

# Example of essay on justice is still not colorblind: differential racial effects ...

[Law](#), [Evidence](#)



In the present day society, cases of racism being expressed openly have reduced, but there are chances that it is still perpetrated in subtle and non overt ways that are not clearly discernable. This is known as “ modern racism.” Over the years, there have been fears that the justice system is not impervious to racism, and this has become a subject of interest for many scholars. A good example is Johnson et al (1995) who carried out a study to determine whether race affects decision making during criminal trials. Although the research was an eye-opener in several ways, a gap still exists on whether exposure to proacquittal inadmissible information varies with race. It is possible that judgment may, or may not, vary with the race of the defendant, and this is something the researchers missed. Nevertheless, I concur with researchers’ perspective on modern racism. In my understanding, modern racism is prejudice expressed towards individuals of a particular race, and this is carried out in subtle and non-threatening ways. This perspective is shared by Johnson, Whitestone, Anderson-Jackson and Gatto (1995) who argue that the current expressions of racism are less overt than in previous years because of social inhibitions against clear and unequivocal manifestations of racist behavior.

The research carried out by Johnson et al (1995) has two categories of independent variables: race of the defendant and admissibility of evidence. These two variables are independent because they do influence and determine the outcome of the dependent variable under study. It is also essential to note that each of the independent variables has levels; the race of the defendant has two levels (black and white), and the admissibility of evidence has three levels ( admissible, inadmissible and the control). The

variables exists between-groups because the differences that occur in individual scores are as a result of independent variables. The independent variable used in the study was the appropriate verdict in the case presented. The actual question was " what would be the appropriate verdict in the present case?". The answers were given in a 9-point scale (1= definitely innocent to 9= definitely guilty), and analyzed with a 2 (information admissibility: admissible, inadmissible, control) \* 2 (defendant's race: black, white) analysis of variance.

In the research conducted by Jonson et al (1995), there are several possibilities of extraneous variables, but the researchers tried to minimize this occurrence. For example, demand bias could take place. Demand bias takes place when the subjects assume that they know the agenda of the research thus give answers which would favor the specific outcome they have in mind. To eliminate the occurrence of demand bias, the researchers told the subjects that the experiment would focus on various facets of impression formation (in politics, advertising, etc). Another case of extraneous variable arises from the fact that some subjects may not be aware of inadmissible evidence, or may underestimate it, which would compromise the results of the subjects in the inadmissible evidence category. To avoid this scenario, the researchers' deliberately placed the clause against the use of inadmissible evidence at the end of the passage. To enable the subjects in the admissible evidence category the chance to assimilate this evidence in their judgment, the researchers deliberately omitted this clause. Again, there is evidence that simulated jurors avoid judicial instruction if they feel that it would compromise their ability to make

the “right” verdict. To avoid this occurrence in the control experiment, the subjects were not given any information regarding the taped wire evidence. At the end of the Johnson et al (1995) study, it is clear that the researchers employed a quasi-experimental design. This is true because although the research carries some the characteristics of an experimental design, the selection of the subjects is not random. In their own admission, the researchers reveal that the subjects who participated in the study came from the first-year psychology class at the University of North Carolina. Additionally, the age distribution of the subjects is not random because all the subjects were aged 18-20 years. Again, as the researchers admitted in the study, the subjects were primarily Caucasians. Moreover, the research was not carried out in an actual jury setting rather it was a simulation. As the researchers admit in their closing remarks, the trial did not simulate an actual trial situation, but the research findings suggest that the legal community should be concerned about the effects of admissible information regarding a defendant and how these effects might interact with other factors to possibly modify judicial outcomes. A simulation of the actual criminal trial has to involve modification of the research methodology, but this is something which may increase the probability of leniency. One of the means of modifying the research methodology to simulate an actual trial, as the researchers suggest, may involve placing the subjects into groups of 6-12 people to allow for deliberation. Although the study uses a quasi-experimental design, the results of the study reveal some intriguing truths about modern racism, thus the study cannot be dismissed altogether.

## **Reference**

Johnson, J. D., Whitestone, E., Anderson-Jackson, L., & Gatto, L. (1995).

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colorblind: Differential racial effects of exposure to inadmissible evidence.

Personality

and Social Psychology Bulletin , 21, 893-898.