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NEWS MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF OBAMA INFLUENCE AUTOMATIC ATTITUDES: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OBAMA EFFECT

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Positive media depictions of Obama likely contribute to the so-called "Obama effect." However, like any attitude-object, effects of those depictions can depend on contextually positive or negative portrayals. We hypothesized that politically conservative news web sites (e.g., FoxNews.com) visually depict Obama more negatively than moderate sites (e.g., CNN.com), and that incidental exposure to such dissimilar depictions can differentially impact perceivers' attitudes toward Obama, particularly when pre-existing attitudes are weak. In Study 1 (n = 111), images of Obama from FoxNews.com were rated more negatively than images of him from CNN.com. In Study 2 (n = 215), participants with weaker attitudes exposed to FoxNews.com images (versus all other images) evinced the most negative SC-IAT bias toward Obama. Thus, incidental exposure to valenced media portrayals can impact attitudes toward public figures. Implications for the Obama effect are discussed.

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States appears to have affected attitudes and stereotypes toward Blacks. Pervasively positive portrayals of Obama conveyed through popular media may have led to a so-called "Obama effect" (Plant et al., 2009), which, among other outcomes, manifested as reduced levels of prejudice toward Blacks. As a counter-stereotypical exemplar, popular representations of Obama challenged ubiquitous stereotypes of Blacks as lazy, relatively unintelligent, and low-achieving. Previous research suggests that such exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars can alter (at least for short periods) Whites' implicit attitudes toward minorities. For example, Dasgupta and

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Greenwald (2001) found that participants exposed to counter-stereotypical Black and White exemplars (e.g., Michael Jordan, Martin Luther King, Jr., vs. Ted Bundy, Al Capone) evinced less negative bias toward Blacks (or perhaps *more* negative bias toward Whites) on the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Analogously, Plant and colleagues (2009) have found correlational evidence for the Obama effect in attitudes measured using the IAT. White participants who either thought of positive Black exemplars or, alternatively, more strongly associated Obama with positive attributes, showed reduced levels of racial bias toward Blacks. In a follow-up study, Columb and Plant (2011) showed that merely exposing participants to images of Obama attenuated the effect of previous exposure to (stereotypically) negative Black exemplars.

However, other research has failed to reproduce the Obama effect. Schmidt and Nosek (2010) examined data collected from the Project Implicit website over the course of 2.5 years and found no change in the level of IAT bias against Blacks among a very large heterogeneous sample (also see Schmidt & Axt, this issue). It is possible that the disparate populations used and likely dissimilar exposure to differentially valenced portrayals of Obama in the above studies led to contradictory results. If the Obama effect depends on the valence of his portrayal (as we contend), the populations from these studies may have been exposed to different portrayals of him. Undergraduate students at a university during the election season (as in Columb & Plant, 2011; Plant et al., 2009) likely met with disproportionately positive exposure to Obama through his campaign's extensive use of social media; indeed, Obama's popularity among college students surpassed that of other age demographics (Panetta Institute for Public Policy, 2011). Additionally, the nationally representative sample of Schmidt and Nosek (2010) was likely to contain as many Obama detractors as supporters who were also exposed to more heterogeneous depictions of him. That Schmidt and Nosek failed to see an overall change suggests that liking of Obama surged among some and plunged among others. To the extent that media influence attitudes toward Obama, it would appear that different information sources provide different portrayals of him.

CONTEXT EFFECTS ON EVALUATIVE ASSOCIATION

We argue that like any attitude-object, effects of exposures to Obama can be influenced by positive or negative portrayals, which are often determined by the context. Indeed, it has been shown that automatically activated attitudes toward Blacks are influenced by contextual valence (for a review, see Blair, 2002). For example, Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park (2001) manipulated the context in which Blacks and Whites were depicted, altering the foreground and background of images to either contain a Black or White face over a positive (e.g., church interior) or negative (e.g., dilapidated street corner) background. Negative bias toward Blacks on a sequential priming task was attenuated to Black/church versus Black/street images, while bias toward Whites was unaffected by the background. Similarly, portraying Blacks in counter-stereotypical (e.g., lawyer, churchgoer, student) ver-

sus stereotypical (e.g., prisoner, athlete) roles has been shown to ameliorate negative bias toward Blacks, providing evidence for the interactive effects of context in moderating automatic attitudes (Barden, Maddux, Petty, & Brewer, 2004). Thus, the Obama effect is likely to be influenced by the context in which he is portrayed.

Political figures are often depicted in more or less positive contexts on news websites. A political figure might, for example, be portrayed next to a very liked or disliked "other," or along with a clearly valenced overlaying text. In this context, the interactive effects of multiple elements are paramount. As Wertheimer's (1923) work on perceptual organization showed, stimuli placed in close proximity to each other in time or space may be perceived as a cluster, and therefore processed in an interactive manner. Such proximity may increase the likelihood that elements in a scene will become associated in memory. Thus, text overlaying an image (similar to those often used by news media websites) is likely to become linked to the image itself, and influence the evaluation of objects in the image.

An obvious mechanism through which proximal stimuli can influence the processing of a target is through implicit misattribution of affect. Our work and others (Hütter & Sweldens, 2013; Jones, Fazio, & Olson, 2009) has shown that elements presented simultaneously or in close proximity can generate "source confusability" regarding the affect generated by the perceptual experience such that affect from one object is misattributed to the other. Affect is more likely to be misattributed when elements are presented in close proximity and when eye-gaze shifts between them are facilitated (Jones et al., 2009). In other words, the more intertwined perceptions of multiple elements are, the more likely affect from the one will be attributed to the other. Such entwinement is readily seen in the imagery of public figures presented on news media websites. For example, some news media often make use of split-screen presentations, whereby politicians are often presented alongside half-screens of valenced material, and the use of split-screens has been shown to influence attitudes (e.g., Scheufele, Kim, & Brossard, 2007; Seiter, Abraham, & Nakagama, 1998). To the extent that an attitude object (e.g., Obama) is depicted as integral to some evaluatively charged context (e.g., valenced text), we predict that evaluative transfer is more likely.

A cursory look at depictions of President Obama on Internet news sites suggests that there is indeed entwinement of valenced objects and Obama. The present research focuses on two popular news websites: FoxNews.com and CNN.com. The former caters to a more conservative audience (Aday, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2009) while the latter caters to more progressive viewers (Pew Research Center, 2009). On the FoxNews.com website, negative images and words are often melded with depictions of Obama, while text is typically not included in CNN images of Obama (contact the author for sample main page images from FoxNews.com and CNN.com). In light of the previously reviewed studies showing how contextual elements are processed in an integrative manner, such text-image melding may facilitate implicit misattribution whereby Obama becomes associated with the negativity activated by the valenced image or word. The question of whether FoxNews.com (as compared to CNN.com) portrays Obama more negatively is an empirical one we address in the present research.

THE CURRENT WORK

Primarily, we aim to demonstrate that dissimilar depictions of Obama presented with contextually positive or negative text or images can influence perceivers' attitudes toward him. This effect would be consistent with the misattribution processes we have described. In particular, we argue that the way in which negative information is often integrated into the depictions of Obama presented on FoxNews.com can encourage source confusability, leading the negative information in the image to be misattributed to Obama.

We expect that the Obama effect is influenced by a number of factors, such as the strength of one's attitude toward Obama prior to exposure, the type of exposure (e.g., watching him give a rousing speech vs. seeing a static image and quotes), and, most germane to this study, the contextual nature in which he is portrayed. Thus, we aim to explore whether evaluations of Obama can be manipulated by altering contextual elements. Importantly, we attempt to make causal inferences via experimental manipulation, but also retain ecological validity by employing actual depictions of Obama found in popular media (i.e., news websites). More so, our dependent variable is not attitudes toward Blacks, per se, but attitudes toward Obama. However, given research on the Obama effect indicating that Obama's popularity and counter-stereotypicality can influence racial attitudes, understanding how attitudes toward Obama might be influenced by media portrayals is particularly important.

Two relevant clarifications are important to make. First, we assumed that people with stronger attitudes would be less likely to misattribute the source of their affect as a function of the way in which an object is depicted (because they are already aware of the source of their affect). Therefore, we predicted that media depictions would influence attitudes only among those with weaker, less-developed attitudes. Thus, we used the Need to Evaluate scale (NES; Jarvis & Petty, 1996) as an indicator of general attitude strength. Second, because misattribution of affect is thought to occur automatically and associatively (Kendrick & Olson, 2012; Gawronski, Balas, & Creighton, 2013), we expected indirect measures, which are better able than explicit measures to assess such associations (Fazio & Olson, 2003), to be most sensitive to implicit misattribution. However, most implicit measures (e.g., priming, IAT) require two naturally contrasting categories (e.g., Blacks vs. Whites), but in the case of Obama, there is no obvious contrast. Therefore, the SC-IAT was employed because it does not require a contrast category (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006).

In Study 1, participants rated a random sample of images depicting Obama collected during the same time period on the main page of FoxNews.com and CNN.com. Our goal was to provide empirical evidence that FoxNews.com and CNN.com indeed depicted Obama dissimilarly. Given FoxNews.com's reputation for catering to a more conservative audience (and hence presumably depicting Obama more negatively), we drew what should be opposing imagery from a

more moderate website (i.e., CNN.com). We predicted that FoxNews.com images of Obama would be viewed as depicting him more negatively than images from CNN.com. In Study 2, we inserted those images into an evaluative conditioning (EC) paradigm (Olson & Fazio, 2001) to assess the impact of incidental exposure to those images on perceivers' attitudes toward Obama. Here we expected that the FoxNews.com images, when presented to participants incidentally in the EC task, would lead to more negative automatic attitudes toward Obama among those with weaker attitudes.

STUDY 1

METHOD

Participants. One-hundred and eleven undergraduate students at a large southeastern American university participated in groups of 1 to 8 for partial fulfillment of course requirements.

Materials. Images were selected from the main webpage of both FoxNews.com and CNN.com. From late May to early September, 2009, parallel checks of each website's front page were conducted once nearly every weekday at the same time (approximately 8:30 a.m. EST). Images depicting Barack Obama as the main front-page image were selected from each site until 20 were acquired from each. Simple stock photos of headshots/busts were excluded under the assumption that they contain little context or emotional material. Thus, the criteria employed for image selection was that the front page image had to include Obama and a word, an object, another person, or a clearly identifiable background. The two sites met these criteria at the same rate, so the time-frame for collecting the images from each site was identical.

One qualitative difference between images sampled from CNN.com and FoxNews.com was that all images on FoxNews.com had text captions embedded within the image itself, whereas no images sampled from CNN.com contained such a feature. Therefore, to control for the potential influence such words might have, duplicate sets of the 20 FoxNews.com images were created with text blackened out. This resulted in three image sets: CNN, Fox-words, and Fox-no-words.

Procedure. Participants were seated in individual cubicles equipped with monitors and keyboards. Participants were then shown all 60 images of Obama (CNN, Fox-words, and Fox-no-words) and indicated how they felt he was depicted in each image on a scale from -2 ("Very Unfavorable") to +2 ("Very Favorable"). They were told to base these judgments on how he was objectively portrayed in each image, not on how they personally felt. Images were presented in random order without any information indicating their original source.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Image ratings were analyzed using a one-factor (Media Type) repeated-measures ANOVA. Results indicated that the source of the images significantly affected the

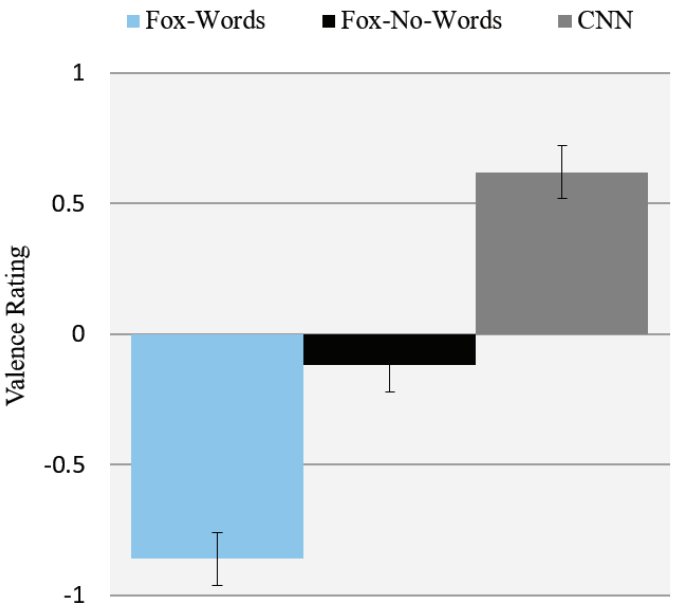

FIGURE 1. Mean ratings of images by Media Type. All means differ at $p < .01$.

ratings of how Obama was portrayed, $F(2, 109) = 253.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .82$. Further, contrasts show that Fox-words images ($M = -.86$, $SD = .53$) were rated more negatively than images taken from CNN.com ($M = .62$, $SD = .55$), $F(1, 110) = 509.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .82$, as well as more negatively than the Fox-no-words images with the text digitally removed ($M = -.12$, $SD = .52$), $F(1, 110) = 285.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. The Fox-no-words images were also rated more negatively than the CNN images, $F(1, 110) = 246.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .69$ (see Figure 1).

Further tests confirmed that all ratings for the three media types differed significantly from the scale neutral point. CNN images were found to contain overall positive depictions of Obama, $t(110) = 11.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.25$, whereas the Fox-words images and the Fox-no-words images were rated as depicting Obama negatively, $t(110) = -17.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.28$ and $t(110) = -2.47$, $p = .01$, $d = .47$, respectively.

Thus, according to our naive participants' perceptions, images selected for use by various news websites vary systematically in how positively or negatively they portray Obama. Moreover, overlaying an individual with text (often negatively phrased statements) had the largest effect on viewers' perceptions of the Obama depictions. Participants rated these Fox-words images significantly more negatively than identical images with the words removed.

Having found empirical evidence of valence differences in the images from FoxNews.com and CNN.com, we next explored the critical question of what effects incidental exposure to such images have on peoples' attitudes toward Obama. Study 2 addressed our hypothesis that repeated exposure to valenced images com-

monly found across media websites can influence attitudes regarding Obama, particularly among those with weakly held attitudes.

STUDY 2

This study employed an evaluative conditioning (EC) paradigm to expose participants to the Obama images. EC, a change in one's attitude toward an object due to its association with other valenced items, is a pervasive source of attitudes (e.g., De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001; Jones, Olson, & Fazio, 2010). A typical EC paradigm pairs a novel object (the CS, e.g., a political figure) with clearly valenced stimuli (the US, e.g., positive and negative words and images). In our work (e.g., Jones, Olson, & Fazio, 2010; Olson & Fazio, 2001, 2006), and the present study, such pairings are presented under the guise of a "surveillance task," where the primary objective is to search for "target objects" not the subject of conditioning embedded in a series of filler words and images. The EC paradigm utilized by Study 2 was well suited as a vehicle for systematically exposing participants to depictions of Obama without drawing attention to the purpose of the study. This paradigm allowed us to "incidentally" expose participants to one of the three sets of Obama images situated within a task ostensibly unrelated to Obama himself. Given its paired presentation of proximal images, this EC paradigm was further useful as a tool for facilitating misattribution of affect, an important quality since we assumed that misattribution may be a mechanism underlying the attitude change brought about through incidental exposure to valenced stimuli.

We also administered the Need to Evaluate Scale as a measure of general attitude strength (NES; Jarvis & Petty, 1996). The NES measures the extent to which people spontaneously evaluate objects as good or bad. Past research has shown that individuals high versus low in need to evaluative possess stronger overall attitudes (Petty & Jarvis, 1996), report attitudes more quickly (Hermans, De Houwer, & Eelen, 2001; Petty & Jarvis, 1996; Tormala & Petty, 2001), and engage in more spontaneous implicit evaluations (Jarvis & Petty, 1996). Given these findings, we expected that NES scores may moderate the effects of valenced Obama exposures as the attitudes of individuals low in NE may be more malleable.

Previous research has also found that NE relates to several behaviors related to the political process (e.g., likelihood of using party identification to inform their evaluations, likelihood of using their own views to inform their evaluations, political engagement, voting intentions, political information-seeking behaviors, etc.; Bizer et al., 2004). That is, people high in NE tend to vote along party lines, vote more, are more informed voters, and have more extreme political attitudes.

METHOD

Participants

Two-hundred and fifteen undergraduate students at a large southeastern American university participated in groups of 1 to 8 for partial fulfillment of course re-

quirements. Four were removed from analyses for committing excessive errors on the SC-IAT (> 30%), leaving 211 for primary analyses. Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 conditions based on which Obama image set they viewed: CNN, Fox-words, Fox-no-words, and a fourth, control condition, where they were shown no images of Barack Obama.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were seated in individual cubicles equipped with monitors and keyboards where they were subjected to an EC procedure designed to minimize explicit awareness of its intended purpose (for further details on the procedure, see Jones, Fazio, & Olson, 2009). They were told that they were participating in a study on "media surveillance" designed to assess how people process visual stimuli while attending to other online media content. Participants were instructed to attend to the monitor while they were shown a stream of images "taken from various online media outlets," which included images of political figures (e.g., Mitt Romney, Charlie Crist), as well as random images from a stimulus pool (e.g., a bicycle, an electrical outlet). To reduce the salience of the Obama images' repetition, some of these filler images were shown between 2–8 times each, and others appeared only once. Participants' task was to be vigilant for target images (which were also political figures taken from news websites, e.g., Joe Biden) and to press the space bar as quickly as possible whenever the target appeared. Targets appeared as either words or both words and images. Targets differed by block, and were presented on the screen before each block. Participants completed five blocks that each contained 86 trials presented for 1.5 seconds, with a 1 second inter-trial interval. Targets appeared randomly eight times per block. The 20 Obama images also appeared randomly, four times per block, among the other fillers, and varied according to the condition participants were assigned. Sixteen trials were "blank" filler trials designed to disrupt the rhythmic flow of the presentation, and the remaining trials consisted of filler images (described above). Targets and fillers were identical across conditions. The 20 Obama trials were omitted for control participants, which resulted in a negligible shortening of the procedure (30 seconds).

Single Category IAT. Participants then completed the Single Category IAT (SC-IAT; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006). The SC-IAT was used to measure individuals' automatic attitudes toward Obama. The SC-IAT is a variation of the original IAT (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) that can be used to measure attitudes toward objects that do not have a natural opposite. This allows for the measurement of evaluative associations without requiring the use of a complimentary category. Since we were more interested in absolute associations toward a single item that does not have a natural complementary category (i.e., Obama), this measure was a fitting choice.

The SC-IAT was administered using parameters from Karpinski and Steinman (2006), and consisted of three practice blocks of 10 trials each in which participants categorized positive words, negative words, and depictions of Obama, respectively, followed by two critical blocks of 60 trials each involving positive and

negative word trials interspersed with depiction of Obama trials. One such block required them to respond by pressing the space bar whenever a positive word or a depiction of Obama appeared, and another required them to respond whenever a negative word or depiction of Obama appeared. The order of critical blocks was counterbalanced across participants (a variable which produced no main effects or interactions).

Need to Evaluate Scale. Next, participants filled out several ostensibly unrelated questionnaires, among them the NES. Need to evaluate is measured on a 5-point scale from *extremely uncharacteristic* to *extremely characteristic*. It prompts participants to rate how well a series of 16 statements describes them. The statements are either related to the number of attitudes one possesses (e.g., "I form opinions about everything") or to the strength of one's opinions (e.g., "It is very important to me to hold strong opinions").

As support for our premise that NE relates to political attitude strength, a pilot study (n = 124) was conducted where participants were led to believe, through false feedback, that they held either relatively weak (n = 66) or strong (n = 58) political attitudes, before completing the NES. The former group showed lower NES scores (M = 3.22, SD = .55) than the latter group (M = 3.38, SD = .47), $t(122)$ = 1.79, p = .08.

Other Measures. Participants then completed a feeling thermometer measure of their attitudes toward Obama and several filler politicians using a 0 (very cold) to 100 (very warm) scale. Participants finally completed a probe whereby they reported anything unusual they observed about the images depicting Obama during the surveillance task, along with anything else about the experiment that they wished to share.[1]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SC-IAT effects were computed by subtracting responses latency means of the Obama-positive blocks from those of the Obama-negative blocks, divided by the standard deviation of the participant's response latencies (after excluding error trials; see Olson & Fazio, 2004), resulting in a d-score where higher numbers indicates a pro-Obama attitude. A feeling thermometer Obama score was created by subtracting the mean of all other thermometer ratings from ratings of Obama for each participant. This index indicated a relatively negative but varied evaluation of Obama in the sample (M = -11.6, SD = 33.0), $t(208)$ = -5.08, $p < .01$, d = -.70. Mean NES scores were computed as described in Bizer et al. (2004), which involves reverse-scoring several items and computing an overall mean such that higher scores indicate a higher need to evaluate. These scores did not vary by condition ($F < 1$). NES was treated as a continuous variable in all analyses.

1. Forty-three participants (20%) reported observing that Obama was depicted positively or negatively in accordance with the results of Study 1 (e.g., a participant in the Fox-words condition reporting that Obama seemed depicted negatively, or a participant in the CNN condition reporting that Obama seemed depicted positively). Excluding such participants altered neither the pattern of results nor reduced any of the significant effects to nonsignificant levels.

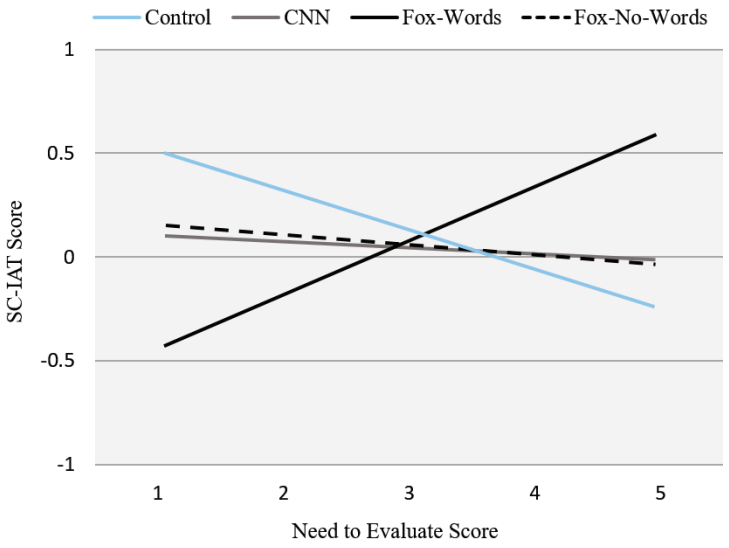

FIGURE 2. Regression lines for Need to Evaluate (NE) and SC-IAT attitude estimates by Media Type.

SC-IAT scores were analyzed using ANOVA with Media Type (CNN, Fox-words, Fox-no-words, and control) as a 4-level categorical between-subjects variable and NES scores as a continuous covariate in a model that included their interaction term. There was no main effect of Media Type, $F(3, 198) < 1$. However, the expected Media Type × NES interaction was observed, $F(3, 198) = 2.98$, $p < .05$. A contrast comparing the Fox-words to all other conditions revealed a significant difference in slopes, $F(1, 198) = 7.48$, $p < .01$. No other conditions differed from one another (all Fs < 1).

Only in the Fox-words condition was there a significant relationship between NES scores and the SC-IAT, $t(51) = 2.64$, $p < .01$, $b = .35$ (see Figure 2). As expected, as NES scores decreased, participants exposed to Fox-words images evinced more negative attitudes toward Obama on the SC-IAT. However, while the NES-SC-IAT regression line showed the expected slope, its intercept was higher than expected, indicating that those with higher NES scores in the Fox-words condition evinced more positive attitudes toward Obama; we speculate on this finding in the general discussion. The control condition also showed a nonsignificant tendency such that higher NES scores were associated with more positive Obama attitudes, $t(49) = 1.49$, $p = .14$, $b = -.21$. There was no relationship between NES and attitude estimates within the CNN and Fox-no-words conditions, ts < 1, $|b|$s < .05.

The same analyses were performed predicting feeling thermometer ratings of Obama. These analyses revealed only a main effect of NES, $F(3, 207) = 7.08$, $p < .01$, such that higher NES scores were associated with lower thermometer ratings of Obama, $r = -.17$, $p < .01$. The Media Type × NES interaction did not approach sig-

nificance ($F < 1$), although the SC-IAT and thermometer measure showed a moderate correlation, $r = .37$, $p < .01$.

In sum, people lower in the need to evaluate who were exposed to unaltered FoxNews.com images of Obama came to have a more negative automatic attitude toward him. Situated within the implicit misattribution model of EC we briefly spoke of earlier, these results provide an ecologically valid demonstration of how real-world attitudes are influenced by incidental media exposures.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our primary aim was to investigate the impact that dissimilar images of Obama displayed on news-media websites can have in shaping the attitudes of viewers toward him. Study 1 showed that images of Obama from FoxNews.com (whether with overlaid text or without) were rated as portraying Obama more negatively than images from CNN.com. The overlaying text among all FoxNews.com images functioned to potentiate the negative manner in which Obama was depicted.

Study 2 showed that FoxNews.com images of Obama can affect viewers' automatically activated attitudes regarding Obama. Insofar as participants possessed weaker attitudes as assessed by the Need to Evaluate Scale, repeated presentations of Obama in negative contexts, as was the case with the raw images sampled from FoxNews.com, produced more negative automatic associations with Obama as assessed by the SC-IAT. Previous NE research has indicated that those who engage in less evaluation (i.e., who are low in NE) are likely to have less established political attitudes, which may include having less established evaluations of Obama. As the Obama effect hinges on positive evaluations of him, these results inform the Obama effect literature by clarifying for whom depictions of Obama can influence his likeability.

Although we observed that lower NE individuals' attitudes toward Obama became more negative after exposure to Fox News depictions of him, the location of the NES-SC-IAT regression line suggests, unexpectedly, that higher NE individuals' attitudes toward Obama became more positive after exposure to Fox News depictions. While admittedly speculative, it may be that high NE individuals actively resisted Fox News' negative depictions of Obama, leading to a contrast effect in their attitudes. Indeed, people often over-correct for perceived undue influence on their judgments (Wegener & Petty, 1997). As we have discussed, high NE individuals have stronger, more established attitudes, and actively process attitude-relevant information online as it is perceived. Low NE individuals, on the other hand, tend to use memory-based processes to retrieve information when reporting their attitudes. Thus, although our data cannot speak directly to this possibility, we suspect our high NE participants were more likely to (a) notice the attitudinal implications of the Fox News images, and (b) actively resist their influence.

Another question worthy of addressing is why, given that CNN depictions of Obama were found to be relatively positive in Study 1, did the attitudes of participants (with weaker attitudes) exposed to those CNN depictions not become

more positive? A variety of studies show the relatively unique influence negative information has over positive information to draw attention (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003) and sway impressions (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Thus, we suspect that negative depictions of Obama had more power to influence attitudes than positive depictions because negative information is generally more impactful.

Finally, comment is in order regarding why media depictions affected attitudes as measured implicitly (via SC-IAT) but not explicitly (via feeling thermometer). This pattern is consistent with other evaluative conditioning studies where change to pre-existing attitudes was observed (e.g., Olson & Fazio, 2006). Evaluative conditioning, particularly when implicit, is thought to influence automatic and affectively oriented associations in particular (Jones et al., 2010), and implicit measures are particularly sensitive to such associations (Fazio & Olson, 2003). Because explicit reports occur "downstream" from automatic responses, other factors, like momentarily salient beliefs, have greater impact on explicit measures. Thus, the pattern of findings on the measures we employed supports our reasoning that media depictions of Obama, at least as implemented here, and at least among those with weaker attitudes, primarily influence affective associations.

WHAT IS THE OBAMA EFFECT?

It remains uncertain if the Obama effect is changing popular attitudes toward Blacks (evaluations of the object), or whether Blacks associated with Obama himself have been flexibly recategorized (object of evaluation). We recognize that as a counter-stereotypical exemplar, Obama challenges attitudes toward Blacks. However, it remains to be seen whether Obama is causing a "change in the object of judgment rather than in the judgment of an object" (Asch, 1948, p. 255). In other words, it may be that the symbolic representation of Obama, and the subsequent Obama effect, are manifestations of people's re-categorization of Blacks into a more positively evaluated group. Thus, rather than causing a change in how the group (i.e., Blacks) is itself attitudinally represented, Obama is actually causing the associated object (i.e., certain Blacks, the self; see Rivera & Benitez, this issue) to be construed differently. While, admittedly, we do not test it, we consider the EC procedure utilized herein to have changed the attitude toward the object; by exposing participants to portrayals of Obama either with contextually negatively valenced elements or certain facial expressions, we were able to alter automatically activated attitudes toward Obama, not change how he is categorized. This is a conceptually similar procedure and outcome as Olson and Fazio (2006), who were able to change automatically activated attitudes toward Blacks by repeatedly pairing Black or White exemplars with positive or negative words. Thus, while we concur with previous postulations that the Obama effect can be a result of exposure to a counter-stereotypically positive exemplar (Columb & Plant, 2011), and while we agree that exemplar exposure matters, we contend that exemplar valence may be the primary cause of the effect (e.g., Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; see Columb & Plant, this issue).

In this light, it is important to note that some research approaches cause a change in the object of evaluation via re-categorization (e.g., Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Mitchell, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001), while others alter the evaluation of the object (e.g., Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000; Olson & Fazio, 2006). Acknowledging this divide may help to rectify some of the incongruent findings on the Obama effect (e.g., Columb & Plant, 2011 vs. Schmidt & Nosek, 2010) and serve to further our understanding of the mechanisms that underlie it. We believe this issue is an important one that deserves further study.

SOURCE CONFUSABILITY + AFFECTIVE MISATTRIBUTION = THE INTERNET?

The manner in which people consume information on the Internet has implications for how that information is processed, and hence how people are influenced by that information. Eye-tracking data shows that web users initiate their gaze on the upper-left portion of a given website (Nielson & Pernice, 2009), precisely the location of front-page images on CNN.com and FoxNews.com. If web users' attention to the site persists, their gaze typically shifts across and down the page in an F-shaped pattern. More so, Internet users read less than a quarter of the words on a given website, and spend less than 4 seconds on nearly 20% of the pages to which they navigate (Nielson & Pernice, 2009; see also Weinreich, Obendorf, Herder, & Mayer, 2008). When engaged in visual scanning similar to that just described, individuals have an average fixation (i.e., spatially stable gaze) duration of 300 milliseconds before their eyes saccade (i.e., rapidly shift) to another point on the display (Rayner, 1998). Elements in a scene or image are probably not processed singularly, but are instead processed interactively, where elements on the screen in close proximity are implicitly grouped into elemental clusters (Wertheimer, 1923), which can influence perceptions of each. Thus, the way in which people process website information while viewing Internet-delivered content may contribute to the "source confusability" referenced earlier (Jones et al., 2009). Given this, the Obama effect may be more susceptible to contextualized portrayals than has been previously acknowledged.

Web users epitomize the "motivated tactician" approach championed by social cognition researchers (Fiske, 2004), skimming most of the websites they visit and reading little, making ripe conditions for misattribution of text captions to adjoining images. Thus, when clearly negative text is superimposed across an image, the affect which is automatically experienced when briefly scanning the text can be misattributed to the individual saliently depicted in the picture (Hütter & Sweldens, 2013; Jones, Fazio, & Olson, 2009). Such a style of web-browsing may discourage those interested in the more thoughtful and energy-consuming modes of social influence, but it is well-suited for the sorts of influences argued to be so pervasive by implicit attitudes researchers. Indeed, previous research indicates that perceivers' attitudes toward an attitude-object can be influenced by as little as

a second or less of exposure to affect-laden content (e.g., Dijksterhuis, 2004). The Internet is rampant with such examples of clearly evaluative phrases positioned in close proximity to images. Given the manner in which images are processed (Barden et al., 2004; Davenport & Potter, 2004; Wittenbrink et al, 2001), it seems likely that implicit misattribution could produce attitude change among individuals who frequently gather information from news websites.

Another facet of the contemporary news landscape that may lend itself to implicit misattribution is the usage of split-screens during news programming, whereby multiple (and often only indirectly related) images are simultaneously presented to viewers (Scheufele, Kim, & Brossard, 2007; Seiter, Abraham, & Nakagama, 1998). For example, one such news story outlined then-candidate for president Hillary Clinton's positions regarding the war on terror by including a split-screen visual of Clinton on one side of the screen with file footage of militants engaged in training activities on the other. Undoubtedly, 9/11-related images elicit negative emotion and this emotion could certainly be implicitly misattributed to adjacent images. Similarly, it was suggested that the use of split-screen footage during the 2004 presidential debates would be harmful to George W. Bush, based largely on the injurious effects that nonverbal displays of anger and frustration had on perceptions of his performance in the first 2000 Bush-Gore debate. However, consistent with the idea of implicit misattribution, research using actual 2004 debate footage showed that exposure to negative spontaneous reactions of a candidate's opponent seen using split-screens did not cause the reactive opponent to be perceived more negatively, but rather, the negative affect created by the reactive opponent was misattributed to the actively speaking candidate (Scheufele, Kim, & Brossard, 2007; Wicks, 2007). Also consistent with the current research, Scheufele and colleagues (2007) found that this effect occurs only among individuals who have relatively weak pre-existing political attitudes.

NEWS MEDIA AND EVALUATIVE CONDITIONING

Evaluative conditioning commonly influences attitude change (e.g., De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001; Jones, Olson, & Fazio, 2010), which typically involves the pairing of an object (the CS) with another stimuli (the US). In an experimental setting, participants typically prefer CSs paired with positive stimuli over those paired with negative stimuli in the absence of awareness of the pairings (for a review see Jones et al., 2010). EC has proven to be a robust mechanism by which attitudes are formed and changed (Jones et al., 2010; Walther, Weil, & Langer, 2011). Granted, while we recognize that evidence for EC in ecologically valid settings is mixed (e.g., Rozin, Wrzesniewski, & Byrnes, 1998), our aim is not to claim reliable evidence for implicit EC, but to postulate that perhaps EC may be one underlying cause of both the results found here and the Obama effect itself. The repeated pairing of an attitude-object with valenced elements has been shown to alter attitudes toward the object, an effect that can persist for days (Olson & Fazio, 2006). The Obama effect may be the result of repeated exposure to pervasive positive por-

trayals of Obama, which, analogous to basic evaluative conditioning paradigms, altered attitudes toward him in a positive direction. But, as our results show, the effect can be influenced by how he is portrayed, particularly for those with weaker attitudes.

The potential for news-media websites to influence viewers' attitudes via EC, whether intentional or not, is difficult to overstate. Consider that in a given month, more than 41 million unique users arrive on the main page of CNN.com, as do more than 22 million others at FoxNews.com (Nielson Online, 2013). Both websites show "front-page" images without fail, and, given the eye-tracking data discussed earlier, such images are likely to be the first stimuli web users perceive, whether or not they decide to delve further into the site. In the real world, CS and US are not necessarily distinct; the first easily discernable aspects can serve as USs to be associated with the object as a whole. Such CS-US entwinement seems particularly likely to facilitate misattributions of affect from one stimulus to another, a mechanism shown to underlie many EC effects (e.g., Jones et al., 2009). Given what we have argued about how affect from the US can be mistakenly attributed to the CS with no effort or intention, and the data we have reported here, it would appear that Internet users' website consumption behavior is conducive to implicit EC.

THE LEGACY OF BARACK OBAMA

The Obama effect entails reduced prejudice toward Blacks among certain populations (Columb & Plant, 2011; Plant et al., 2009; however see Skinner & Cheadle, this issue). However, others have failed to replicate the Obama effect in an ostensibly more diverse sample (Schmidt & Nosek, 2010). These seemingly contradictory results likely stem from both the populations tested and the stimuli used. For instance, Plant and her colleagues relied on university students who had likely consumed affect-laden pro-Obama media during the election season (e.g., rousing convention speeches). Thus, participants in Plant's studies likely both held positive pre-existing attitudes toward Obama, but were also disproportionately exposed to primarily positive portrayals. Conversely, the (presumably nationally representative) sample of Schmidt and Nosek likely had much more varied attitudes toward Obama while also being exposed to more diverse portrayals (i.e., both positive and negative). Alternatively, Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) observed a stereotype threat buffering effect of exposure to Obama on Black standardized test takers. However, Aronson, Jannone, McGlone, and Johnson-Campbell (2009) failed to replicate Marx and colleagues' (2009) buffering effects, with Black students showing no performance enhancement. These seemingly disparate results may reflect the unique ways in which participants in each of these studies were exposed to Obama. In some contexts Obama was depicted very positively (e.g., college campuses; Plant et al., 2009), in others a more mixed exposure (e.g., Schmidt & Nosek, 2010), and in others a much more neutral, information-based exposure (e.g., Aronson et al., 2009). In this light, these differential depictions underscore

our postulations that the Obama effect is driven by evaluations of Obama, which are directly affected by how he is portrayed. Media portrayals can affect attitudes toward Obama through evaluative conditioning mechanisms. Thus, relatively more positive exposures (e.g., campaign speeches) result in more positive evaluative outcomes, and a larger effect. On the contrary, mixed or mundane exposures may not influence evaluations toward Obama enough to evoke an Obama effect. In this regard, we argue that the legacy of Obama, and the power of the Obama effect itself, will likely be influenced by how he is portrayed as much as by his actual accomplishments.

CONCLUSION

Nearly half a century ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the oft-quoted maxim "the medium is the message," referring to the prospect that the method of conveying information will become more important than the content being conveyed. Recently, an on-air commentator on the Fox News television station explicitly suggested the advantageous use of a split-screen in a way reminiscent of evaluative conditioning, specifically that images of Obama be presented opposite images of John McCain, purportedly as a way of turning one of Obama's strengths from the 2008 election into a weakness during the upcoming election (Goldberg, 2011). In a time of ever increasing political polarity among news providers, claims of bias are certainly commonplace among critics of the media (e.g., Coe et al., 2008). To be clear, while we have no evidence that the effects of these news sites' images on viewers' attitudes are intentional, suggestions that a negative attribute could be implicitly misattributed is a prospect about which some in the media appear keenly aware. While the findings presented here remain agnostic to such assertions, it is worth noting that, even if unintentional, measurable and potentially influential effects can result from superficial exposure, particularly among individuals with weaker pre-existing attitudes. The risk then for those most susceptible is in their unwittingly implicitly conditioning themselves via repeated exposure to the effects of valenced images. Unless the implicit effects of valenced images are acknowledged, the media itself runs the risk of becoming the message.

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