

The “Oprah Effect:” How Celebrity Jurors Influence Jury Decision-Making

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This study examined whether a celebrity juror would persuade participants to support his/her verdict more than a non-celebrity and whether celebrity jurors interfere with participants' abilities to consider case facts appropriately. Two mock-juror experiments used a 3 (juror type: celebrity votes for death penalty/life sentence/control no celebrity) X 2 (case type: high aggravators/high mitigators) factorial design. Both studies found a significant main effect for case type but not juror type, and a significant interaction. Overall, participants weighed case facts correctly, however in certain conditions; jurors were unable to properly consider case facts. This may be because of violated schemas of these celebrities. Results also indicate that jurors believed that celebrities would be more likely to be voted foreperson as compared to non-celebrity jurors.

Keywords: decision-making process, celebrity jurors, schema violations

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, society has grown accustomed to witnessing celebrity defendants on trial (e.g., Kobe Bryant and Michael Jackson; LA Times, 2003; NY Times, 2005).

Occasionally, celebrities also serve as jurors. Most notably, Oprah Winfrey served as a juror in a 2004 murder trial (CBS News, August 2004). More recently, Brad Pitt (EOnline,

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October 2007) was chosen as a juror on a case that was plea bargained hours prior to trial. While there has been some research examining the effects of the defendant's celebrity status on verdicts (e.g., Chamberlain, Miller, & Jehle, 2005), no studies have investigated the influence of celebrity jurors on verdicts. This is unfortunate, as celebrities may be unduly influential on the jury's decisions and the decision-making process. Celebrities may be viewed as having high status and perceived authority, enabling them to directly influence the verdict or indirectly affect the decision-making processes of their fellow jurors (e.g., by interfering with their ability to understand legal instructions). Prompted by Oprah Winfrey's time as a juror, the present study examined whether celebrity jurors influence a jury's verdict and decision-making process.

Celebrities as Authority Figures

The heavy presence of celebrity figures in the media suggests that the public and private lives of actors, athletes, politicians, and other media figures are a prominent part of American culture. It is not surprising, then, that the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of celebrities can shape or change certain behaviors and attitudes held by the American public (Basil, 1996; Boon & Lomare, 2001). An example of this influence was demonstrated by the influx of Americans who visited their cardiologist after former President Bill Clinton's highly publicized heart surgery and after the cardiology-related deaths of actor John Candy and baseball pitcher Daryl Kyle (Associated Press, 2004). Celebrities may be highly influential because they are often perceived as icons (McCracken, 1989) and role models (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004). Research on advertising effectiveness suggests that television viewers are more aroused when observing celebrity spokespersons as compared to non-

celebrity spokespersons (Chen, 2003). Because celebrities have distinctive images, their endorsement of a product has been shown to effectively differentiate merchandise from its competitors and even enhance brand images (Erdogan, 1999). These findings suggest that celebrities can influence a variety of behaviors, including the likelihood that members of the public will purchase items (e.g., books) endorsed by a celebrity (Butler, Cowan, & Nilsson, 2005) in an attempt to possibly emulate a celebrities' style (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

Social psychological theories: Power, authority, and leadership status

A review of relevant social psychological theories and constructs can explain why some individuals have more social influence than others. Power, status, and authority are individual traits that affect the level of influence a person exerts on group decisions (Hans & Vidmar, 1986). Established authority figures, in particular, tend to have power and social influence on others (Torrence, 1954). Power is defined as the ability to influence others, while resisting being influenced (Michener & Suchner, 1972). Although there are different types of power, referent power is the most germane to the topic of celebrity influence on fellow jurors. French and Raven (1959) indicate that referent power is acquired when a person is admired or liked by others. This type of power is likely to stimulate an identification response, in which an individual changes his/her behavior and internalizes a new attitude. A celebrity would likely gain this type of power within the context of a jury and subsequently have greater influence over the sentencing decision and decision-making process.

Because of their power, celebrities hold a certain status in our society and may be viewed by some as authority figures. Research has shown that even under extreme

circumstances individuals tend to be influenced by and obedient toward those they perceive as authority figures (Milgram, 1963, 1965). The way in which an authority figure is dressed has been shown to serve as an influential obedience cue (Bickman, 1971; Sigelman & Sigelman, 1976, Bushman, 1988). In group settings, studies have shown that the group's decision is directly impacted by the contributions of specific individuals, particularly those with perceived power and status (Van Der Honert, 2001; Dembo & McAuliffe, 1987).

Within any group, the leader is often the person who wields the most influence in a group (Hollander, 1985). Research has demonstrated that people have a generalized leadership schema that defines a leader and their behaviors (Simonton, 1986). Some culturally-universal traits associated with leaders include intelligence, trustworthiness, and decisiveness (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Physical size/strength, verbosity, and motivation are also traits that have been associated with leaders (Sorrentino & Boutiller, 1975; Sorrentino & Field, 1986; Stodgill, 1946; Winter, 1987). Individuals who are physically attractive and charismatic can also influence others. Researchers have shown that most individuals infer that more attractive people are good and well-intentioned (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijana, & Longo, 1991). Charismatic leaders, in particular, are more likely to surface in uncertain situations (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). In unfamiliar and stressful situations, group members tend to attribute more authority to leaders (Klein, 1976). Research has indicated that potential jurors may perceive the courtroom to be a stressful and unknown environment (National Center for State Courts, 1998; Miller & Bornstein, 2005; Bornstein, Miller, Nemeth, Page, & Musil, 2005). Being in an unfamiliar environment may make jurors more susceptible to authority influences (i.e., celebrities) during group decision-making processes. The combination of celebrities possessing many attributes commonly associated

with leadership (i.e., power, status) and that potential jurors are being placed in an unfamiliar setting (i.e., a courtroom) may increase the likelihood of jurors recognizing celebrities as leaders. Thus, celebrities may be even more effective in unknown, stressful situations and subsequently able to influence others.

Influence and juror decision-making

Traits associated with authority figures and influential leaders are pertinent to the interactions between jury members. Research suggests that jurors are more inclined to pick an experienced leader (Dillehay & Nietzel, 1985). Further, Foley and Pigott (1997) found that forepersons had more influence on other jurors' decisions than non-forepersons, perhaps because other jurors perceived the foreperson to be the group leader. Research has also indicated that jurors with more experience and training (i.e., jurors who have served in past trials) appear to have more social power on group decisions than laypersons (Kaplan & Martin, 1999). Perhaps this is because other jurors accept trained jurors as experienced, knowledgeable, and natural leaders. These limited studies suggest that some jurors are more influential than others; although it is untested, celebrity jurors may be among those that are most influential.

The potential legal impact of celebrity jurors

From a legal perspective, the present study is important for a couple of reasons. First, it investigates whether or not a celebrity juror may unfairly influence the outcome of a case. For instance, a celebrity may have the ability to affect fellow jurors because of their admiration of the celebrity. Due to referent power, jurors may identify with celebrity jurors

and listen to their opinions more than non-celebrity jurors. Subsequently, this may influence jurors' opinions of the case, resulting in a celebrity juror having an undue influence on the jury's decision.

Another reason this study is imperative from a legal perspective is that it examines whether the presence of a celebrity juror leads to an unfair decision *process*. The possibility of celebrity jurors negatively influencing the decision-making process has huge legal ramifications, as the Supreme Court has placed more and more responsibility in the hands of jurors over the years. During the 1970's, the Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty sentencing decisions are important and cannot be determined arbitrarily (*Furman v Georgia, 1972*). Therefore, it is necessary to give jurors some guidance. As a result, states have developed ways to give jurors direction in their decision-making process (*Gregg v. Georgia, 1976*). In death penalty cases, for example, juries in many jurisdictions are directed to consider aggravating and mitigating circumstances.

Aggravating circumstances refer to acts that are particularly serious or heinous because of the way in which they are committed. Mitigating circumstances, on the other hand, refer to factors that may lessen the severity of the offender's punishment. The expectation is that jurors will "weigh" aggravators and mitigators in order to decide the 'appropriate' sentence. Without these guidelines, the death penalty would be unconstitutional (*Furman v Georgia, 1972*). For this reason, the courts take any factors threatening the decision-making process into serious consideration (Miller & Bornstein, 2005). If celebrity jurors, for example, are so influential that they interfere with other jurors' ability to evaluate case facts properly, their presence negatively affects the decision-making process and may potentially result in the violation of a defendant's constitutional rights.

Due to their perceived power and status, celebrities also may be seen as more knowledgeable and credible than non-celebrity jurors. For this reason, the arguments of celebrity jurors may be seen as more credible and accurate than arguments made by their non-celebrity counterparts. A celebrity juror also may be more likely to be elected foreperson due to his or her high status in society. Thus, celebrity jurors may influence jury discussions to the extent that being elected foreperson allows them to have more control (than non-celebrity jurors) over the jury decision-making processes.

In sum, celebrities may be viewed as having high status and authority, and thus may be perceived by some as leaders. The present study attempts to enhance the field's knowledge of celebrity's who may be perceived as leaders in the courtroom, as well as their influence on fellow jurors sentencing verdicts and the decision-making process.

Overview of Study One

In the present study, we examined the influential effects of celebrities on mock-jurors by manipulating the celebrity status of jurors. In one set of conditions the arguments of the celebrity/non-celebrity were in favor of death and in the other set of conditions the arguments of the celebrity/non-celebrity were in favor of life. In Study One, a celebrity's (i.e., Oprah Winfrey) argument was presented in the experimental conditions in order to determine whether sentencing decisions would differ from the control condition. It was expected that when Oprah voted for life, participants would be most likely to vote for life; compared to those in the control condition or those in the Oprah voted for death condition. Consistent with previous research (Miller & Bornstein, 2006), it was expected that participants who received high aggravator case scenarios would be more likely to vote for death, whereas participants

who received the high mitigator case scenarios would be more likely to vote for life in prison. This represents “proper” weighing of aggravators and mitigators.

When examining juror verdict type by case type, it was hypothesized that participants in the control condition would properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. In the experimental (celebrity-present) conditions, it was hypothesized that jurors would not properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. Thus, when Oprah voted for life, participants would be more likely to vote for life, regardless of which case facts (aggravators or mitigators) were present; and when Oprah voted for death, participants would be more likely to vote for death, regardless of case facts. It was also predicted that celebrity status would influence jurors’ perceptions of influence to the point that it would disrupt jury decision-making processes. Specifically, it was expected that participants who read an argument given by Oprah, as compared to those who read an identical argument from a non-celebrity, would be more likely to believe that her argument was stronger, that she was more influential, and that she was more likely to be voted foreperson of the jury.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 131 university students who received course credit for their participation. Twenty-five participants were excluded from Study One because of 1) their affirmative response to a death qualification item (*Wainwright v. Witt, 1985*), which determined whether a participant’s feelings about the death penalty were strong enough to prevent them from acting as an impartial juror and/or 2) their responses to a manipulation check question, which indicated they were unaware of the presence of a celebrity juror. The

final sample for Study One consisted of 81 participants, the majority of whom were Caucasian (74.4%) and female (65.4 %). The average age of participants in this convenience samples was 21.3 years ($Mdn=20$)..

Design

A 3 (juror type: Oprah voted for death penalty/Oprah voted for life sentence/control) X 2 (case type: high aggravators/high mitigators) factorial design was used. Cell sizes averaged 21.8 participants per cell for the full sample and 13.5 participants for the final sample. *Procedure*

Participants enrolled and took part in an online study. After reading the consent form, each participant was told that they would read a trial scenario and a summary of the arguments made by six jurors during deliberations. They then read a cover story explaining that people sometimes communicate better or worse when they are in the presence of people who they admire (e.g., an authority figure). As such, participants were going to rate each juror's ability to communicate. This measure was included to remove any unwanted effects of participants becoming aware of the study's true purpose.

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of six trial scenarios. They were given jury instructions based on those given in death penalty sentencing trials in North Carolina and were approximately 2,200 words. Next, participants answered the death qualification questionnaire, in order to ensure that participants were cognizant of important case facts (i.e., aggravators and mitigators). Then, participants read a description of juror one (e.g., name, occupation) and a summary of the juror's opinion. They then rated the juror on several dimensions, including strength and influence of the argument. Additionally,

participants rated each juror's knowledge of the trial and their likelihood of being elected as the foreperson.

Participants then answered demographic questions and a manipulation check item about the juror's occupation. This process was repeated for the remaining five jurors. Oprah was presented as the fifth juror in the "death" condition or the sixth juror in the "life" conditions. In the control condition, a non-celebrity gave the identical argument Oprah had given in the experimental condition. After reading all juror arguments, participants responded to items inquiring how they would have voted had they been a juror in the case. Lastly, participants rated how certain they were of their sentencing decision of the case.

Materials

Trial scenarios. Each scenario was approximately 650 words, and included two standard aggravators (i.e., the defendant had participated in multiple crimes and had committed these acts for pecuniary gain) and two standard mitigators (i.e., the defendant was shown to be emotionally disturbed and demonstrated good psychological rehabilitation). In the high aggravator condition, trial scenarios contained two additional aggravating case facts: the defendant had previous convictions and the crime details were made much more heinous. Trial scenarios for the high mitigator condition included two additional mitigating case facts: the defendant told the police where the body was (i.e., the defendant confessed) and gave police vital information about another criminal while in prison (i.e., the defendant "snitched"). All aggravators and mitigators were legally relevant, as they are factors that jurors are commonly allowed to consider when making death penalty sentencing decisions in many states (e.g., North Carolina).

The trial scenarios and method of manipulating aggravating/mitigating factors was used previously (Miller & Bornstein, 2006). Thus, researchers were confident that the scenarios would produce significantly more death sentencing decisions in the high aggravator scenario and significantly more life sentencing decisions in the high mitigator scenario.

Deliberation Summaries. Summaries were used to introduce the influence of celebrity and non-celebrity figures. Group decision-making processes of a six-person jury were simulated by having participants read jurors' opinions about the trial scenario. Three of the mock-jurors argued for a death penalty sentencing verdict, and three argued for a life in prison sentencing verdict. Jurors were described by age and occupation (e.g., mechanic, secretary).

In the experimental conditions, one of the jurors was identified as Oprah Winfrey. In the control group, there was no celebrity, and a non-celebrity juror gave the same argument as was given by Oprah Winfrey in the experimental condition. This allowed for examination of the presence of a "celebrity" on the decisions of the participants, as compared to the influence of a non-celebrity. The manipulation of celebrity status also allowed for an analysis of mock-jurors' perceptions of a celebrity's argument, and whether or not a celebrity would be more likely to be elected foreperson than a non-celebrity juror.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main analysis investigated whether the presence of a celebrity juror influenced participants' sentencing verdicts and ability to properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. A 3 (juror verdict type: Oprah votes for death penalty/Oprah votes for life sentence/control) X 2 (case type: high aggravators/high mitigators) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

The main dependent variable was a “verdict confidence” score which was based on a participant’s decision to vote for life or death, and the participant’s certainty of their verdict decision (on a 7-point Likert scale). This variable is identical to those used in previous studies (e.g., Miller & Bornstein, 2006). When a participant voted for the life sentence, their certainty score was multiplied by +1. When a participant voted for the death penalty, their certainty score was multiplied by -1. Therefore, scores fell within a 14-point continuum, between +7 (highly certain in a life sentence verdict) and -7 (highly certain in a death sentence verdict). Tukey’s HSD was used to perform post-hoc analyses.

Main Effect for Case Type

Results revealed the predicted main effect for case type ($F(1,75)=8.41, p=.005$). In the condition with high aggravators, participants were significantly more likely to vote for death ($M=0.10$), compared to their counterparts in the condition with high mitigators ($M=4.75$), who were more likely to vote for life in prison. These results suggest that participants were weighing aggravators and mitigators appropriately.

Main Effect for Juror Type

It was hypothesized that when Oprah voted for life, participants would be more likely to vote for life as compared to the control condition; and when Oprah voted for death, participants would be more likely to vote for death. Contrary to this prediction, there was not a significant difference between the three levels of juror verdict type ($F(2,75)=.307, p=.737$). This finding implies that Oprah (as a juror) did not influence participants’ sentencing decisions directly.

Interaction between Case Type and Juror Type

In the two-way interaction (case type by juror verdict type), it was hypothesized that participants in the control (non-celebrity) condition would properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. In the experimental conditions, it was hypothesized that participants would not properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. Analysis revealed a significant interaction ($F(2,75) = 3.12, p < .05$). As expected, participants in the non-celebrity (control) condition with high aggravators case scenario ($M = -2.29$) were significantly more likely to vote for death, compared to their counterparts with high mitigators case scenarios ($M = 5.80$) who were more likely to vote for life in prison. This demonstrates that participants in the control condition were weighing aggravators and mitigators properly. In the “Oprah voted for life” condition with high mitigators case scenario, participants were significantly more likely to vote for life in prison ($M = 5.38$), compared to their counterparts in the high aggravators condition who were more likely to vote for death ($M = -0.86$). These findings demonstrate that participants weighed aggravators and mitigators appropriately, when Oprah voted for life. In the “Oprah voted for the death penalty” condition, however, there was no difference found between participants in the high aggravator condition ($M = 3.69$) and high mitigator condition ($M = 2.75$). Because there was no difference between the high aggravator and high mitigator condition, participants were unable to weigh these factors when Oprah voted for the death penalty. Thus, these participants were not making decisions as legally prescribed.

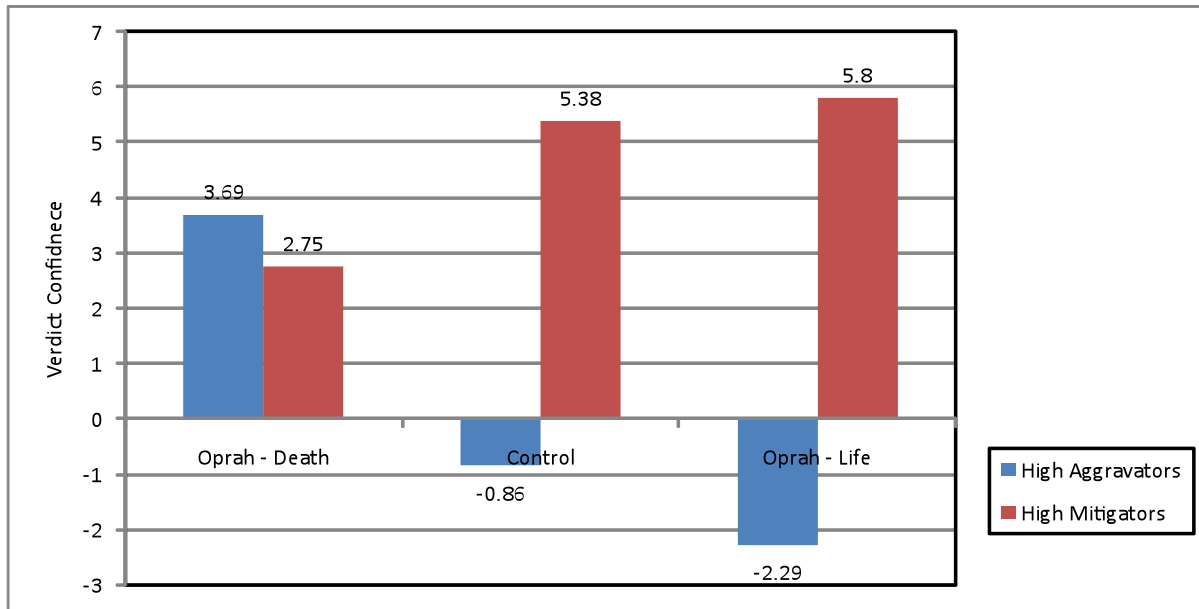


Figure 1. Interaction between Case Type and Juror Type for Study One

Analysis of participants' perceptions of influence

A secondary focus of these analyses was to examine the perceptions of celebrity jurors' status and influence and their impact on jury decision-making processes. As mentioned above, the deliberation summary described the arguments of six mock-jurors. In the experimental conditions, Oprah made one of the arguments; in the control group, a non-celebrity made the same argument. This manipulation of celebrity status allowed for comparison of participants' perceptions of the argument. It was expected that participants would have more favorable perceptions of the argument, and of the juror, when it was Oprah as compared to the non-celebrity. A one-way between groups MANOVA was conducted to determine if arguments made by Oprah (as compared to those made by a non-celebrity) influenced participants' perceptions of the target mock-juror on several dimensions.

Specifically, the strength of the argument, the strength of the juror's influence, the extent of

the juror's knowledge, and the likelihood that the juror would serve as a foreperson for the jury were used as the dependent variables. The identity of the juror (Oprah or a non-celebrity making the same argument) served as the independent variable. In the first analysis, participants who read that Oprah made the *argument favoring the death* penalty were compared to participants who read that a non-celebrity made that same argument. Analysis revealed a significant difference between these two groups on the combined dependent variables: $F(4, 97)=3.62, p=.01$; Wilks Lambda=.87. Further analysis of the dependent variables revealed that the participants in the Oprah condition were more likely to believe that Oprah would be elected as foreperson ($M=6.77$) than control participants were to believe that the non-celebrity juror would be elected foreperson ($M=5.25$; $F(1, 100)=11.27, p<.01$). However, these two groups did not differ in their perceptions of the strength of the juror's argument, influence, and extent of knowledge.

In the second set of analyses, participants' perceptions of the non-celebrity and Oprah's *argument for life in prison* were compared. Similar to the analyses above concerning arguments for the death penalty, MANOVA revealed a significant overall difference between participants who read about Oprah and participants who read about a non-celebrity ($F(4, 97)=4.44, p<.01$; Wilks Lambda=.85). Specifically, results revealed that participants who read Oprah's argument were more likely to believe that she would be elected foreperson ($M=6.82$) than control participants were to believe that the non-celebrity would be elected foreperson ($M=5.71$; $F(1, 100)=7.43, p<.01$). However, ratings of the strength of argument, influence, or knowledge did not differ between those who read about Oprah and those who read about a non-celebrity.

These results are important to the field of social psychology and law. First, these findings reflect the tenets of social influence. In particular, how an individuals' social network (e.g., fellow jurors) can influence his or her behavior. Our findings indicate that a celebrity juror's opinions influenced participants' decision-making processes. However, this was found to be true only in certain conditions (i.e., when Oprah voted for death). When Oprah voted for death, it appeared that participants found it difficult to weigh case facts properly. These results are concerning, as one of the expectations of legal system is to provide a defendant with a fair and impartial jury who are required to evaluate aggravators and mitigators appropriately. However, if certain factors (e.g., the presence of a celebrity) prevent jurors from carrying out their responsibility, the expectations of a fair trial are reduced. While these findings imply that having a celebrity present may impact juror's ability to weigh case facts, they fail to provide evidence that this occurs under all conditions.

The results also suggest celebrity influence may impact jurors' perceptions about jury decision-making processes. In particular, participants who read about Oprah as a juror were more likely to believe that she would be elected foreperson than mock-jurors who read about a non- celebrity juror believed the non-celebrity juror would be elected as foreperson. In the eyes of jurors, celebrities may possess more knowledge and understanding and thus may be more likely to be elected as foreperson of a jury. Although participants in the Oprah condition did believe she was more likely to be elected as foreperson (as compared to participants' perceptions of a non-celebrity), their perceptions of her influence and knowledge were no different than participants' perceptions of a non-celebrity juror who made the same argument. In short, the results suggest that celebrity jurors may impact jury decision-making processes to the extent that they are more likely to be elected foreperson.

Despite these interesting results, the question remains: Why did participants have more difficulty weighing aggravators and mitigators when Oprah voted for the death penalty and not when she voted for life? One possibility is that the sentencing decision given in this condition (i.e., Oprah voting for death) is counter to participant's schematic ideals of Oprah. That is, Oprah voting for the death penalty may have contradicted participant's schema-driven expectancies of Oprah being a kind and caring person. Because her behavior deviated dramatically from what was anticipated, this may have caused participant's expectation to be violated (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). When an individual's schema expectation is challenged, it might result in a negative reaction from others. In this case, it may have lead participants to question her reasoning and oppose her vote. For this reason, we felt these findings needed further examination and thus, we replicated this study using a different celebrity.

Overview of Experiment Two

The hypotheses, procedure, design, and materials used in Study One were identical for Study Two. The only exception was a change in the celebrity name utilized in the experimental condition. In Study Two, Bruce Willis was used as the celebrity rather than Oprah Winfrey. As in Study One, participants in Study Two were asked to read a trial summary, a deliberation summary, and indicate a sentencing verdict and their confidence in their verdict. A 3 (juror verdict type: Bruce Willis voted for death penalty/Bruce Willis voted for life sentence/control) X 2 (case type: high aggravators/high mitigators) between subjects design was utilized.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were university students who received course credit for their participation. A total of 40 participants were excluded from Study Two due to indicating either that their strong sentiment about the death penalty would deter them from being an impartial juror, and/or their lack of awareness of Bruce Willis as a juror. The final sample for Study Two was demographically similar to Study One, consisting of 104 participants, who were Caucasian (97.2%), female (54.7%), with an average age of 20.43 years ($Mdn=20$). Cell sizes averaged 24 participants per cell for the full sample and 17.3 for the final sample.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Similar to Study One, a 3 (juror type: Bruce Willis voted for death penalty/Bruce Willis voted for life sentence/control) X 2 (case type: high aggravators/high mitigators) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the participant's combined verdict score. Tukey's HSD was used to perform post-hoc analyses.

Main effect for Case Type

As predicted, analysis revealed a main effect for case type ($F(1,98)=9.55, p=.003$). As expected, participants in the condition with high aggravators case scenarios ($M=1.14$) were significantly more likely to vote for death, compared to their counterparts in the condition with high mitigators ($M=5.19$) who were more likely to vote for life in prison. As in Study

One, this finding implies that participants in Study Two were able to weigh aggravators and mitigators properly.

Main effect for Juror Type

It was hypothesized that when Bruce Willis voted for life, participants would be more likely to vote for life; and when he voted for death, participants would be more likely vote for death. Similar to findings in Study One, and contrary to the prediction, there was not a significant difference between conditions ($F(2,98)=.096, p=.91$). This finding implies that participants' verdicts were not influenced by the presence of Bruce Willis as a juror.

Interaction between Case Type and Juror Type

It was hypothesized that participants in the control (non-celebrity) condition would properly weigh aggravators and mitigators, whereas participants in the experimental (Bruce Willis-present) conditions would not properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. Analysis revealed the predicted interaction ($F(2,98)=3.52, p=.033$). As expected, participants in the non-celebrity condition with high aggravators case scenarios ($M=0.84$) were significantly more likely to vote for death, compared to their counterparts with high mitigators case scenarios ($M=5.11$), who were more likely to vote for life in prison. This demonstrated that participants in the control condition were weighing aggravators and mitigators appropriately. In the "Bruce Willis voted for death" condition with high aggravators, participants were significantly more likely to vote for death ($M=-0.67$), compared to their counterparts with high mitigators ($M=7.53$), who were more likely to vote for life in prison. These findings demonstrated that participants weighed aggravators and mitigators appropriately, when Bruce

Willis voted for death. However, there was no difference between participants in the “Bruce Willis voted for life” condition with high mitigators ($M=3.04$), and participants in the “Bruce Willis voted for life” with high aggravators ($M=3.86$). In this particular condition (i.e., when Bruce Willis voted for life), participants were unable to properly weigh aggravators and mitigators.

Analysis of participants' perceptions of influence

Similar to Study One, a one-way between groups MANOVA was conducted to determine if Bruce Willis' presence impacted participant's perceptions of the target juror on several dimensions. It was expected that participants would have more favorable perceptions of the argument, and of the juror, when it was Bruce Willis as compared to the non-celebrity. As in Study One, the strength of the argument, the strength of the juror's influence, the extent of the juror's knowledge, and the likelihood that the juror would serve as a foreperson for the jury were used as the dependent variables. Willis' presence/absence served as the independent variable. For the first set of analyses, participants' perceptions of an identical *argument for the death penalty* were compared: In one group participants read about Bruce Willis voting for death and in the other group participants read about a non-celebrity voting for death. A significant difference between these two groups was found on the combined dependent variables: $F(4, 47)=2.78, p=.04$; Wilks Lambda = .81. An analysis of the dependent variables revealed that the participants in the experimental condition were more likely to believe that Bruce Willis would be elected as foreperson ($M=6.61$) than control participants were to believe that the non-celebrity juror would be elected foreperson ($M=5.35$; $F(1, 50)=8.47, p<.01$). In the second set of analyses, participants' perceptions (in

terms of strength of argument, influence, etc.) of an identical *argument for life in prison* were compared: in one group, participants read about Bruce Willis voting for life in prison and in the other group participants read about a non-celebrity voting for the same argument.

MANOVA revealed no significant difference between participants who read Willis' argument and participants who did not ($F(4, 54) = .28, p = .89$). Consistent with the findings in Study One, there were no differences between groups in any analyses of participants' perceptions of the jurors' (i.e., Willis or the non-celebrity) influence and knowledge.

Similar to Study One, our findings in Study Two suggest that under certain conditions, participants were unable to weigh case facts appropriately. Specifically, Bruce Willis' vote for life in prison made it difficult for participants to be impartial and evaluate case facts properly. Like Study One, it is speculated that participant's schema of Bruce Willis may have affected their sentencing decisions, thus interfering with the decision-making process. Because Bruce Willis is known for portraying tough, hard-hitting characters, it might have been difficult for participants to understand why he would vote for life in prison. That is, they might believe that voting for the death penalty is more in line with his schema.

Results also indicate that Bruce Willis, like Oprah Winfrey, may be more likely to be voted foreperson as compared to a non-celebrity juror. Participants who read Bruce Willis' argument were more likely to believe that he would be elected foreperson, as compared to participants who read an identical argument from a non-celebrity. Thus, celebrity status may affect jury decision-making processes due to the fact that a celebrity may be more likely to be elected foreperson. It is important to note that participants who read Bruce Willis' argument did not think it was stronger or more influential than participants who read an identical argument given by a non-celebrity.

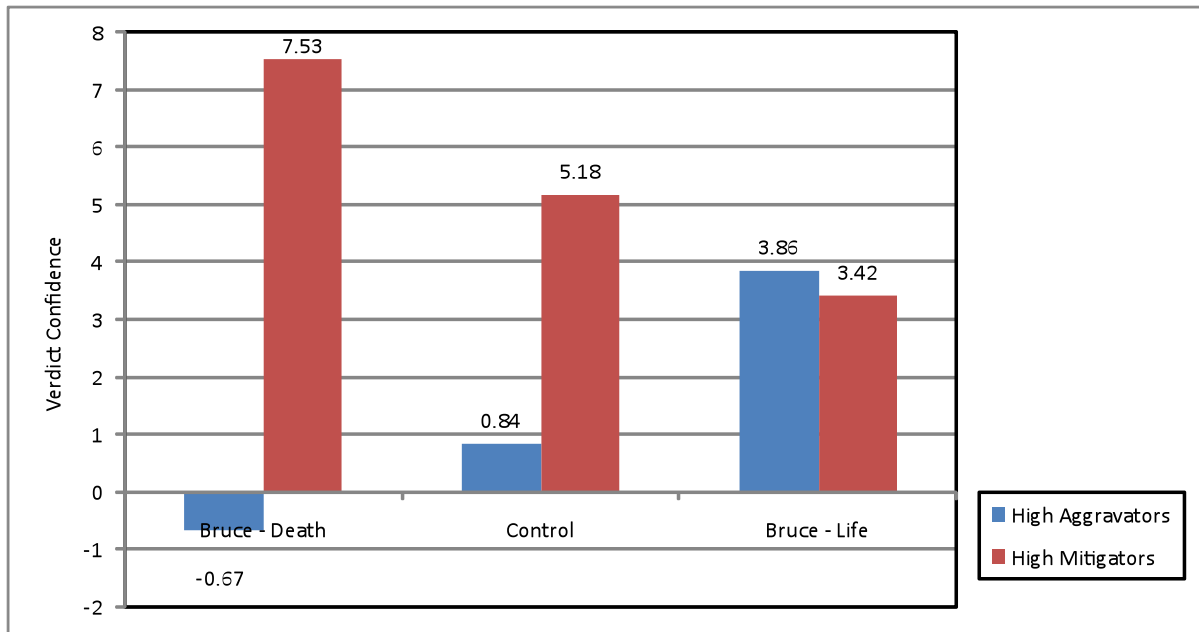


Figure 2. Interaction between Case Type and Juror Type for Study Two

GENERAL DISCUSSION

As discussed earlier, researchers have examined the effects of celebrities as defendants (Chamberlain et al., 2005), yet none have examined celebrity influence on jurors' sentencing decisions. Studies (Basil, 1996; Boon & Lomare, 2001) suggest that celebrities are influential in shaping certain behaviors and attitudes held by many Americans, who perceive them as icons (McCracken, 1989) and role models (Bush et al., 2004). This research, coupled with relevant social psychological theory, suggests that celebrity jurors may influence fellow jurors and the jury decision-making processes. From a legal standpoint, the influence of celebrity jurors on case verdicts and the decision-making process is quite worrisome. Such an effect calls into question the fairness and impartiality of our judicial system, as well as the possible violation of defendants' constitutional rights.

The hypotheses were partially met in Studies One and Two. In both studies, there was no main effect for celebrity juror on participant's sentencing verdicts. It is possible that this manipulation was ineffective because participants merely read a celebrity's deliberation summary rather than actually interacting with a celebrity juror. If, however, a celebrity had been a fellow juror and an active member of the deliberation process, this scenario would have been more realistic and the presence of a celebrity juror may have been strong enough to alter their sentencing verdicts.

The second analysis measured effects of a celebrity juror on participants' decision-making processes: specifically their ability to properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. Findings in the control (non-celebrity) conditions for both studies resulted in expected outcomes, with participants voting for the death penalty in the high aggravators conditions and voting for life in prison in mitigator conditions, respectively. This indicates that participants were properly weighing case facts in the control condition. However, it appeared that participants could not always weigh aggravators and mitigators in the presence of a celebrity. Specifically, when Oprah Winfrey voted for the death penalty, and when Bruce Willis voted for life in prison, participants were unable to weigh aggravators and mitigators properly. Participants in the high mitigating condition did not differ from their counterparts in the high aggravating condition, suggesting that the celebrity's presence made it more difficult to evaluate case facts. To the contrary, when Oprah Winfrey voted for life in prison, and Bruce Willis voted for the death penalty, participants could properly weigh aggravators and mitigators. Thus, findings in both studies suggest that certain factors (e.g., the verdict preference of a celebrity juror) prevented participants from making proper decisions.

Social psychological theory pertaining to schemas assists in explaining our mixed results in both studies. Schemas are subjective theories that individuals utilize to organize information and make sense of the world, based primarily on general social experiences (Howard & Renfrow, 2003). Particularly relevant to these findings are person and role schemas, which organize knowledge about the traits of a certain individual and the expectations of an individual's social position, respectively (Howard & Renfrow, 2003). In certain celebrity-present conditions (i.e., Oprah Winfrey voted for the death penalty and Bruce Willis voted for life in prison), the celebrities' verdict may contradict the American public's person and role schemas for these individuals. For example, the common perception of Oprah Winfrey is that she is a humanitarian who gives to charities and establishes organizations for the needy. Oprah voting for the death penalty challenges our schema of her as a compassionate and generous individual. The public's view of Bruce Willis, on the other hand, may be quite different. Since more often than not, Bruce Willis plays rough and forceful characters in movies, it may be difficult for some individuals to separate his role schema from his true persona. For this reason, Bruce Willis voting life in prison may conflict with the public's perception of him as an assertive, violent individual. The contradiction between participants' schemas of these celebrities and their sentencing decisions may have caused participants to pay more attention to celebrities' individual sentencing preference. If participants were distracted by celebrities' sentencing preference, it may have made it difficult for them to focus on the actual case facts and could have possibly lead to the non-significant results in the certain conditions (i.e., Oprah Winfrey voted for life and Bruce Willis voted for death). Because this has the potential of infringing upon a defendant's right

to an impartial jury, it is imperative that further research be conducted on the consequences of schematic violations and its impact on sentencing decisions.

In addition to disrupting jurors' ability to weight aggravators and mitigators, celebrities may also influence the process by which juries decide cases in another way. Although Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Willis did not impact participants' perceptions of knowledge and influence, participants believed that Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Willis are more likely to be voted foreperson of a jury than a non-celebrity. Thus, these celebrities (and celebrities in general) may impact jury decision-making processes because they are more likely to be elected foreperson. These findings suggest that participants were aware of the influence of a celebrity juror (i.e., that Oprah was more likely to elected foreperson), but were unwilling to acknowledge that the celebrity actually impacted their response (i.e., they did not indicate that she was more influential). It is likely that participants recognized that they were expected (by the researchers) to believe that the celebrity was influential, and, as a reaction to this, they did not indicate that the celebrity was more influential.

LIMITATIONS

The present experiment had some limitations worth noting. First, it utilized a sample of university students. The use of a convenient sample may limit the generalizability of the study's findings as sample members may be more homogenous than members of the general population. However, some researchers have demonstrated few differences between college students and the general population (Bornstein, 1999). Another methodological limitation of the study was that participants read short trial scenarios and deliberation summaries to simulate the events of an actual case. The use of these materials created an unrealistic

environment. In other words, the experience of serving as a juror on an actual death penalty trial (as compared to a simulated trial) would require a juror to spend a significant more amount of time and energy in a courtroom listening to evidence, interacting with fellow jurors, and deliberating on a sentence. Clearly, reading a celebrity juror's opinions and sentencing decision would have less impact on a potential juror than actually serving alongside a celebrity through the duration of a trial.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study sheds light on the potential influence of celebrities in the courtroom. Specifically, it highlights that, under certain conditions, the presence of a celebrity juror may prevent other jurors from properly evaluating case facts. This finding is of relevance to the judicial system as it draws attention to the possibility of extraneous variables influencing jurors' decision-making processes.

Another possible negative effect of celebrity jurors that the present study did not address is that they may be a distraction in the courtroom. That is, they may interfere with jurors' ability to pay attention to case facts and court proceedings. In our studies, the presence of the celebrity was not revealed until participants were provided with all other case information. Thus, participants read trial scenarios and summaries of the other jurors, before discovering that Oprah Winfrey or Bruce Willis was one of the jurors. In real life, however, jurors discover that a celebrity is a juror during jury selection, which may result in a celebrity becoming a distraction to fellow jurors at the beginning of the trial proceedings. While our study does not assess whether the presence of a celebrity is distracting, it is reasonable to assume that this could play a factor. Future studies are needed to examine this topic further.

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