Agenda-Setting and Priming in the Prime-Time Hour[1]

R. Andrew Holbrook
Department of Political Science
The Ohio State University
holbrook.61@osu.edu

ABSTRACT

The effects of agenda setting and priming are well established in regards to the news media. Considerably less attention has been paid to these phenomena in entertainment media, in spite of the fact that entertainment media make up a much larger portion of television programming. This paper argues that agenda-setting and priming effects generalize to entertainment media. It develops a theory of entertainment media influence based on evidence that individuals do not treat entertainment media as irrelevant sources of political information. It then tests this theory using evidence from two controlled laboratory experiments and analysis of the 1996 National Election Study. In conjunction, these data suggest that significant agenda-setting and priming effects are associated with a wide range of television dramas. Congruent with recent research on news media priming (Miller and Krosnick 2000) priming is found to be moderated by trust in the media source. Political knowledge is found to be inconsequential as a moderator of these effects. These findings suggest that previous research in media effects has employed too narrow a focus. Non-news sources of political information appear to play a significant role in the construction of political attitudes.

Two of the more robust findings in the study of news media influence on political attitudes have been the affiliated effects of agenda-setting and priming (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; McCombs and Shaw 1972). Agenda-setting is observed when consumers of news programming see as the nation's most important problems those issues given more prominent attention by the news media. Priming occurs when this increased attention increases the prominence of these issues when people form judgments about public officials.

What has been lacking in this body of research is a comparable examination of these effects in regards to media designed more to entertain than to inform. In spite of the fact that entertainment programs make up a much larger portion of television programming and enjoy a larger viewing audience than do television news programs (*TV Dimensions* 2003, 239), they are often treated as inconsequential in regards to the formation of political attitudes. The implicit assumption in much of this research is that viewers discount information encountered as part of entertainment programming. But as the line between information and entertainment is blurred (Baum 2002), how people adapt to the changing information environment is important to our understanding of public opinion.

Focus group research suggests that people are just as apt to cite a fictional source as a non-fiction source when coming up with arguments to support their policy stances (Delli Carpini and Williams 1996, 1994; Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992). In addition, there is mounting evidence suggesting that those unlikely to turn to traditional news sources are relying on non-traditional sources for their political information (Baum 2002; Chaffee and Kanihan 1997), and that these sources exert some influence on attitudes about the government (Pfau, Moy, and Szabo 2001).

In light of this, I turn to one non-traditional source of political information that has been largely ignored in the literature: television dramas. This genre of entertainment television has made and continues to make up a very significant amount of entertainment television programming (*TV Dimensions* 2003). Looking at two of the more common types of television drama, "crime dramas" and "doctor dramas," I demonstrate that both genres increase concern in viewers for the topics covered by a given program. This agenda-setting effect is demonstrated using evidence from both a controlled laboratory experiment and the 1996 National Election Study (NES). The NES data also suggest that one doctor drama in particular, *ER*, has a significant priming effect on its regular viewers. To better examine the dynamics of these effects, evidence from a second controlled experiment is presented. The second experiment yields significant evidence of agenda-setting associated with crime dramas, and moderate support for priming. These findings are discussed in relation to recent study of news media priming that suggest that priming is moderated by trust in the media source and political knowledge (Miller and Krosnick 2000). I find evidence of a somewhat different moderating relationship in regards to trust in the media source for entertainment media. The significance of these findings in regards to the larger body of media research is discussed.

Agenda-Setting and Priming in News Media

For nearly forty years, the prevailing theory in the study of media and politics suggested that the media had little, if any, impact on the opinions of Americans. This "limited effects" model found its origins in some of the earliest work in political science (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Since the intent of these early studies was to illustrate the impact of the media on political attitudes (Lazarsfeld, et al 1948, 1), it has been argued that the compelling evidence and the unexpected results deterred further examination of the media for decades (Chaffee and Hochheimer 1982).

The work of Shanto Iyengar and Don Kinder (1987; Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, and Krosnick 1984; Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982) represented a significant challenge to the limited effects paradigm in political science. Using controlled experiments in which participants viewed television news programming that had been edited to highlight specific issues, these authors demonstrated two points.

First, the news media, although not particularly adept at telling viewers what to think, are persuasive in guiding viewers what to think *about*.[2] Secondly, by virtue of steering attention to certain issues, the news media are able to determine in part the standards by which people make evaluations about politics and politicians. These two effects are respectively known as "agenda-setting" and "priming." Since Iyengar and Kinder conducted this research, these two effects have found much support in studies of the news media (Iyenger 1991; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Mendelson 1996).

Until recently, the prevailing wisdom regarding priming and agenda-setting was that they are driven by an "accessibility bias" (Iyenger 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Zaller 1992). This bias is based on the assumption that individuals are only able to retrieve a small subset of relevant information from memory when called upon to form an impression of something or someone (Iyengar 1991; Zaller 1992). Presumably, some considerations are more easily or more rapidly[3] retrieved from memory based on characteristics

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[2] Bernard Cohen (1973) deserves credit for this memorable, if grammatically incorrect, phrase. It bears noting that prior to the work of Iyengar and Kinder, Cohen and others (*e.g.*, Lippman 1922; McCombs and Shaw 1972) had done much theoretical and empirical work to flesh out this so-called agenda-setting effect. Previous authors, however, could not make the strong causal claims Iyengar and Kinder made with use of controlled experiments.

[3] Although, theoretically, accessibility is concerned with the *ease* of retrieval, it is often operationalized as the *speed* with which considerations are retrieved from memory. An example of this is an experiment Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) used to differentiate framing effects from priming effects. Participants in this experiment were asked to indicate whether or not a word flashed on a computer screen was a word or a nonsense word (e.g. "dinrlsy") by typing a specific key on a typical computer keyboard. A computer measured how quickly each respondent was able to complete this task. Because many of the true words were associated with news frames participants had recently watched as part of the experiment, it was argued that reaction times to these words would be quicker for those individuals who had watched the appropriate frame than for those watching other frames *if* there was a priming

of that information. That is, they are more accessible. An important determinant of this accessibility is the recency with which that information has been encoded or retrieved from memory. The specific argument in regards to news media messages is that those messages that have been recently and/or repeatedly aired, are more likely to be "top-of-the-head" considerations for news viewers, and thus are more likely to be enlisted in the construction of political attitudes.

Miller and Krosnick (2000) challenge this prevailing wisdom, arguing that agenda-setting and priming are mediated not by accessibility, but by the inferred importance of a subject. Moreover, priming is argued to be moderated by the amount of political knowledge a person has and the amount of trust that person puts in news media sources. To put it another way, conditional on a person knowing about political issues and having some faith in the ability of the news media to report fair and accurate information, that person will infer that just because the news media have devoted precious time and space to an issue, it must be an important issue and, therefore, should figure into their judgments about elected officials.

Entertainment Media and Politics

If agenda-setting and priming are driven by accessibility, it is not too heroic a proposition to make that entertainment media that deal with political issues can have at least some effect similar to that witnessed in news media. Simply by making certain issues salient, entertainment media can determine what issues are deserving of consideration when viewers are called upon to make political evaluations. In fact there is some evidence that entertainment media are capable of doing this.

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effect associated with the frames. Nelson, *et. al.* found that there was no significant difference in reaction times, and concluded that framing is distinct from priming. Since priming is most often operationalized as a function of time, it is perhaps more appropriate to model it as such. Future work by the first author will more fully address this issue.

In February of 1987, ABC aired the seven-part mini-series "Amerika." This television event portrayed the United States ten years after being taken over by the Soviet Union. The program generated a great deal of controversy (see Lenart and McGraw 1989 for a summary), and a commensurate amount of interest in the impact it had on viewers' political attitudes regarding policy toward the Soviet Union. Although there was some evidence of agenda-setting associated with the program (Kim, Shoar-Ghaffari, and Gustainis 1990; Lenart and McGraw 1989; Perloff, *et. al.* 1992), these and other studies regarding this particular program (e.g. Lasorsa 1989) suffered from an inability to completely distinguish effects resulting directly from viewing the program and effects resulting from exposure to the media event surrounding it.[4]

Apart from the studies on "Amerika," most of the research in this area has dealt with the possibility that entertainment generates "incidental learning" (Surlin 1978, 309; Sigelman and Sigelman 1974). That is, incidental to the intended effect of entertaining viewers, entertainment programs educate viewers by teaching them something about the characters and contexts pivotal to the story line. If that story line borrows heavily from the real world, then the possibility for "learning" is enhanced. Baum (2002) presents evidence that so-called "soft news" television programming (e.g. talk shows, MTV News) is able to "piggyback" (96) important political information in an entertaining setting that reduces the normal costs of seeking out this information. Feldman and Sigelman (1985), in a study of the made-for-television movie "The Day After," present evidence that such learning effects occur, but only in regards to issues about

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[4] Soroka (2000) suggests that one way popular entertainment fare is able to set the political agenda is by influencing subsequent news media stories. Using the example of *Schindler's List*, he presents evidence that television news programs in Canada devoted more attention to holocaust survivors and related issues in the months after the film. Another issue explored in studies of entertainment media and politics is the possibility of a "third-person effect" (Davison 1983) in regards to entertainment media. The argument here is that most people consider themselves uninfluenced by media, but assume that others are not insulated from media effects. As such, attitude change could result in response to the "impersonal influence" (Mutz 1998) of groups assumed to have been influenced by entertainment media. The data presented here do not deal with the possibility of these indirect effects of entertainment media.

which viewers do not have well-formed pre-existing attitudes.[5] A number of scholars have suggested that all individuals, regardless of pre-existing constructs, rely at least partially on fictional portrayals of political events and actors in the construction of their perceptions of political realities (Adams, *et. al.* 1985; Nimmo and Combs 1983; Gerbner, *et. al.* 1980; Lippmann 1922).

What has yet to be examined in this line of research is whether or not priming effects are associated with entertainment media. If priming, like agenda-setting and political learning, is simply about making certain information more accessible in memory, then the theoretical expectation is that priming effects should be observed in association with the consumption of entertainment television that portrays events and situations relevant to politics.

However, the findings of Miller and Krosnick (2000) suggest something more complex is involved. The findings of these two authors are that priming is moderated by trust in media and political knowledge. The former is an important distinction in regards to entertainment media because it is not entirely clear what role trust should play if information from such programming is in fact contributing to political attitudes. It is easy to see how trust would be integral in regards to the news media given their particular role in society. A reliable source of accurate information regarding the realm of politics being necessary for the proper functioning of a popular government, it stands to reason that the chief provider of that information be held to certain standards. But does trust in the media source moderate priming in regards to ALL media, or are the news media solely beholden to this construct?

The social function of entertainment media differs greatly from that of news media. Still, viewers could draw inferences about the importance of political topics based on the attention afforded them by entertainment media. Presumably only compelling and important issues

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[5] Interestingly, judgments of the realism of the program had no bearing on these effects.

generate enough attention to get entertainment television producers to sit up and take notice. If Jay Leno tells a political joke, it is likely to be on a topic that is important to the real world of politics.[6] Likewise, if NBC airs a made-for-TV movie on a political topic, it is likely that the topic has garnered a fair deal of attention in the news media[7] and is thus deserving of consideration. If priming and agenda-setting are inference-based processes, viewers could be making inferences like these to arrive at the same conclusions that they would with news media coverage. What becomes a relevant issue then is whether or not viewers trust entertainment media to be secondary sources of political information.

Another relevant issue is the amount of political knowledge people have. It could be said that if a viewer already has a good deal of knowledge about a subject, a fictitious portrayal of the subject will garner skepticism, if not counterargument. It has been argued that both of these responses tend to counteract priming and agenda-setting effects (Iyengar and Kinder 1985). However, as Miller and Krosnick (2000) point out, empirical support for political knowledge's dampening effect on media effects has been spotty, at best.

It is my contention that political knowledge will have little influence on priming in entertainment media, precisely because it is not traditionally considered a source of information. Because of this, counterargument is less likely to be stimulated. Likewise, because entertainment media are adept at presenting events and situations with which viewers are likely to have very little personal information, the opportunity to counterargue is reduced. That is, how can individuals counterargue something about which they know little or nothing?

In both the case that media effects are mediated by accessibility and the case that a moderated inference-based process is at play, the expectation is that entertainment media should

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[6] Arnold Schwarzeneggar's announcement on *The Tonight Show* only gives credence to the possibility that Jay Leno is a far more influential political entity than current theory suggests. See Parkin, Bos, and van Doorn (2003) for evidence of attitude and knowledge change associated with late night talk-show consumption.
[7] This is an empirical question that has been left unexamined by scholars of media and politics.

have similar influences on political attitudes as do the news media. I expect that the agenda-setting and priming effects in regards to entertainment media to be almost identical to those observed in regards to the news media. Issues receiving prominence in television dramas will be more likely to be cited as important problems facing the nation by viewers of these programs than will issues not covered by these programs (*agenda-setting hypothesis*). In addition, the performance of political decision-makers—in the case of this study, of the president—in regards to these issues will play a more prominent role in viewers' general approval ratings of those decision-makers (*priming hypothesis*).

In some regards, I expect that priming will show evidence of an inference based process similar to that described by Miller and Krosnick (2000). Entertainment media priming effects will be moderated by the amount of trust viewers have in the media source (*trust-in-entertainment-media hypothesis*). In other regards, I expect this process to differ. The unique social role of entertainment media being less likely to activate counterargument in viewers, I expect political knowledge to play no role in entertainment media priming effects (*political knowledge hypothesis*).

In summary, the expectation is that television dramas will exert nearly identical influences upon viewers that the news media have been shown to exert. The primary difference between these media is that political knowledge is likely to play less of a moderating role in priming effects. The studies enumerated below examine the veracity of these expectations.

Data

For the analysis that follows, I rely on three sources of data. Two experiments were conducted to explore the effects of television dramas on political attitudes. In the first experiment, agenda-setting looking at crime dramas is explored. Based on these findings, a second experiment was designed to examine both agenda-setting and priming effects associated

with television crime dramas. The third source of data, the 1996 National Election Study (NES), examines agenda-setting and priming in association with the popular drama *ER*. Although I am unable to deal with the issue of causality using the NES data, in tandem with the experimental data, they represent a compelling case for entertainment television agenda-setting and priming.

Experiment One: Crime Dramas and Agenda-Setting

In 2000, an experiment designed to investigate the influence of *The West Wing*[8] on levels of political trust and efficacy was conducted. In that experiment, 213 students enrolled in undergraduate political science courses at The Ohio State University were randomly assigned to watch one of four television programs. Two of the programs were episodes of *The West Wing* and two were episodes of the crime drama *Third Watch*.[9] While the primary intent of the study was to investigate the possible influences of *The West Wing* on levels of trust in government and feelings of political efficacy, data were also collected to explore possible agenda-setting effects associated with both of the television dramas. Participants in this experiment were asked to list what they believed to be the most important problem facing the nation in an open-ended question. Whereas no evidence of an agenda-setting effect associated with either episode of *The West Wing* appeared, a significant agenda-setting effect was associated with *Third Watch*. As evidenced by Table 1, viewers of that program were significantly more likely than viewers of *The West Wing* to name crime or violence as a most important problem facing the nation ($\chi^2 =$ 8.352, p < .01).

Table 1 about here

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[8] For those unfamiliar with the program, *The West Wing* is an NBC television drama that portrays the inner machinations of the White House under the administration of Jeb Bartlett (Martin Sheen). Now entering its fifth season, the program was a critical and popular hit from its debut in the fall of 1999, and the topic of much media speculation as to what influence it might have on political attitudes. For a more complete discussion of the program and the experiment mentioned here, see Holbrook and Hill (2001).
[9] *Third Watch* is another NBC drama that debuted in the fall of 1999. It chronicles the lives of police, paramedics, and firefighters that work the 3-11 p.m. shift, i.e. the third watch.

It bears noting that this is not the first time that depictions of crime on television have been singled out for their effects on beliefs about politics. George Gerbner and his colleagues (1980) have argued that portrayals of violence on television have generated perceptions of a far more violent world than actually exists. Through the analysis of survey data, they conclude that people who watch a great deal of television are more likely than those who watch little television to believe in this "mean world," in which crime is considerably more prevalent than it is in reality. The shortcoming of Gerbner's research has been its reliance on correlational data. Although he and his colleagues have argued that by virtue of spending so much time depicting crime, entertainment television makes crime a more prevalent part of viewers' constructs of the real world, the causal arrow they propose could be reversed. That is, viewers of television who think the world is more violent could be the least likely to leave their homes, and so have more opportunities to watch. True causality in regards to Gerbner's argument, therefore, has never been established.

The findings of this first experiment support the argument of George Gerbner and his colleagues, and it can claim more convincingly that it is viewership of crime dramas that drives perceptions of a more crime-ridden world in need of political action. However, there are still a number of issues unresolved. The argument of Gerbner, *et. al.* is that it is the genre of crime dramas that causes changes in beliefs. This experiment cannot generalize beyond the one program, *Third Watch*. In addition, it does not address agenda-setting's close cousin, priming. A second experiment, explained in detail below, was designed to more rigorously examine agenda-setting and priming effects associated with crime dramas.

Experiment Two: Crime Dramas, Agenda-Setting *and* Priming

Experiment Design

Similar to the first experiment, participants in the second experiment were randomly assigned to watch an episode of one of four programs. Two of the programs (*Everwood* and *American Dreams*) are classified as family dramas, and are considered the control conditions for this experiment. Neither program portrayed a criminal act, nor were there any crime-related references. The other two programs (*Without a Trace* and *Robbery Homicide Division*) are classified as crime dramas, and are considered the treatment condition. Specific details about each of the four episodes can be found in Appendix A. It bears noting, however, that none of the effects enumerated below appear to be the result of a particular episode. Disaggregating the analysis by episode changes none of the findings. Whatever effects there are seem to be driven by the specific genre of a program.

A number of criteria went into the selection of these particular programs for use in the second experiment. To minimize the possibility of participants' prior exposure to the shows in question (and particularly to the specific episodes used), only shows premiering in the same season in which the experiment was conducted, i.e. the fall of 2002, were used. Since many new crime dramas debuted that fall, there were a number of viable candidates. Ultimately, episodes from NBC's *Robbery Homicide Division* and CBS' *Without a Trace* were chosen since neither of these shows were in any sense spin-offs, and thus fully maintained their novelty.

A similar precision was used in choosing episodes for the control group, family dramas. The episodes of *American Dreams* from NBC and *Everwood* from The WB used in this experiment had no hint of crime content in them whatever.

After reviewing videotapes of episodes from each of the four shows, one of each was chosen and edited using professional quality software to remove the commercials. Removing

advertisements accomplished two goals. First, it reduced the running time of the episodes to about 42 minutes, which allowed participants to complete the entire experiment in under an hour. Second, and more importantly, it prevented any "dating" of the episode by local news promotions, commercials for movie openings, and the like. Keeping the commercials might have increased the mundane realism of the experiment since distractions are a part of the natural television viewing experience. However, distractions also might introduce confounds to the theorized relationships and thus reduce internal validity. In the battle between these two trade-offs, internal validity was judged the more important to ensure.

As with the first experiment, students from the subject pool in the Ohio State political science department, which consists of students in political science classes who have agreed to participate in studies for extra credit in those courses, took part in this study. This sample is, of course, not representative of the country as a whole. Sears (1986) suggests that "college sophomore samples" such as the ones used here tend to be more compliant than the general population. Thus, the results presented here could exaggerate the effects of entertainment media on the average viewer. The inclusion of the NES data below suggest that the experimental findings generalize to other populations, but the possibility still remains.

In an effort to make the situation feel as natural as possible, students were invited to sign up for sessions in groups of eight people or less at a time. This was judged to be the maximum number for which a fairly organic television experience could be maintained; above eight, a "classroom" feeling might set in, detracting from the mundane realism of the experience. A total of 148 students from the subject pool signed up for and completed the experiment. At the predetermined time, the participants entered the room, set up to feel as much as possible like an ordinary living room, complete with a couch and coffee table. They were encouraged to relax and behave in the same way they would at home; most responded to these requests. Each session

had earlier been randomly assigned one of the four shows above, so that participants in each session watched their show communally, much as they would do with family or roommates.

Prior to beginning the videotape, a cover story to mask the true nature of the experiment was provided. In order to prevent participants from divining the actual reasons for the study and altering their answers, they were told it was research into selective perception and selective recall. Using a memory-related cover story had the added advantage of giving participants added incentive to pay attention to the episode, further purifying the effect of the treatment. In the post-experiment debriefing, no students guessed the true nature of the study.

Immediately after the videotape ended, participants filled out a self-administered, paper-and-pencil questionnaire that asked questions on a variety of topics, from importance of problems facing the nation and evaluations of the president on various issues to political knowledge and attitudes about fictional television. To maintain the integrity of the cover story, participants were also asked a number of recall questions about the content of the show. Finally, information on the standard demographic information was collected. (For the exact wording of the questions used in the analysis that follows, see Appendix A.)

Crime Drama Agenda-Setting

In the post-experiment questionnaire, both open-ended and closed-ended questions were included to test for agenda-setting effects. The first question they answered on the questionnaire requested their views on "the most important problems facing the country today." Participants were then given three opportunities for open-ended responses. Two first-year graduate students, blind to the purpose of the study, coded the open-ended responses, in accordance with the NES most important problem codes. Inter-coder reliability was extremely high—Pearson's r = .81, .90, and .90 for the three response opportunities. The few disagreements which affected the

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results of this study were resolved without reference to the experimental condition of the subjects in question.[10]

Later in the survey, participants also answered closed-ended questions asking them how important, in their estimation, four separate issues were: the economy, foreign relations, crime, and education. While the potential for ceiling effects exists in these variables, the wide array of potential concerns one could express in an open-ended format gave me enough pause to include both formats so that each could compensate for the weakness of the other. In point of fact, a significant agenda-setting effect is found using both measures.

Since the open-ended questions, by definition, allow respondents to answer the question any way they wish, there is no guarantee that enough of them within either condition will mention crime to render a significant effect. It makes sense, then, to combine the three responses into a larger pool of important problems and examine the difference in the number of times participants receiving the treatment condition mentioned crime-related issues to the number of times those in the control group did so. This is the approach taken in calculating the results reported in Table 2. Clearly, the programming exposure had some impact. While just under thirteen percent of participants who viewed a family drama mentioned crime or related issues at least once among their three choices for the most important problems facing America, almost 38 percent of those watching a crime drama mentioned these issues, a more than threefold increase.

Table 2 about here

The open-ended responses are not the only evidence of agenda-setting effects. The results are corroborated through the use of a series of closed-ended questions. In part to mask the true nature of this study, subjects were asked to rate the importance of the issues of the economy, foreign relations, and education on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "very

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[10] See Appendix A for complete coding details.

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important" in addition to rating the importance of crime on this scale.[11] All of these issues, with the exception of crime, were hot-button topics in the time and place the experiment took place, and so all of them received high importance marks from this sample. Indeed, without controlling for experimental condition, crime is judged to be the least important of the four by the sample, with only 56 percent of them claiming it "very important," thirteen percentage points below the third-most "very important" issue, foreign relations. It is significant, then, that in Table 3 crime is the only statistically significant result in an independent samples t-test of difference in mean importance ratings between the treatment and control groups ($t = 1.75$, $p < .05$). In fact, this is the very definition of agenda-setting—an issue considered relatively unimportant by those in the larger social context is made important through exposure to coverage of that issue. Agenda-setting theory has long held that the content of this coverage does not matter—simply the fact that exposure has occurred is enough to activate the issue's importance. These data suggest that coverage need not even be factual or intended to inform to create these effects.

Table 3 about here

Crime Drama Priming

Turning now to priming effects, recall that priming is observed when evaluations of job performance on a policy dimension made salient by a media message figure more prominently in the overall evaluations of a political figure. Priming effects have been well established in regards to news media coverage and presidential approval ratings (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982). Of interest to this study is the possibility that non-news media might also influence the criteria by which presidents are evaluated. As part of the second experiment, relevant measures were collected to test this possibility, and models of crime drama priming were estimated.

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[11] See Appendix A for coding information.

The dependent variable for these models is assessment of President George W. Bush's overall job performance. Participants in the experiment were asked to rate the president on a five-point scale in which 1 = "Strongly disapprove," 2 = "Disapprove," 3 = "Neither approve nor disapprove," 4 = "Approve," and 5 = "Strongly approve." In addition to overall approval ratings, participants were asked to rate the president along four policy dimensions (crime, the economy, education, and foreign relations) using this scale.

Exposure to crime drama is the independent variable of primary interest to this study. Participants were coded as 1 if they were exposed to one of the crime dramas and 0 if they watched a family drama instead. Demographic information as well as party identification for all participants was collected and are included here as control variables. Party identification is a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "Strong Democrat" to 7 = "Strong Republican." "Female" is coded 1 if a participant was female and 0 if they indicated they were male. "African American" is coded 1 if a participant indicated their race as "Black" and 0, otherwise.

Table 4 reports estimates from two models using ordered probit.[12] The first model is a naïve model of the impact of the various issue evaluations, demographic and political variables, and exposure to a crime drama on overall evaluations. As one would expect, issue evaluations play a significant role in determining overall evaluations of the president. How participants judged Bush's performance on crime (b = 0.47, s.e. = 0.18), the economy (b = 0.7, s.e. = 0.18) and foreign relations (b = 0.85, s.e. = 0.15) figured significantly in their overall approval of the president. The only issue not to play an important role is education (b = 0.05, s.e. =0.14). Women are significantly less approving than are men of President Bush (b = -0.53, s.e. = 0.23),

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[12] This is the preferred estimation technique when the dependent variable of interest is ordinal in nature. Estimation using ordinary least squares generates results similar to those reported below, albeit with some inefficiency due to the structural heteroscedasticity built in by using the ordinal level approval ratings.

and Republicans are significantly more approving than are Democrats (b = 0.34, s.e. =0.10). These results do not differ significantly from what one would expect.

Note that simply viewing a crime drama has a negative, but statistically insignificant, effect on overall approval ratings (b = -0.23, s.e. 0.22). This issue is addressed in further detail below, but it suggests that apart from agenda-setting and priming, simply viewing certain programs could have negative effects on the evaluations of political actors.

Table 4 about here

In the second column of Table 4, the issue evaluations are interacted with exposure to a crime drama in the experiment. At first glance, this model suggests that if there is a priming effect associated with crime dramas, it seems to be in increasing the importance of economic evaluations in making overall judgments about the president. Of the four interaction terms, the exposure x economic evaluations is the only one to achieve traditional levels of significance (b= 0.67, s.e. = 0.33). In addition, the crime and foreign relation interaction terms report coefficients with negative signs (Exposure x Crime = -0.40, Exposure x Foreign Relations = -0.37). These two coefficients suggest that for participants exposed to crime dramas increasing approval of the president along these dimensions leads to *decreased* overall approval. Although these coefficients do not achieve statistical significance, the change in signs indicates a possible backlash priming effect associated with crime drama exposure.

While I am open to this possibility, it is likely that something else is going on. As noted above, Miller and Krosnick (2000) suggest that the effects of priming are moderated by political knowledge and trust in the media source. In Tables 5 and 6, I explore the moderating effects of trust in prime-time media and political knowledge on priming, separately. Given the relatively small sample size, and the number of interaction effects, estimation would likely generate considerable multicollinearity problems. In fact, a likely explanation for the negative coefficients

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attending the interaction variables in Table 4 are possibly attributable to such multicollinearity problems between the simple issue evaluations and the issue evaluations interacted with exposure to crime dramas. Given the estimation difficulties of using one interaction variable in this relatively small sample, generating a quadruple interaction effect of issue evaluation x exposure x trust in prime-time media x political knowledge like that used by Miller and Krosnick would likely lead to untrustworthy estimates. To minimize estimation problems, the sample was split into those exposed to crime dramas and those exposed to family dramas. The impact of issue evaluations, party identification, demographic information, and trust in media for each of these two groups' overall evaluation of President Bush were estimated, interacting trust in media with crime evaluations to see if trust in fact moderates priming. This procedure was then duplicated replacing trust with political knowledge.

To capture political knowledge in the sample, a battery of eleven items testing general and specific knowledge about politics and the political system was included. Five general knowledge questions suggested by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) were employed. In addition, since the experiment is designed around crime, a number of crime-specific political knowledge questions are included. (See Appendix A for the specific questions used.) Looking at general knowledge and issue-specific knowledge separately did not change the findings included here. As such, knowledge is treated as a single index. Following Miller and Krosnick (2000), respondents are coded as 1 if they scored at or above the median number of correct responses on the knowledge index (median = 8). Respondents coded below the median were coded as 0.

Trust in crime dramas as a media source required the construction of a battery of questions seeking to gauge how viewers believed prime-time media, in particular, convey political information. These questions were based partially on questions used by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (http://people-press.org) to gauge trust in the news

media. Respondents were asked how confident they were in the ability of prime-time media to deal with social issues. In addition, they were asked if they thought prime-time media were moral or immoral, supportive of or detrimental to democracy, and supportive of or too critical of America. Responses were on a seven-point scale where low ratings indicated less confidence, beliefs of immorality, criticalness, and detriment to democracy. High ratings indicated more confidence and beliefs of prime-time media morality, democratic support, and support for America. Principal components analysis suggests that all four of these indicators load up on a single factor. An index of prime-time media trust was constructed by summing respondent ratings for these four measures. Respondents falling at or above the median trust score were coded as 1 and those falling below the median were scored as zero.

Tables 5 & 6 about here

Table 5 reports the moderating effects of trust in prime-time media as estimated for both the treatment and control groups in experiment two. The first column of the table reports ordered probit estimates of the treatment group. These estimates look very much like the naïve model estimated in the first column of Table 4. Evaluations of President Bush in regards to crime, the economy, and foreign relations seems to have a significant role in overall evaluations of the president. Again, women tend to be less approving of the president, and Republicans more approving. The second column reports estimates of the control group. These estimates do not perform as expected. Unlike the treatment group, economic evaluations and gender seem to have no statistically significant impact on overall evaluations of Bush. Although interesting, these results are not as illuminating as the interaction effect between trust in prime-time media and crime evaluations.

For the treatment group, the evaluations of those high in prime-time media trust have a significantly negative impact on overall evaluations. As approval of Bush on this dimension

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increases, overall approval of Bush decreases for high-trusting people, on average. Although a similar "backlash" effect appears in the control condition, this effect is only significant for the treatment group. It is impossible to say whether or not this effect is due to the multicollinearity issues mentioned above, or evidence of a true effect. A possible explanation for a true backlash effect is that the trust viewers have in entertainment media to convey political information produces a "rally-'round-the-flag" effect in regards to the specific topic covered by a television drama. Because viewers trust prime-time media to convey socially and politically relevant material, they grow more supportive of the president as he faces this important issue. However, because their support is tempered by concerns for the unresolved problems associated with the issue, their overall approval of the president is adversely affected. Future examinations of these data will more fully address these counterintuitive results, and will seek to resolve the issue of possible multicollinearity. Still, the findings presented in Table 5 suggest that trust in the media source might be an important moderator for priming effects associated with entertainment television.

Whereas the relationship between trust in prime-time media and priming is somewhat in question, what is not in question is the relationship between political knowledge and crime drama priming. Table 6 reports the ordered probit estimates of the moderating influence of political knowledge for viewers of crime dramas and family dramas, respectively. There appears to be no difference between these two groups based on the level of political knowledge individuals have. Because both of these models deviate substantially from the naïve model, basing inferences on them is troublesome.

However, taken together, the models estimated in Tables 5 and 6 suggest that an inference-based priming effect like that discovered by Miller and Krosnick (2000) in regards to the news media generalizes somewhat to entertainment media. In line with their argument, the

evidence presented here hint that crime drama priming might be moderated by trust in primetime media. Contrary to their argument, however, political knowledge seems to have no significant impact on the priming effects of crime dramas. Again, limitations of the models estimated in Tables 5 and 6 forbid a conclusive argument in regards to these relationships. Still, the evidence suggests that knowledge is not as much of a factor in entertainment programming as it is in television news programming. Viewers exhibit characteristics that suggest that they do not counter-argue fictional sources as much as they have been shown to counter-argue non-fictional sources, precisely because they are fictional.

These findings suggest that priming effects in entertainment television exist, albeit in a slightly different form than what are witnessed with news media. However, as the discussion above notes, this is to be expected given the vastly different roles these two media sources play in society.

NES Study: Agenda-Setting and Priming in "ER"

Although illuminating, the experimental findings reported above warrant further exploration. To generalize to shows other than crime dramas and to populations other than undergraduate political science students, I turned to the 1996 National Election Study (NES). In 1996, the NES collected data on the television viewing habits of respondents. Respondents were asked to report their viewing habits of a number of popular television programs. One of the programs mentioned was the popular "doctor drama", *ER*. In addition to this information, the normal retine of political information was collected. Of particular interest to this study are respondents' reports of the most important problems facing the country and evaluations of the overall and issue-specific performance of the president. Precise wording and coding details can be found in Appendix B.

As the results in Table 7 indicate, respondents who claimed to be weekly watchers of *ER* were significantly more likely to list health care as the most important problem facing the nation than were respondents who claimed not to be frequent watchers of the show ($\chi^2 = 2.871$, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.10$). Three other issues (the economy, foreign relations, and the environment) were explored and no significant differences between weekly viewers of *ER* and other respondents developed. Although I cannot with these data make the strong causal claim as I did with the crime drama experiment, there appears to be support for an agenda-setting effect associated with *ER*. Regardless, the 1996 NES data complement the experimental data nicely. Both crime dramas and *ER* appear to have significant agenda-setting effects.

Table 7 about here

In Table 8 I turn to the priming effects of *ER*. A number of limitations of the data prohibit as elaborate an exploration of the structure of these effects as was allowed using the experimental evidence. First, there simply are no comparable indicators of trust in the media source. As mentioned above, the indicators created for the second experiment are unique to this study. Second, the 1996 NES data contain a relatively small number of indicators of political knowledge. A number of attempts by the first author to use those indicators failed to generate anything significantly different from what is presented below. Because it is my argument that knowledge does not moderate priming in entertainment media, these results are encouraging. However, a more appropriate test of the alternative hypothesis would require better data.

Table 8 about here

Despite these minor limitations, it is still possible to estimate the priming effects of *ER* on presidential evaluations. The first column of Table 8 reports ordered probit estimates of a naïve model of overall approval ratings of President Clinton. Variables covering issue-specific evaluations, gender, race, party identification, and *ER* viewership are included. Variables are

coded as they were in experiment two with three notable exceptions. Approval is measured using a four-point, rather than a five-point scale. The middle option is excluded in the NES form of the question. Party identification is coded such that 1 = "Strong Republican" and 7 = "Strong Democrat." Thus, the expectation is that a positive coefficient will attend the party identification variable in estimating overall approval of Bill Clinton. Lastly, the *ER* variable is coded such that weekly viewers of the show are coded as 1, and all other respondents are coded as 0. The results presented below extend to respondents who claimed to watch *ER* "most weeks," albeit statistically weaker.

The naïve model estimates are highly significant and in expected directions. The only insignificant variable is weekly viewership of *ER*. In the second column, however, the introduction of an interaction effect between weekly viewership of *ER* and issue-specific evaluations has a powerful influence on the model. In line with the priming hypothesis, weekly viewership of ER appears to make evaluation of the president's performance in regards to health care a significant factor in overall approval ratings (b = 0.47, s.e. = 0.15). It does not appear to have a significant influence on evaluations of the president in regards to the environment or the economy. However, weekly viewership does seem to have a backlash effect in regards to evaluations of Clinton on the foreign relations dimension (b = -0.25, s.e. = 0.12). This result resembles the priming effect associated with crime dramas in that increasing approval along the foreign relations dimension when interacted with weekly viewing of *ER* leads to decreasing approval of the president. This may have something to do with trust in the media source. Trust in *ER* to deal with socially-relevant material might stimulate a backlash effect in other policy dimensions not covered by *ER*. Limitations in the data prohibit a fuller examination of this explanation. Future versions of this paper will more fully examine this possibility in tandem with an examination of multicollinearity as a source of this counterintuitive estimate.

It bears noting that the second model in Table 8 provides a significant improvement upon the model reported in the first column. A likelihood ratio test of the full model compared to the constrained indicates a significant improvement. A null hypothesis that the interaction effects do not provide substantial information is rejected with almost 99% confidence (χ^2 = 12.50, p = 0.014). Thus, inclusion of the interaction effects not only suggest a statistically significant priming effect is associated with *ER*, but the added information these effects provide improve considerably explanations of presidential approval ratings.

Discussion

The laboratory is an ideal place to establish the mechanism of media effects, but all too often the findings in the laboratory do not generalize to other situations and settings. Some studies have sought to bolster laboratory findings with survey data (e.g. Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1982). Here, too, I have turned to multiple of sources of data to help support a theory of entertainment media agenda-setting and priming.

The data from the 1996 National Election Study suggest that weekly viewing of *ER* contributes to increasing concerns about health care among viewers. In addition, heavy consumption of this program seems to make more important judgments of the president's performance in regards to health care in overall approval of the president. Although it is impossible to make this causal inference relying solely on these data, their suggestive power is considerable.

Evidence from the laboratory abets this argument, suggesting that crime dramas entice viewers to consider crime a more important issue facing the nation than they normally would. This finding corroborates the findings of George Gerbner and his colleagues (1980), and improves upon them by making a stronger causal argument then the correlational data used by those researchers would allow. In addition, evidence of an inference-based priming effect is

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presented. Evaluations along policy dimensions given prominent attention by this genre of television play a more significant role in the overall ratings of presidents in viewers of these programs. The trust viewers put in entertainment media to deal with social issues in a way that does not violate traditional political values appears to moderate this process, whereas political knowledge appears to play no role.

What these findings tentatively suggest is that unlike news media priming, entertainment media priming put less informational demands on viewers. Miller and Krosnick (2000) argue that it is the small number of people who are both trusting in the news media and high in political knowledge that are most prone to priming effects (303-4). The findings presented here suggest that the most susceptible population when it comes to entertainment media priming is less exclusive. Trust in the media source seems to be sufficient. Thus, it could be argued that the opportunity for opinion change in reaction to media consumption is greater for entertainment media than it is for news media.

This might be cause for some concern due to the omnipresence of this genre on television and its subtextual political nature. Crime dramas are among the most prevalent forms of entertainment on prime-time television (*TV Dimensions* 2003). While most commercial television tries to steer away from taking stands on political issues that might alienate a large segment of their audience, the networks like producing crime dramas because the stories are engaging, morally unambiguous, and translate easily into other cultures and languages. Unlike many other issues, then, crime is one that is readily studied in the context of prime-time programming because its political nature is subtextual rather than textual, and so producers are willing to dramatize it in large quantities. Despite this subtextual nature, the message appears to come through loud and clear. Given the abundance of these programs and their potential to

influence political opinion in an indirect manner, considerable more attention to this source of political information is warranted.

In fact, the findings presented here suggest that students of media and politics might be wise to cast a wider net when searching for media effects. The evidence provided here and elsewhere (see Baum 2002; Delli Carpini and Williams 1994, 1996; Feldman and Sigelman 1985; Lenart and McGraw 1989) pay tribute to the influence entertainment media have on political attitudes. Media consumers do not appear to treat non-news information sources as inconsequential. Theories of media and politics need to more closely reflect this tendency.

APPENDIX A: Experiment Two

Crime Dramas

Robbery Homicide Division: NBC drama dealing with division of Los Angeles police department responsible for investigating theft and murder. Episode traces the death of a dock security guard through a notorious gang member to his defense attorney, who is eventually charged with the crime.

Without a Trace: CBS drama dealing with FBI investigators who track down missing persons. Episode covers the disappearance of a foster child who turns out to be running from a dishonest cop after he witnesses the robbery of a donut shop that turns out to be a front for the cop's drug business.

Family Dramas

American Dreams: An ABC drama chronicling the events surrounding a Catholic family in the 1960's. The episode used examines the strained relationship between a father and son as the athletic son is reluctantly wooed by Notre Dame to play football.

Everwood: The story of a world-renowned physician (Treat Williams) who relocates his practice and his children to a small town. Appeared on WB. The episode used deals with a hermaphrodite child befriended by one of the physician's children, and a traveling psychologist whose interactions with the locals range from therapeutic to confrontational.

After viewing one of the four programs, participants were invited to complete a questionnaire containing the following questions.

Dependent Variables**.**

Agenda-setting (open-ended): "What do you think are the most important problems facing the country today? (Please list up to three problems.)" Coding: 1 = mention of crime or crime related issues (NES open-ended codes 320 (narcotics), 340 (crime), and 360 (law and order issues)), 0 = no mention of crime or crime related issues.

Agenda-setting (closed-ended): "How important an issue do you consider the economy to be?" "How important an issue do you consider our relations with foreign nations to be?" "How important an issue do you consider crime to be?" "How important an issue do you consider education to be?" All four questions are coded as follows: 1 = "Not at all important," 2 = "Not very important," 3 = "Somewhat important," and 4 = "Very important."

Priming: "In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?" Coded: 1 = "Strongly disapprove," 2 = "Disapprove," 3 = "Neither approve nor disapprove," 4 = "Approve," and 5 = "Strongly approve."

<u>Issue-specific Approval</u>.

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the economy?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling our relations with foreign countries?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling crime?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling education?"
All four questions are coded as follows: 1 = "Strongly disapprove," 2 = "Disapprove," 3 = "Neither approve nor disapprove," 4 = "Approve," and 5 = "Strongly approve."

<u>Trust in Media Source</u>.

"How much confidence do you have in prime-time television to deal with social issues responsibly?" "Do you think prime-time television is basically moral or immoral?" "Do you think prime-time television tends to defend democracy or hurt democracy?" "Do you think prime-time television tends to stand up for America or is it too critical of America?" Seven point scale. Lower values indicate "No confidence at all," "Immoral," "Hurts democracy," and "Too critical of America." Higher values indicate "A great deal of confidence," "Moral," "Defends democracy," and "Stands up for America."

Principal components analysis of the four items suggests that they load up on a single dimension. Raw responses were added together to create an index of media trust. Cronbach's alpha for this index is 0.63. Following Miller and Krosnick (2000), this index was transformed into an indicator of high or low trust in prime-time television. Participants were coded as 1 if they fell at the median or above on the trust index, and 0 if they fell below the median.

<u>Political Knowledge</u>.

Open-ended: "What job or political office is now held by Richard "Dick" Cheney?" "What is the name of the U. S. Attorney General?" "How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?" "What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called?" "Based on the results of the November election, which party will have more members in the U. S. House of Representatives?" "Which of the major parties is generally considered to be more conservative than the other at the national level?"

Closed-ended: "True or False: A district attorney's job is to defend an accused criminal who cannot afford a lawyer." "True or False: In a criminal trial, it is up to the person who is accused of a crime to prove his/her innocence." "True or False: Every decision made by a state court can be reviewed and reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court." "Who has the responsibility of determining if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?" "Who has the responsibility of nominating judges to the federal courts? Is it the President, Congress, or the Supreme Court?"

Coded: 1 = A correct response, and 0 = All other responses. A knowledge index was created by summing the eleven knowledge questions. Following Miller and Krosnick (2000), this index was transformed into an indicator of high or low knowledge. Participants were coded as 1 if they fell at the median or above on the knowledge index, and 0 if they fell below the median.

Party Identification.

"Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Coded: 1 = "Strong Democrat," 2 = "Democrat," 3 = "Independent Leaning Democratic," 4 = "Independent," 5 = "Independent Leaning Republican," 6 = "Republican," and 7 = "Strong Republican."

Demographic Variables.

Gender: "Please indicate your gender." Coded: 1 = female and 0 = male.

African-American: "Please indicate your race." Coded 1 = "Black," and 0 for all other racial categories

APPENDIX B: 1996 National Election Studies Data

Dependent variables

Agenda-setting (open-ended): "Of those you've mentioned, what would you say is the single most important problem the country faces?" Health care coding: 1 = mention of health care or related issues (NES open-ended code 40); 0 = no mention of health care or related issues. Economy coding: 1 = mention of economic issues (NES codes 400-499); 0 = no mention of economic issues. Environment coding: 1 = mention of environmental issues (NES codes 150, 151, 153, and 154); 0 = no mention of environmental issues. Foreign relations coding: 1 = mention of foreign relations (NES codes 500-599); 0 = no mention of foreign relations or related issues.

Priming: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?" Coded: 1 = "Disapprove strongly," 2 = "Disapprove not strongly," 3 = "Approve not strongly," and 4 = "Approve strongly."

Issue-specific Approval

"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling health care?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling the economy?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling our relations with foreign countries?"
"Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling the environment?"

All four questions are coded as follows: 1 = "Disapprove strongly," 2 = "Disapprove not strongly," 3 = "Approve not strongly," and 4 = "Approve strongly."

"ER" Consumption

"Do you watch 'ER' every week, most weeks, only occasionally, or not at all?" Coded: 1 = "Every week" and 0, otherwise. (Effects were similar, but statistically weaker, if respondents who stated they watched "most weeks" were included with the "every week" respondents.)

Party Identification.

"Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Coded: 1 = "Strong Republican," 2 = "Republican," 3 = "Independent Leaning Republican," 4 = "Independent," 5 = "Independent Leaning Democratic," 6 = "Democrat," and 7 = "Strong Democrat."

Demographic Variables.

Gender: "Please indicate your gender." Coded: 1 = female and 0 = male.

African-American: "Please indicate your race." Coded 1 = "Black," and 0 for all other racial categories

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Table 1: Most Important Problem Frequencies by Show Exposure (Experiment One)

	The West Wing	*Third Watch*
Crime/Violence	13	27
Other Issues	100	73

N = 213 $\qquad$ $\chi^2 = 8.352$, $p < .01$

Table 2: Most Important Problem Frequencies by Show Exposure (Experiment Two)

	Family Drama	Crime Drama
Crime/Violence	9	29
Other Issues	67	43

N = 148 $\qquad$ $\chi^2 = 15.666$, $p < 0.001$

Table 3: Mean Importance Ratings of Four Issues by Show Exposure (Experiment Two)

	Crime Drama	Family Drama	t-ratio
Crime	3.39	3.17	1.75*
Economy	3.17	3.13	0.3
Education	3.22	3.11	0.71
Foreign Relations	3.24	3.15	0.44

N = 148 $\qquad$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Predictors of Overall Presidential Approval Ratings (Experiment Two) [a]

Independent variable	Ordered Probit estimates	
Crime Evaluation	0.47** (0.18)	0.72** (0.25)
Economy Evaluation	0.7*** (0.18)	0.36 (0.23)
Foreign Relations Evaluation	0.85*** (0.15)	1.09*** (0.2)
Education Evaluation	0.05 (0.14)	-0.16 (0.2)
Exposure	-0.23 (0.22)	-1.03 (1.08)
Exposure x Crime		-0.40 (0.38)
Exposure x Economy		0.67* (0.33)
Exposure x Foreign Relations		-0.37 (0.27)
Exposure x Education		0.39 (0.3)
Female	-0.53* (0.23)	-0.53* (0.23)
African American	0.15 (0.38)	-0.08 (0.41)
Party Identification	0.34*** (0.10)	0.31** (0.10)
τ_1	3.18	2.78
τ_2	5.81	5.46
τ_3	6.88	6.62
τ_4	10.19	9.98
N	148	148
Log Likelihood	-96.6	-92.95

[a] Dependent variable: Overall approval ratings for President Bush. See APPENDIX A for coding information. Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates using ordered probit. Coefficient standard errors are in parentheses directly below coefficients. * A $p < 0.05$ level of significance; ** a $p < 0.01$ level of significance; *** a $p < 0.001$ level of significance. Estimates were computed using STATA 8.0.

Table 5: Predictors of Overall Presidential Approval Ratings: Trust as Moderator (Experiment Two) [a]

Independent variable	Crime Drama	Family Drama
Crime Evaluation	0.85*	0.94**
	(0.4)	(0.34)
Economy Evaluation	1.1***	0.48
	(0.29)	(0.26)
Foreign Relations Evaluation	0.74**	1.29***
	(0.25)	(0.26)
Education Evaluation	0.3	-0.15
	(0.24)	(0.21)
Female	-0.87**	-0.42
	(0.23)	(0.34)
African American	0.11	-0.53
	(0.6)	(0.63)
Party Identification	0.38*	0.31*
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Trust in Media	2.21	1.33
	(1.48)	(1.58)
Trust x Crime Evaluation	-0.92*	-0.22
	(0.47)	(0.46)
τ_1	5.23	4.48
τ_2	8.33	7.31
τ_3	9.81	8.39
τ_4	13.04	12.61
N	72	76
Log Likelihood	-43.25	-42.77

[a] Dependent variable: Overall approval ratings for President Bush. See APPENDIX A for coding information. Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates using ordered probit. Coefficient standard errors are in parentheses directly below coefficients. * A $p < 0.05$ level of significance; ** a $p < 0.01$ level of significance; *** a $p < 0.001$ level of significance. Estimates were computed using STATA 8.0.

Table 6: **Predictors of Overall Presidential Approval Ratings: Political Knowledge as Moderator (Experiment Two)** [a]

Independent variable	Crime Drama	Family Drama
Crime Evaluation	0.1	0.70
	(0.47)	(0.49)
Economy Evaluation	0.96***	0.39
	(0.28)	(0.25)
Foreign Relations Evaluation	0.75**	1.22***
	(0.24)	(0.25)
Education Evaluation	0.22	-0.15
	(0.23)	(0.21)
Female	-0.63	-0.36
	(0.36)	(0.33)
African American	0.19	-0.53
	(0.58)	(0.63)
Party Identification	0.34*	0.29
	(0.15)	(0.15)
Political Knowledge	-1.02	-0.77
	(1.63)	(1.87)
Knowledge x Crime Evaluation	0.37	0.14
	(0.49)	(0.54)
τ_1	2.99	2.88
τ_2	5.85	5.51
τ_3	7.11	6.6
τ_4	10.19	10.53
N	72	76
Log Likelihood	-46.84	-43.87

[a] Dependent variable: Overall approval ratings for President Bush. See APPENDIX A for coding information. Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates using ordered probit. Coefficient standard errors are in parentheses directly below coefficients. * A $p < 0.05$ level of significance; ** a $p < 0.01$ level of significance; *** a $p < 0.001$ level of significance. Estimates were computed using STATA 8.0.

Table 7: Most Important Problem of Weekly Viewers of "ER"
(1996 NES)

	χ^2
Health Care	2.871*
Economy	0.330
Foreign Relations	0.012
Environment	0.501

N = 1534, *p < .10

Table 8: Predictors of Overall Presidential Approval Ratings (1996 NES) [a]

Independent variable	Ordered Probit estimates	
Health Care	0.19***	0.17***
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Economy	0.59***	0.59***
	(0.04)	(0.05)
Foreign Relations	0.39***	0.41***
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Environment	0.3***	0.31***
	(0.04)	(0.04)
ER	-0.02	-0.34
	(0.12)	(0.49)
ER x Health Care		0.47**
		(0.15)
ER x Economy		0.04
		(0.15)
ER x Foreign Relations		-0.25*
		(0.12)
ER x Environment		-0.09
		(0.15)
Female	0.19**	0.19**
	(0.07)	(0.07)
African American	0.30*	0.31*
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Party Identification	0.23***	0.22***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
τ_1	3.35	3.33
τ_2	4.21	4.2
τ_3	6.19	6.19
N	1335	1335
Log Likelihood	-1010.66	-1004.41

[a] Dependent variable: Overall approval ratings for President Clinton. See APPENDIX B for coding information. Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates using ordered probit. Coefficient standard errors are in parentheses .
* A $p < 0.05$ level of significance; ** a $p < 0.01$ level of significance; *** a $p < 0.001$ level of significance. Estimates were computed using STATA 8.0.