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The role of race in television news coverage of shortcomings in U.S. secondary education

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THE ROLE OF RACE IN TELEVISION NEWS
COVERAGE OF SHORTCOMINGS IN U.S.
SECONDARY EDUCATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
Jasmine Elise Haynes
B.A., Dillard University, 2008
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ABSTRACT

Scholars and news media alike acknowledge that one of the main problems in education today is the minority achievement gaps in national testing. Although many education scholars have compiled several in-depth reasons as to why minorities, particularly African-American students, seem to generally lag behind their white counterparts, television news fails to give audiences a comprehensive view of why minority achievement gaps are so prevalent in United States secondary public education. The purpose of this study was to examine where news consumers perceive television news places blame for problems in public education with regards to race. Studying how people perceive where television news places blame for minority gaps in academic achievement will build on the arguments of previous research that minorities are underrepresented as victims of social and political problems.

Through a descriptive online survey of quantitative responses, this study assesses respondents' political affiliations and perspectives, their views on race, racial achievement gaps and television news coverage of those gaps. This study will discuss some of the major research on why African-Americans and other minorities struggle with academic achievement more than Whites and how television news rarely, if ever, covers these issues nor provide context to stories on African-Americans and education.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study/ Problem Statement

In March 2010, the Obama administration announced plans for a national reconstruction of the No Child Left Behind education law, based on the contention that the law's current stipulations forced some schools to reduce their requirements in order to comply with federal standards. The Bush administration passed the law in 2002 in hopes of creating a system of state reading and math tests for students in grades 3 through 8 that would identify under-performing schools. Some of the main purposes of the original No Child Left Behind educational law are that all groups of students must be able to fulfill the requirements of their grade level in all tests and demonstrate advancement every year, or face sanctions. The critics of No Child Left Behind complain that one of the main reasons the program was and is unsuccessful is that it lacks adequate funding and needs more elasticity to achieve the standards of the program. In order to combat these major problems, President Obama's administration is proposing a \$50 billion budget for No Child Left Behind, which adds \$3 billion to the original budget of the program, in order to aid schools in achieving modified goals.

Television news announces the financial changes to the program but fails to give context to the biggest issues in United States secondary education. Scholars and news media alike acknowledge that one of the main problems in education today is the minority achievement gap in national testing. Minority achievement gaps are the quantifiable disparity in scholastic performance of racial, gender and socioeconomic status groups that is generally calculated with several measures such as college enrollment and completion rates, grade point average, dropout rates and standardized test scores. Schools with the highest number of poor and minority students commonly run into obstacles for achieving No Child Left Behind objectives. Although many education scholars have compiled several in-depth reasons as to why minorities,

particularly African-American students, seem to generally lag behind their white counterparts, television news fails to give audiences a comprehensive view of why minority achievement gaps are so prevalent in United States secondary public education (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2006; Min, 2004; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Oakes 1985; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987). This study explores where news consumers perceive television news places blame for problems in public education with regards to race.

Education is an important tool in academia, career and employment success and success in the global market. If any group of American students receives less equal opportunity for educational advancement than any other group of students in and outside the country, the United States' secondary education system would be doing a great disservice to its students' success here in the United States employment and academic markets and markets abroad. It is important that news consumers receive a holistic picture of problems in minority achievement gaps and lack of equal opportunities in order to make informed decisions about supporting policies and political candidates who can aid, or even eradicate this problem.

1.2 Significance of Study

Prior studies in mass communication research observed how African-Americans are frequently overrepresented in television news stories as welfare recipients and criminals and underrepresented as crime victims and law-abiding citizens (Campbell, 1998; Dixon, 2004; Gray, 1991). These stereotypes of race in news frames prime audiences to believe that African-Americans are at fault for the United States' societal woes and that African-Americans lack motivation to be productive members of society (Gray, 1991).

The majority of research on the racial framing of news focuses on how exposure to the overrepresentation of African-Americans as perpetrators and parasites affect public opinion of blame for American societal problems with regard to race (Dixon, 2004). There is very little

research on television news coverage of education, and even less on how that coverage is framed. The researcher found no research on how television news frames disparities in public education between inner city, mostly minority populated-schools and majority White suburban public schools.

This study is important to the field of mass communication because it adds to research about African-Americans not only being overrepresented as criminals and parasites of government assistance programs, but also underrepresented as journalists, law enforcement and victims of crime and other social ills such as institutionalized racism. This study will discuss some of the major research on why African-Americans and other minorities struggle with academic achievement more than Whites and how television news rarely, if ever, covers these issues nor provide context to stories on African-Americans and education. Studying how people perceive where television news places blame for minority gaps in academic achievement will build on the arguments of previous research that minorities are underrepresented as victims of social and political problems.

If journalists, producers, and all other members of a newsroom that have an impact on news content observed research on how the racial frames they create on various subjects affect public opinion, perhaps they could move toward a goal of eliminating racialized news frames. In addition, this study has the ability to help news consumers do a better job of holding news organizations accountable for the stereotypes used while reporting the news. Thus, this investigation has the ability to encourage journalists to improve their storytelling skills by avoiding framing stories using racial stereotypes and to produce more contextual information for those who consume news. “If educated to understand the difference between including scattered oppositional facts and challenging a dominant frame, journalists might be better equipped to construct news that is equally salient- equally accessible to the average, inattentive, and

marginally informed audience- two or more interpretations of problems. This task would require a far more active and sophisticated role for reporters than they now take, resulting in more balanced reporting than what the formulaic norm of objectivity produces” (Entman, 1992, p. 333).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Salience and Priming

Salience means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to an audience. More salience increases the chances that an audience will perceive the information, give it definition, process it, and store it into memory. Texts can make bits of information more salient by placement or repetition, or by connecting them with culturally familiar symbols (Entman, 1993).

Priming is a prior action that causes pieces of memory that are more accessible to come to mind. By priming certain aspects of national life while ignoring others, television news sets the terms by which political judgments are rendered and political choices are made (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In the context of race, priming associates the method by which freshly activated information concerning a group (e.g., a stereotype) is used in making immediate judgments of “group-related stimuli” (Dixon, 2006, p. 132). The information connected to groups or stereotypes also links to memory. “When a stereotype is activated, it has the potential to bias the way that incoming information is processed, usually in ways consistent with the stereotype” (Dixon, 2006, p.132). Consequently, short-term priming correlating African-Americans to negative stereotypes such as intellectual inferiority or criminality has a likelihood of prejudicing racial group-related cognizance and discernment. “Over time, repeated exposure to these media portrayals may contribute to formation and maintenance of stereotypes about blacks. Thus, individuals with a more frequent history of exposure to an association may be even more likely to use it in judgments” (Dixon, 2006, p. 132).

2.2 Episodic and Thematic Framing

Salience and priming are tools used within a story to link ideas and memories but framing is the perspective used to shape a story. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived

reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Causal responsibility focuses on the root of a problem; treatment responsibility discusses whom or what has the power to relieve the problem. Episodic news frames appear to be a case study or event-oriented report and portrays public issues in a sense of concrete instances. According to Iyengar (1991) the thematic frame, by contrast, places public issues in some more general or abstract context and creates a report directed at general outcomes or conditions. “The difference between episodic and thematic framing is that episodic framing depicts concrete events that illustrate issues, while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence. Visually, episodic reports make ‘good pictures’ while thematic reports feature talking heads” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14). Frames possess the ability to define problems and decide what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits that are usually measured in terms of common cultural values. They also identify the forces causing the problem, make moral judgments by evaluating causal agents and their effects, and suggest and justify treatments for the problems and predict how that suggestion might bring about change (Entman, 1993).

All communicators-whether purposely or not- use frames that are guided by their own belief systems. “The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key-words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, 53). The frames that lead the receiver’s rationale and conclusions can reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the journalist. “Culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames; in fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping” (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

When journalists use thematic framing, viewers have a tendency to assign blame for national problems to general societal factors such as economic conditions, the actions or lack of action from public officials, and cultural norms. When television news coverage presents a general or analytical frame of reference for national problems, the public's reasoning about causal and treatment responsibility focuses on society. Under episodic framing, the opposite occurs; viewers attribute responsibility not to society, but to the actions of particular individuals or groups. "For example, when poverty, crime and terrorism were depicted in episodic terms, viewers attributed causal and treatment responsibility primarily to poor people, criminals, and terrorists" (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p. 379). Under episodic framing, television news sends out a plethora of stories describing and presenting images of what's happening around the nation and cause viewers to concentrate on individual and group characteristics rather than cultural, historical, social, political, or other such general forces (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

2.3 Cultural, Social, and Political Forces: The Context and Framing Television News Neglects to Cover in Stories Concerning Minority Achievement Gaps

Due to television news' lack of contextual explanations of factors of minority achievement gaps in secondary education, American public opinion tends to see a problem with the students instead of questioning what and how the structure of schools and society at large contribute to the achievement gaps of some minority groups (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2006). "Since television news is heavily episodic, its effect is generally to induce attributions of responsibility to individual victims or perpetrators rather than to broad societal forces, and hence the ultimate political impact of framing is proestablishment" (Iyengar, 1991, p. 16).

Bartlett and Brayboy (2006) argue that failure, "is a culturally necessary part of the American school scene. We do not need to explain it; we need to confront it.... [T]he ethnographer's work might be better focused on how Americans have become so preoccupied

with failure, and how, being so preoccupied, we have found ways to make so constant the attribution of failure to particular children or particular kinds of children” (p. 362).

This attribution of failure to groups of children, specifically racial groups, is harmful to not only the minorities blamed for the achievement gaps between Whites and minorities, but it also hurts the racial minority groups who excel in academia. Several researchers wrote arguments concerning the manner in which some groups are considered “model minorities,” a stereotype of hard work and success that hurts the minority group itself by failing to mention other disadvantages, such as higher rates of unemployment. This ideal stereotype also adds to the perception that other less successful groups must be the cause of their own downfalls (Min, 2004). Instead of focusing on what group of children deserve the blame for failure, television news should more closely observe the manner in which societal and institutional forces contribute to the levels of achievement within underrepresented minority students of color (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2006).

Segregation and SES

A key component that television news fails to observe in depth is to reflect on possible causes for minority achievement gaps is segregation. In 1999, 66% of African-American K-12 students and 73% of Latino K-12 students in the United States attended schools where more than half the students were not White (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Although the number of minorities attending mostly minority-populated secondary schools is past the 50% margin, White students have been and continue to be the most segregated students. White students’ segregation from African-American, Latino, and Asian students is rising and contributes to 80% of all secondary school segregation (Reardon, 2000). On the 50th anniversary of the ruling on *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka*, the Supreme Court case that ended ‘*de jure*’ segregation, various reports showed an increase of Latino and African-American students who go to predominately

minority-populated schools for secondary education. For example, during the 2001–2002 school year, almost 63% of African-American Michigan students attended schools that were 90–100% minority (Orfield & Lee, 2004). This effect has an even greater impact on inner-city schools. According to Orfield and Lee (2004), more than 58% of Latino students in the state of New York attended highly segregated schools (90–100% minority) during the 2001–2002 school year. Researchers have collected similar data in several other areas of the country. This education-related racial segregation is linked to different levels of educational opportunity. “The vast majority of intensely segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are strongly related to unequal educational opportunity” (Orfield & Lee, 2004, p. 28).

Students in the United States segregated by race tend to cause segregation by socioeconomic status, as well. Several researchers have found that when African-American and Latino students are compared with White students, African-American and Latino students have a greater probability of belonging to a family with a low socioeconomic status (SES), and residing in high-poverty communities. In addition, because of their low socioeconomic status, these minority students are also more likely to attend subpar elementary, middle and high schools and are frequently instructed under less vigorous curriculum (Ainsworth 2002; Kao, Tienda, and Schneider 1996; Oakes 1985; Roscigno 2000; Kozol 1991). For example, Orfield and Lee (2004) compared neighborhood poverty rates and found the rates to be 0.11% for White students attending majority White-populated schools; 0.16% for White students at schools with mixed race populations; and 0.25% for White students at majority minority-populated schools. These rates are higher for African-American students: 0.16% for African-Americans attending majority White-populated schools; 0.23% for African-Americans attending schools with mixed race populations; and 0.30% for African-American students attending majority minority-populated schools. The neighborhood poverty rates also increase for Latino students: 0.13% for Latino

students attending majority White-populated schools; 0.21% for Latino students attending schools with mixed race populations; and .32% for Latino students attending majority minority-populated schools.

Racial segregation in schools tends to bunch students in poverty, and since African-American and Latino students tend to come from low socioeconomic families and communities, in comparison to White students (Massey & Denton, 1993), they acquire secondary education in environments that diminish students' beliefs relevant to academic and employment opportunities. According to Wilson (1987), this weakening of beliefs concerning the importance of education in low socioeconomic communities stems from the social segregation that distances these students from values and attitudes that encourage education in preeminent American Culture. A school's socioeconomic status affects the levels of fiscal, human and physical resources accessible to educate students. Multiple studies imply a connection between academic achievement and school poverty (Myers, Kim, & Mandala, 2004). According to Myers et al. (2004), "school poverty can serve to reduce the effectiveness of teacher resources and, when used as a proxy for social capital, lends itself to declining test scores when the social capital declines" (p. 87). Thus, consistent with the literature, school poverty has a tendency to negatively influence student achievement.

Another factor in minority achievement gaps that television news fails to accurately report is that location of schools also affects student performance and achievement. Due to the fact that the majority of American secondary schools educate students from the surrounding area, most schools tend to be manifestations of the values and organizations of those communities (Gottfredson, 2001; Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins, 1999). Schools in inner city, poverty-stricken, and disorganized neighborhoods experience more school problems than schools in suburban, affluent, and organized neighborhoods (Gottfredson, 2001). Studies have demonstrated that

students attending schools in highly populated and/or inner city school districts are often subject to acts of school violence, high dropout rates, vandalism, inadequate equipment and facilities, an increased percentage of inexperienced teachers, student and teacher alienation, and educational failure (Boyd, 1991). Thus, according to the literature, inner city schools tend to have a debilitating impact on student achievement.

Even though the stipulations of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka* and other educational busing policies and mandates were put in place to provide more equal opportunities in education for minorities, minority students have yet to fully, equally benefit from the sanctions associated with segregation reforms (Gillborn, 2005). In fact, according to Bell (2004), “the statistics on resegregation...painfully underscore the fact that many Black and Hispanic children are enrolled in schools as separate and probably more unequal than those their parents and grandparents attended under the era of separate but equal” (p.114).

Opportunity to Learn

Racialized perceptions of U.S. secondary education shortcomings in television news media continue to exist because television news fails to acknowledge the lack of equal Opportunities to Learn. “Opportunity to Learn (OTL) refers to the conditions or circumstances within schools and classrooms that promote learning for all students. It includes the multiplicity of factors that create the conditions for teaching and learning, such as curricula, learning materials, facilities, teachers and instructional experiences” (Cooper & Liou, 2007, p. 44). The concept of Opportunity to Learn is neither new nor unfamiliar, but it has been given less attention since the rise of problems in closing the current achievement gap between minorities and non-minorities. As Gordon (1995) acknowledged, it is unfair and inaccurate to compare student outcomes without first analyzing the allocation of advantages, tools and resources necessary to the development of intellect and competence.

Financial and material resources are not the only necessary components for academic development and growth for students of secondary schools. Students are also heavily influenced by the perceptions, support or lack thereof from teachers and principals. Studies show that students who feel their teachers encourage them are more dedicated to acquiring educational skills and are more successful scholastically (Harachi, Abbott, Catalano, & Haggerty, 1996; Murdock, 1996). One of the most consistent reports on school-based selection processes is that, when asked to judge the potential, attitude and/or motivation of their students, White teachers had a tendency to place disproportionate amounts of African-American students in low ranked groups (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998). When White teachers repeatedly make such decisions, overtime, they have a cumulative effect on the amount of African-American and minority students' opportunities to advance; thus, African-American students face increasing roadblocks on the path of academia, making success almost impossible (Cooper & Liou, 2007). For example, when students are placed in low-ranked teaching groups they often cover a limited curriculum that limits their chances of success and their teachers have systematically lower expectations of them (Cooper & Liou, 2007). Television news not only rarely covers these possible causes of minority achievement gaps, but news also fails to question whether these practices would be allowed if the students victims were mostly middle class Whites.

Another frame that television news fails to explore is that students in segregated minority schools encounter circumstances that students in segregated White schools rarely face (Orfield & Lee, 2004). House (1999) noted that the U.S. retains students, i.e., holding them back a year, and Americans will support policies that are harmful to minorities that they would not tolerate if those same policies were applied to majority populations. In education, for example, Americans are strongly in favor of retention—retaining students at the same grade level for another year—

even though the research evidence overwhelmingly shows strong negative effects (Cooper & Liou, 2007). Retention programs are applied massively to minorities in large cities, but not to majority populations (House, 1999). Retention is only a part of the problem. There are a plethora of solutions to many education-related problems that television news does not bring to the public's attention such as hiring a more diverse faculty, creating a more multicultural curriculum, and doing away with racially and culturally biased standardized testing.

One solution often relatively unexplored is hiring teachers whose ethnicities reflect the ethnicities of the student body in secondary schools. Ferguson's (1998) studies concerning teacher effects suggests that teachers frequently have racially-biased perceptions of their students and that minority students are especially observant and sensitive to teachers' perceptions. It is possible that this bias will be minimized if students have a teacher of the same race. Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, and Brewer (1995) observed this possible achievement gap aid with National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data, found that students receive reasonably higher-than-average assessments from teachers who share their racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds.

Ladson-Billings (1994) presents a similar contention. She also argues that African-American teachers' constant use of cultural commentary that is indigenous to African-American culture and history to convey information and cultivate skills, enhances the inspiration and performance of African-American students. Foster (1990, 1997) suggests that African-American teachers are exceptionally effective teachers of African-American students due to the political messages they communicate to their students. Whereas blame-the-victim interpretation of racial inequality are the normal societal belief in integrated schools, Foster found that African-American teachers are dedicated to reversing the status quo by concentrating on the roots and results of racial inequality and the inequitable power connections in society. This dissimilarity,

the teachers believe, benefits African-American students by motivating them to progress in school because they learn the political significance of education.

Many argue that more coverage should be given to testing specifically because “high-stakes testing, school performance tables and selection by ‘ability’ are all being used increasingly—despite their *known* detrimental impact on Black students” (Gillborn, 2005, p.499). Here the author is referring to African-Americans scoring below Whites and below accepted levels of performance. “Racist measures are not only retained, but actually extended, suggests that policy-makers have decided (tacitly, if not explicitly) to place race *equity* at the margins—thereby retaining race *injustice* at the center” (Gillborn, 2005, p.499).

Although there is ample research on how standardized testing and IQ tests are flawed measures of intelligence and are culturally biased, television news continues to ignore biased testing’s effect on minority achievement gaps. In response to a discussion about different levels of measured intelligence between Whites and Blacks, a committee of the American Psychological Association considered the salience of historical and cultural deprivation and concluded that IQ test are culturally biased (Williams, 2009). The official report on the decision stated that, “only a single generation has passed since the Civil Rights movement opened doors for African-Americans, and many forms of discrimination are still all too familiar in their experience today...discrimination is also a sharp reminder of a still more intolerable past. It would be rash indeed to assume that those experiences, and that historical legacy, have no impact on intellectual development” (Jackson & Weidman 2004, p. 232).

Another missing angle of framing education stories about minority achievement gaps in television news is teacher stereotypes and interactions with African-American students. Research shows that stereotypes about African-Americans prevent teachers and other educators from seeing the students’ potential and teachers often have lower expectations for African-

American students and other students of color (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002; Steele, 2003). Instead, educators focus on the shortcomings (both real and perceived) of these students. For example, Barlett and Brayboy (2006) did an ethnographic study of teachers taking diversity training in two schools and found that one of the White special education teachers stated that she seldom allowed her African-American students to leave their special education placements even when they have achieved and surpassed their goals. The teacher does this because she feels their families are dysfunctional and she is convinced they will always “need assistance” (p. 440). This belief that Black students can only achieve extremely limited levels of academic excellence, lead the teacher to feel justified in designing the lesson plans to have less performance requirements; thus, under-preparing African-American and other minority students for standardized testing and pursuits of higher education or employment after completing secondary school (Barlett & Brayboy, 2006).

This study adds knowledge to the fields of mass communication and education because it demonstrates that even those who pursue higher education are influenced by television news. This demographic is known to have the ability to better comprehend and process news information than lesser-educated consumers. Even those in the college educated demographic develop misinformed opinions based on news frames of minority intellectual inferiority and incompetence.

2.4 Research Questions

R1: How much do respondents perceive that television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

R2: How does age, ethnicity and party affiliation influence where respondents perceive that television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

R2^a: How does ethnicity, age, class and party affiliation affect where respondents personally view the blame for disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans should be?

R3: How does frequency of viewing television news and fictional shows centered on education affect where respondents perceive television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

R3a: How does frequency of viewing television news and fictional shows centered on education affect where respondents personally place blame when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

R4: How does type of secondary education and type of institution of higher learning affect where respondents perceived television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

R5: How does symbolic racism affect where respondents perceive local, network and cable television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Survey Research Method

This analysis focuses on where news consumers perceive local and national television news places blame for problems in public secondary education with regards to race. Survey analysis was selected as a research method due to its quantitative measuring strengths. The survey research method presents an opportunity for respondents to not only communicate their perceptions of television news frames on U.S. secondary education minority achievement gaps over time, but also over a multitude of local and national television news sources and platforms.

An online survey was developed to assess respondents' political affiliations and perspectives, their views on race, racial achievement gaps and television news coverage of those gaps. An online survey was the most advantageous method of measuring this because when respondents are given the privacy of their computer screens, it lessens the chances of people presenting answers that are socially desirable as opposed to truthful responses. It would be difficult to execute in-person interviews because people tend to fear social stigma when discussing political views and matters concerning race. Online surveys are also beneficial because they conserve time, expedite the circulation and gathering of data and allow researchers to reach a plethora of people even when divided by geographic distances (Wright, 2005). In addition, online surveys eliminate issues with the price of postage, printing paper and other costly factors of data processing (Wright, 2005).

3.2 Measurement

The goal of this survey was to measure personal beliefs about African-Americans and education, and to measure how large respondents viewed educational achievement gaps between African-Americans and Whites; where respondents perceive local, network and cable television

news place blame for minority achievement gaps and what media and other sources impact respondents' perceptions concerning education.

Perception of African-Americans and Persons of Low SES and Symbolic Racism Scale

To answer the proposed research questions, the data for this study is based on an online survey of 155 college students conducted from April 24 to May 3, 2010. The researcher utilized the Manship School of Mass Communication's MEL research pool to gain respondents from Louisiana State University. The researcher created the survey at surveymonkey.com and placed the link to the survey in emails and facebook messages snowball sampling techniques were used through five other students in order to involve other college students from multiple colleges and universities that differed from Louisiana State University in financial support, size and location.

College students have continued schooling beyond basic requirements, earned a high school diploma and have pursued higher education. In addition, according to Henry and Sears (2003), symbolic racism has an equally as strong affect on the racial policy decisions of persons who pursued higher learning as those who did not pursue higher learning. Symbolic racism is commonly characterized as a clear political belief system that represents four distinct ideas: the mindset that (1) African-Americans no longer grapple with discrimination or prejudice; (2) African-Americans' lack of success with advancement is caused by their reluctance to work hard enough; (3) African-Americans desire too much too soon; and (4) African-Americans receive more than they are entitled (Henry & Sears, 2002; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000; Tarman & Sears, 2003).

Some of the questions in this survey are based on the Symbolic Racism Scale, created by Henry and Sears (2003) because the authors created it to have scaling properties that aid the prevention of untruthful, socially desirable answers and other thoughtless responses. This scale is a crucial tool of measurement because it was created based on the premise of new symbolic

racism, which is stimulated by symbols like crime, welfare, single parenting, and the view that African-Americans possess more than they deserve (Sears & Henry, 2003). News stories consistently shape and continuously apply these images as racial frames. The symbolic racism scale has been mostly used in sociological and psychological studies and has three main critiques, but the critiques have been proven to be merely speculative. The three main critiques are that “1) symbolic racism has been conceptualized and measured in inconsistent ways; 2) it reflects multiple and diverse elements rather than a single construct; and 3) its measures are so similar to the policy preferences it purports to predict that the main findings are mere tautologies” (Henry & Sears, 2002, p. 275). However, none of the critics have been able to present supportive empirical data for alternative theories where as several research provides empirical data that bring validity to symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002).

To measure if respondents exhibit signs of symbolic racism, the researcher used five-point Likert scales for the perceptions of African-Americans and low socioeconomic persons section of the survey. This type of measurement was also used to measure stereotypes in reaction to assertions that African-Americans were the cause of plummeting living standards in National Election Survey (NES, 1985, 1986). The researcher measured perceptions concerning African-Americans with the subsequent questions: “How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think African-Americans are responsible for creating,” and “How much discrimination against African-Americans do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead.” Answers were tabulated as 1 for persons who responded, “all of it,” 2 for those who responded “a lot,” 3 for responses “some,” 4 for those who responded “a little,” and 5 for persons who responded “none at all” to those questions. The researcher also gauged beliefs about African-Americans by asking respondents to check how much they agree with the following statements: “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if

African-Americans would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites;” “Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. African-Americans should do the same;” and “Over the past few years, African-Americans have gotten more economically than they deserve.”

To offer a counter position, a corresponding statement asked respondents to check how much they agreed African-Americans received less than they deserved and if “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African-Americans to work their way out of lower class.” Answers were coded as 1 for persons who responded, “strongly agree;” 2 for those who responded “somewhat agree;” 3 for responses “neither agree nor disagree;” 4 for those who responded “somewhat disagree;” and 5 for persons who responded “strongly disagree” to those questions. Responses to questions based on the Symbolic Racism scale were used as an independent variable in a multiple linear regression with respondents’ view of where television places blame for African-American achievement gaps as dependent variables.

In order to measure respondents’ personal view of who is to blame for racial minority achievement gaps, respondents were asked, “How much do you feel each is responsible for the lack of educational advancements for African-Americans,” and then an identical question concerning educational advancements for persons of low-socioeconomic status. In order to provide the most clarity possible, for each question that included a reference to ‘educational advancements,’ the phrase was defined in terms of low test scores, teachers’ instructional communication skills and curriculum goals.

The researcher presented three options to attribute blame, 1) individuals or groups of racial or socioeconomic status, 2) Government/Politicians and 3) teachers and those in the profession of education. Respondents were asked to check a response from a drop-down Lickert

scale under each of the three options. Answers were tabulated as 1 for persons who responded, “all of it;” 2 for those who responded “a lot;” 3 for responses “some;” 4 for those who responded “a little;” and 5 for persons who responded “non at all” to those questions. Personal attributions of blame were calculated as dependent variables.

Episodic and Thematic Frames in Local, Network and Cable TV News

This survey not only observes personal perceptions but it also attempts to gauge where news consumers believe television news places blame for minority achievement gaps in education. When television news communicates stories in either a thematic or an episodic manner, television influences the assignment of cause or blame. Since several studies suggests that the overwhelming majority of television news is framed episodically, television news tends to encourage attributions of responsibility to “individual victims or perpetrators” as opposed to larger cultural and national dynamics (Iyengar, 1991).

In order to measure where news consumers perceive television news places blame for racial minority achievement gaps, the researcher used a five-point Likert scale to specify how much blame is attributed to African-Americans. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they felt local, network and cable television news blames individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans. In order to offer a counter position, respondents were asked to indicate how much they felt local, network and cable television news blames the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans. Because race and class are often both factors of educational achievement gaps and lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (Iyengar, 1991), respondents were asked to respond to identical questions concerning persons of low socioeconomic status as opposed to African-Americans. Answers were coded as 1 for persons who responded, “strongly agree;” 2 for those who responded “somewhat agree;” 3 for

responses “neither agree nor disagree;” 4 for those who responded “somewhat disagree;” and 5 for persons who responded “strongly disagree” to those questions. All responses pertaining to blame were dependent variables.

Influences on Beliefs about Education

In order to avoid survey fatigue, media consumption, and demographic and educational influence questions were reserved for the end of the survey. Respondents were asked how often they watched fictional shows involving or based in education. Answers were tabulated as 1 for persons who responded, “never;” 2 for those who responded “rarely;” 3 for responses “sometimes;” 4 for those who responded “often;” and 5 for persons who responded “all the time” to those questions. Viewing frequency education-based fictional shows were independent variables.

The survey contained several questions concerning news media usage. Respondents were asked how often they watched television news, listened to news on the radio, read the newspaper, read online news, watch local television news, use online sources for news and use magazines as a source for news. Responses were coded as 1 for persons who responded, “never;” 2 for those who responded “once or twice a month;” 3 for responses “1 to 2 times a week;” 4 for those who responded “3 to 5 times a week;” and 5 for persons who responded “everyday” to those questions. Respondents were given the options ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC and FOX to indicate which television news sources they use the most frequently to find national and international news. The survey also had an ‘other’ option that allowed respondents to specify news sources if the ones listed were not appropriate options. Frequency of television news watching was measured as an independent variable.

For demographic information purposes, respondents were asked to indicate their age, race, details surrounding their K through 12 and higher education, and non-media related

influences on personal beliefs about education. Students also answered questions about their self-perceived family socioeconomic status. Questions concerning political party and ideology were included in the survey because several studies show significant links between attitudes towards African-Americans and other racial minorities and political affiliation (Bobo, 2000; Hughes, 1997; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sears et al., 1997; Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratto, 1992; Sidanius et al., 1999). This measure was coded 1 for conservative, 2 for moderate and 3 for liberal.

Data Analysis

After collecting and analyzing the surveys the researcher ran regressions to evaluate how the predictors of ethnicity, party affiliation, age, frequency of television news watching, frequency of watching fictional shows concerning education impacted the criterion of where respondents view television news places blame. The researcher also ran paired-sample *t* tests in order to compare responses to two different survey questions of persons who exhibited symbolic racism.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Summary

This study addressed how college students perceive local, cable and network television news placed blame on race, specifically African-Americans, when it comes to coverage of minority achievement gaps in United States secondary education. Results were tabulated and analyzed using quantitative statistical methods including regressions and paired t tests with SPSS predictive analytics software. Although most inquiries did not produce significant findings, news viewing frequency did significantly predict respondents' personal blame towards teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps. There were also significant findings with persons who exhibited symbolic racism and how their personal beliefs opposed their perceptions of where television news placed blame for African-American minority achievement gaps.

4.2 Demographic Overview

The responses of the survey participants cannot be considered representative of where all college students perceive local, cable and national television news projected blame for the racial achievement gaps in secondary education in the United States. However, they do provide insight into some college students' perception. Out of the 156 respondents, the average respondent was 21 years old, White, politically affiliated with the Republican Party, belonging to the upper-middle class, currently attending a Predominately White Institution of higher learning and received their secondary education in a suburban public school. Table 1 presents an overview of the respondents' demographic information.

R1: Perception of TV News' Placement of Blame for Minority Achievement Gaps

When respondents were asked how much they agreed that local television news blames African-Americans for their lack of equal opportunities in education, 40.5% of respondents

Table 1 Demographic Overview

Variable	Percentage (N=156)
Ethnicity	
African-American/Black	20.9 (33)
Asian/Asian American	1.9 (3)
White	71.6 (113)
Political Ideology	
Conservative	38.7 (60)
Liberal	20.0 (31)
Moderate	41.3 (64)
No response	(1)
Self-reported class bracket	
Poverty/ low-lower class	3.9 (6)
Upper-lower class	3.9 (6)
Lower-middle class	24.7 (38)
Upper-middle class	54.5 (84)
Lower-upper class	8.4 (13)
High-upper class/wealthy	4.6 (7)
No response	(2)
Political Party Affiliation	
Democrat	30.3 (46)
Independent	17.8 (27)
Republican	40.8 (62)
I have no political party affiliation	11.2 (17)
No response	(4)
K through 12 Education	
Inner-city public school	18.7 (29)
Suburban public school	40.0 (62)
Inner-city private	13.5 (21)
Suburban private	27.1 (42)
Home schooled	.6 (1)
No response	(1)
Size and Funding of Four-year Institution	
Small and Public	4.0 (6)
Small and Private	9.8 (15)
Large and Public	79.7 (122)
Large and Private	6.5 (10)
No response	(3)
Demographics of Four-year Institution	
PWI (Predominately White Institution)	91.6 (141)
HBCU (Historically Black College or University)	8.4 (13)
No response	(2)

somewhat agreed and 7.8% strongly agreed. Table 2 gives an overview of respondents' perception of where television news places blame for minority achievement gaps.

Table 2 Perception of Where TV News Places Blame for Minority Achievement Gaps

State how much you agree with each statement. <i>Local TV news blames individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans.</i>				
Strongly Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
7.8% (12)	40.5% (62)	29.4% (45)	16.3% (25)	6% (9)
<i>Network and cable news blame individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans.</i>				
5.3% (8)	45.4% (69)	23.0% (35)	19.1% (29)	7.2% (11)
<i>Local TV news blames the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans.</i>				
7.8% (12)	39.6% (61)	26.6% (41)	20.8% (32)	5.2% (8)
<i>Network and cable news blame the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans.</i>				
12.9% (20)	41.3% (64)	26.5% (41)	14.2% (22)	5.1% (8)

R2: Age, Ethnicity, Party affiliation and perceived blame of African-Americans for Minority Achievement Gaps

Four multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict how ethnicity and party affiliation influenced where respondents perceive television news placed blame for the disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. The first analysis included ethnicity and party affiliation as predictors and how much respondents perceived local news blamed the government for African-American minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variable. Based on these results, the regression equation was not significant, $R^2=.039$, adjusted $R^2=.006$, $F(5, 148)=1.171$, $p=.360$, $\beta=-.086$.

The second analysis included ethnicity and party affiliation as predictors and how much respondents perceived cable and network news blamed African-Americans for African-American minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variable. Based on these results, neither ethnicity nor party affiliation significantly affected respondents' perception of television news' blame $R^2=.073$, adjusted $R^2=.041$, $F(5, 150)=2.273$, $p=.734$, $\beta=-.030$.

The third analysis included ethnicity and party affiliation as predictors and how much respondents perceived local television news blamed African-Americans for African-American minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variable. Based on these results, the regression equation was not significant, $R^2=.035$, adjusted $R^2=.001$, $F(5, 146)=1.025$, $p=.915$, $\beta=-.010$.

The fourth analysis observed ethnicity and party affiliation's interaction with television news blaming African-Americans for minority achievement gaps. Based on these results, the regression equation was not significant, $R^2=.023$, adjusted $R^2= -.011$, $F(5, 149) =.664$, $p=.652$, $\beta=.031$.

R2a: Age, Ethnicity, Class, Party Affiliation and Personal Blame

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict how ethnicity, age, party affiliation and class influence where respondents personally place blame for the disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. The results of the first analysis concluded that ethnicity, age, party affiliation and class did not significantly impact how much respondents personally blamed the government for African-American minority achievement gaps, $R^2=.084$, adjusted $R^2=.037$, $F(7, 136)=.095$, $p=.186$, $\beta=.117$.

The second analysis determined that ethnicity, age, party affiliation and class did not dictate how much respondents personally blamed African-Americans for African-American minority achievement gaps, $R^2=.092$, adjusted $R^2=.045$, $F(7, 136)=.063$, $p=.133$, $\beta=-.138$.

Neither ethnicity, age nor party affiliation significantly predicted how much respondents personally blamed African-Americans for minority achievement gaps. Table 3 is a regression table of the previously mentioned regressions.

Table 3 Research Question 2^a Regression Table

Predictors	Government Blame		Individual Blame	
	News	Personal Blame	News	Personal Blame
Political Party	-.066	-.138	-.049	.159
Family class	-.183	-.040	.108	.117
Age	.253	.010	.156	.083
African-American	.160	.207	.191	.245
Asian-American	.138	.007	-.051	.066
Hispanic-American	-.028	-.023	.010	.171
White	.196	.034	-.096	.333
Adjusted R ²	.077	.037	.065	.045
<i>F</i>	.905	.095	.168	.063

R3: News viewing and Fictional education-based show frequency and perception of where television news placed blame

Survey results show that only 10.3% of respondents watch television news everyday and that only 5.2% respondents watch fictional education-based television shows with much frequency. Table 4 gives an overview of the respondents' use of traditional media and table 5 presents the view frequency of fictional education-based television shows.

Several multiple regression analyses were performed to answer R3. First, a regression analysis was performed between the dependent variable of how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame on African-Americans for African-American

Table 4 Frequency of Media Usage

How often respondents use the following types of media	Everyday	3-5 times a week	1-2 times a week	Once or twice a month	Never
Television News	10.3% (16)	29.7% (46)	36.1% (56)	20.6% (32)	3.3% (5)
Radio	13.2% (20)	15.8% (24)	23.7% (36)	26.3% (40)	21.2% (32)
Newspapers	18.5% (28)	24.5% (37)	23.8% (36)	23.8% (36)	9.4% (14)
Online News	33.3% (51)	23.5% (36)	23.5% (36)	14.4% (22)	5.3% (8)
Magazines	.6% (1)	8.4% (13)	16.1% (25)	47.1% (73)	27.8% (43)

Table 5 Fictional Education-Based TV Show Watching Frequency

<i>How often do you watch fictional shows involving or based in education (i.e. Glee, Boston Public, etc.)?</i>				
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time
18.3% (28)	30.1% (46)	26.8% (41)	19.6% (30)	5.2% (8)

achievement gaps in education and the independent variables of television news watching frequency and fictional education-based television show viewing frequency.

No violations of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity of residual were detected. Regression analysis revealed that news and education-based show viewing together, did not significantly predict how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps, $F(2,148) = .725$, $R^2 = .010$, $p = .486$, $\beta = -.099$.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and how much respondents viewed network and cable television news placed blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps in education, television news viewing frequency ($\beta = -.099$, $p = .231$), and fictional education show viewing frequency ($\beta = -.004$, $p = .965$) neither significantly

predicted how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps in education on an individual level.

A regression performed between the dependent variable of how much respondents viewed local television news placed blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps in education and the independent variables of television news watching frequency and fictional education-based television show viewing frequency did not reveal any significant interaction, $F(2,147) = .053$, $R^2 = .001$, $p = .748$.

Concerning individual relationships, neither television news viewing frequency ($\beta = .004$, $p = .965$), nor fictional education show viewing frequency ($\beta = -.027$, $p = .748$) significantly predicted how much respondents viewed local television places blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps in education

A multiple regression analysis was performed between the dependent variable of how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame on the government for African-American achievement gaps in education and the independent variables of television news watching frequency and fictional education-based television show viewing frequency.

Regression analysis revealed that news and education-based show viewing did not significantly predict how much respondents viewed cable and network television news placed blame on the government for African-American achievement gaps, $F(2,150) = 1.048$, $R^2 = .014$, $p = .233$. Neither television news viewing frequency ($\beta = -.066$, $p = .423$), nor fictional education show viewing frequency ($\beta = -.098$, $p = .233$) individually had any influence on how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame the government for African-American achievement gaps in education.

A regression analysis between the dependent variable of how much respondents viewed local television placed blame on the government for African-American achievement gaps in

education and the independent variables of television news watching frequency and fictional education-based television show viewing frequency did not produce evidence of a influential relationship, $F(2,149)= 1.617$, $R^2=.022$, $p=.078$. Neither television news viewing frequency ($\beta=.025$, $p=.762$), nor fictional education show viewing frequency ($\beta=-.145$, $p=.078$) individually predicted how much respondents viewed network and cable television placed blame on African-Americans for African-American achievement gaps in education.

R3^a: News Viewing and Fictional Education-based show Frequency and Personal Blame

According to the results of a regression analysis that evaluated how well television news watching frequency and fictional education-based show watching frequency predicted how much respondents personally blamed teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps, television news viewing frequency ($\beta=.165$, $p=.044$) did not significantly impact personal blame. Only news viewing frequency significantly predicted personal blame towards teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps, $F(2, 148)=2.359$, $\beta=-.055$, $p=.499$.

Table 6 presents indices to indicate the relative strength of the individual predictors. For this particular regression, $R=.177$; $R^2 =.031$; $\text{adj } R^2 =.01$; $B= 2.526$; β of news watching frequency= .165, β of fiction show viewing frequency = -.055.

Table 6 Relative Strength of Show Frequencies

Predictors	Beta scores between each predictor and personal blame of teachers	Beta scores between each predictor and personal blame of teachers controlling for other predictors
News watching frequency	.168*	.165*
Fiction education-based show frequency	-.064	-.056
* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$		

A second regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well television news watching frequency and fictional education-based show watching frequency predicted how much respondents personally blamed the government for African-American minority achievement gaps. Regression analysis revealed that in terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and personal blame for the government, television news viewing frequency ($\beta=.237$, $p=.003$) and fictional education-based show viewing frequency, only news viewing frequency significantly predicted personal blame towards teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps, $F(2, 148)=5.584$, $\beta=-.110$, $p=.171$.

Table 7 presents indices to indicate the relative strength of the individual predictors. For this particular regression, $R=.267$; $R^2=.071$; adj $R^2=.058$; $B=2.652$.

Table 7 Relative Strength of Individual Predictors

Predictors	Beta scores between each predictor and personal blame of the government	Beta scores between each predictor and personal blame of the government controlling for other predictors
News watching frequency	.243**	.239**
Fiction education-based show frequency	-.122	-.113
* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$		

A third regression analysis revealed that neither television news viewing frequency ($\beta=.004$, $p=.963$) nor fictional education-based show viewing frequency ($\beta=-.058$, $p=.487$) significantly predicted personal blame towards teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps, $F(2, 148)=.247$.

R4: Secondary education, Type of Higher Learning, and effects on Personal blame for Minority Achievement Gaps

Four multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict where respondents personally place blame for minority achievement gaps. One analysis included size and funding of higher education, type of secondary schooling and racial demographic of institution of higher learning as predictors and how much respondents perceived local news blamed African-Americans for African-American minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variable. Based on these results, the regression equation was not significant, $R^2=.073$, adjusted $R^2=-.001$, $F(3, 133)=1.223$, $p=.450$, $\beta=.191$.

The second analysis included size and funding of higher education, type of secondary schooling and racial demographic of institution of higher learning as predictors and how much respondents perceived cable and network news blamed African-Americans for African-American minority achievement gaps served as an dependent variables. None of the interactions between the predictors and dependent variables were significant, $R^2=.130$, adjusted $R^2=-.065$, $F(3, 133)=.918$, $p=.587$, $\beta=-.049$.

The third analysis included size and funding of higher education, type of secondary schooling and racial demographic of institution of higher learning as predictors and how much respondents perceived local news blamed the government for African-American minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variables. Based on these results, the regression equation was not significant, $R^2=.142$, adjusted $R^2=-.077$, $F(3, 131)=.441$, $p=.472$, $\beta=-.066$.

The fourth analysis included size and funding of higher education, type of secondary schooling and racial demographic of institution of higher learning as predictors and how much respondents perceived cable and network news blamed the government for African-American

minority achievement gaps served as a dependent variable. These results also did not yield a significant interaction, $R^2=.123$, adjusted $R^2=.056$, $F(3, 132)=.889$, $p=.750$, $\beta=.029$.

R5: Symbolic Racism's affect on perception of how much Television News blamed African-Americans for Minority Achievement Gaps

Respondents were asked seven questions to test for attitudes and beliefs reflecting symbolic racism. Table 8 exhibits respondents' answers to those seven questions.

Table 8 Symbolic Racism: Attitudes and Beliefs

<i>1. How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think African-Americans are responsible for creating?</i>				
All of it	A lot	Some	A little	None at all
.6 % (1)	38.1% (59)	41.3% (64)	18.1% (28)	1.9% (3)
<i>2. How much discrimination against African-Americans do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?</i>				
1.3% (2)	26.5% (41)	41.9% (65)	23.9% (37)	6.4% (10)
<i>3. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if African-Americans would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites.</i>				
Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
17.4% (27)	37.4% (58)	20.0% (31)	16.8% (26)	8.4% (13)
<i>4. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. African-Americans should do the same.</i>				
33.3% (51)	32.0% (49)	17.6% (27)	12.4% (19)	4.7% (7)
14.3% (22)	37.0% (57)	16.2% (25)	17.5% (27)	15.0% (23)
<i>6. Over the past few years, African-Americans have gotten less economically than they deserve.</i>				
7.1% (11)	22.6% (35)	25.8% (40)	26.5% (41)	18.0% (28)
<i>7. Over the past few years, African-Americans have gotten more economically than they deserve.</i>				
3.2% (5)	15.5% (24)	41.9% (65)	19.4% (30)	20.0% (31)

Four paired-samples *t* tests were conducted to evaluate how symbolic racism affects where respondents perceive local, network and cable television news blames individuals and social groups in society, and the government when it comes to African-American achievement gaps. From the above table 8, persons who responded “all of it” or “a lot” to question one; persons who responded “a little” or “none at all” to question two; persons who responded “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” to questions three, four and seven; and persons who responded “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree” to questions five and six exhibited signs of symbolic racism. Only the responses of those who exhibited symbolic racism were evaluated in the following *t* tests.

First, the researcher paired perception of how much local news blamed African-Americans and perception of how much local news blamed the government for African-American achievement gaps. The results indicated the mean perception of local news blaming African-Americans ($M= 3.057$, $SD= 1.109$) was not significantly different from the mean perception of local news blaming the government ($M=2.771$, $SD=1.031$), $t(34)= 1.010$, $p=.319$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was $-.288$ to $.860$.

The second *t* test paired perception of how much network and cable news blamed African-Americans and perception of how much network and cable news blamed the government for African-American achievement gaps. The results indicated the mean perception of network and cable news blaming African-Americans ($M= 3.057$, $SD= 1.027$) was not significantly different from the mean perception of local news blaming the government ($M=3.114$, $SD=1.105$), $t(34)= -.259$, $p=.797$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was $-.505$ to $.391$.

The third *t* test paired perception of how much network and cable news blamed government and perception of how much local news blamed the government for African-

American achievement gaps. The results indicated the mean perception of network and cable news blaming the government ($M= 3.055$, $SD= 1.145$) was not significantly different from the mean perception of local news blaming the government ($M=2.805$, $SD=1.037$), $t(35)= 1.505$, $p=.141$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was $-.087$ to $.587$.

The fourth t test compared perception of how much local news blamed African-Americans and perception of how much network and cable news blamed the government for African-American achievement gaps. The results indicated the mean perception of local news blaming African-Americans ($M= 3.029$, $SD= 1.114$) was not significantly different from the mean perception of network and cable news blaming African-Americans ($M=3.029$, $SD=1.029$), $t(33)= .000$, $p=1.000$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was $-.087$ to $.587$.

Although the t tests performed to answer R4, did not reveal significant interactions, t tests comparing where persons who exhibit symbolic racism personally place blame for African-American achievement gaps and where they perceive television news place blame did produce some significant results. Four paired-samples t test were conducted to compare the personal placement of blame from persons who exhibit symbolic racism to where they perceive local, network and cable television news blames individuals, social groups and the government when it comes to African-American achievement gaps. Table 9 shows the results of where respondents personally place blame for African-American minority achievement gaps.

The first paired-samples t test paired perception of how much local news blamed African-Americans and personal placement of blame towards the government for African-American achievement gaps. The results indicated the mean perception of local news blaming African-Americans ($M= 2.805$, $SD= 1.037$) did not significantly differ from the mean personal placement

Table 9 Where Respondents Personally Place Blame for Minority Achievement Gaps

<i>How much do you feel each is responsible for the lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for African-Americans?</i>	Completely	A lot	Some	A Little	None at all
African-Americans	9.0% (14)	35.3% (55)	36.5% (57)	15.4% (24)	3.9% (6)
Government/Politicians	6.4% (10)	28.2% (44)	41.7% (65)	19.2% (30)	4.6% (7)
Teachers/Education Professionals	5.8% (9)	30.8% (48)	28.8% (45)	23.7% (37)	10.9% (7)

of blame towards African-Americans ($M=2.583$, $SD=.874$), $t(35)= 1.016$, $p=.316$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was -.221 to .666.

The second t test compared perception of how much cable and network news blamed the government and personal placement of blame towards the government for African-American achievement gap. The results indicated the mean perception of cable and network news blaming government ($M= 3.055$, $SD= 1.145$) was not significantly different from the mean personal placement of blame towards the government ($M=2.583$, $SD=.874$), $t(35)= 1.016$, $p=.058$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was -.016 to .960.

The third t test paired perception of how much local news blamed African-Americans and personal placement of blame towards African-Americans for African-American achievement gap. The results indicated the mean perception of local news blaming African-Americans ($M= 3.057$, $SD= 1.109$) was significantly less than the mean personal placement of blame towards African-Americans ($M=3.857$, $SD=.912$), $t(34)= -4.179$, $p<.001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was -1.189 to -.411.

The fourth t test compared perception of how much cable and network news blamed African-Americans and personal placement of blame towards African-Americans for African-

American achievement gap. The results indicated the mean perception of cable and network news blaming African-Americans ($M= 3.0571$, $SD= 1.027$) was significantly less than the mean personal placement of blame towards African-Americans ($M=3.857$, $SD=.912$), $t(34)=-2.983$, $p<.01$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings was -1.345 to -.254.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

Chapter five summarizes the findings, implications and limitations of this study and provides recommendations for future research. This study examined where news consumers, specifically college students, perceived television news placed blame for African-American minority achievement gaps in United States secondary education. There were two significant effects in this study. Television news viewing frequency significantly predicted respondents' personal blame towards teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps. For persons who exhibited symbolic racism, personal placement of blame for minority achievement gaps significantly affected where respondents perceived television news placed blame for minority achievement gaps.

5.2 Discussion

The researcher did not find any other media-related studies where the symbolic racism scale was implemented as a tool of perception measurement. The data shows that symbolic racism does predict where respondents who exhibit symbolic racism perceive television news places blame for African-American minority achievement gaps. Symbolic racism was also a predictor in where persons who exhibit symbolic racism personally placed blame for African-American achievement gaps.

R1 had the objective of finding out how much respondents perceive that television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Based on the data associated with R1, 43% of respondents somewhat agreed and 7.8% strongly agree that television news blamed African-American individuals and groups in society for disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps. When news seems to attribute blame to

individuals or groups in society as opposed to creating more thematic and analytical frames that examine multiple possible causes of a problem, journalists are using episodic frames (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). These findings indicate that some television news consumers perceive that television news tends to frame education coverage of African-American minority achievement gaps in an episodic news frame. The results of this study reflect Iyengar's (1991) findings that television news is for the most part framed episodically and forces perspectives on viewers that individuals and victims are always to blame as opposed to presenting the possible influences of political and social forces. Thus, audiences remain uninformed about the causes and possible solutions for problems in U.S. secondary education, specifically with minority achievement gaps.

This study applies to framing theory because it further infers that television news tends to present 'case studies' by frequently using episodic frames as opposed to also using thematic frames that present holistic information and analysis over time (Iyengar, 1991). Further, these results indicate that when covering African-American achievement television news tends to place treatment and causal responsibility on African-Americans.

The objective of R2 was to find out how age, ethnicity and party affiliation influence where respondents perceive television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Neither age, ethnicity, class, nor party affiliation significantly influenced where respondents perceive television news blamed individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps. These results oppose Iyengar's (1991) findings that race, age, political partisanship and socioeconomic status have a significant influence on perceptions of television news. A possible reason for the lack of significance is that the pool of respondents was not very diverse in age, ethnicity, class or party

affiliation. Perhaps a larger and more diverse respondent pool would have resulted in more significant findings.

The objective of R2^a was to determine if age, ethnicity, class and party affiliation affected where respondents personally placed blame for disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Concerning R2^a, neither age, ethnicity, class, nor party affiliation significantly influenced where respondents personally placed blame for disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps. It is possible that once some respondents realized that the majority of the questions were concerning race, they decided to select responses that were socially desirable so that their respondents would not label them a racist. Also, a respondent pool with more diversity in the areas of party affiliation, class, ethnicity and age may have produced more significant results.

The objective of R3 was to determine how the frequency of viewing television news and fictional shows centered on education affect where respondents perceive television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Based on the data gathered to answer R3, only television news viewing frequency significantly impacted how much respondents personally blame teachers for African-American minority achievement gaps. Frequency of viewing fictional shows centered on education may not have been significant because respondents watched television news much more frequently than they watch education-based fictional shows (see tables 3 & 4).

The goal of R3^a was to determine how frequency of viewing television news and education-based fictional shows impacted where respondents personally placed blame for disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Neither television news viewing frequency nor education-based fictional show

viewing frequency significantly impacted where respondents placed blame for African-American achievement gaps. It is possible that these findings were not significant because there are other social and cultural forces that may impact where respondents personally place blame. Also, having questions pertaining to race may have lead respondents to choose a socially desirable response over a response that was more reflective of how they felt about the questions.

The objective of R4 was to discover how type of secondary education and type of institution of higher learning impacted where respondents perceived television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Concerning R4, type of secondary education and type of institution of higher learning did not significantly predict where respondents perceived television news placed blame for African-American disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents attended suburban public schools and currently attend a Predominately White Institution of higher learning. Since the majority of the respondents did not attend inner-city public schools their ability to comprehend the complexities of inner-city public school problems is limited, especially since television news rarely provides an analytical frame for minority achievement gaps (Iyengar, 1991). Also, since most of the respondents have similar educational backgrounds it is highly probable that a lack of variation in educational backgrounds led to secondary education and higher learning not significantly influencing respondents' perceptions of where television news places blame for minority achievement gaps.

The goal of R5 was to determine if symbolic racism significantly influenced where respondents perceive local, network and cable television news blames individuals and social groups when it comes to disparities in educational advancements and achievement gaps between Whites and African-Americans. Based on the data gathered for R5, symbolic racism did not

significantly predict where respondents perceived local, network and cable television news blamed African-Americans for African-American disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps. However, additional analysis revealed that persons who exhibited symbolic racism tend to perceive that local television news blamed the government for African-American minority achievement gaps, which was against their personal belief that African-Americans are to blame for African-American disparities in educational advancements and minority achievement gaps.

Symbolic racism did not significantly influence where respondents perceived television news blames African-Americans for minority achievement gaps because an overwhelming majority of all the respondents, which includes those who exhibited symbolic racism, had conservative political ideologies or republican party affiliations and they tend to reject television news frames due to the belief that mainstream media generally has a liberal bias. However, symbolic racism was a predictor of personal blame towards African-Americans for minority achievement gaps. Prior studies show that republicans or persons with conservative ideologies have strong levels of resistance against the cues and other textual devices used to prime audiences in television news frames (Iyengar, 1991). This conservative belief that television news generally has a liberal bias also offers insight as to why respondents who exhibited symbolic racism perceived television blames the government more than African-Americans for minority achievement gaps against their personal beliefs that African-Americans are at fault for minority achievement gaps.

The vast majority of studies concerning the racial framing of news concentrate on how exposure to the overrepresentation of African-Americans as social ills and parasites affect public opinion of blame for problems in American society with regard to race (Dixon, 2004). There is very little research on television news coverage of education, and that coverage lacks research on

how that coverage is framed. This study is valuable to the field of mass communication because it adds a new angle to studies concerning African-Americans not only being overrepresented as criminals and freeloaders of government assistance programs, but also underrepresented as victims of crime and other social and political factors of institutionalized racism. This study highlighted some of the missing context of education news coverage such as the major research on why African-Americans and other minorities struggle with academic achievement more than Whites and how television news seldom, if ever, present these issues nor supply depth to news pieces on African-Americans and education. Studying how people perceive where television news places blame for minority achievement gaps strengthens the arguments of preceding research that minorities are underrepresented as victims of social and political forces.

If all the staff members of a newsroom that influence news content observed studies on how the racial frames they create and impose on numerous issues that affect public opinion, it is possible that they could move toward a goal of removing racialized news frames. Also, this research may aid news consumers in doing a better job of holding news organizations responsible for the stereotypes created in news by excessive usage of racially-biased frames.

5.3 Limitations

One of this study's main limitations is the sample population of respondents. The size (n=156) was relatively small and the sample was not random, which limited the generalizability of the results. Although respondents were from different sized and funded institutions of higher learning, the majority of respondents were from Louisiana State University. This survey sample size cannot be viewed as reflective of the higher education student population. Another limiting factor is the type of students who participated. The Louisiana State University students in this survey were all either students in the Manship School of Mass Communication or were taking a class in mass communication. It is quite probable that those students' perspectives and

experiences vary from other groups of students such as business, engineering, biological sciences and education majors just to name a few.

The question of ethnicity offered respondents the opportunity to check all options that apply with the option of writing something in as opposed to being a multiple choice question that only allowed respondents to pick one race/ethnicity. This open response question was originally intended to allow respondents outside of the options to self-identify. This resulted in difficulty in statistically analyzing race/ethnicity.

The survey may have provided more findings if a question concerning gender was included and if the survey had asked respondents to list any possible causes for disparities in test scores and educational advancements by race.

Also, the questions asking respondents to gauge minority achievement gaps did not specify to estimate those gaps on a local, state or national level. Perhaps doing so would have solicited more accurate data to correspond with the responses concerning where respondents felt local, network and cable television placed blame for minority achievement gaps.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Study

Further study in several directions would be useful to build upon the findings of this study. It could be valuable to do a qualitative analysis of local, cable and network news coverage of education concerning minority achievement gaps along with a comparative analysis of a survey similar to the one used in this study as far as methods of measuring where respondents personally place and view television news places blame for minority achievement gaps. Also, personal interviews with reporters, producers and news directors at television news stations about their newsgathering and source selection in stories concerning problems in education, specifically minority achievement gaps, may also lead to advantageous research.

Future research would benefit from surveying a larger group of students so that the sample population could be more comparable to the general population. Also, measuring for causal and treatment responsibility in a qualitative study and looking at other minorities in the United States may also solicit more specific answers to questions concerning the episodic and thematic framing of minority achievement gaps in the United States.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. If applicable, please type in your five-digit MEL identity number.

2. By what percentage do you believe that African-American high school students score lower than Whites students on standardized tests?

3. By what percentage do you believe that African-American students have higher high school drop out rates than white students?

4. By what percentage do you believe African-American students score lower than White students in reading proficiency testing for grades K-5?

5. By what percentage do you believe African-American students score lower than White students in math testing for grades K-5?

6. By what percentage do you believe African-American students score lower than White students in writing proficiency for grades K-5?

7. How much do you feel each is responsible for the lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements for persons of low socio-economic status?

Please select one from each drop down menu:

The individuals or groups who are of low socio-economic status	Government/ Politicians	Teachers and those in the profession of education
1.Completely	1.Completely	1.Completely
2.A lot	2.A lot	2.A lot
3.Some	3.Some	3.Some
4.A Little	4.A Little	4.A Little
5.None at all	5.None at all	5.None at all

8. How much do you feel each is responsible for the lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for African-Americans?

Please select one from each drop down menu:

The individuals or groups who are of low socio-economic status	Government/ Politicians	Teachers and those in the profession of education
1.Completely	1.Completely	1.Completely
2.A lot	2.A lot	2.A lot
3.Some	3.Some	3.Some
4.A Little	4.A Little	4.A Little
5.None at all	5.None at all	5.None at all

9. How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think African-Americans are responsible for creating?

- 1. All of it 4. A little
- 2. a lot 5. None at all
- 3. Some

10. How much discrimination against African-Americans do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?

- 1. All of it 4. A little
- 2. a lot 5. None at all
- 3. Some

11. For the rest of the questions, please state how much you agree with each:

Local television news blames individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for persons of low socio-economic status.

- 1. Strongly agree 4. Somewhat disagree
- 2. Somewhat agree 5. Strongly disagree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree

12. Local television news blames individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for African-Americans.

- 1. Strongly agree 4. Somewhat disagree
- 2. Somewhat agree 5. Strongly disagree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree

13. Network and cable news blame individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for persons of low socio-economic status.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

14. Network and cable news blame individuals or groups in society for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for African-Americans.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

15. Local television news blames the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for persons of low socio-economic status.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

16. Local television news blames government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for African-Americans.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

17. Network and cable news blame the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for persons of low socio-economic status.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

18. Network and cable news blame the government for lack of equal opportunity for educational advancements (i.e. low test scores, teachers' instructional communication skills, curriculum goals, etc.) for African-Americans.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

19. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if African-Americans would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

20. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. African-Americans should do the same.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

21. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African-American to work their way out of the lower class.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

22. Over the past few years, African-Americans have gotten less than they deserve.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

23. Over the past few years, African-Americans have gotten more economically than they deserve.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 4. Somewhat disagree |
| 2. Somewhat agree | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree | |

24. Which of these political parties do you identify with?

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. Democrat | 3. Republican |
| 2. Independent | 4. I have no political party affiliation |

Other (please specify)

25. Besides internet, magazines, television, newspapers and radio what are some other influences on your perceptions of education?

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| 1. Co-workers | 3. Family |
| 2. Teachers/professors | 4. Friends |

Other (please specify)

26. What is your political ideology?

1. Conservative

2. Liberal

3. Moderate

27. Which class bracket do you feel your intermediate family belong to?

1. Poverty/ low-lower class

4. Upper-middle class

2. Upper-lower class

5. Lower-upper class

3. Lower-middle class

6. High-upper class/ wealthy

28. From grades k through 12, which type of schools did you mostly attend?

1. Inner-city public

4. Suburban private

2. Suburban public

5. Home schooled

3. Inner-city

29. Which one of these best describes the institute of higher learning that you are attending?

1. Small and public

Large and public

2. Small and private

Large and private

30. Which one of these best describes the type of institute of higher learning that you are attending?

1. PWI (Predominately White Institution)

2. HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)

31. What is your age?

32. What race/ethnicity do you identify with? Check all that apply:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. African-American/Black/of African descent | 4. Native American/ American Indian |
| 2. Asian/ Asian American | 5. White |
| 3. Non-Black/ Hispanic/ Hispanic-American | |

Other (please specify)

33. How often do you watch fictional shows involving or based in education (i.e. Glee, Boston Public, etc.)?

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Never | 4. Often |
| 2. Rarely | 5. All the time |
| 3. Sometimes | |

34. How often do you watch the news?

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Everyday | 4. Once or twice a month |
| 2. 3-5 times a week | 5. Never |
| 3. 1-2 times a week | |

35. How often do you listen to radio news?

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Everyday | 4. Once or twice a month |
| 2. 3-5 times a week | 5. Never |
| 3. 1-2 times a week | |

36. How often do you read the newspaper?

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Everyday | 4. Once or twice a month |
| 2. 3-5 times a week | 5. Never |
| 3. 1-2 times a week | |

37. How often do you read online news?

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Everyday | 4. Once or twice a month |
| 2. 3-5 times a week | 5. Never |
| 3. 1-2 times a week | |

38. How often do you use magazines as a source for news?

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Everyday | 4. Once or twice a month |
| 2. 3-5 times a week | 5. Never |
| 3. 1-2 times a week | |

39. What source of news do you use most to find national news?

- | | |
|--------|----------|
| 1. ABC | 3. MSNBC |
| 2. CNN | 4. FOX |

40. What source of news do you use most to find international news?

- | | |
|------------------|----------|
| 1. ABC, NBC, CBS | 3. MSNBC |
| 2. CNN | 4. FOX |

Other (please specify)

VITA

Jasmine Elise Haynes is a graduate assistant at theanship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University with research interest in media law and media diversity. While completing her master's degree, Jasmine served two semesters as a general assignment reporter and one semester as the health anchor/producer for Tiger TV, the student-operated news station at LSU, and has remained in the practice of reporting as well as managing her graduate studies for the last three semesters.

Born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, Jasmine received a Bachelor of Arts in mass communication from Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. After graduating in May 2008, Jasmine served as producer and assistant director of *Discover DU*, a monthly, promotional show created by the Dillard University Division of Student Success. While at Dillard, Jasmine interned at ABC26-WGNO in New Orleans for three semesters and served as a reporter, features editor and copy desk chief for the Dillard University student newspaper, *The Courtboullion*.

Jasmine was a resident of New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf shores and feels fortunate to have the study of coverage of the biggest natural disasters to hit the United States integrated within her curriculum. The misrepresentations and false information circulating after Hurricane Katrina inspired Jasmine to pursue graduate studies in order to better analyze the effects of news coverage on audience perceptions and to be a journalist who accurately reports news events in context. Jasmine is excited about future adventures in news, and after summer 2010 commencement, she cannot wait to begin her career as a television journalist.