Can Social Media News Encourage Activism? The Impact of Discrimination News Frames on College Students’ Activism Intentions

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Abstract
The marginalization of African Americans is a pervasive issue in American society. As African Americans are left on the fringes of economic, social, and political resources, social media news offers the potential for motivating action that combats the institutional policies contributing to societal disparities. Utilizing the lens of the Anger Activism Model (AAM), this experiment recruited undergraduate participants (N=198) and tested the effects of implicit and explicit discrimination news frames on activism intentions. The findings indicate that news frames directly impact reported levels of activism intentions among college students. Unexpectedly, we found racial differences in perceptions of whether the news stories involved racial discrimination. The implications of these findings are discussed considering social media news, marginalization, and activism among college students.

Keywords
social media news, institutional discrimination, framing, activism, civic engagement

Despite perceptions that Americans reside in a post-racial society, African Americans are pushed toward the margins of social, political, and economic systems (Dawson & Bobo, 2009). The marginalization of African Americans is made evident by the myriad of negative outcomes they experience. African Americans are disproportionately affected by health and income inequalities, and are frequently excluded from access to integral educational and political resources. African American mothers experience adverse birth outcomes irrespective of their education (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2011). African American students are suspended at rates double their actual enrollment, frequently for the same or similar behavioral problems as their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Moreover, institutional policies that create and sustain residential segregation contribute to wealth gaps (Killewald et al., 2017), enable environmental racism (Mohai et al., 2009), and sustain negative environmental health outcomes (Downey & Hawkins, 2008; Jacobs, 2011). Inequity in access to resources, assets, or services blocks the progress of marginalized groups and inhibits their full engagement in society (von Braun & Gatzweiler, 2011).

Remediying the marginalization of African Americans requires public acknowledgment of discrimination and civic activism that leverages policy change. However, this is challenging since perceptions and lived experiences differ, especially between different racial groups. African Americans report more direct, personal experiences with institutional discrimination than White Americans. These experiences include being unfairly stopped by the police and job discrimination (Horowitz et al., 2019). Conversely, White Americans are less apt than African Americans to recognize systemic discrimination that hinders African American access to economic and educational opportunities (Horowitz et al., 2019).

News narratives depicting marginalized communities’ susceptibility to institutional discrimination provide opportunities...
for defining the underlying reasons for societal disparities and changing public perceptions. News frames suggest how audiences should interpret social issues, including the groups impacted, social factors causing these issues, and potential solutions for fixing these problems (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). News emphasizing the systematic differential treatment of marginalized groups, due to discriminatory institutional practices, may encourage audiences to consider discrimination as the catalyst for racial disparities, as opposed to innate negative deficiencies (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018; Iyengar, 1990).

Although the circulation of news frames emphasizing differential treatment due to institutional discrimination may very well be present within traditional news environments, digital environments like social media afford new opportunities for news dissemination (see Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). Social media’s unique affordances provide amplified opportunities for news exposure that promotes the recognition of institutional discrimination and encourages civic engagement. Affordances such as visibility and scalability allow social media users, journalists, social activists, and otherwise, the opportunity for distributing discrimination news frames beyond what can occur within the limitations of traditional journalistic cycles (Fox & McEwan, 2019). Furthermore, social media algorithms and social media connections facilitate exposure to such sociopolitical content (Thorson et al., 2019). Prominent activists and online social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter) utilize these affordances for social media advocacy, strategically pushing issues of discrimination onto the public consciousness (e.g., Freelon et al., 2016, 2018; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, 2016).

The ample opportunities for using social media as a platform for alerting the public about discrimination warrants the question of whether exposure to such information can rally support for marginalized African Americans vis-a-vis evoking acknowledgment that African Americans experience racial discrimination and increasing the likelihood of civic engagement. Of particular interest are young adults, whose reliance on social media for news exceeds that of other populations (Diehl et al., 2019; Grieco, 2017). Many scholars have investigated relationships between social media news exposure and political knowledge or civic engagement among young adult populations. Specifically, recent research suggests that the magnitude of social media news predicts young adults’ political knowledge and civic engagement (Chan & Guo, 2013; Edgerly et al., 2018; Wells & Thorson, 2017).

Considering the potential impact of social media news exposure on sociopolitical attitudes and civic engagement, it is important that we determine whether exposure to news emphasizing institutional discrimination shows promise for influencing college students’ perceptions and civic engagement. The current experiment investigates whether exposure to news emphasizing racial discrimination (i.e., implicitly or explicitly) motivates activism behavior. We test this through the lens of the Anger Activism Model (AAM; Turner, 2007). According to the AAM, anger may motivate activism, provided the person also possesses efficacy for remedying the problem. We examine whether exposure to news emphasizing systematic discrimination produces anger and, subsequently, civic participation. Our analysis also addresses post hoc findings pertaining to discrimination news frames and the recognition of racial discrimination. News frames that implicitly (via mentions of class discrimination) or explicitly (via mentions of racial groups) point to institutional racism as the cause of social inequalities yield different perspectives among African American and White audiences. We discuss these findings in light of its implications for civic engagement among college students and support for marginalized communities.

**Discrimination News Frames and Anger**

Anger can serve as a constructive and motivating emotion (Averill, 1982; Nabi, 2002). Anger is often caused when one’s goals are thwarted (Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004) or when there is a demeaning offense against oneself or one’s loved ones (Lazarus, 1991). The emotion motivates the pursuit of behavior to address the source of the anger (Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999, 2002). News narratives emphasizing that biased institutional practices block marginalized populations from reaching equal opportunities for educational attainment or equal treatment under the law may elicit anger among audiences. Information about the disenfranchisement of marginalized populations can elicit anger because it highlights unequal treatment that is contradictory to what “ought to” occur within American society (Averill, 1982; Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004; Lazarus, 1991). For instance, knowledge of voter laws that disenfranchise the African American electorate prompts feelings of anger (Valentino & Neuner, 2017). Audiences appraise institutional discrimination practices as unjust, triggering feelings of anger.

Discrimination news frames may also evoke anger because they reflect social stressors—macro-level events due to social disadvantage (see Harrell, 2000; Lewis et al., 2015). Social stressors include highly publicized events of police brutality like the murder of Atatiana Jefferson or, in the case of the Flint water crises, failure of the government to protect the health of marginalized citizens. Encountering news detailing social stressors potentially influences all populations, increasing the amount of anger associated with the stressor. Considering that discrimination news frames emphasize the unjust mistreatment of marginalized communities, we first anticipate that exposure to such news frames will elicit anger among college students.

H1a: Participants exposed to implicit racial discrimination frames will report higher levels of anger than participants not exposed to a news story.
H1b: Participants exposed to explicit racial discrimination frames will report higher levels of anger than participants not exposed to a news story.

**Discrimination News Frames as a Motivator for Activism**

Anger is an especially powerful motivator for prosocial behaviors (Haidt, 2003). Prosocial actions, such as volunteering for an organization or serving as an officer in a political organization can contribute to policy change and help to remedy injustice, thus addressing sources of the anger (see Nabi, 1999, 2002; van Zomeren et al., 2004). Relationships between anger and prosocial responses are outlined by the AAM.

The AAM focuses on the effect of message-based anger on individual levels of civic engagement. Within this paradigm, messages highlighting the unjust treatment of marginalized communities can produce anger toward the target issue. High amounts of anger stemming from the message and accompanying feelings of efficacy predict activist behavior (Turner, 2007). The AAM conceptualizes efficacy in a manner consistent with Bandura (1997) and Witte's (1992). Bandura (1997, 2006) describes perceived self-efficacy as the belief in one’s capabilities; the belief that one is able to act on the issue. Self-efficacy perceptions also include the belief that one possesses both the ability and capacity to perform a behavior (Witte, 1992). We conceptualize self-efficacy as an individual’s perception that they are generally capable of remediating the issues outlined within the news article, such as reducing social problems or fighting against discrimination in the United States.

According to the AAM, messages can motivate activism when audiences have high efficacy. For example, if news elicits high levels of anger and message recipients also have high levels of efficacy, they are likely to engage in activism, including activism that requires high levels of commitment (e.g., writing a congress person or organizing a protest). Turner (2007) describes this group as activists. Messages inducing lower levels of anger encourage participation that involves lower commitment activism behaviors. Individuals with lower levels of anger and high efficacy are described as empowered. Similar to the activist group, the empowered group utilizes civic engagement as means of addressing the target issue. Our research tests whether self-efficacy (in conjunction with anger) serves as a predictor for activism intentions following exposure to news messages that emphasizes the role of institutional discrimination in different facets of society. Consistent with previous research concerning activism and civic engagement, our investigation treats self-efficacy as an innate trait, rather than a state concept (Jung et al., 2011; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2008). If exposure to news that frames social inequality in terms of institutional discrimination evokes anger, we expect anger and innate feelings of self-efficacy to predict activism. Consequently, the following is proposed:

H2a: Anger will mediate the relationship between exposure to implicit racial discrimination frames and reported activism intentions.

H2b: Anger will mediate the relationship between exposure to explicit racial discrimination frames and reported activism intentions.

H3: Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between anger and reported activism intentions.

**Method**

**Participants and Design**

A total of 205 undergraduate students recruited at a large Midwestern university received course credit in exchange for their participation in the online experiment. Three participants who were not exposed to the stimuli and four students who indicated that they had completed the experiment previously were excluded from further analysis. The final sample was 70.7% female and the mean age was 20.24 years (SD = 1.60). The sample included 85 White and 63 Black participants (i.e., Black or African American). The remaining participants, such as multiracial participants or participants of other racial groups, were classified as “Other” (n = 50). Participants were assigned to one of four experimental conditions: no exposure, no discrimination—control, implicit race discrimination, and explicit race discrimination. Random assignment into each condition was stratified by race (i.e., Black, White, or Other).

**Experimental Procedures**

Participants took the survey on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Participants were informed that the study was about social media and news. Participants assigned to the no discrimination—control, implicit racial discrimination, and explicit racial discrimination conditions were shown a mock news feed presenting four news stories. Each article included a stock photograph, title, and story summary like the ones that appear on social media. Participants were instructed to read the headlines and summaries corresponding with the four news articles. After reviewing the articles, participants were instructed to select which one of the four articles they would most like to read. After reading the full article, participants completed dependent measures and manipulation checks. Upon completion of the experiment, participants were thanked and debriefed.

**Stimuli**

The news stories were compiled from actual news sources. Topics for the news articles included lead poisoning, zero-tolerance policies in school, voter ID laws, and policing for profit. Regardless of the condition, each article depicted a
situation where exemplars were subject to a negative outcome because of policies related to the topic of the article. Exemplars are individual case examples (Zillmann & Brosius, 2000). In news stories, exemplars often take the form of “short quotations (verbal or visual) from concerned or interested people that illustrate a particular problem or a particular view on a problem” (Brosius, 1999, p. 213).

The explicit race discrimination condition explicitly framed institutional policies as discriminatory against racial minorities and described the exemplars as Black and African American. Because the media have historically connected Blacks to poverty-related issues like welfare (Gilens, 1996), class can also imply race and cue audiences to consider race during attitude formation (Gilens, 1996; Valentino, 1999). In the implicit race condition, the news article did not mention race and featured poor and low-income exemplars. Previous research has used poverty frames as an implicit race cue (White, 2007). The no discrimination—control condition made no mention of discrimination. Including the no discrimination—control helps distinguish effects of the discrimination frames (i.e., implicit and explicit) from results due to stories that are generally negative. The headlines of the articles were held constant across condition, but the location varied. To ensure that race was not primed in the no discrimination—control condition, urban areas associated with minorities (e.g., Ferguson, MO, USA) were changed to other locations (e.g., Mantua, UT, USA).

Short summaries were written to mirror the content of the corresponding article. In order to make the manipulation more subtle, the preview for the lead poisoning article summary did not mention discrimination in the experimental conditions (i.e., implicit and explicit race discrimination condition). However, the full-length article in these conditions did mention discrimination. The average length of the articles was 562 words. News articles in the implicit race and explicit race discrimination article were longer than articles in the no discrimination—control condition. However, a manipulation check across conditions indicated no difference in perceptions of the situation as negative, F (2,143) = 1.33, p = .27, regardless of the race of the participant.

**Measures**

**Race.** Participants were instructed to self-report their race. Categories included American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, Middle Eastern, or Other. Participants were allowed to select multiple categories for their race. Given the low number of participants who selected multiracial categories or racial categories other than Black or White, we collapsed these participants to the classification of “Other” (n = 50).

**Socioeconomic Status.** Since our population of interest is college students, socioeconomic status was assessed by asking participants to indicate their financial situation while growing up. Participants specified their financial situation using the following categories: (1) poor, not enough to get by (n = 8), (2) enough, not many extras (n = 58), (3) comfortable (n = 102), and (4) well-to-do (n = 30). Responses were unequally distributed across the experimental groups, particularly in the case of students reporting the lowest socioeconomic background. Consequently, we collapsed the four conditions into two conditions, recoding them as low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status.

**Anger.** The single-item measure for anger was from the expanded positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt the particular emotion at the present moment. Participants indicated their anger on a scale from 1 = very slightly or not at all to 5 = extremely (M = 1.74, SD = 1.06).

**Efficacy.** Efficacy was measured using a 4-item scale. The measure was adapted from a previous group efficacy measure (see van Zomeren et al., 2011). Participants indicated their level of agreement with the statements on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (“I can reduce social problems,” “I can fight against social problems,” “I can successfully fight against discrimination in the United States,” and “I can reduce discrimination in the United States”). The items were averaged to create the efficacy scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .89; M = 4.64, SD = 1.15).

**Activism.** Activism intentions were measured by adapting the Activism Orientation Scale (Corning & Myers, 2002) so that it assessed participant likelihood of engaging in activism. Participants indicated their likelihood of engaging in 28 specific activities within the next 6 months on a scale from 1 = extremely unlikely to 5 = extremely likely. Example items include “Try to change a relative’s mind about a social or political issue” and “Participate in discussion groups designed to discuss issues or solutions of a particular social or political group.” The items were averaged to create the scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .97; M = 2.58, SD = .98).

**Results**

**Manipulation Check**

To test the effectiveness of the stimuli in depicting explicit racial discrimination, participants responded to the following statements: “The story I read mentioned racial discrimination” and “The story I read reported on someone who experienced racial discrimination” on a 5-point scaled from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded results consistent with the expected manipulation, F (2, 143) = 8.27, p < .001, and F (2, 142) = 7.41, p < .01, respectively. More specifically, the no
discrimination—control condition provided the lowest mean ($M=2.71$, $SD=1.15$), followed by the implicit racial condition ($M=2.98$, $SD=1.39$), and explicit racial discrimination ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.31$) for the first manipulation check. The second manipulation check yielded similar results. The control condition provided the lowest mean ($M=2.65$, $SD=1.15$), followed by implicit race discrimination condition ($M=3.00$, $SD=1.38$), and explicit race discrimination condition ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.30$). For each manipulation check, post hoc Tukey tests demonstrated significant differences between the control condition and explicit race discrimination condition ($p<.05$), as well as the implicit race discrimination condition and explicit race discrimination condition ($p<.05$) for both items. There were no significant differences between the no discrimination—control condition and the implicit racial discrimination condition. When participants viewed news explicitly attributing social inequality to racial discrimination, they acknowledged racial discrimination was the cause of the exemplar’s negative experiences.

When these perceptions were analyzed by racial groups, participants’ perceptions diverged for minority participants, particularly Black participants. Among Black participants, perceptions of whether the story mentioned racial discrimination did not differ significantly across the experimental conditions, $F(2, 44)=1.79$, $p=.18$. There were similar means for the implicit racial discrimination ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.28$) and explicit racial discrimination ($M=3.56$, $SD=1.41$) conditions. In addition, while there were overall differences across conditions, $F(2, 44)=3.12$, $p=.05$, Black participants’ evaluation of whether the exemplar experienced racial discrimination did not differ between the implicit ($M=3.79$, $SD=.98$) and the explicit racial ($M=3.38$, $SD=1.50$) discrimination conditions, $p=.63$. Participants in the “Other” race category showed a statistical difference for mentions of racial discrimination, $F(2, 33)=3.50$, $p<.05$. However, there was no significant difference between the implicit ($M=2.86$, $SD=1.41$) and explicit ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.41$) racial discrimination conditions, $p=.11$. In addition, participants within this racial category perceived that the exemplar experienced racial discrimination across all of the experimental conditions, $F(2, 34)=2.93$, $p=.07$. There was no significant difference between the implicit ($M=2.79$, $SD=1.48$) and explicit racial discrimination ($M=3.86$, $SD=1.57$) conditions, $p=.18$.

The results indicate racial differences in responses to racial discrimination news frames despite all racial groups rating the outcomes as similarly negative across frame conditions. White respondents perceived racial discrimination when it was explicitly connected to social inequality for minorities. Black participants, however, perceived racial discrimination even when it was not explicitly connected within the article’s narrative.

**Mediated Discrimination, Anger, and Activism**

We tested our proposed model (see Figure 1) using Hayes PROCESS macro version 3 for SPSS (Hayes, 2018; Model 14). Hayes PROCESS provides a method for analyzing the conditional effects of exposure to mediated discrimination on activism intentions. Means and standard deviations for the dependent measures are reported in Table 1. The model was
created using percentile bootstrap confidence intervals with 5,000 bootstrap samples. In addition, the model included race and socioeconomic status as covariates (see Table 2).

H1a predicted that participants exposed to implicit racial discrimination frames would report higher levels of anger than participants not exposed to a news story. H1b predicted that participants exposed to explicit racial discrimination frames would report higher levels of anger than participants not exposed to a news story. There was a marginal main effect for exposure to explicit racial discrimination frames ($b = .39, p = .07, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.03, .82]$). Participants who viewed news articles explicitly attributing racial discrimination to social injustice reported higher levels of anger than participants who did not view an article. Since the relationship was only marginally significant, H1a and H1b were not supported.

H2a and H2b predicted that anger would mediate the relationship between exposure to implicit and explicit racial discrimination frames, respectively, and reported activism intentions. Overall, the relationship between exposure to implicit racial discrimination and activism intentions was not mediated by anger (index = −.05, $SE = .04, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.14, .01]$). Furthermore, the relationship between exposure to explicit racial discrimination and activism intentions was not mediated by anger (index = −.05, $SE = .04, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.16, .01]$).

H3 predicted that self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between anger and reported activism intentions. Anger ($b = .65, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.13, 1.17]$) and efficacy ($b = .53, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.30, .75]$) were significant predictors of activism intentions. Participants who reported higher levels of anger or greater efficacy reported greater levels of activism intentions. The model indicates that the interaction between anger and efficacy was a significant predictor of activism intentions; however, the interaction was not significant at different levels of the efficacy (i.e., the mean and ±1 standard deviation from the mean). In addition, as indicated by the mediation analysis, anger was not a result of exposure to the experimental conditions. H2a, H2b, and H3 were not supported.

Instead of the effect on activism intentions occurring through anger, there were main effects for exposure to the no discrimination—control condition ($b = .39, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.03, .75]$) and the article emphasizing explicit racial discrimination ($b = .39, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.01, .76]$). There was also a significant main effect for exposure to the article emphasizing implicit discrimination on activism intentions ($b = .64, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.27, 1.01]$). Exposure to news messages indicating negative, unequal treatment (whether due to discrimination or otherwise) predicted activism intentions, such that participants in these conditions reported greater activism intentions than participants in the no exposure condition.

### Discussion

This study investigated the influence of news emphasizing racial discrimination as a source for social inequality. Especially, we sought to determine whether these news frames connecting detrimental institutional policies to adverse outcomes amongst poor or African American communities motivate activism, and whether this relationship is
explained by the AAM. We found that exposure to explicitly framed mediated discrimination marginally impacts anger. Surprisingly, the findings demonstrate direct effects for news exposure on activism intentions, including the discrimination news frames. Participants exposed to news articles overall reported greater activism intentions than participants who did not read a news article, controlling for race and socioeconomic status.

In addition to our primary findings, the manipulation check revealed interesting and unexpected racial differences in perceptions of discrimination news frames. White participants reported that the articles’ exemplar experienced racial discrimination when it was explicitly mentioned. In contrast, Black and other minority participants reported mentions of racial discrimination not only when it was explicitly discussed, but also in other conditions. Below, we discuss these findings considering its implications for activism, support for marginalized communities, and social media news consumption.

**Discrimination News Frames and Activism**

The findings suggest that exposure to news portraying institutional practices that marginalize social groups have the potential for assisting in addressing inequality, as exposure to these news stories motivated greater activism intentions. Unexpectedly, the key predictions based on the AAM did not explain the relationship between mediated discrimination and activism intentions. Anger and efficacy influenced activism intentions, but anger was not a significant result of stimuli.1 One potential explanation for these findings may stem from the modest sample size. Post hoc power analysis conducted in G*power (Faul et al., 2007) revealed that the experiment only possessed a power of .75 to detect the effect on anger, thus increasing the potential for a type II error.

Another potential explanation for this outcome is the inability of the news articles to elicit anger. The stimuli were adapted from professional news articles, which often strive to be neutral when presenting facts to the audience so as to reflect journalistic norms about objectivity. Floor effects resulting from the article may have limited our ability to find significance for anger as a mediating variable and as an outcome variable. Although anger was not completely explained by the stimuli, the explicit race condition’s marginally significant effect on anger is suggestive of the idea that racial discrimination rather than merely negative outcomes may contribute to anger.

This study extends previous work pertaining to race in media and policy support, such as prior research finding race-centered frames (or racial cues) effective in swaying support for public policy (e.g., Gilens, 1996; Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018), by examining the effects of frames on activism intentions. The implicit and explicit racial discrimination frames, and the no discrimination news frame were all significant predictors of engagement in activism. The ability for racial discrimination frames to motivate future activism intentions indicates that college students respond directly to information regarding the mistreatment of their fellow Americans with greater intentions of engaging in activism.

Given the pattern of our findings, we acknowledge that it is difficult to disentangle the impact of discrimination frames. Nevertheless, our findings are still important in that implicit racial discrimination news frames were a significant predictor of activism intentions among college students. This indicates that when college students encounter news content consistent with this news frame on social media, they may engage in activist behavior to protect marginalized communities. Social media activists may strategically employ implicit racial discrimination news frames such as these to leverage activism among young adult populations.

**Racial Differences for Racial Discrimination Frames**

Manipulation checks assessing perceptions of racial discrimination within the news articles indicate that White college students recognize racial discrimination when it is explicitly discussed within the article. However, African American college students interpret racial discrimination differently, reporting that both the implicit and explicit discrimination news frames mentioned and exemplified racial discrimination. These unexpected results are interesting in and of themselves, especially for African Americans whose average responses demonstrated a different trend than that of overall participant responses. African Americans inferred negative news articles as containing mentions of racial discrimination. Furthermore, African Americans recognized racial discrimination in various facets of society, including in policing or in voter regulations, even when the article did not mention its role in shaping the experiences of marginalized populations.

Prior research suggests that African Americans encounter race-related news on social media at greater rates than White Americans (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). Meanwhile, Hispanics report encounters with race-related news on social media at greater rates than White Americans, but at lower rates than Blacks. Continued exposure to news frames highlighting the constant impact of societal level discrimination may render African Americans and other minorities (e.g., Hispanics) more aware of how public policies impact marginalized communities.

Differences may also stem from personal experiences. While Blacks generally report more experiences with institutional discrimination than Whites, perceived experiences of racial discrimination are particularly prevalent among college educated African Americans (Anderson, 2019). Since participants were college students, they may be especially aware of institutional practices that impact issues mentioned in the articles. Even in the absence of overt references to race, Black college students recognize that these issues are due to racism perpetrated by institutions.
Although we intentionally selected topics consistent with existing news frames and relied on actual stories to boost ecological validity, future research on the impact of discrimination news frames should consider issues without previous links to racial discrimination. Testing perceptions of racial discrimination for issues where there has been no history of prior attributions of racial discrimination in news coverage would assist in determining whether prior knowledge contributes to inferences of racial discrimination or whether Blacks generally assume racial discrimination for other reasons.

Considering these racial differences, we conducted post hoc analyses to determine whether the relationship between exposure to the news article and anger was moderated by race. Analyses revealed no significant interactions between race and frame condition. Although we found racial differences in the perception of racial discrimination across conditions, they did not translate into racial differences with respect to anger following exposure to the news articles.

**Activism and the Marginalized**

Marginalized groups that experience the daily afflictions of adversarial institutional policy rely on their fellow Americans to assist in correcting policy that contributes to marginalization. However, supportive behavior via policy support or civic engagement is hindered by a lack of acknowledgment that racism plays a continuous role in the treatment of marginalized populations (see Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). Ignorance of institutions and how they influence societal inequalities allow Americans to continuously support the same institutional policies that perpetrate inequality. As discrimination, whether it stems from income or race, is outside of the lived experiences of many Americans, many Americans are blind to structural biases facilitated by institutional policies. News media disseminated within social media can help to bring these issues to people’s attention.

Young adults are substantial users of social media. According to the Pew Research Institute, 88% of young adults aged 18–24 years report using some sort of social media, a percentage higher than the rest of the adult population (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Since young adults use social media frequently, social media news pertaining to discrimination can motivate young adults (and America’s up and coming voters) to address social inequalities. Marginalized groups rely on social protections from other members of society, and social protection can manifest in voting patterns or the willingness to advocate on behalf of the marginalized group. Our findings indicate that when college students encounter news, including news that frames income or racial inequalities in the broader context of institutional practices, it can motivate intentions to participate in civic engagement.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Although our findings offer information on the power of social media news exposure for motivating young Americans to action, our study presents a few limitations and suggestions for future research. The experimental nature of our study ignores the role of curated information flows in social media news exposure (Thorson & Wells, 2016). That is, social media algorithms and friends’ sharing behavior facilitates potential exposure to discrimination news frames (see Chan, 2016; Thorson et al., 2019). Future research should examine how often college students encounter discrimination news frames, considering their individual networked connections on social media. Future research should also expand our experimental design, testing the AAM with a larger sample to determine whether the proposed relationships between discrimination news frames, anger, efficacy, and activism occur. The testing of this model in future studies should consider activism specific to the topics presented within the news article. That is, does exposure to discrimination news frames on social media promote activism that specifically combats institutional racial discrimination? Furthermore, to better detect relationships proposed in this study, researchers should consider measures for anger that are specific to the context (i.e., anger because people are subjected to racial discrimination) and measures for response-efficacy. Incorporating specific measures for anger and response-efficacy could provide more insight into whether people believe activism to be a useful method for addressing racial discrimination.

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Note
1. Since the experiment utilized the expanded positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS-X), the authors conducted post hoc tests considering additional emotions (e.g., frustration and guilt) as potential mediators for the relationship between exposure to implicit or explicit racial discrimination frames and activism intentions. Analysis revealed that these emotions did not explain participants’ reported activism intentions.

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