

The Effects of General Pretrial Publicity on Juror Decisions: An Examination of Moderators and Mediating Mechanisms¹

Margaret Bull Kovera²

Two studies examined three moderators (gender, attitudes, and media slant) and four mediators (accessibility, evidence importance, evidence plausibility, and standards of guilt) of general pretrial publicity's influence on juror decisions. In Study 1, participants who watched a prodefense rape story were more likely to report that they would need more inculpatory evidence to convict a defendant of rape than were participants who watched a prosecution rape story. In Study 2, participants watched news stories, one of which was a prosecution rape story, a prodefense rape story, or a nonrape story. In an ostensibly unrelated study, participants indicated their attitudes toward rape, watched a rape trial, and provided trial and witness ratings. Accessibility did not mediate the media effects on participants' judgments of rape importance; however, attitudes moderated media effects. Rape news influenced juror ratings of the importance of evidence about the complainant's behavior. Finally, media altered the standards participants used to determine defendant guilt. Implications for understanding the mechanisms responsible for pretrial publicity effects are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, Anita Hill charged that Clarence Thomas, then nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court, had sexually harassed her while she worked under his supervision at both the U.S. Department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The Senate Judiciary Committee investigated these allegations in nationally televised public hearings, resulting in a public discussion of the credibility of the two major participants. At the time of the hearings, national opinion polls

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²Department of Psychology, Florida International University, Miami, Florida 33181; e-mail: koveram@fiu.edu

indicated that the majority of the public believed that Thomas was telling the truth, and that Hill had fabricated her allegations. A year later, the public's appraisal of Hill's credibility had changed; now the majority of the public believed that Anita Hill had been sexually harassed (Freedman, 1993). What happened during that year to cause this change in public opinion? One explanation might be an increased attention of the broadcast news to the issue of sexual harassment during that year. Perhaps increased media attention to allegations of sexual misconduct would alter public perceptions of the perpetrators and victims of these crimes.

Researchers studying the effects of the media on juror decision-making have generally focused their efforts on understanding the influence of case-specific pretrial publicity on jurors' decision-making (for a review, see Steblay, Besirevic, Fulero, & Jimenez-Lorente, 1999). Less is known about the influence of broadcast news reports on jurors' judgments of witness credibility in unrelated cases. How might the cumulative effects of exposure to crime news influence juror judgments? Although some researchers have examined the influence of media-covered crime stories on juror verdicts (Greene & Loftus, 1984; Greene & Wade, 1988), very little theory or research has addressed the influence of stories about crime on juror judgments of witness credibility in unrelated cases.

Rather than investigating the role of the media in jurors' perceptions of witness credibility, psycholegal researchers have focused their research on personal characteristics (e.g., defendant and witness characteristics, nonverbal behaviors) and evidentiary factors that influence juror judgments of credibility (for a review of this literature, see Kerr & Bray, 1982). However, our culture and various socialization agents shape our views of women and men; the media are powerful agents in this context (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980, 1982; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979; McGuire, 1985). Because broadcast news reports are credible and reach an extraordinary number of people, it seems reasonable that news reports of allegations of sexual misconduct might influence—directly or indirectly—our judgments of the alleged victims and perpetrators of this misconduct.

General pretrial publicity has received little attention from psycholegal scholars, with three notable exceptions. Naturally occurring publicity prompted the first of these studies (Greene & Loftus, 1984). These researchers had been conducting a mock jury study to investigate the effects of eyewitness testimony on juror decision-making in an assault trial when they noticed a precipitous drop in the number of guilty verdicts their participants rendered. Analyses revealed that jurors who participated in the study while a case of mistaken identification was being prominently reported in the news were less likely to convict the mock defendant than were jurors who participated in the study after the trial-relevant publicity had subsided (Greene & Loftus, 1984).

Greene and Wade (1988) then investigated whether similar effects could be obtained experimentally. In this new series of studies, participants read a news account that described the conviction of a serial killer who had perpetrated some particularly horrific crimes, a report of a misidentification and subsequent wrongful conviction of an innocent man, or unrelated news. In an ostensibly unrelated experiment, participants read written excerpts from a robbery and assault case. Participants who read

the wrongful conviction publicity were less likely to find the defendant guilty than were the participants who read the heinous crime publicity or unrelated news stories. However, heinous crime publicity did not cause an increase in conviction rates as compared to the conviction rates in the unrelated media (control) condition. The authors conclude that exposure to general pretrial publicity can cause jurors to render more lenient decisions but will not cause jurors to render more punitive decisions. In a second study, Greene and Wade (1988) demonstrated that general pretrial publicity about a miscarriage of justice was more likely to decrease convictions when the case described in the publicity was similar to the case being tried.

The trial simulations used in these studies were meager; therefore, there is still little evidence that these effects would obtain in a more realistic trial context in which the richness of the evidence may attenuate or eliminate media influence. Finally, the authors' conclusion that pretrial publicity cannot result in more punitive decisions is premature at best. Although their news article about heinous crimes may not have produced harsher decisions, another news article might. Moreover, it is likely that the information about heinous crimes is not as compelling or as gruesome in print as it might be on the evening television news. Perhaps a report of these same heinous crimes via the more vivid and engaging medium of television would produce an increase in punitive judgments.

Only Mullin, Imrich, and Linz (1996) have studied the effects of general pretrial publicity in the context of an acquaintance rape case. These researchers manipulated whether participants read a brief article on a typical acquaintance rape modeled after essays in popular women's magazines. All participants watched a videotaped simulation of a sexual assault trial and then completed a questionnaire describing their attitudes about the trial. Although the authors expected that exposure general pretrial publicity would increase prosecution beliefs, it caused men to render more prodefendant decisions than men who were not exposed to the rape article. Women were unaffected by the publicity. It is unclear whether the pretrial publicity caused unintended effects because the source of the story lacked credibility. Perhaps a story on acquaintance rape appearing on national broadcast news would have a different effect than an article written in the style of a women's magazine essay.

Agenda-Setting as a Theoretical Framework

Although psychologists studying juror decisions have not developed a theoretical framework for understanding media effects on juror decisions, scholars in other disciplines have extensively researched and theorized about the effects of news reporting on decision-making. Media attention to particular political issues and social problems influences our evaluations of issue importance and our appraisals of political candidates (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Political scientists have developed a theory called agenda-setting to explain these media effects (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1985; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting theorists argue that newscasts determine the issues that are important to the electorate by calling attention to some societal problems, and neglecting others. Researchers have hypothesized that newscasts about a social issue make newly acquired and previously acquired information about the issue more accessible to the decision-maker, thereby increasing the

perceived importance of the issue. In turn, these newly important issues become criteria by which voters evaluate political candidates. This political psychological theory of agenda-setting could serve as a theoretical framework for the investigation of how the media influence juror judgments and their appraisals of credibility.

The present research addressed several questions about both the robustness of agenda-setting effects and the mechanism by which the media exert their agenda-setting influence. First, the present research explored whether the agenda-setting effects found in the political domain would generalize to another domain, in particular, the legal system. Second, it examined whether certain situational (e.g., the evaluative slant of the media) or individual difference (e.g., attitudes, participant gender) variables moderated media influence on participant judgments of issue importance and witness credibility. Third, reaction time data were collected that could provide direct evidence for the cognitive accessibility mechanism proposed by several political scientists. However, additional data were collected to explore whether the media might influence participants' credibility appraisals by first altering intermediate trial judgments such as the importance of specific evidence or the plausibility of certain evidentiary patterns.

Moderators of General Pretrial Publicity Effects

Previous researchers of agenda-setting have generally employed as experimental stimuli news stories that report on a social problem of increasing significance (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). More recent research has suggested, however, that the frame provided in a news story influences judgments of responsibility for social problems (Iyengar, 1990, 1991). This new evidence suggests that the evaluative slant of the newscasts employed in previous investigations may have influenced the results obtained. Moreover, the evaluative slant of the news may be of particular importance in legal settings, because crime news may be particularly likely to be biased. For example, researchers who have conducted content analyses of newspaper articles found that reports of crime monopolize the news (Antunes & Hurley, 1978; Humphries, 1981; Roberts & Doob, 1990). Similarly, television news broadcasts devote disproportionate attention to violent crime (Graber, 1980). It also appears that the crime news that is reported is evaluatively slanted, specifically in favor of the prosecution (Dreschel, Netteburg, & Aborisade, 1980; Millspaugh, 1949). Therefore, the present investigation also addressed the moderating role of a news story's evaluative slant on the agenda-setting effects of the news.

Although attention to situational variables such as media attention to rape and the evaluative slant of a news story is essential to a complete understanding of juror decision-making and credibility appraisal processes, it is equally important to examine whether individual difference variables moderate the effects of media exposure on individuals' judgments at trial. Attitudes toward rape influence the judgments that jurors make in rape trials. Feild (1978b; Feild & Bienen, 1980) demonstrated that participants' scores on the Attitudes Toward Rape Scale (Feild, 1978a) were a better predictor of their judgments in a rape trial than either their demographic characteristics or characteristics of the rape case itself. Media priming of different rape beliefs may differentially affect jurors who hold different attitudes toward rape.

Jurors with more extreme, highly polarized attitudes about rape should be more likely to have a crystallized belief system than jurors with neutral or moderate attitudes toward rape. People with crystallized attitudes are more likely to engage in on-line information processing (i.e., retrieve a stored evaluation and update that evaluation on-line given new information) than those who do not (Hastie & Park, 1986; Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989). Conversely, people who hold neutral attitudes are more likely to engage in memory-based processing (i.e., form a judgment based on information that is easily retrievable from memory at the time of judgment) than are people with polarized attitudes. Because recently seen news stories should be easily retrievable from memory, one would expect that rape media exposure might affect the judgments made by jurors with neutral attitudes more than the judgments of jurors with polarized attitudes.

To cite but one example, suppose that a news story reports that a woman has confessed to falsely accusing a man of raping her. This story could prime some viewers' beliefs that false allegations are frequently made in rape cases. However, it is not likely that viewers with provictim attitudes toward rape will have this false allegation belief in memory; therefore, the news story will not serve as a prime for these respondents. Viewers with prodefendant attitudes toward rape may also be relatively unaffected by the media priming of this belief. Exposure to the construct of rape in any context—including a rape trial—should prime their prodefendant beliefs about rape and the false allegation belief would merely be one of the many beliefs that would be activated. However, viewers who hold ambivalent attitudes (i.e., both provictim and prodefendant attitudes toward rape) should be influenced by their exposure to this hypothetical news story. Neutral viewers might evaluate a rape victim more negatively because the false allegation story would prime the prodefendant set of rape beliefs but not the provictim set of rape beliefs (see Katz & Hass, 1988, for a description of this process in the context of racial attitudes). Priming only the prodefendant beliefs in the rape neutral viewers should cause these viewers to render more prodefendant decisions. Again, we would expect that the jurors with more polarized attitudes should be less susceptible to the agenda-setting function of the news.

Research has also shown that juror gender is related to attitudes toward sexual assault (Feild, 1978a; Frazier & Borgida, 1988); women tend to hold attitudes that are more provictim than do men. Similarly, women are more likely to render prosecution decisions in sexual assault trials and to rate alleged victims favorably than are men (Borgida & White, 1978; Brekke & Borgida, 1988). Juror gender might also serve as a personal moderator of the agenda-setting influence of the news on juror judgments. Because women are more likely to be victimized than are men, perhaps women would find the issue more involving and would pay greater attention to a news story on rape. If so, then rape media might have a greater influence on the decisions of women than on the decisions of men.

Mechanisms Underlying General Pretrial Publicity Effects

Both psychologists who study pretrial publicity and political scientists who study agenda-setting have primarily focused on the outcomes associated with the media's

attention to specific issues; they have generally neglected to examine the process by which these outcomes are achieved (Ogloff, 2000; Studebaker & Penrod, 1997). Although political scientists have hypothesized that the cognitive accessibility of specific social issues is the mechanism through which media exposure affects subsequent judgments of issue importance and candidate credibility (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984), they have not collected the appropriate measures that would provide direct evidence for the accessibility hypothesis. The most direct method of determining the accessibility of a given piece of information would be to measure how quickly a person can make a judgment based on that information. However, no published research exists that directly tests this accessibility hypothesis. Even so, it is quite reasonable to expect that general pretrial publicity influences the accessibility of different trial-relevant beliefs (e.g., characteristics of typical rapes, typical reactions of sexual harassment victims). These highly accessible beliefs may have a greater impact on juror judgments of trial participants' credibility than would less accessible beliefs.

Further, the present research examined the other mechanisms through which news media may influence individuals' appraisals of witnesses in a rape trial. For example, Linz and Penrod (1992) have suggested that pretrial publicity may influence jurors' weighting of the importance of various pieces of evidence. Thus, it is possible that exposure to rape media may alter the importance that jurors attach to certain types of evidence. For example, jurors who watch prodefense rape media may judge physical evidence and eyewitnesses to the rape to be more important than would jurors who watched prosecution rape media.

In addition, Linz and Penrod (1992) suggested that pretrial publicity may influence juror judgments by altering the plausibility of the evidence, and thereby altering the scenarios that jurors construct to incorporate the evidence presented at trial. Perhaps jurors who are exposed to prosecution rape media would find some evidentiary patterns to be more plausible as a rape scenario than would jurors exposed to prodefense rape media. For example, viewers of prosecution rape media may require less inculpatory evidence to believe that it is plausible that the complainant was raped than would viewers of prodefense rape media. Finally, Linz and Penrod (1992) hypothesized that pretrial publicity may change the standards that jurors use for judging the guilt of the defendant. For example, jurors exposed to prosecution rape media may be more likely to base their guilt judgments on their appraisals of the defendant's credibility than would jurors exposed to prodefense rape media. Therefore, in addition to the accessibility mechanism, three alternative mechanisms for media influence on juror judgments also were investigated in the present research: evidentiary importance, evidence plausibility, and standards of guilt.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY 1

The first study was conducted to investigate whether exposure to rape media would alter participants' perceptions of evidence plausibility. Specifically, does exposure to a news story about rape influence participants' agendas for the types of evidence they would need to hear before convicting a defendant of rape? In addition,

this study examined whether participants' standards of proof were affected by exposure to rape media. The rape news story stimulus employed in this study was altered to convey information that was determined in a pilot study to be prosecution or prodefense information. After watching the prosecution, prodefense, or no news story, participants were asked to list the evidence they would need to find a defendant guilty of rape. First, it was expected that exposure to prodefense rape news would cause participants to require more corroborating evidence (e.g., witnesses, physical evidence) than would no media exposure or prosecution media exposure. Similarly, participants who viewed prodefense rape media should require more evidence regarding both the complainant's lack of consent and the defendant's use of force to complete the sexual act than should participants who viewed prosecution rape media. Second, exposure to prosecution rape news might cause participants to require less inculpatory evidence than would exposure to prodefense media or no media exposure. Third, it was predicted that gender would affect requests for inculpatory and exculpatory evidence. Specifically, it was expected that men would be more likely to request inculpatory evidence and less likely to request exculpatory evidence than would women.

Before any of these hypotheses could be tested, it was necessary to create prosecution and prodefense versions of a rape news story. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted to determine whether edited versions of a rape news story, originally broadcast on network news, were perceived to be defense-oriented, prosecution-oriented, or balanced presentations of acquaintance rape issues.

Pilot Study

Participants

Fifty-nine undergraduates at University of Minnesota participated in exchange for extra credit in their introductory psychology classes.

News Stories

A videotape of a national news story on rape, broadcast on CBS, was obtained from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archives. In this story, reporters detailed an incident at Brown University in which women wrote the names of alleged sexual offenders on bathroom walls. This report included interviews with students and Brown University administrators who either supported the rights of rape victims or supported the rights of alleged rapists. This original newscast served as the Balanced (i.e., prorape victim and proalleged rapist) version of the newscast. This videotaped story was edited, resulting in two additional versions of this news story. Specifically, interviews with individuals who supported the rights of alleged rapists were removed from the original newscast, resulting in a Prosecution (i.e., prorape victim) version of the news story. The result of this editing was a newscast containing footage of a candlelight vigil for rape victims, an interview with a rape victim advocate, and an interview with a Brown University administrator who had been hired to design programs to help rape victims on campus. A Prodefense (i.e., proalleged rapist) version of the news story was created by deleting interviews with individuals who

supported the rights of rape victims from the original newscast. The edited version of the prodefense newscast contained two interviews: an interview with a male student who called the women who wrote on the bathroom walls “idiots” and said that campus men may be “aggressive at parties” but were not rapists, and an interview with a University administrator who said that universities should not prosecute rape allegations and that administrators should believe men when accusations of date rape are made. These three news stories were approximately 3 min in length.

Procedure

When participants came to the laboratory, they were told that they would be participating in a study of the influence of political party affiliation on information processing of the news. Participants watched one of the three versions of the rape news story. To assess the effectiveness of the manipulation of rape story content, participants were asked two sets of questions. First, participants responded on 9-point scales to two items assessing their perceptions of whether the news story they had viewed was favorable to the plight of alleged rape victims or to the plight of alleged rapists. Responses to these items were averaged to create a single index of the evaluative slant of the story, with higher means representing that the story was more favorable to alleged victims. Second, participants responded to two items assessing their perceptions of the adversarial orientation of the news story: (1) “In your opinion, was the news story oriented toward the prosecution of alleged rapists?” and (2) “In your opinion, was the news story oriented toward the defense of alleged rapists?” Responses to these items were also averaged to create a single index of the adversarial orientation of the story, with higher means representing a more prosecutorial orientation. Participants also responded on 9-point scales to items assessing their perceptions of the quality of the reporting in the story (i.e., was the reporting professional, was the story interesting, was the story newsworthy), and whether they experienced the following emotions while watching the story: satisfied–dissatisfied, joyful–angry, happy–sad, sympathetic–unsympathetic, calm–upset, empathic–not empathic, and elated–disappointed.

Results

Participants’ responses were subjected to a one-way ANOVA with Rape Story Content (Prodefense vs. Balanced vs. Proprosecution) as the between-subjects variable. As expected, these analyses revealed a main effect for Rape Story Content on participants’ evaluations of the evaluative slant of the news story, $F(2, 56) = 5.59, p = .006$. Follow-up Newman–Keuls tests indicated that participants judged both the Proprosecution and Balanced news stories to be more favorable to alleged rape victims than the Prodefense story ($M = 4.22, 5.76, \text{ and } 5.68$ for Prodefense, Balanced, and Proprosecution stories, respectively). There was no difference between the responses from participants in the Balanced and Proprosecution conditions. Moreover, a main effect for Rape Story Content obtained for participants’ evaluations of the adversarial orientation of the story, $F(2, 56) = 7.62, p < .002$. Follow-up tests indicated that participants judged both the Proprosecution and Balanced stories to be more prosecution-oriented than the Prodefense story ($M = 4.22,$

5.68, and 6.11 for Proprosecution, Balanced, and Prodefense, respectively). Again, responses from participants in the Balanced and Proprosecution conditions did not differ.

Neither participants' evaluations of the quality of the news story nor their self-reported emotions while watching the story differed as a function of Rape Story Content, all $F < 2.05$, *ns*. Because the responses of participants who viewed the Balanced or Proprosecution stories did not differ on the key manipulation checks, only the Prodefense and Proprosecution versions of the news story were employed in Studies 1 and 2.

Experiment 1

Participants

One hundred twenty undergraduates (60 women and 60 men) at the University of Minnesota participated in exchange for extra credit in their introductory psychology course.

Procedure

Upon arriving at the laboratory, an experimenter told participants that we were interested in the type of evidence people required to convict a defendant in an acquaintance rape case. To help them think about this issue, the experimenters told participants that we would give them information about date rape. One third of the participants watched a story on rape that had a prodefense orientation. One third of the participants watched a rape story slanted in favor of the prosecution of rape. The remaining third of the participants were in the control condition; that is, these participants did not watch a news story on rape. Participants were randomly assigned to condition.

All participants received brief descriptions of the facts of an acquaintance rape case and the legal definition of rape (i.e., sexual intercourse occurred, no consent was given, force or resistance was used). Participants then listed the type of evidence they would have to hear to find the defendant guilty of raping the complainant (i.e., their evidence agendas). Two trained research assistants, blind to participant gender and experimental condition, read verbatim typewritten transcriptions of participants' evidence agendas and coded these responses for content (i.e., type of evidence requested). Coders indicated whether each phrase written by the participant referred to the credibility of the defendant, the credibility of the complainant, consent, force, physical evidence, or witnesses. If a phrase did not fall into any of these six categories, it was coded as unclassifiable.

The formula used for calculating concordance estimates was $C = 2(C_{1,2}) / (C_1 + C_2)$, where C = concordance for evidence agenda, $C_{1,2}$ = number of identical categories assigned by both coders, and C_1 and C_2 = total number of categories assigned by the first and second coders, respectively. For the content of participants' evidence agendas, concordance between the raters ranged from .29 to 1.00, with a mean concordance rate of .84 across all evidence agendas. Final measures of content were

created by dividing the total number of phrases in each superordinate category (e.g., number of phrases about complainant's credibility) by the total number of codeable phrases for each evidence agenda, resulting in the proportion of the evidence agenda that was devoted to a particular category of evidence.

Although participants were asked to provide evidence that would help prove the guilt of the defendant (e.g., bruises on the complainant), often participants requested evidence that may or may not be evidence of the defendant's guilt (e.g., information about his previous relationships with women). Less frequently, participants even mentioned evidence that would suggest the innocence of the defendant (e.g., the defendant and the complainant had an argument after having intercourse). Given this variation in the valence of participant's evidence agendas, raters also coded whether a given phrase was evidence of the defendant's guilt, evidence of the defendant's innocence, or neutral evidence (i.e., evidence could support either guilt or innocence of the defendant). For the valence of participants' evidence agendas, concordance between the raters ranged from .40 to 1.00, with a mean concordance rate of .80 across all evidence agendas. I created final measures of valence by computing the proportions of the codeable phrases that were coded as evidence of guilt, evidence of innocence, or evidence of neither. Not surprisingly given the task, participants requested evidence of the defendant's innocence extremely infrequently; because of the low frequency of the response and to guard against ipsitivity, these data were excluded from analyses.

Results

Content of Evidence Agendas. Proportions of the evidence agenda that were devoted to a particular category of evidence (i.e., proportions devoted to complainant credibility, defendant credibility, consent, force, physical evidence, and witnesses) were subjected to 3×2 (Rape Story Type \times Participant Gender) ANOVAs. It was expected that exposure to prodefense rape news would cause jurors to require more corroborating evidence (e.g., witnesses, physical evidence) to find a defendant guilty of rape than would no media exposure or proprosecution media exposure. In addition, jurors who viewed prodefense rape media should require more evidence regarding both the complainant's lack of consent and the defendant's use of force to complete the sexual act. These analyses revealed partial support for this hypothesis. Effects not mentioned were not statistically significant.

Jurors' perceptions of the complainant's consent to sexual activity and the amount of force the defendant used during sexual intercourse are vital to the outcome of a rape trial. The analysis of the proportion of participants' evidence agendas devoted to the issue of consent revealed a significant main effect for rape story type, $F(2, 114) = 3.74, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. In particular, participants who watched the prodefense story requested evidence about consent more often than did participants who watched the proprosecution story, suggesting that these participants were skeptical of the complainant's story ($M = 0.12, 0.10, \text{ and } 0.07$ for prodefense, neutral, and proprosecution, respectively).

In an acquaintance rape case, a primary issue to be resolved is whether the complainant or the defendant is telling the truth about the consensual nature of

their sexual activity. Therefore, evidence that corroborates the complainant's allegations (e.g., physical evidence, witnesses) can play an important role in determining the defendant's guilt or innocence. Again, these analyses provide some support for the hypothesis that exposure to prodefense rape media increases jurors' need for evidence to corroborate a complainant's allegations. Although the analysis of the proportion of participants' evidence agendas devoted to physical evidence did not differ as a function of rape story type or participant gender, a main effect for rape story type on the proportion of participant's agendas devoted to witnesses obtained, $F(2, 114) = 4.49$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Participants who watched the prodefense rape story requested evidence from witnesses more often than did participants who watched the prosecution rape story or watched no news story at all ($M = 0.15$, 0.09 , and 0.10 for prodefense, neutral, and prosecution, respectively). In essence, participants exposed to the prodefense story were again more skeptical of the complainant's allegations.

For the proportion of participant's agendas devoted to the complainant's credibility, a main effect for rape story type obtained, $F(2, 114) = 3.00$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Participants who watched the prosecution rape story or who did not watch a rape story requested more evidence about the complainant's credibility than did participants who watched the prodefense rape story ($M = 0.07$, 0.10 , and 0.10 for prodefense, neutral, and prosecution, respectively).

Analyses yielded a significant Rape Story Type \times Participant Gender interaction for the proportion of participants' agendas devoted to the defendant's credibility, $F(2, 144) = 3.71$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Simple effects analyses revealed that in the no rape story condition, women requested evidence on the defendant's credibility more often than did men, $F(1, 114) = 6.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$ ($M = 0.23$ and 0.13 for women and men, respectively). In addition, these analyses indicated that there was a marginally significant difference between women's and men's responses in the prodefense rape story condition, $F(1, 114) = 3.68$, $p < .06$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Again, women requested evidence on the defendant's credibility more often than did men ($M = 0.18$ and 0.11 for women and men, respectively). Finally, there were no differences between women's and men's focus on the defendant's credibility in the prosecution rape story condition ($M = 0.16$ and 0.21 for women and men, respectively).

Valence of Evidence Agendas. Proportions of participants' evidence agendas that were devoted to evidence of the defendant's guilt or to neutral evidence were subjected to 3×2 (Rape Story Type \times Participant Gender) ANOVAs. For the proportion of participants' agendas devoted to evidence of the defendant's guilt, a main effect for rape story type obtained, $F(2, 114) = 5.16$, $p = .007$. As predicted, participants in the prodefense story condition requested more evidence of the defendant's guilt than did participants in the other two conditions ($M = 0.62$, 0.49 , and 0.51 for defense, no newscast, and prosecution, respectively).

The analysis of the proportion of participants' agendas devoted to neutral evidence yielded a significant main effect for rape story type as well, $F(2, 114) = 5.41$, $p = .006$. Again, the responses of participants in the prodefense story condition differed from the responses of participants in the other two conditions; that is, participants who watched the prodefense story requested neutral evidence less often than did participants who watched the prosecution story or who did not watch a news

story on rape ($M = 0.33, 0.46,$ and 0.46 for defense, no newscast, and prosecution, respectively).

Discussion

As predicted, exposure to rape news did alter the type of evidence participants would find a plausible indication of a defendant's guilt. Participants who watched a prodefense rape story were less interested in hearing evidence about the complainant's credibility and more interested in hearing testimony from witnesses to the alleged rape than were participants who watched no rape media. Exposure to defense-oriented rape news also affected the amount of inculpatory evidence that participants would find sufficient for determining guilt; that is, participants who viewed the prodefense news story requested more inculpatory evidence than did participants who were not exposed to rape media. If participants exposed to defense-oriented rape media require more evidence to find a defendant guilty of rape than do participants who did not view prodefense rape media, they should also be more likely to assign a lower probability of guilt to any defendant accused of rape. This possibility is consistent with research showing that case-specific pretrial publicity alters jurors' initial judgments about a defendant's guilt (Otto, Penrod, & Dexter, 1994).

However, it is important to note that it was exposure to defense-oriented rape media that produced these differences. In general, responses of participants in the prosecution condition did not differ from the responses of participants in the no media exposure condition. This finding is not altogether surprising. According to Vanderbilt Television News Abstracts (e.g., a summary of all stories appearing on the three major networks), most of the rape news presented on the network broadcasts is prosecution-oriented. Thus, the no media exposure participants had probably been exposed to prosecution rape news stories when they watched the news at home, making it more likely that these participants would respond similarly to the participants who had been exposed to prosecution news in the laboratory.

It is also clear that the evaluative slant of the rape story exerted an influence on participants' requirements for sufficient evidence of guilt and for the categories of evidence that would point to guilt. On the one hand, participants who watched a prosecution rape news story were more likely to require evidence about the complainant's credibility than were participants who watched a prodefense story. On the other hand, participants who watched a prodefense rape story were more likely to require both evidence that the complainant did not consent to intercourse and testimony from witnesses to the alleged rape than were participants who watched a prosecution-oriented rape story. In essence, participants who were exposed to prodefense media were more likely to request evidence that is difficult to obtain in a rape case. Rarely do witnesses to an acquaintance rape exist. Because the only witnesses to a rape are usually the victim and her attacker, it is difficult to prove that the victim did not consent to intercourse; it is the rapist's word against the victim's word. In sum, both media exposure and the evaluative slant of those media influenced participants' determinations of the types of evidence that would indicate the guilt of the defendant. Consistent with the evidence plausibility hypothesis put forward by Linz and Penrod (1992) to explain pretrial publicity effects, these findings suggest that rape

news exposure may influence the stories that jurors construct from the evidence, and consequently may alter the verdicts that jurors would render (see also Olsen-Fulero & Fulero, 1997).

This study also suggests that gender may not be a powerful moderator of media influence in the context of rape trials. Indeed, participant gender interacted with media exposure to influence only one variable: the proportion of participants' requests that was devoted to evidence of the defendant's credibility. Women generally have more favorable attitudes toward sexual assault victims than do men (see Feild & Bienen, 1980; Frazier & Borgida, 1988). Also, people who hold polarized attitudes are less likely to be influenced by new information than are individuals who hold more neutral attitudes (e.g., Hastie & Park, 1986; Lodge et al., 1989). However, using participant gender as a proxy for participants' attitudes toward rape does not allow for the identification of participants—men and women—with more moderate attitudes. Moreover, juror gender generally has not been a powerful predictor of juror decisions except in sexual assault cases, thereby limiting the generalizability of this moderating variable to different contexts. Therefore, it may be more fruitful to examine trial-relevant attitudes as potential moderators of pretrial publicity effects.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY 2

Although the methodology employed in the current study can provide useful information about media influences on the types of evidence we think that we require to make specific attributions about others (e.g., guilty or innocent, competent or inept), this methodology provides no information about the actual appraisals individuals will make after exposure to network news. Participants were not asked to make judgments about the importance of social issues, nor did participants evaluate the credibility of other individuals. In addition, the current methodology (e.g., only one news story shown to participants in the media exposure condition) unrealistically focuses participants' attention on the news. Therefore, a second study that employed the agenda-setting paradigm created by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) was conducted to examine the agenda-setting influence of rape news on juror decision-making.

In the first phase of Study 2, participants watched a series of news stories about a variety of issues. One of the stories was varied to manipulate rape media exposure; some participants watched a prosecution rape story, others watched a pro-defense rape story, and the remaining participants viewed a story on the trade deficit. Participants judged the importance of many social issues while a computer collected their reaction times. Participants also completed a questionnaire that further probed their beliefs about issue importance. In the second phase of Study 2, participants completed a voir dire questionnaire that measured their attitudes toward rape, and watched a videotaped simulation of an acquaintance rape trial. Participants then rendered a verdict in the case and completed a questionnaire assessing their beliefs about the trial. This questionnaire included measures of evidence importance and witness credibility.

The design of this second study allowed for a test of traditional agenda-setting effects in a political context. Specifically, participants who watched a news story on the trade deficit should judge the trade deficit to be a more important social issue than would participants who watched one of the two rape stories. Moreover, it is possible to test Iyengar and Kinder's accessibility hypothesis with the reaction time data collected in this study (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). That is, if media exposure altered the cognitive accessibility of certain issues, then participants who watched a trade deficit story should be able to make judgments about that issue's importance more quickly (i.e., they should have faster reaction times) than would participants who watched one of the rape stories. Finally, if cognitive accessibility does mediate judgments of issue importance, then analyses that control for differences in participants' reaction times should find no effect of news story exposure on participants' judgments of trade deficit importance.

Two possible moderators of media effects were examined in this study: the evaluative slant of the news story (i.e., prosecution vs. prodefense stories) and attitudes toward rape (i.e., prodefendant, neutral, and provictim). Several effects were predicted a priori. First, it was expected that participants' attitudes toward rape would moderate the effects of rape media exposure on participant judgments of issue importance. Specifically, it was proposed that neutral participants who watched rape media would judge rape to be a more important issue than would neutral participants who viewed a story on the trade deficit. Second, the evaluative slant of the media was also expected to moderate participants' judgments of issue importance. In particular, media exposure effects were expected to be more pronounced among participants who viewed a prosecution story than among participants who viewed a prodefense story.

A similar pattern of effects was expected for participants' appraisals of the complainant's (i.e., alleged victim's) and the defendant's credibility. Neutral participants who watched rape media should judge the victim to be more credible—and the defendant less credible—than should neutral participants who were not exposed to rape media. Again, it was expected that this media effect would be more evident among participants who watched a prosecution story than among those who watched a prodefense story. Finally, it was predicted that neutral participants exposed to rape media would judge the victim to be less responsible and would be more likely to convict the defendant than would neutral participants who did not view a rape news story. Once again, it was expected that this effect of rape media exposure should be stronger among neutral participants who viewed the prosecution story than among those neutral participants who viewed the prodefense story. No media effects were expected for participants with polarized rape attitudes (i.e., prodefendant or provictim).

In addition, three possible mechanisms through which media exposure could influence juror judgements were examined: accessibility, evidence importance, and changing standards of guilt. First, reaction time data were collected to determine whether rape media exposure increased the accessibility of the rape construct. It was expected that rape media exposure would increase the cognitive accessibility of the rape construct—as evidenced by decreased response latencies—among neutral participants. Because extreme attitudes tend to be more readily accessible from memory

(Downing, Judd, & Brauer, 1992), rape media exposure was not expected to affect the cognitive accessibility of the rape construct among participants with provictim or prodefendant attitudes toward rape. However, the cognitive accessibility of the rape construct is expected to mediate media influence on participants' issue importance judgments. Moreover, if cognitive accessibility plays a role in importance judgments, evidence of spreading activation should exist. Specifically, if the construct of rape is activated via the rape news story, then related constructs (e.g., sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, crime) should also be activated (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977), resulting in decreased response latencies for neutral participants judging the importance of these related issues. Finally, the neutral participants' judgments of the importance of these related issues should also increase as a function of rape media exposure.

Second, it was also expected that rape media exposure would influence participants' judgments of evidence importance. Neutral participants who were exposed to prodefense rape media were expected to rate evidence that corroborates the complainant's allegations to be more important than were neutral participants who were exposed to prosecution rape media. Again, no media effects were expected for participants with polarized attitudes toward rape.

Finally, rape media exposure may alter the standards by which participants make determinations of guilt. To test this possibility, the study examined whether exposure to rape media altered the amount of variance in verdict could be explained by of participant ratings of complainant and defendant credibility.

Participants

One hundred twenty-four undergraduates (61 women and 63 men) at the University of Minnesota participated in exchange for both extra credit in their introductory psychology course and \$4. The responses of four subjects who voiced suspicion about the purpose of the study or social-psychological experiments in general were excluded from all analyses.

Newscast Stimulus

All participants viewed 10 news stories from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archives. Nine of these stories were shown to all subjects, and reported on a variety of social issues facing the nation. Specifically, these nine stories addressed issues regarding police brutality, drugs, energy conservation, pollution, political misconduct, war, education, racial tension, and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In the remaining story, participants' exposure to media on acquaintance rape was systematically varied. Specifically, for those participants who were exposed to media on rape, half viewed the Prosecution story described above; the other half viewed the Prodefense story. One third of the participants did not see a rape news story; instead, they saw a story on the trade deficit. This manipulation was presented as the 3rd story in the series of 10 stories.

Computerized Reaction Time Task

During the computerized reaction time task, participants were presented with social issues and were asked to indicate, by pressing a key, whether each issue was important or was not important. Prior to this task, participants were given seven practice trials in which they were instructed about the task and practiced responding to the stimuli presented. Following the practice trials, participants were presented with 32 social issues, randomly ordered. Each participant controlled the rate of presentation; that is, between each trial, participants were reminded of the keys to press, and were told to press the space bar when they were ready for the next trial. At the beginning of each trial, a “+” was presented at the center of the computer screen to center participants’ vision; subsequently, a social issue was presented, also centered on the screen. The issue remained on the screen until the participant responded.

Trial Stimulus

The trial stimulus consisted of a videotaped reënactment of a rape trial used previously by researchers investigating jury decision-making (e.g., Borgida & White, 1978; Brekke & Borgida, 1988). In this case, the defendant was charged with third degree sexual misconduct for allegedly forcing the alleged victim to engage in sexual intercourse against her will. This case was prototypical of an acquaintance rape case. That is, the alleged victim and the defendant were acquainted prior to the evening in question and both parties stipulated that intercourse had occurred. The issue in contention was whether the complainant consented to the sexual behavior. The videotaped version contained all of the elements of an actual trial: opening remarks by the judge, opening arguments by both attorneys, the testimony and cross-examination of four witnesses (including the alleged victim and the defendant), closing arguments by the attorneys, and the judge’s charge to the jury.

Procedure

Initially, participants were recruited via bulletin board notices to participate in a 4-hr study of jury decision-making. When they came to the laboratory, participants were told that the researcher was studying jury decision-making in different types of criminal cases by showing different participants different criminal trials that vary somewhat in length. Participants were then informed that they had been randomly assigned to watch the shortest of the trials, and therefore, participation in this study would not take the full 4 hr. Participants were told that if they wanted to receive full credit for 4 hr of research participation, they could participate in a study on newscasts that was being conducted by an undergraduate honors student in another laboratory. If they participated in this study, they would receive \$4 from a research grant that the undergraduate student had won and the full 4 hr of extra-credit toward their grade. After they indicated that they were interested in participating in the “newscast” study, subjects were directed to another room where a different researcher conducted the newscast portion of the study.

A research assistant told participants that she was interested in examining the relationship between individuals' political views and their processing of information contained in the news and that she wanted them to watch a series of stories that had been randomly selected from newscasts broadcast nationally over a 1-year period. After watching the news stories, participants completed the computerized reaction time task. For this task, participants were instructed to try to maximize both the accuracy of their responses and the speed with which they respond (see Fazio, 1990). After completing this task, participants completed a questionnaire in which they answered questions about 32 social issues, their beliefs about the media, and the frequency with which they view various types of television programming. After completing the newscast phase of the study, participants received a mock educational debriefing, were paid \$4 for their participation, and were told to return to the "jury study."

After returning to the original laboratory, participants responded to measures that assess the extent of their personal experience with rape, as a part of a *voir dire* questionnaire. Participants also completed items from the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA; Burt, 1980) and the Attitudes Toward Rape Questionnaire (ATR; Feild, 1978a). After watching the trial simulation, participants completed questionnaire items assessing verdict, their ratings of the various witnesses, and their judgments about the importance of various pieces of evidence. After all participants completed this questionnaire, they were fully debriefed, including full disclosure of the deception.

Rape Attitudes

Twenty-seven items designed to tap the evaluative tone of participants' rape attitudes were drawn from the RMA (Burt, 1980), the ATR (Feild, 1978a), and from a questionnaire developed by Brekke (1985). Participants responded to all 27 items on 7-point scales. Participants' responses to these items were highly consistent ($\alpha = .83$); therefore, the 27 items were averaged to form a single index of participants' attitudes toward rape. Participants were categorized into one of three groups based on their attitudes toward rape. Specifically, participants with scores in the top third of the distribution of rape attitudes (>5.98) were classified as people who held provictim attitudes toward rape ($M = 6.17$). Participants with scores falling within the middle third of the distribution were classified as people who have neutral rape attitudes ($M = 5.63$). Participants with scores falling in the lowest third of the rape attitudes distribution (<5.20) were classified as people who held prodefendant attitudes toward rape ($M = 4.73$).

Although one might expect that attitudes toward rape might be influenced by exposure to rape media, a study by Feldman and Sigelman (1985) suggests that television affects the salience of an issue (e.g., nuclear war) rather than attitudes toward the issue. Indeed, in the present study, participants' rape attitudes did not differ across conditions. In particular, an analysis of rape attitude scores revealed no main effect of rape media type, $F < 1$, *ns*. Moreover, participants' rape attitudes did not differ as a function of exposure to rape media (e.g., rape story vs. trade deficit story) nor as a function of rape story type (e.g., prosecution story vs. prodefense story, both $F_s < 1$, *ns*).

Dependent Measures

Reaction Times

During the first phase of the study, participants' response latencies in indicating the importance or unimportance of the trade deficit, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, rape, and crime were recorded by the computer on which participants completed the computerized reaction time task. Because the frequency distributions for these response latencies were positively skewed, the reaction times were subjected to a reciprocal transformation to normalize the distributions (see Fazio, 1990). As response times may differ for different responses, the very few people who judged these issues to be unimportant were removed from the analyses of the reaction time data.

Ratings of Issue Importance

In addition to completing the computerized reaction time task during the first phase, participants used a series of 9-point scales to answer the following four questions for each of 32 social issues: (a) how important was the issue?; (b) how much did they care about the issue?; (c) should the government do more to develop solutions to the issue?; and (d) how much did they talk about the issue? These questions were taken from earlier investigations of agenda-setting effects (see Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). For each of the six issues central to the hypotheses advanced (i.e., trade deficit, rape, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, and crime), participants' responses to these four questions were averaged, reflecting the importance of that issue to participants. Reliabilities for these six scales were acceptably high: trade deficit ($\alpha = .87$), rape ($\alpha = .86$), sexual harassment ($\alpha = .86$), child sexual abuse ($\alpha = .83$), and crime ($\alpha = .82$).

Ratings of Complainant and Defendant

During the second phase of the study (i.e., the jury decision-making phase), participants used 9-point scales to rate both the complainant and the defendant on a set of 14 bipolar adjective pairs. For each trial participant, the first factor extracted using principal factor analysis with varimax rotation represented a credibility factor. Items with loadings greater than .5 were unit weighted and averaged for each participant, resulting in the following two scales. Participants' scores on the complainant credibility scale consisted of an average of participants' ratings of the complainant on the following bipolar adjective pairs: credible–not credible, certain–uncertain, believable–not believable, convincing–unconvincing, honest–dishonest, sincere–insincere, trustworthy–untrustworthy ($\alpha = .94$). Participants' scores on the defendant credibility scale were computed by averaging participants' ratings of the defendant on the following bipolar adjective pairs: believable–not believable, sincere–insincere, convincing–unconvincing, credible–not credible, honest–dishonest, certain–uncertain ($\alpha = .92$).

Evidence Importance

Two trained research assistants, blind to participant gender and experimental condition, read verbatim typewritten transcriptions of participants' responses to a

question asking them to name the evidence that was most important in determining their decision, and coded these responses for their content. Coders indicated whether each phrase written by the participant referred to the complainant's behavior after the rape, consent, force or resistance, the defendant's testimony, motivations for fabrication of the allegations, physical evidence, and the complainant's testimony. If a phrase did not fall into any of these six categories, it was coded as unclassifiable. Concordance between the raters ranged from .50 to 1.00, with a mean concordance rate of .87 across all evidence agendas. Final measures of content were created by dividing the total number of phrases in each superordinate category (e.g., number of phrases about complainant's credibility) by the total number of codable phrases for each evidence agenda, resulting in the proportion of the evidence cited as important that was devoted to a particular category of evidence. To normalize the distribution of these scores, an arcsine transformation was performed on these proportions prior to their analysis.

Verdict

Participants indicated whether the defendant was guilty or not guilty by circling the appropriate verdict on the questionnaire. Responses were coded so that a score of 1 indicated a guilty verdict, and a score of 0 indicated a not guilty verdict.

Results

Agenda-Setting for Political Issues

Before we attempt to use agenda-setting as a framework for understanding media effects on juror decision-making, it is important to demonstrate that the present study replicated the traditional agenda-setting effects. Participants' importance ratings for the trade deficit issue were subjected to a planned comparison between the responses of participants who saw a rape story and those participants who saw the trade deficit story. As predicted, participants' judgments of the importance of the trade deficit were influenced by their exposure to news about the trade deficit, $F(1, 117) = 8.21, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$. Participants who watched a news story on the trade deficit judged the trade deficit to be a more important social issue than did participants who watched a news story on rape ($M = 6.21$ and 5.20 for trade deficit and rape, respectively). Exposure to broadcast news on the trade deficit also influenced participants' reaction times as predicted, $F(1, 117) = 5.12, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$. Participants who saw the news story on the trade deficit were able to judge the importance of the trade deficit more quickly than were participants who saw either of the two rape stories ($M = 1382.33$ and 1818.65 ms for trade deficit and rape, respectively).

Mediational Analysis. To determine whether participants' reaction times account for some or all of the relationship between participants' exposure to a news story on the trade deficit and their judgments of the importance of the trade deficit, a mediational analysis was conducted. Specifically, participants' importance ratings were subjected to a one-way (News Story Type) ANCOVA with participants' reaction times as a covariate. When the variance attributable to participants' reaction

Table 1. Tested Contrasts and Sample Sizes

Contrast effect	Experimental cell								
	Prodefendant			Neutral			Provictim		
	P-D	C	P-P	P-D	C	P-P	P-D	C	P-P
Media within prodefendant	1	-2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media within neutral	0	0	0	1	-2	1	0	0	0
Media within provictim	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	-2	1
Slant within prodefendant	1	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slant within neutral	0	0	0	1	0	-1	0	0	0
Slant within provictim	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	-1
Number of participants	13	15	13	14	7	15	13	18	12

Note. P-D: prodefense rape news story; C: control (trade deficit) news story; P-P: proprosecution rape news story. Media refers to rape media exposure; slant refers to the evaluative slant of the rape news story.

times was controlled, the influence of the media on participants' importance ratings—although not eliminated—was weakened, providing some evidence to support the mediational role of cognitive accessibility in agenda-setting effects, $F(1, 115) = 5.90$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

Agenda-Setting and Rape

Because clear predictions were made regarding the moderating effects of participants' attitudes toward rape and the evaluative slant of the rape story, participants' responses to the remaining dependent measures were analyzed using orthogonal a priori contrasts. These contrasts examined whether attitudes toward rape moderated the influence of rape media exposure and the evaluative slant of rape media on participants' responses (see Table 1). To investigate the effects of rape media exposure within each level of rape attitudes (i.e., prodefendant, neutral, and provictim attitudes), the responses of participants exposed to rape stories were compared to the responses of participants who did not view a rape story, resulting in three orthogonal contrasts. To examine the effects of the evaluative slant of rape media, the responses of participants exposed to proprosecution rape stories were compared to the responses of participants exposed to prodefense rape stories within each level of rape attitudes, resulting in an additional three orthogonal contrasts. The contrasts examining the effects of evaluative slant resulted in very few significant effects, probably due to chance, and are not discussed further.

Ratings of Issue Importance. As predicted, exposure to rape media did influence the importance ratings of participants who held neutral attitudes about rape, $F(1, 111) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Specifically, among participants who had neutral rape attitudes, those who watched a rape news story judged rape to be a more important social issue than did those participants who did not watch a rape story (see Table 2 for means). Exposure to rape media did not influence the rape importance ratings of participants who held either prodefendant or provictim attitudes toward rape. The influence of rape media on participants' importance ratings was limited to ratings of rape importance; that is, participants' importance ratings of child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, murder, and crime were not influenced by rape media exposure (see Table 2 for means).

Table 2. Participants' Mean Ratings of Issue Importance as a Function of Participants' Attitudes Toward Rape and Rape Media Exposure

Issue	Media exposure	Attitudes toward rape		
		Prodefendant	Neutral	Provictim
Rape	Rape	6.52	7.13 _a	8.33
	Control	6.11	5.89 _a	8.19
Child sexual abuse	Rape	6.47	7.15	8.37
	Control	6.52	5.99	7.83
Sexual harassment	Rape	5.66	6.39	7.35
	Control	5.39	5.10	7.19
Crime	Rape	7.26	7.58	8.10
	Control	7.32	6.98	8.14

Note. Higher means indicate greater importance of the issue. Means sharing subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

Reaction Times. The six planned comparisons were conducted using participants' response latencies for the rape importance judgment as the dependent measure. Rape media exposure did not influence reaction times for the rape importance judgment, irrespective of participants' attitudes toward rape. In addition, reaction times for the other three social issues that were relevant to sexual assault (i.e., child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and crime) were unaffected by rape media exposure and the evaluative slant of the rape story.

Ratings of the Complainant and the Defendant. For participants who held prodefendant attitudes toward rape, exposure to rape media influenced perceptions of the complainant's credibility, $F(1, 111) = 3.67, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. I expected that neutral participants' credibility appraisals would be affected by rape media exposure. However, exposure to rape media caused participants who held prodefendant rape attitudes to view the complainant as a more credible witness ($M = 5.69$ and 4.88 for rape and control, respectively). Moreover, exposure to rape media also influenced credibility judgments made by participants who held provictim attitudes toward rape, $F(1, 111) = 4.17, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$. However, for these participants, exposure to rape media caused them to view the complainant as a less credible witness ($M = 6.58$ and 7.31 for rape and control, respectively). Rape media exposure did not significantly influence the credibility judgments of participants who held neutral attitudes toward rape ($M = 6.63$ and 6.08 for rape and control, respectively).

Evidence Importance. Exposure to rape media did influence some participants' perceptions of which evidence was important; specifically, the responses of participants who held provictim attitudes toward rape were affected by this exposure. For example, provictim participants who were exposed to rape media were more likely to cite evidence about changes in the complainant's behavior after the alleged incident as important evidence for determining guilt than were provictim participants who did not view a rape news story, $F(1, 111) = 9.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$ ($M = 0.22$ and 0.37 for rape and control, respectively). Among participants who held neutral or prodefendant attitudes toward rape, rape media exposure did not influence the likelihood that participants would mention the complainant's behavior change as important evidence (neutral $M = 0.12$ and 0.12 for rape and control, respectively; prodefendant $M = 0.22$ and 0.37 for rape and control, respectively). The proportion of participants'

evidence importance responses devoted to the complainant's testimony, defendant's testimony, issues of consent or force, physical evidence, and motivations for fabrication were not influenced by rape media exposure, irrespective of participants' attitudes toward rape.

Verdict. There were two marginally significant effects of rape media exposure on verdict. Specifically, prodefendant participants who viewed a rape news story tended to be more likely to render a guilty verdict than were prodefendant participants who did not view a rape story, $F(1, 111) = 2.94, p < .09, \eta^2 = .03$ (50% and 27% for rape and control, respectively). In contrast, for participants who held provictim attitudes toward rape, rape media exposure had the opposite effect on conviction rates, $F(1, 111) = 3.28, p < .08, \eta^2 = .03$. That is, provictim participants were *less* likely to render a guilty verdict than were provictim participants who did not watch a rape news story (68% and 89% for rape and control, respectively). Rape media exposure did not influence the verdicts of participants who held neutral attitudes toward rape (66% and 57% for rape and control, respectively).

Determinants of Verdict Choice. Agenda-setting theorists have argued that exposure to broadcast news alters the standards used by the electorate to judge a political official's performance (e.g., Iyengar et al., 1984; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Similarly, psycholegal scholars have argued that exposure to pretrial publicity may alter the standards used by jurors to judge a defendant's guilt. To investigate whether rape news will alter the relative weight jurors give to complainant and defendant credibility when rendering their verdicts I conducted a regression analysis. Specifically, I computed regression coefficients as indices of the effects of the complainant's and the defendant's credibility ratings on verdicts for each of the media exposure conditions (i.e., prodefense, control, and proprosecution conditions). The unstandardized regression coefficients, computed separately for each media exposure condition, are reported in Table 3. The complainant's credibility was an important determinant of participants' verdicts in all media exposure conditions. However, participants who watched rape news—irrespective of its evaluative slant—attributed greater weight to the defendant's credibility when determining their verdicts than did participants who did not view a rape news story. Indeed, among participants who did not see rape media, the defendant's credibility was not a significant predictor of participants' verdicts ($p > .35$).

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the statistical significance of these differences. Participants' verdicts were regressed upon five variables: a dummy

Table 3. Impact of Complainant Credibility and Defendant Credibility Ratings on Verdicts as a Function of Media Exposure

Rating	Media exposure					
	Prodefense		Control		Proprosecution	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Complainant credibility	0.15	0.05	0.21	0.03	0.16	0.03
Defendant credibility	-0.13	0.03	-0.03	0.04	-0.12	0.03

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. All coefficients, except the coefficient for the defendant's credibility in the control condition, were significant at $p < .003$.

variable representing the treatment effect for media exposure (0 = *control*, 1 = *rape media*), ratings of the complainant's credibility, ratings of the defendant's credibility, and two terms that captured the interaction between the treatment effect and each of the credibility ratings. Therefore, the regression equation is specified by the following equation: $\text{Verdict} = b_0 + b_1(\text{media exposure}) + b_2(\text{complainant credibility}) + b_3(\text{complainant credibility} \times \text{media exposure}) + b_4(\text{defendant credibility}) + b_5(\text{defendant credibility} \times \text{media exposure}) + u$. These variables were entered simultaneously to capture the unique effects of each of these variables. A statistically significant b_3 would indicate that the predictive power of the complainant's credibility differs as a function of rape media exposure. Similarly, a statistically significant b_5 would indicate that the predictive power of the defendant's credibility differs as a function of media exposure. The results indicate that participants' weighting of the complainant's credibility in determining their verdict did not differ as a function of media exposure ($b_3 = -.05$, $p > .20$). However, participants who were exposed to rape media did attribute more weight to the defendant's credibility when determining their verdicts than did participants who were not exposed to rape media ($b_5 = -.09$, $p < .06$).

Discussion

One purpose of the present investigation was to explore whether agenda-setting theory might generalize beyond the domain of politics and provide an explanation for media effects on individuals' judgments of the importance of sexual misconduct. Indeed, this investigation demonstrated that exposure to rape media did influence some participants' judgments of the importance of rape. However, participants' attitudes about an issue represent an important moderator of agenda-setting effects. As predicted, the rape importance judgments made by participants with polarized attitudes toward rape (i.e., prodefendant and provictim attitudes toward rape) were unaffected by exposure to rape media. Only participants with neutral attitudes toward rape were influenced by rape media exposure. Although these findings are consistent with the agenda-setting effects found for economic and political issues (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), they are inconsistent with previous research on the influence of rape media on judgments of rape importance (Protess, Leff, Brooks, & Gordon, 1985). It is possible that a failure to account for the moderating role of participants' rape attitudes masked the media effects that are present for a particular subset of the participants, specifically, those participants with neutral attitudes toward rape.

The findings from the issue importance ratings suggest that attitude accessibility is not solely responsible for the media effects on rape importance judgments. This conclusion is further supported by the lack of media influence on participants' response latencies when making issue importance judgments. It seemed that participants tended to respond much more quickly for the rape judgment than they did for the other social issue importance judgments—suggesting that rape may be a chronically accessible construct for this population. The chronic accessibility of the rape construct should not limit the power of the media to make the rape construct even

more accessible, as the effects of chronic and temporary accessibility on judgments are additive (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986). Moreover, irrespective of the chronic accessibility of the rape construct, the response latencies for the other crime-related issues should decrease as a function of media influence due to spreading activation. However, the response latencies for these related issues were unaffected by rape media exposure.

Ultimately, it is the effect of media exposure on trial-relevant decisions that is crucial for determining whether media influence prejudicially affects juror judgments. In the present investigation, exposure to rape media affected participants' perceptions of the two major trial participants: the complainant and the defendant. However, participants' attitudes toward rape moderated the influence of the media on these judgments. Contrary to predictions, exposure to rape media did not influence the witness ratings made by participants who held moderate attitudes toward rape. Exposure to rape media did influence the perceptions of participants who held more polarized rape attitudes. Specifically, prodefendant participants rated the complainant as more credible and were more likely to convict the defendant if they had watched a rape news story. Provictim participants rated the complainant to be less credible and were less likely to convict the defendant if they had watched a news story about rape than if they watched an unrelated story.

Therefore, for some trial-relevant judgments, exposure to rape media caused provictim participants to render more lenient (e.g., prodefense) decisions; conversely, rape media exposure caused prodefendant participants to render more punitive (e.g., prosecution) decisions. These findings are inconsistent with several findings from previous research. For example, Greene and Wade (1988) found that prosecution pretrial publicity (i.e., a news report that described the conviction of a man who later confessed to the crime of which he had been convicted) did not cause jurors to render harsher judgments against a defendant in an unrelated case. From this evidence, these authors argued that exposure to trial-relevant publicity does not make jurors more punitive. However, the current research indicates that some types of news—at the very least, the particular story presented in this investigation—can cause jurors to render more punitive judgments. One possible explanation for these differences is that Greene and Wade (1988) employed print media as their stimuli; the current investigation utilized television news—which Graber (1980) demonstrated to be more influential than print media—as stimuli. However, the print media utilized by Greene and Wade (1988) that primed participants' beliefs about wrongful convictions did successfully influence participants' trial judgments, despite its less vivid, less impactful form. Therefore, further research is needed to clarify the conditions under which this hardening effect is likely to occur.

Note that in the current investigation the favorability of participants' witness evaluations was influenced by rape media exposure, depending upon their initial attitudes toward rape. These findings are inconsistent with findings in political science that media exposure did not influence the favorability of participants' candidate appraisals (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987); rather, media exposure merely altered the information on which these appraisals were based. However, it is possible that the failure of previous researchers to explore preexisting attitudes as a moderator of media influence masked the effects of news exposure on changes in the favorability

of participants' evaluations. Previous research has revealed that the valence of individuals' attitudes influences their perceptions of and their susceptibility to being influenced by new information (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985); therefore, it is important to explore further how attitudes might moderate the effects of general pretrial publicity.

In addition to the evidence regarding media influence on the accessibility of the rape construct, the current investigation also provided some information regarding the process or processes underlying media influence on juror decision-making. In the current investigation, participants reported which pieces of evidence were important in determining their verdict. However, the regression analyses that identified the relative weight participants gave to the complainant and the defendant's credibility in determining their verdicts allow us to identify which factors influenced verdicts without having to rely on self-report data. These analyses indicated that the complainant's credibility is always predictive of participants' verdicts, irrespective of their exposure to rape media. However, the defendant's credibility is only predictive of participants' verdicts when the participants have been exposed to rape news, irrespective of the evaluative slant of the news story that the participants had watched. Thus, rape media exposure altered the standards that participants used to make their evaluations of the defendant's guilt.

Why would both forms of rape media (i.e., proprosecution and prodefense) increase the predictive power of the defendant's credibility? In both versions of the rape story, acquaintance rape was depicted as a crime that pitted a man's version of a sexual encounter against a woman's version of the same encounter. The stories differed in where they placed the burden of proof; the proprosecution story advocated believing women, whereas the prodefense story reminded the viewer that the defendant should be believed unless the prosecution has overwhelming evidence of the defendant's guilt. Perhaps because both stories focused attention on the credibility inherent in allegations of sexual misconduct, both stories primed the defendant's credibility resulting in its greater impact on verdicts. Only further research that employs different rape stories as stimuli will provide answers to this question.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current investigation demonstrated the utility of applying agenda-setting theory to assess the impact of the media on our decision-making processes in contexts other than politics. Clearly these results indicate that the media influence our perceptions of the importance of the social problem of rape, and our credibility appraisals of both the victims and perpetrators of sexual misconduct. More generally, this research contributes to our understanding of agenda-setting and credibility appraisal processes, and how these processes are moderated both by the evaluative slant of the media and by individual differences in attitudes and beliefs. Contrary to the assertions of McCombs and Shaw (1972) and other agenda-setting theorists, media not only changes what we think about, it also changes what we think. The media do influence the favorability of our evaluations of others. Given the findings of the interactive influence of rape media exposure and attitudes toward rape on

participants' witness appraisals and verdicts, it appears necessary to acknowledge that preexisting attitudes moderate the influence of the media on our judgments.

Rape media exposure also altered participants' determinations of the evidence that would be sufficient to prove a defendant's guilt in an acquaintance rape case. Other researchers have demonstrated that watching television affects people's schemata of police work and criminal victimization (e.g., Gerbner et al., 1977). Similarly, the present research suggests that participants' beliefs about what constitutes a plausible rape scenario can also be influenced by media exposure. As people are more likely to remember information that is consistent with their preexisting schema, participants' expectations for what evidentiary patterns are plausible indications that a crime occurred have important implications for juror decisions.

Linz and Penrod (1992) hypothesized that pretrial publicity may ultimately influence decision-making by first altering participants' standards of evidence. A similar process (e.g., altering standards of evidence) is responsible for the agenda-setting influence of the media on political reasoning (e.g., Iyengar et al., 1984; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Similarly, rape media exposure altered the factors that influenced participants' verdicts in the Study 2. Participants who viewed a rape news story attributed greater weight to the defendant's credibility when determining their verdict than did participants who did not view a rape news story. Therefore, it appears that the media's alteration of the standards of evidence generalizes beyond the political context.

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) claim that these changes in standards are the result of changes in construct accessibility; that is, they argue that the media make certain constructs more accessible and that these constructs are used subsequently to appraise the characteristics of others. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that a primed construct may serve as a standard against which information is judged (Herr, 1986; Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Higgins & Lurie, 1983). However, Iyengar and Kinder (1987; Iyengar et al., 1984) have no direct evidence that the cognitive accessibility of judgment-related constructs was increased by media exposure. They argue that their failure to find effects of the media on the favorability of participants' presidential evaluations provides conclusive evidence that cognitive accessibility—and not persuasion—is the mechanism for agenda-setting effects; however, this is not sufficient evidence to support their accessibility hypothesis. As seen in the present research, the failure to consider attitudinal moderators of agenda-setting effects may have masked the presence of media influence on the favorability of evaluations.

The present work was designed to test directly the assumption that cognitive accessibility is the mechanism underlying media influence on credibility appraisals by collecting the appropriate reaction time measures. Indeed, the reaction times measures employed in the current research indicated that media effects on participants' judgments of trade deficit importance were partially mediated by the cognitive accessibility of the trade deficit construct. However, the evidence regarding the accessibility mechanism is equivocal. The rape media exposure did not influence the cognitive accessibility of the rape construct. In addition, there was no evidence of spreading activation in either the importance ratings of related constructs or in participants' response latencies when they made these crime-related importance

judgments. Iyengar et al. (1984) discuss two situations in which accessibility will not result in agenda-setting: (a) when the primed construct is perceived to be unrelated to the judgment; and (b) when participants are knowledgeable about an issue because these participants engage in on-line information processing, which is less likely to be influenced by changes in accessibility. Neither of these conditions existed in the present experiment. Therefore, the findings regarding the accessibility of the rape construct and the lack of spreading activation, taken together with evidence that reaction times only partially mediated the media effects on trade deficit importance judgments, suggest that other mechanisms—in addition to cognitive accessibility—may be responsible for the agenda-setting effects of the media. Perhaps general pretrial publicity effects are caused by some combination of automatic and deliberative information processing of media messages.

These studies provided new information about the processes by which general pretrial publicity influences juror decision-making. However, one should be cautious about drawing firm conclusions based on two studies. Both of the studies discussed herein employed the same rape news stories; specifically, only one prosecution rape news story and one prodefense rape news story were used. Perhaps some particular of the stories employed in these investigations caused the evaluative slant effects described here. In addition, only a single trial simulation was used to examine the influence of these news stories on juror decision-making. Perhaps juror decisions in rape trials are particularly susceptible to agenda-setting effects. Or perhaps the rape news stories presented to participants activated constructs that were pertinent to the particular case utilized in Study 2, but unrelated to most rape cases. Only further research using different news stories, different trials, and different criminal allegations will determine whether the obtained effects will generalize to other contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Research that clarifies the relationship between the media and social appraisal processes has practical implications. The present research demonstrates that rape media—irrespective of its evaluative slant—influence individuals' witness appraisals and alter the standards individuals use to determine a defendant's guilt. Establishing that such media effects exist is the first step in correcting them. Moreover, as noted by Linz and Penrod (1992), research that investigates the cognitive processes that produce these media effects can inform a search for remedies to media bias. On the one hand, if pretrial publicity effects are the result of the increased accessibility of prejudicial information, remedies such as voir dire and judicial instruction to disregard the publicity are likely to be ineffective because they will only increase the accessibility of that information. Instead, continuances may be more effective at reducing the influence of prejudicial media on juror decisions because accessibility of the information should decrease over time (unless reactivated by subsequent exposures to the publicity). On the other hand, if pretrial publicity alters the standards by which jurors judge defendant guilt or alters the plausibility of certain evidentiary patterns, then jurors may respond to the more overt persuasion attempts in voir dire and judicial instruction. Then again, if a combination of cognitive processes mediate

the effects of general pretrial publicity on juror decisions, then any one safeguard may not be enough to counteract the damaging effects.

Of course, one should be cautious before implementing any remedies for general pretrial publicity. The current research is subject to many of the criticisms targeted toward most jury simulations (for a comprehensive review of the limitations of jury simulations, see Bornstein, 1999). Although several studies have failed to find differences between the decisions made by student and adult "jurors," it is unknown whether the decisions made by a nonstudent sample may have been influenced differently by rape media. Moreover, because of the intentional focus of this investigation on the cognitive processes underlying media effects on juror judgments, participants did not engage in deliberations before providing their judgments. Although deliberations may alter the strength of the media effects found in the present research, researchers generally have not found differences between jurors' pre- and post-deliberation responses (e.g., Hastie, Penrod, & Pennington, 1983; Steblay et al., 1999). However, there is some evidence that deliberations may even accentuate the biasing effects of case-specific pretrial publicity (Kramer, Kerr, & Carroll, 1990).

Finally, although the media effects demonstrated in this study may appear modest at first blush, a single 2-min news story produced these effects. It is most probable that potential jurors will watch many news stories about sexual misconduct over a period of years. Over time and with repeated exposure, incremental changes in jurors' orientations may have an enormous influence on the decisions that jurors render in rape trials (e.g., Hans & Dee, 1991).

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