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Without Mercy: The Immediate Impact of Group Size on Lynch Mob Atrocity

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Two independent research traditions have focused on social contributions to lynching. The sociological power threat hypothesis has argued that lynching atrocity will increase as a function of the relative number of African Americans. The psychological self-attention theory has argued that lynching atrocity will increase as a function of the relative number of mob members. Two series of analyses (one using newspaper reports and the second using photographic records) using different and nonoverlapping samples of lynching events rendered a consistent pattern of results: Lynch mob atrocity did not increase as a function of the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population but it did increase as a function of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob. Discussion considers the implications of these results.

Keywords: *self-attention; power threat; lynching; mob atrocity; intergroup relations*

It dawned on me that if I could isolate a person from a lynch mob, I would have a different character from the brute who participated in the crime. People don't commit horrible crimes like this when they are alone.

—Pearl Primus (quoted in Glover, 1989, pp. 60-61)

Lynching is typically defined as an illegal and summary execution at the hands of a mob (Corzine, Huff-Corzine, & Nelson, 1996; Cutler, 1905). In the United States, lynching is “one of the most grisly chapters in American history” (Brundage, 1993, p. xii), the terrorism of African American minority groups by White supremacists. Estimates of the number of African American victims of lynching in the United States during the late 19th

and the 20th centuries have ranged from 2,522 (Soule, 1992) to 2,789 (Tolnay, Beck, & Massey, 1989a) to 3,220 (Brundage, 1993) to 3,417 (Dray, 2002). Highlighting this dark facet of intergroup relations in American history, the United States Senate recently issued an apology for its failure to enact any federal laws that would have made lynching a crime (Stolberg, 2005).

Although lynching in the United States has come to define a certain time in the past and a culture that was less sophisticated and less educated, the crime of lynching is in fact timeless and examples can be found in all cultures. For example, in 2004, a group of Indian women and children removed a suspected rapist from court and knifed him to death (“Women Kill,” 2004). In 2006, an Israeli man opened fire on a bus and then was beaten to death by onlookers while he tried to reload his gun (“Israelis Arrest,” 2006). Most recently, in 2006, British soldiers videotaped themselves beating a group of rock-throwing Iraqi teenagers and children (Kennedy, 2006).

Lynching, like hate crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, unequivocally represents an instance of intergroup hostility that occurs within a social context and,

Authors' Note: It is with deep sadness that we acknowledge the death of our esteemed mentor, colleague, and friend, Professor Brian Mullen. Portions of this research were presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the Social Section of the British Psychological Society in Birmingham. We would like to thank Carsten De Dreu and two anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tirza Leader, Centre for the Study of Group Processes, Department of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NP, UK; e-mail: ti12@kent.ac.uk.

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like most real-world phenomena, reasons for lynching are multiply determined and have been explained using theories within different social science disciplines (for reviews of the literature, see Corzine et al., 1996; Pereti, & Singletary, 1981). Lynchings have generally been explained in terms of the majority group's desire to maintain their majority position (Corzine et al., 1996). As such, research has concentrated on times when the majority's structural power has weakened and the potential for equality in competitive forces has increased (Olzak, 1990). Hovland and Sears (1940) found that there was a connection between macroeconomic indexes and lynching behavior. However, these connections have been criticized throughout the literature and have not been consistently replicated (Green, Glaser, & Rich, 1998; Mintz, 1946).

Two completely independent research traditions have scrutinized the role of relative group size as a social contribution to lynching. The power threat hypothesis, developed within a sociological research tradition, has considered the impact of the relative number of African Americans on lynching atrocity (e.g., Blalock, 1967, 1989; Corzine, Creech, & Corzine, 1983; Reed, 1972, 1989; Tolnay, Beck, & Massey, 1989a, 1989b). On the other hand, within the social psychological perspective, self-attention theory has considered the impact of the relative number of mob members on lynching atrocity (e.g., Diener, 1980; Mullen, 1986).

Not only have these two separate research traditions developed completely independent of one another but also they have yielded apparently opposite predictions regarding the role of majority/minority ratios to lynching. This article examines and considers the possibility of reconciling these two cognate but disconnected research traditions. First, the power threat hypothesis and the self-attention theory will be reviewed. Then, to examine how well the evidence supports hypotheses from each of these two perspectives, results will be presented from analyses of two distinct and nonoverlapping sources of archival data on lynching events in the United States.

THE POWER THREAT HYPOTHESIS: POPULATION CONCENTRATION

Blalock's (1967) classic text *Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations* articulates the foundation for the power threat hypothesis perspective on the effects of social context on lynching. Blalock argued that as the African American proportion of the population increases, European Americans presumably perceive African Americans as representing a greater political or economic threat. This threat stimulates a rational response on the part of the European Americans to exercise control

over the growing African American population. Various oppressive and discriminatory behaviors have been interpreted as indicative of these rational efforts to exert social control, including police use of deadly force (Chamlin, 1989), executions (Phillips, 1986), and lynchings (Reed, 1972).

Within the power threat perspective, the social context is operationalized in terms of the African American population concentration (i.e., $\text{Number of African Americans} / [\text{Number of African Americans} + \text{Number of European Americans}]$). For example, for a county with an African American population of 1,000 people and a European American population of 10,000 people, the African American population concentration = $1,000 / (1,000 + 10,000) = .091$. Relatively few studies have actually confirmed the assumed association between African American population concentration and perceptions of threat among European Americans. Eitle, D'Alessio, and Stolzenberg (2002) observed that "the most serious problem that besets this research" is

Most researchers simply postulate that racial threat is a function of the relative size of the black [*sic*] population. Then they interpret any substantive relationship evinced between percent of the population that is black and the amount of social control that is experienced by blacks as indicative of their governing definition of threat. (p. 558)

However, more recently, Tougas, De La Sablonniere, Lagace, and Kocum (2003) did provide analogous support for this perspective by demonstrating that numerical representation of immigrants in Canada was positively associated with feelings of threat experienced by citizens of the receiving nation.

Consider how a real-world event, the recent attacks in the Middle East, could be predicted by the power threat hypothesis. After the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian extremists, the summer of 2006 saw Israel bomb Gaza's power plant and reestablish a military presence. Consistent with the power threat hypothesis, Israel's military response could be explained partially by the steady proportionate increase of the Palestinian population. Recent reports have stated that if the rate of increase is constant, the Palestinian minority will become a majority by the year 2020 (Rebhun & Waxman, 2003). These reports come at a time when the concessions of land to the Palestinians may also increase the perception of a potential political or economic threat. We recognize that there may be multiple other causes at work and use this example merely to illustrate an application of the predictions from the power threat hypothesis.

Several studies have examined the extent to which the proportion of African Americans in county populations

predicted lynching (Corzine et al., 1983; Creech, Corzine, & Huff-Corzine, 1989; Reed, 1972; Tolnay et al., 1989a). An index of lynching rate has sometimes been shown to increase as a function of the proportion of African Americans in county populations (Corzine et al., 1983; Reed, 1972). Corzine et al. (1983) noted that this pattern was especially pronounced in the so-called Deep South. However, Tolnay et al. (1989a) raised several criticisms about the inclusion or exclusion of data for specific counties in these analyses and serious concerns about the use of Reed's (1972) index of lynching rates. These concerns led Tolnay et al. (1989b) to conclude that

alternative methods for measuring the intensity of lynching, and describing its relation with minority concentration, are now required. (p. 634)

Thus, although previous research and anecdotal evidence seem consistent with the power threat hypothesis, it remains to be tested rigorously or in contrast to alternative hypotheses.

THE SELF-ATTENTION THEORY: MOB COMPOSITION

Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb's (1952) classic experiment on deindividuation provides a foundation for the self-attention theory perspective on the effects of social context on lynching. Festinger et al. (1952) argued that sometimes people will become submerged in groups, where individuals are not seen or paid attention to as individuals, and this state of deindividuation leads to the reduction of internal restraints against transgressive behaviors (see also Diener, 1980; Mullen, 1983). Various transgressive behaviors have been interpreted as indicative of this failure to regulate personal behavior, including prosocial behavior and antisocial behavior (Mullen, 1983), reduced organizational productivity (Mullen, Johnson, & Drake, 1987), and reduced participation in religious groups (Mullen, 1984).

Within the self-attention perspective, the social context is operationalized in terms of the Other-Total Ratio (i.e., $\text{Number in Other Group} / [\text{Number in Other Group} + \text{Number in Self Group}]$). For example, for 10 people in a group attacking a solo victim, the Other-Total Ratio for the group members = $1 / (1 + 10) = .091$. Several studies have actually confirmed the assumed association between group composition and levels of self-focused attention (e.g., Mullen, 1983, Studies 1 and 2; Mullen, Chapman, & Peaugh, 1989, Studies 1, 2, and 3).

Consider how a real-world event, attacks by British soldiers on Iraqi civilians in 2006, could be explained by self-attention theory. After a large group of young

Iraqi boys and teenagers attacked British soldiers with stones, British soldiers were video recorded isolating and taking into custody four of the culprits (Kennedy, 2006). Once the British soldiers were safely within the compound and away from the civilian population, the soldiers brutally beat and mocked the teenagers (Kennedy, 2006). Consistent with self-attention theory, the soldiers' behavior could be explained by the decrease in the size of the minority group as the size of the majority group increased. According to the videotape, the British soldiers purposefully targeted only four of the teenage attackers and did not become violent until joined by other soldiers in the British compound (Kennedy, 2006). It is not assumed that the self-attention theory fully explains this event but merely that the event is consistent with the theory.

Only one study has examined the extent to which the proportion of mob members in a lynch mob predicted lynching atrocity. An index of lynching atrocity has been shown to decrease as a function of mob members' Other-Total Ratio (Mullen, 1986). Thus, as the lynchers became more numerous relative to the victims, consistent with the idea that lynchers became less self-attentive, there was an increase in lynch mob atrocity.

A CONCEPTUAL COMPARISON

There are many areas of cognate interest in sociology and psychology with many instances of parallel conceptual development and empirical focus, including reference groups, social networks, and social identity (e.g., see Abrams & Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Thoits, 1995). What makes the consideration of sociological and psychological perspectives particularly salient in the context of lynching atrocity is that these two research traditions use the same algebraic proportional formulas at different levels of group composition to lead to apparently opposite predictions regarding social contributions to lynching. That is, the power threat hypothesis posits that lynching atrocity will increase as a function of the relative number of African Americans, whereas self-attention theory posits that lynching atrocity will increase as a function of the relative number of mob members. However, several elements distinguish these two research traditions and highlight how these apparently opposite predictions may not be entirely contradictory.

First, there seems to be a more fundamental difference between these two research traditions in the assumed nature of the lynch mob. On one hand, the power threat hypothesis perspective seems to assume that lynch mob atrocity is a conflict-based motive engaged in by a European American hegemony that chooses to exert control over a potentially threatening minority through violence. On the other hand, the

self-attention theory perspective seems to assume that the savagery of lynch mob atrocity, which goes well beyond the pale of any normal individual behavior, represents a fundamental reduction of self-regulation using normal personal standards of conduct.

Second, the power threat hypothesis conceptualizes group proportion as the relative number of African Americans at the level of county population, whereas self-attention theory conceptualizes group proportion as the relative number of mob members at the level of lynch mob composition. Third, empirically, the power threat hypothesis has scrutinized the effect of group composition on lynching with aggregate data that span years, whereas self-attention theory has scrutinized the effect of group composition on lynching with single event data that span, at most, a few hours.

Finally, the power threat hypothesis has tended to scrutinize the frequency of lynching events within a given time frame, whereas self-attention theory has tended to scrutinize the degree of savagery or atrocity exhibited during a single lynching event. Nonetheless, the power threat hypothesis does embrace the idea that a higher percentage of African Americans amplifies atrocity. For example, scholars working within the power threat hypothesis research tradition have often referred to “the level of lynching” (Corzine et al., 1996, p. 137) and “the intensity of lynching” (Tolnay et al., 1989a, pp. 606, 614). And, as indicated above, serious concerns have been raised about the indexes of lynching rate employed in previous tests of the power threat hypothesis (e.g., Tolnay et al., 1989b).

Given these differences in focus and level of analysis, it is intriguing to consider the possibility that there could be evidence that might provide support for both of these perspectives. For example, hypotheses from both would be consistent with the finding that maximal atrocity arises when the county population of African Americans is highest and the lynch mob population is largest whereas atrocity should be low if either of these ratios is low. To examine this theoretically consistent possibility, it is necessary to have observations at the lowest unit of analysis, that is, the lynch mob. Four possibilities can be considered: (a) The sociological level predominates consistent with power threat theory, (b) the psychological level predominates consistent with self-attention theory, (c) both levels account for atrocity additively, and (d) effects of the levels interact. This effort was designed to examine the possible outcomes of these two research traditions.

STUDY 1: WORDS ARE WISE MEN'S COUNTERS

Following Mullen (1986),¹ Ginzburg's (1962) *100 Years of Lynching* provided the archival data on lynching examined in this study. This book contains newspaper

reports of approximately 300 lynchings that occurred in the United States (along with several lynching-related editorials). The present effort was restricted to reports of lynching events wherein the victims were African American. A report was selected for inclusion in this analysis if (a) the victim(s) of the lynching was (were) killed, (b) the number of victims was reported, and (c) the number of lynchers was reported or numerically estimated (range descriptions were averaged—for example, a mob described as being between 150 and 200 people was estimated to be 175). These selection criteria resulted in 60 distinct lynching events that occurred between the years 1899 and 1946 ($M = 1918$).

Measures

Lynching atrocity. The atrocity of each lynching was operationalized in the following manner. Each lynching was scored for the occurrence (a score of 1) or the nonoccurrence (a score of 0) of five acts of violence: hanging, shooting, burning, lacerating or stabbing, and dismembering or mutilation of the victim(s). In addition, each lynching was scored in terms of the duration of the event, such that 1 = *relatively quick*, 2 = *moderate*, and 3 = *explicitly prolonged and torturous*. The scores obtained for the five lynch acts and the score obtained for the duration of the event were summed to yield the composite index of atrocity. Note that this composite index of atrocity is analogous in many ways to Watson's (1973) coding of cultural aggression and Jacob's (1942) classification of atrocity stories.²

African American population concentration. The newspaper reports typically identified the year, the town, and the state in (or near) which each lynching occurred. From this information, the county in which the lynching occurred was determined. One exception to this procedure was one report that failed to mention any city but did mention the county and state in which the lynching occurred. Then, similar to Corzine et al. (1983), Reed (1972), and Tolnay et al. (1989a), the percentage of the county population that was African American during the year in which the lynching occurred was derived from U.S. Census reports. Population concentration was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Population Concentration} = \frac{\text{Number of African Americans}}{(\text{Number of African Americans} + \text{Number of European Americans})}$$

Thus, the population concentration of a county decreases as the number of European Americans in a county increases relative to the number of African Americans in a county.

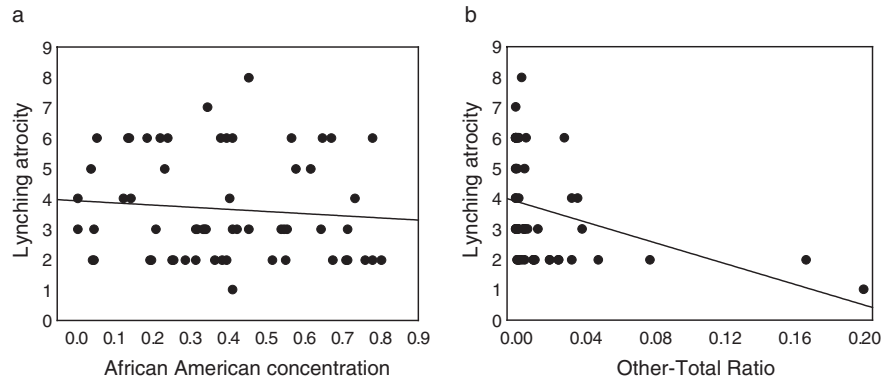


Figure 1 Lynching atrocity as a function of African American population concentration and the Other-Total Ratio, data from newspaper reports.

Lynch mob composition. The Other-Total Ratio for lynchers was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Other-Total Ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of Victims}}{\text{Number of Victims} + \text{Number of Lynchers}}$$

Thus, the Other-Total Ratio decreases as the number of lynchers increases relative to the number of African American victims.

Severity of victim's alleged crime. The newspaper reports identified the crime that the victim(s) was (were) alleged to have committed. Each lynching event was assigned an indicator of the severity of the alleged crime based on federal sentencing guidelines. Specifically, a 1 was assigned for alleged crimes that constituted infractions (e.g., engaging in an argument), a 2 was assigned for Class C misdemeanors (e.g., intoxication), a 3 was assigned for Class B misdemeanors (assault), a 4 was assigned for Class A misdemeanors (e.g., killing a cow, stealing a mule), a 5 was assigned for third-degree felonies (e.g., attempted rape, attempted murder), a 6 was assigned for second-degree felonies (e.g., burglary of a residence), and a 7 was assigned for first-degree felonies (e.g., rape, murder). Lynchings for which the report failed to mention the alleged crime were excluded from the analysis.

Results

African American population concentration. The proportion of the county population that was African American could be determined for all of the 60 lynching events involved in these analyses. The mean proportion of the county population that was African American was 38.9% (range from 0.3% to 80.5%). As illustrated in Figure 1a, the proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant predictor of

lynching atrocity, $r(58) = -.093, p = .240$.³ Thus, there is no evidence to indicate that lynchings became more savage when, by dint of their increasing concentration in the population, African Americans might have represented more of a threat.

Lynch mob composition. The mean number of victims was 1.2 (range from 1 to 4); the mean number of mob members was 1,492.1 (range from 4 to 15,000); the mean Other-Total Ratio was .0146 (range from .000067 to .2000). Because the Other-Total Ratio can generally range between 0 and 1 with a conceptual midpoint of 0.5, this low mean Other-Total Ratio is consistent with the basic notion that members of a lynch mob are generally non-self-attentive, or deindividuated (see Mullen, 1983; Mullen et al., 1989). As illustrated in Figure 2a, the Other-Total Ratio was a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(58) = -.345, p = .003$.⁴ Note that the Other-Total Ratio was still a significant predictor of atrocity if the variability because of the mere number of victims is first removed, $\beta = -.368, p = .003$, or if the variability because of the mere number of lynchers is first removed, $\beta = -.273, p = .014$, or if the variability because of the mere number of victims and the mere number of lynchers is first removed, $\beta = -.293, p = .014$. This indicates that the Other-Total Ratio is not redundant to the effects of the size of either subgroup alone. Thus, the evidence indicates that lynchings become more savage when, by dint of their proportionately greater numbers, the lynchers become lost in the crowd.

Ancillary analyses: Interrelations of elements of social context. The possibility remains that the zero-order effects reported thus far might mask more complex interrelations. For example, lynch mobs that form in counties where African Americans enjoy a greater numerical advantage might be of very different composition. Contrary to this possibility, there was no relation

between the proportion of the county population that was African American and the Other-Total Ratio, $r(58) = +.065$, $p = .622$. Nonetheless, lynching atrocity was simultaneously regressed on the proportion of the county population that was African American and the Other-Total Ratio. Essentially confirming the zero-order effects reported above, the proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.229$, $p = .112$, the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.315$, $p = .008$, and the interaction between the proportion of the county population and the Other-Total Ratio was not a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.212$, $p = .130$.

Ancillary analyses: Severity of victim's alleged crime and regional variations. The possibility also remains that the effects reported thus far might mask some effect of the severity of the victim's alleged crime. The average severity of the victim's alleged crimes, derived from federal sentencing guidelines, was 5.5 (range from 1 to 7). Most of the reports indicated that the victim's alleged crimes were first-degree felonies (rape or murder, $n = 32$) or third-degree felonies (attempted rape or attempted murder, $n = 15$); only one report failed to mention the victim's alleged crime (and, as indicated above, was excluded from the analyses of victim's alleged crime). The indicator of severity of the alleged crime was a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(57) = +.389$, $p = .002$. Thus, lynchings did become more savage when the victim was alleged to have committed a more severe crime.

The effects reported thus far might also mask differences due to regional variations in African American population concentration or lynch mob composition. One might speculate about regional differences in the prediction of lynch mob atrocity as a function of regional differences in the proportion of the county population that was African American or regional differences in the number of lynchers relative to victims. Therefore, lynching events were disaggregated into two regional clusters. Specifically, similar to Corzine et al. (1983), lynchings that occurred in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas ($n = 45$) were identified as occurring in the Deep South, and lynchings that occurred in Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee ($n = 15$) were identified as occurring elsewhere. There was no significant difference between the mean degree of atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.70$) and that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.85$), $F(1, 58) = 0.266$, $p = .608$. Similarly, there was no significant difference

between the mean Other-Total Ratio for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = .02$, $SD = .04$) and that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = .01$, $SD = .02$), $F(1, 58) = 0.716$, $p = .401$. It is not surprising that there was a significantly greater mean proportion of the county population that was African American for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = 46.3\%$, $SD = 20.2$) than that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = 16.9\%$, $SD = 14.1$), $F(1, 58) = 27.202$, $p = 3.00E-06$.

More importantly, the interaction between county proportion and region the effect was not significant, $\beta = -.607$, $t(56) = -1.102$, $p = .138$. The proportion of the population that was African American did not predict lynching atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South, $r(43) = -.135$, $p = .188$, or for lynchings that occurred elsewhere, $r(13) = +.212$, $p = .224$; the prediction of lynching atrocity by proportion of the county population that was African American for these two regional clusters were not significantly different, $Z = 1.073$, $p = .142$.

The interaction between county proportion and region was not significant, $\beta = .448$, $t(56) = .979$, $p = .166$. The Other-Total Ratio did predict lynching atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South, $r(43) = -.344$, $p = .010$, and for lynchings that occurred elsewhere, $r(13) = -.405$, $p = .067$; the prediction of lynching atrocity by the Other-Total Ratio for these two regional clusters was not significantly different, $Z = 0.217$, $p = .414$.

Lynching atrocity was simultaneously regressed on the proportion of the county population that was African American, the Other-Total Ratio, the severity of the alleged crime, and a dichotomous coding for the Deep South (1) versus elsewhere (0). The proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.045$, $p = .382$; the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.249$, $p = .027$; severity of the alleged crime was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = +.315$, $p = .016$; and the dichotomous coding for regional clusters was not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = +.002$, $p = .988$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 reveal that lynch mob atrocity did not increase as a function of the relative numbers of African Americans in the population but that lynch mob atrocity did increase as a function of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob. These results fail to provide support for the power threat hypothesis perspective but are consistent with the self-attention theory perspective. Ancillary analyses revealed

that the effects of the relative numbers of African Americans in the population and the effects of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob were independent, and these effects could not be dismissed as an artifact of the severity of the victim's alleged crime or of regional differences between the Deep South and elsewhere.

Two methodological attributes of the archival data used in Study 1 should be scrutinized before the generalizability of these results can be considered (for general discussions of such issues regarding the use of archival data, see Earl, Martin, McCarthy, & Soule, 2004; McGuire, 1976). Both of these attributes stem from the use of newspaper reports in Study 1. First, the operationalization of lynch mob composition was derived from newspaper reporters' estimates of crowd size. However, it should be noted that people's estimates of crowd sizes are often incorrect (Kemp, 1984). Moreover, Mann (1974) found that newspaper reporters' estimates of crowd sizes tend to be highly influenced by their political leanings. This biasing effect in estimates of crowd size may have been particularly strong in newspaper accounts of lynching events. For example, Perloff (2000) recently documented that newspaper accounts of lynchings were at times "virulently racist" (p. 321) in tone, and this racist tone may have exerted influence on the estimates of crowd size. Thus, the newspaper reporters' estimates of crowd size employed in Study 1 to operationalize group composition may have been biased or inaccurate.

Second, the operationalization of lynch mob atrocity was derived from newspaper reporters' descriptions of the atrocities conducted by the mobs. However, this reliance on textual descriptions may underestimate the actual degree of savagery visited on victims of lynching events. In studying atrocity, Douglas, Lyon, and Ogloff (1997) and Whalen and Blanchard (1982) found that exposure to photographs instead of just written or spoken transcripts lead to higher monetary awards and guilty verdicts when dealing with juror verdicts. Thompson, Clarke, and Dinitz (1974) found that exposure to photographs of the mass killing of civilians at My-Lai during the Vietnam War led to higher rates of condemnation than did exposure to written descriptions. This suggests the possibility that the textual descriptions of lynching events employed in Study 1 to operationalize atrocity may have rendered biased or inaccurate estimates (underestimates) of the degree of atrocity compared to what might emerge from the photographic records of lynching events.

Therefore, Study 2 was undertaken in an effort to replicate Study 1. The primary difference between Study 2 and Study 1 was the use of an alternative archival source of lynching events, which would not be subject

to these potential problems in operationalizing crowd size and lynching atrocity.

STUDY 2: A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Allen, Als, Lewis, and Litwack's (2000) *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* provided the archival data on lynching examined in this study. This book contains photographs of 98 lynchings that occurred in the United States. This effort was restricted to photographs of lynching events wherein the victim(s) was (were) African American. A photograph was selected for inclusion in this analysis if (a) the victim(s) of the lynching was (were) killed, (b) the number of victims could be determined from the photograph, (c) the number of lynchers could be determined from the photograph, and (d) the photograph appeared to be taken during or at the conclusion of the lynching event (as evidenced by the victim not being obviously posed for the photograph and the mob's still being present in the photograph). These selection criteria resulted in photographs of 22 distinct lynching events that occurred between the years 1890 and 1935 ($M = 1912$).⁵ However, none of the lynching events depicted in Allen et al.'s (2000) photographs were described in Ginzburg's (1962) newspaper reports.

Measures

Lynching atrocity. The atrocity of each lynching was operationalized in the following manner: High-resolution copies of each lynching photograph were rescaled so that the victim's head was approximately 0.5 inches long. The image of the entire person was then cropped to a 2 × 4-inch window to omit as much of the crowd as possible from the image. In the lynching events involving multiple victims, a separate image was obtained for each victim; atrocity was judged separately for each victim and then averaged across the multiple victims. The victim images were judged independently by two judges by placing the photographs along a meter stick with endpoints of *least atrocity* to *most atrocity*. The victim images were then assigned a numerical value based on their correspondence to the meter stick. These judgments exhibited almost perfect reliability: $r = .936$, $R = .967$, and lynch mob atrocity was derived as the average of the two judges' judgments.

African American population concentration. Annotations for photographs in Allen et al. (2000) often identified the year and the town and state in (or near) which each lynching occurred. When possible, the county in which

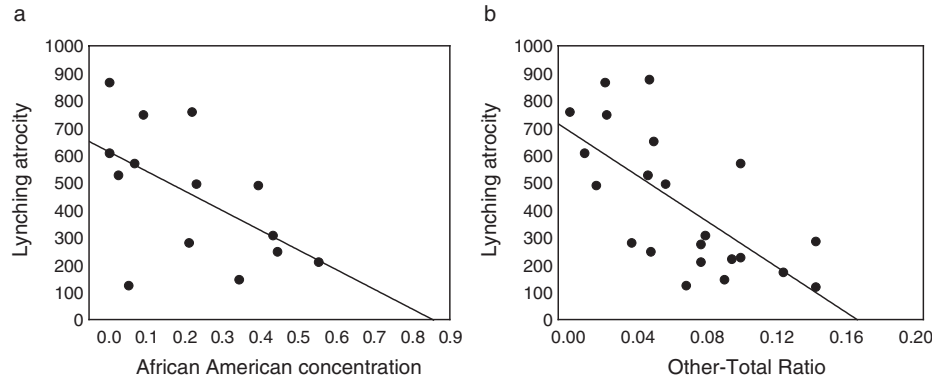


Figure 2 Lynching atrocity as a function of African American population concentration and the Other-Total Ratio, data from photographs.

the lynching occurred was determined. Then, similar to Study 1, the percentage of the county population that was African American during the year in which the lynching occurred was derived from U. S. Census reports.

Lynch mob composition. The number of victims and the number of the lynchers were tabulated from the photographs by two judges with perfect reliability: interjudge correlation $r = 1.000$, Spearman Brown effective reliability $R = 1.000$. Then, similar to Study 1, the Other-Total Ratio was derived.

Results

African American population concentration. The proportion of the county population that was African American could be determined for 14 of the 22 lynching events involved in these analyses. The mean proportion of the county population that was African American was 22.1% (range from 0.3% to 55.4%). As illustrated in Figure 2a, the proportion of the county population that was African American was a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(12) = -.558$, $p = .019$. However, contrary to the power threat hypothesis, these analyses suggest that lynchings became less savage when, by dint of their increasing concentration in the population, African Americans might have represented more of a threat.

Lynch mob composition. The mean number of victims was 1.1 (range from 1 to 3); the mean number of mob members was 53.7 (range from 6 to 495); the mean Other-Total Ratio was .0664 (range from .0020 to .1429). As illustrated in Figure 2b, the Other-Total Ratio was a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(20) = -.683$, $p = 2.33E-04$. Once again, the Other-Total Ratio

was still a significant predictor of atrocity if the variability because of the mere number of victims is first removed, $\beta = -.693$, $p = 4.73E-04$, or if the variability because of the mere number of lynchers is first removed, $\beta = -.647$, $p = .002$, or if the variability because of the mere number of victims and the mere number of lynchers is first removed, $\beta = -.655$, $p = .003$. This indicates that the Other-Total Ratio is not redundant to the effects of the size of either subgroup alone. Thus, similar to the results of Study 1, the evidence indicates that lynchings became more savage when, by dint of their proportionately greater numbers, the lynchers became lost in the crowd.

Ancillary analyses: Interrelations of elements of social context. There was only a modest relation between the proportion of the county population that was African American and the Other-Total Ratio, $r(12) = +.298$, $p = .301$. Nonetheless, as in Study 1, lynching atrocity was simultaneously regressed on the proportion of the county population that was African American and the Other-Total Ratio. Essentially confirming the zero-order effects reported above, the proportion of the county population that was African American was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.421$, $p = .041$ (albeit in the direction opposite to that predicted by the power threat hypothesis), the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.502$, $p = .016$, and the interaction between the proportion of the county population and the Other-Total Ratio was not a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = .027$, $p = .468$.

Ancillary analyses: Regional variations. Once again, the possibility remains that the effects reported thus far might mask some effect of regional variation. Lynching

events were disaggregated into two regional clusters (Deep South $n = 11$, occurring elsewhere $n = 11$). There was no significant difference between the mean degree of atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = 414.8$, $SD = 281.52$) and that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = 422.0$, $SD = 225.45$), $F(1, 20) = 0.004$, $p = .948$. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the mean Other-Total Ratio for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = .07$, $SD = .04$) and that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = .07$, $SD = .04$), $F(1, 20) = 0.002$, $p = .961$. It is not surprising that there was a marginally greater mean proportion of the county population that was African American for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South ($M = 30.6\%$, $SD = 18.8$) than that for lynchings that occurred elsewhere ($M = 17.5\%$, $SD = 17.9$), $F(1, 12) = 1.677$, $p = .220$.

More importantly, the interaction between county proportion and region the effect was not significant, $\beta = -.392$, $t(10) = -.714$, $p = .246$. The proportion of the county population that was African American marginally predicted lynching atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South, $r(3) = -.767$, $p = .065$, and for lynchings that occurred elsewhere, $r(7) = -.479$, $p = .096$ (although, once again, both of these predictions was in the direction opposite to the power threat hypothesis); the prediction of lynching atrocity by proportion of the county population that was African American for these two regional clusters was not significantly different, $Z = 0.602$, $p = .274$. Although the lack of power in this study makes it difficult to interpret these results, the direction and size of the effect are consistent with Study 1, and there does not seem to be any reason to expect that greater power would change these results.

The interaction between county proportion and region was not significant, $\beta = -.273$, $t(18) = -.734$, $p = .236$. The Other-Total Ratio did predict lynching atrocity for lynchings that occurred in the Deep South, $r(9) = -.740$, $p = .005$, and for lynchings that occurred elsewhere, $r(9) = -.616$, $p = .022$; the prediction of lynching atrocity by the Other-Total Ratio for these two regional clusters was not significantly different, $Z = 0.464$, $p = .321$.

Finally, replicating the analyses reported in Study 1, lynching atrocity was simultaneously regressed on the proportion of the county population that was African American, the Other-Total Ratio, and with the dichotomous coding for the Deep South (1) versus elsewhere (0). The proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.392$, $p = .074$; the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.530$, $p = .027$; and the dichotomous

coding for regional clusters was not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.025$, $p = .921$.

Ancillary analysis: Comparison. The question remains as to why the analysis of the photographs showed that lynchings became less savage when, by dint of their increasing concentration in the population, African Americans might have represented more of a threat. A careful examination of the data suggests that the photograph sample might not represent lynching events that occurred in largely African American areas. Whether a lynching event occurring in a predominately European American neighborhood was (a) more likely to be photographed, (b) more likely to lead to the photograph being kept and taken care of, or (c) more likely to be included in Allen et al.'s (2000) collection is unknown. The possibility remains that this sample bias might be responsible for the counterintuitive results reported earlier.

Therefore, a series of analyses was conducted on a subset of the sample for both newspaper reports and photographs. Data were included for analyses if the population concentration for the lynching event was .45 (the midpoint response) or lower. Lynching atrocity was simultaneously regressed on the proportion of the county population that was African American and the Other-Total Ratio. Consistent with the effects reported above, for the newspaper reports the proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.026$, $p = .437$, but the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.364$, $p = .015$. For the photographs the proportion of the county population that was African American was not a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.384$, $p = .074$, but the Other-Total Ratio was a significant independent predictor of lynching atrocity, $\beta = -.519$, $p = .031$.⁶

Discussion

Consistent with the results of Study 1, Study 2 reveals that lynch mob atrocity did not increase as a function of the relative numbers of African Americans in the population but that lynch mob atrocity did increase as a function of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob. These results fail to provide support for the power threat hypothesis perspective but they do provide support for the self-attention theory perspective. Similar to Study 1, ancillary analyses reveal that the effects of the relative numbers of African Americans in the population and the effects of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob were independent and that these effects could not be dismissed as an artifact of the regional differences between the Deep South and elsewhere. Finally, given that Study 2 employed photographic records of lynching

events, the results of Study 1 cannot be easily dismissed as being because of artifacts or biases in the newspaper reports of crowd size or lynching atrocity in newspaper reports.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The analyses reported above examined evidence regarding two cognate but disconnected research traditions on the social contributions to lynching atrocity. These two empirical comparisons render a consistent pattern of results: Lynch mob atrocity did not increase as a function of the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population, lynch mob atrocity did increase as a function of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob, and lynch mob atrocity was not predicted by an interaction between the ratios at the county and lynch mob levels. Given that the two datasets involved records from nonoverlapping samples of lynching events, the results of the analyses for newspaper reports cannot be easily dismissed as being because of artifacts or biases in the verbal reports of crowd size or lynching atrocity.

Defenders of the sociological power threat hypothesis perspective might argue that the use of an indicator of the atrocity of specific lynching events may have led to an unfair comparison between the power threat hypothesis and self-attention theory. That is, the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population may be more distal in time and space from the atrocity of a particular lynching event. However, a comparable logic might emphasize an advantage that the power threat hypothesis perspective enjoyed over self-attention theory in its approach to the social context. That is, the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population is a pervasive, enduring aspect of the social context that should exert robust effects. Moreover, the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population have never been considered more distal in time and space from specific instances of the police use of deadly force (Chamlin, 1989) or specific instances of executions (Phillips, 1986).

Clearly, most of the studies of lynching conducted within the power threat hypothesis research tradition have employed some indicator of lynching incidence rather than lynch mob atrocity. This might suggest that the power threat hypothesis is simply better suited to predicting frequency of lynching in the aggregate rather than intensity of lynching in the single instance. Nonetheless, scholars working within the power threat hypothesis research tradition have often referred to “the level of lynching” (Corzine et al., 1996, p. 137) and “the intensity of lynching” (Tolnay et al., 1989a,

pp. 606, 614). As indicated above, serious concerns have been raised about the indexes of lynching rate employed in previous tests of the power threat hypothesis (e.g., Tolnay et al., 1989b). It seems abundantly clear that the indicators of lynching atrocity employed in these analyses represent defensible operationalizations of “the intensity of lynching.”

Of course, the possibility remains that the 82 lynching events scrutinized in these two studies are in some way unrepresentative of lynching behavior in general. Indeed, the 94 victims of these lynching events comprise, at best, a 3.7% sample of all of the African Americans who were killed by lynch mobs in the United States during the late 19th and the 20th centuries (2,522). Nonetheless, this sample is not inordinately smaller than the 14.6% sample (369 victims) studied by Corzine et al. (1996), the 4.4% sample (111 victims) studied by Olzak and Shanahan (2003), or the 3.2% sample (83 victims) studied by Soule (1992). Moreover, the foreword of Ginzburg’s (1962) *100 Years of Lynching* and the afterward of Allen et al.’s (2000) *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* each seem to convey a genuine intent to provide a thorough (if not exhaustive) record of “one of the most grisly chapters of American history.” It seems unlikely that both Ginzburg and Allen et al. somehow selectively included reports or photographs, respectively, of lynching events that would disconfirm the basic premise of the power threat hypothesis; it seems unlikely that both Ginzburg and Allen et al. somehow selectively included reports or photographs, respectively, of lynching events that would confirm the basic premise of self-attention theory.⁷

An important limitation of this effort is its focus on only fatal lynching events. The inclusion of nonfatal events could have increased the sample size, expanded the operationalization of atrocity, and addressed the theoretically interesting question of what factors are involved when a person’s life is spared by the mob. Unfortunately, these datasets do not lend themselves to this examination. As stated earlier, a lynching is defined as an illegal and summary execution at the hands of a mob (Cutler, 1905; Corzine et al., 1996). As such, anthologies of lynching behavior tend to include events that led to a fatal outcome (i.e., a lynching). In fact, there were only five nonfatal events (two of which provided enough information about the mob and victim to be potentially includable) in Ginzburg (1962), and there were no nonfatal events in Allen et al. (2000). However, it would be possible to conduct this analysis with other phenomena of intergroup hostility (i.e., police brutality, military action, or ethnic cleansing) for which execution is not a function of the definition. Therefore, it is suggested that future research examine the relationship between group composition and other operationalizations of atrocity that include nonfatal events.

Thus, lynch mob atrocity does not seem to increase as a function of the relative numbers of African Americans in the county population, but lynch mob atrocity does seem to increase as a function of the relative numbers of mob members in the lynch mob. This evidence speaks to a more fundamental difference between the sociological power threat hypothesis research tradition and the psychological self-attention theory research tradition regarding the assumed nature of lynch mob atrocity. The power threat hypothesis research tradition implies that lynch mob atrocity is a conflict-based motive engaged in by a European American hegemony that chooses to exert control over a potentially threatening minority through violence. Even if threat is an important motivator of lynchings, the results of the two sets of analyses reported here fail to support the view that the relative number of African Americans contributes to these motives in any systematic way. The self-attention theory research tradition implies that the savagery of lynch mob atrocity is a fundamental reduction in self-regulation based on normal standards of personal conduct. A painstaking reading of the verbal descriptions of lynching atrocities (in Ginzburg, 1962) or a vigilant examination of the photographic record of lynching atrocities (in Allen et al., 2000) make it very difficult to reconcile the excessiveness of this savagery with any model of normal, rational behavior. It is, however, consistent with the idea that immediate group goals and standard norms may play a greater role as the Other-Total Ratio reduces (cf. Abrams, 1994; Abrams & Hogg, 2001; Reicher, 1987). In particular, lynchings may satisfy motives for group-based identity and meaning. Therefore, it is conceivable that these predominate over personal standards for behavior as the mob becomes larger in relation to the number of victims.

Clearly, real-world instances of intergroup hostility are multiply determined, with potential contributions ranging from economic and geopolitical factors to social and personality factors. The foregoing analyses may provide a heuristic template for the comparison of the relative contributions of various research traditions in other domains of intergroup conflict. In this study, the self-attention theory was reliably associated with the phenomenon of lynching atrocity but the power threat hypothesis was not reliably associated with the phenomenon of lynching atrocity, nor was there any interaction between the unit of analysis at which these two theories assume minority-majority ratios should have an impact. However, it is possible that with other phenomena of intergroup hostility (i.e., police brutality, military action, or ethnic cleansing) an interaction may occur between population concentration and the size of the group. It remains for future research to examine the

relative contributions of different facets of the social context to more recent examples of the darker side of intergroup relations, including hate crimes (Stanko, 2004), ethnic cleansing (Casparly, 2005), and genocide (Dutton, Boyanowski, & Bond, 2005), police brutality in crowd control (Chamlin, 1989), and military brutality during periods of occupation (Dutton et al., 2005).

NOTES

1. The Ginzburg (1962) dataset has been used to examine the relationship between the Other-Total Ratio and lynching atrocity in Mullen (1986). The overall effect size reported by Mullen for the Other-Total Ratio and lynching atrocity was the same as reported in this study. However, revisiting this dataset was considered important for the further understanding of the new analyses comparing the role of self-attention theory and the power threat hypothesis in lynching atrocity.

2. The relative nature of the indicators of atrocity employed here should be emphasized. It is not to be inferred that a lynching that involved the quick hanging of the victim was not an atrocity. However, the mutilation of the victim's bodies was qualitatively more horrific in some lynching events than in others. For example, a lynching in which a victim is simply hung is argued to involve less atrocity than a lynching wherein the victim was hung, burned, lacerated, and dismembered over a prolonged period of time. The skeptical reader is directed to Ginzburg's (1962) book; Allen, Als, Lewis, and Litwack's (2000) book; or Allen et al.'s corresponding Web site (<http://www.withoutsanctuary.org/>) for vivid depictions of lynchings that varied greatly in savagery and atrocity.

3. The significance levels associated with the expected effects of African American population concentration and lynch mob composition represent one-tailed probabilities. All other significance levels represent two-tailed probabilities.

4. The two apparent outliers present in the examination of the Other-Total Ratio in Study 1 were removed from the analysis and the remaining data were reanalyzed. Although the effect is reduced slightly, $r(56) = -.317, p = .008$ from $r(58) = -.345, p = .003$, it is still robust. With these data points removed, the county population that was African American was still not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(56) = -.099, p = .230$.

However, whereas the removal of the outliers reduced the skewness of the Other-Total Ratio, it did not eliminate this problem. Therefore, the data (specifically the Other-Total Ratio and the proportion of county population) were transformed using a natural log to reduce skewness. For Study 1, the Other-Total Ratio was still a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(58) = -.493, p = 3.16E-05$, and the proportion of the county population that was African American was still not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity, $r(58) = -.039, p = .384$.

5. Note that these selection criteria are comparable to those employed in Study 1 and that the resultant sample of 22 of 98 lynching events (or 22%) is nearly identical to the 60 of 300 lynching events (or 20%) included in Study 1.

6. It is possible that the change in these analyses is simply an artifact of a reduction in power. However, the important point to note is that the removal of the possible bias of an underreporting of lynching events does not change the overall conclusions. Specifically, the Other-Total Ratio predicts lynching atrocity but the proportion of the county population that was African American was still not a significant predictor of lynching atrocity.

7. However, it is possible that the exclusionary criteria used in this study added an element of sampling bias. To address this issue, the current dataset was compared to the Tuskegee Institute's (1979) demographic survey of lynchings by race and state. If the current dataset is unbiased, then a large, positive, and significant relationship between the proportion of lynchings by state documented by the

Tuskegee Institute and the proportion of lynchings by state used in the current study would be expected. If the dataset is biased, the relationship would be low or nonsignificant. The relationship between these two datasets, $r(18) = .706, p = 2.56E-04$, appears consistent with the conclusion that the current sample is unbiased.

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