of officer-involved shootings and other similar incidents also likely depend on why individuals are reaching different conclusions. To suppress the effects of goal-oriented processing, we would need to somehow diminish the salience of racial identification when evaluating officer-involved shootings and find a way to ensure that people consciously evaluate their biases. Not only is this difficult to accomplish, but it precludes a range of potential interventions. The suggestion that lived experiences and

associated beliefs are underlying causes of the divide may yield more tangible remedies, as people may be willing to accept the legitimacy of others' experiences and institutions can alter behavior in ways that change those experiences. For instance, efforts to foster positive interactions between police officers and Black community members could improve intergroup expectations, resulting in less-polarized perceptions when incidents occur (Pettigrew 1998; Peyton, Sierra-Arévalo, and Rand 2019).

As a note, the reader will likely recognize that we have been careful throughout not to expect differentially biased information processing from members of one racial group and not the other. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that both whites and Blacks are similarly susceptible to the tendencies to engage in identity-protective strategies or to update based on existing beliefs and expectations. But the presence of similar psychological processes does not imply that the effects of biased perceptions are somehow racially neutral. To the contrary, the presence of the sorts of biases identified can instead serve to exacerbate racial tensions and to induce additional inequities. It also may well be the case that racially distinct priors are not equally well informed.

Left unchecked, the perceptual biases we identify would be expected to result in a vicious cycle of distrust between Black Americans and the criminal justice system. When officer-involved shootings are adjudicated in court, convictions may be structurally unlikely. As white jurors and Black jurors consider the evidence, we would expect them to seek out information that confirms their existing perspectives and build on pre-existing beliefs to arrive at diverging judgments. This may make it difficult to achieve a unanimous conviction and may leave Black communities, in particular, feeling that justice has not been served. And these differences in perceptions could also have larger implications in a society stratified by race, where whites maintain greater influence over many social and political institutions.

Unanswered Questions

The results of our study raise a series of important questions for future research. Narrowly, it is important to consider whether the conclusions we draw depend heavily on schemas for how officer-involved shootings operate (cf. Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). For example, should we expect the processes that we document to be similarly consequential when the various features of the context change, such as the race of the officer or the race of the victim? Also, what happens when the ambiguity surrounding an incident varies? Do we continue to observe a strong divergence in judgments and evaluations, or does less ambiguity attenuate these divides? Similarly, in real-world scenarios, biases may occur at all stages of information processing, including the information acquisition stage (e.g., news consumption differences by race). It would

be valuable to unpack how both motivated and experiential differences between groups operate across these processes as well as in somewhat different circumstances.

More broadly, scholars should replicate this design across other salient social groups and issue domains to consider how often motivated reasoning really is the primary explanation for why two groups of people reach different conclusions about the same information. For instance, it seems possible that the increasingly distinct social lives of Democrats and Republicans could induce beliefs and expectations that are almost as distinct as those driven by racial experience (cf. Mason 2015). Similar processes may also explain differences in attitudes toward the #MeToo Movement by gender or divides in opinion between members of different religious and ethnic groups. Just as we take race seriously as a social construct (in line with Sen and Wasow 2016) that has both psychological and experiential components, so too may other identities.

Finally, the design we employ in the current project provides one framework for understanding the mechanisms that sustain divides in public opinion across salient social groups. We believe that other studies that control the information that people receive and observe divergences in their attitudes will allow for a window into how differences in information processing occur across other groups. We also believe it is important in assessments of motivated reasoning to clearly articulate the goals that we think people are motivated to serve so that we can employ meaningful manipulations and consider whether those goals are indeed driving behavior.

Conclusion

It is no secret that members of different social groups hold different attitudes on a range of political issues. In this paper, we do more than merely note the presence of such a divide in the context of officer-involved shootings. Using data collected in response to an actual shooting and data from a fictitious event, we show not only that Blacks and whites differ in their judgments and beliefs, but that these differences emerge as a consequence of biased information processing. We go on to provide clarifying evidence for how this biased processing occurs. First, we find some evidence that Blacks and whites arrive at their opinions as a function of race-based motivated reasoning. Yet this identity-driven explanation fails to capture the full scope of the racial divide. Importantly, we also find that Black–white differences emerge as a function of different prior beliefs and expectations, which are themselves informed by race. Differences in perceptions, therefore, cannot be attributed *solely* to either motivational goals or to differences in pre-existing beliefs. These factors instead compound one another to yield racially divergent views.

Importantly, these findings not only speak to the persistent racial divide in Americans' responses to officer-involved shootings. They highlight how challenging it is

for diverse citizenries to arrive at consensus positions when the issues at stake bear on individuals' identities or reveal chasms in citizens' expectations and prior beliefs. When individuals deliberate about these kinds of issues, the information they prioritize and draw upon will differ, depending on the identities they hold as well as the experiences those identities imbue. By attending to differences in beliefs, expectations, and motivations when assessing the effects of social identities like race (or gender, partisanship, religion, nationality, etc.), scholars and policymakers can more effectively understand the work that these identities are doing in affecting citizens' responses to some of the most pressing issues of the day. And whether the goal is to further explicate the meaning of these identities for an academic audience or to design effective interventions that aid in the administration of justice, future scholarship must do more than simply note that identity matters; it must take up the much more difficult task of understanding *why*.

Notes

1 https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/us/pew-study-race-twitter-news-events.html

2 Notably, our use of the term "bias" is purely technical and should not be regarded as suggesting that any particular viewpoint or interpretation of events is necessarily invalid. This technical treatment of the term does not imply, however, that all interpretations of an event are equally close to the true state of the world.

3 Here, "racial identification" refers to the strength of one's association with a racial category and "racial self-categorization" indicates that an individual self-identifies with a given racial group.

4 Qualtrics recruited 3,729 respondents from the ClearVoice Surveys panel to complete an online survey between August 29 and September 8, 2014. Study design and question wordings are described in Online Appendices A and B. Note: Michael Brown was shot on August 9 of that year.

5 This is consistent with findings from the Pew Research Center. There, whites and Blacks differed in their confidence in the investigations of Brown's death: only 18% of Blacks interviewed were confident in the investigations compared to 52% of whites; Drake 2014.

6 We cannot be certain that Blacks and whites were exposed to the same media following the shooting in Ferguson (e.g., Blacks may have been more likely to consume information from Black-oriented sources). This could reflect biased information acquisition (see e.g., Zaller 1992; Gubitz and Pasek n.d.). Here, we are interested in what happens when individuals receive the same information; our second study

therefore implements a controlled information environment.

7 Admittedly, these outcomes represent at least two classes of evaluations, namely subjective judgments and more objective assessments. We contend that both are interesting but acknowledge that divergence in response to questions on factual elements of the case provide more compelling evidence for a motivated reasoning framework, which we discuss in subsequent hypotheses.

8 This study is separate from the 2014 "Ferguson study" discussed earlier in the article.

9 Refer to online appendix D for information about the study design and a discussion of generalizability.

10 Including data collected beyond this period yields slightly stronger results, though we decided *a priori* to exclude these data. Refer to online appendix H for the results.

11 Individuals who identified as both Black and white (N=13) were excluded from all analyses.

12 University of Michigan IRB #HUM00116494. All respondents were fully debriefed.

13 The races of the victim and the officer were not manipulated, as such manipulations would run counter to the schematic representations that undergird the racial divide we set out to examine.

14 Refer to online appendix E for the full text of all statements. It is possible that respondents inferred characteristics about the witnesses not explicitly mentioned in the information provided. Here, we consider the most important characteristic whether a statement is pro-officer or pro-victim.

15 Only half the respondents were given this manipulation because we wanted to test whether rendering an initial judgment altered the later judgments that respondents conferred. We did not find evidence of this.

16 Respondents were randomly asked to evaluate either eight statements or only four statements (randomly sampled from the eight) for a separate analysis on whether providing additional information might alter perceptions. Limiting the results of the current study to respondents who were asked all eight statements did not alter any conclusions.

17 Table E2 in the online appendix shows Ns in each treatment cell by racial group.

18 Items used to prime racial identification were also used to assess H4, an additional observational test of motivated reasoning. Refer to online appendix I to see that the priming manipulation did not affect responses to the racial salience items.

19 This paper relies on responses to closed-ended questions only.

20 Independently, these measures of racial group identification have different theoretical bases. Here, they are

collectively treated as a proxy of attachment to one's racial group. For a discussion of identity's role in shaping responses in political contexts, see Huddy 2001, 2003.

21 The questions were: 1) In general, do the police treat whites better than Blacks, treat Blacks better than whites, or treat them both the same? 2) Do the police stop whites more than Blacks, Blacks more than whites, or do they stop them both equally? 3) How often do you think the police use more force than is necessary under the circumstances when dealing with white people? 4) How often do you think the police use more force than is necessary under the circumstances when dealing with Black people? 5) How common do you think racial or ethnic prejudice is among police officers? The resulting index was scaled 0–1, with higher values indicating greater perceptions of bias. Correlations between measures of racial identification and prior beliefs are in table F2 of online appendix F. Modest correlations across these two types of items indicate that the prior belief measures are not simply a proxy for racial identification.

22 We regard Mrs. Walker's statement as ambiguous, as it is not clearly a pro-officer or pro-victim statement. Mrs. Walker, the neighbor who called the police, simply comments about what led to her call and notes that she was unaware of whether there was a weapon on the scene.

23 Refer to figure G1 in online appendix G for analyses that examine the influence of each of the group salience measures separately.

24 While it is possible that our manipulation "failed" to prime race, studies have had success with similar techniques; Steele and Aronson 1995. It is therefore likely either that race was inherently primed by the scenario or that the processes simply were not driven by motivational goals.

25 Restricting analyses to respondents who received all eight statements does not alter results.

26 If the weights respondents assigned to these later statements were purely expressions of their goals (cf. Bullock et al. 2015), they might match overall evaluations, but would not explain any change in variance between initial and final summary judgments. Refer to online appendix table G9 for additional analyses, including evaluations of whether the officer's actions were appropriate.

27 We calculated the mediation sensitivity parameter proposed by Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010 and found that all sensitivity parameters had absolute values of less than 1 x 10-16, making it unlikely that there is a significant uncontrolled endogenous covariate.

28 We use the terms "direct effect," "indirect effect," and "total effect" here as they are typically used for mediation models, but stress that they should not be construed to imply causality.

Supplementary Materials

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720003618.

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