

Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1997, pp. 563-581

Cognitive-Affective Processing System Analysis of Reactions to the O. J. Simpson Criminal Trial Verdict

Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton**

Columbia University

Ozlem N. Ayduk

Columbia University

Yuichi Shoda

University of Washington

Walter Mischel*

Columbia University

Reactions to the O. J. Simpson verdict were analyzed using the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) model. Content analyses of participants' open-ended reactions to the verdict revealed that differences in the accessibility of cognitive-affective units and their subsequent activation pathways characterized respondents' reactions, but participants' race appeared to have no direct effect. The results were used to construct cognitive-affective domain maps that underlay elated, dismayed, and ambivalent reactions. By promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of reactions to the verdict, we believe the domain maps facilitate overcoming the widespread tendency to attribute the cause of divergent reactions to an individual's race. The results have implications for the understanding of cultural differences.

*NIMH grant MH39349 to Walter Mischel supported the preparation of this article.

**The authors would like to thank Liz Ekoblad, Alessandra Testa, and Anita Sethi for their help in preparing the manuscript.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, Columbia University, Department of Psychology, 406 Schermerhorn Hall, New York, NY 10027. Electronic mail should be sent via Internet to rodolfo@psych.columbia.edu.

The O. J. Simpson criminal trial verdict has perhaps been the strongest reminder in recent history that Blacks and Whites in America live in different worlds. Images of cheering Black faces juxtaposed with those of dismayed White faces across front pages of newspapers and magazine covers illustrated how people who live in the same world can understand it and experience it differently. The same case, the same evidence, and the same trial led to two virtually opposite reactions to the same verdict.

Part of the continuing fascination with the Simpson case lies in the almost irreconcilable nature of the two predominant viewpoints about the criminal trial verdict: one claiming that Simpson's acquittal was a travesty of justice, the other that anything *but* his acquittal would have been a travesty of justice. Moreover, the inability of either side to see the other's point of view has provided little common ground for discussion or reconciliation. In this article, we aim to provide some common ground by exploring reactions to the verdict not as the thoughtless, irrational responses portrayed by opposing sides, but rather as a result of the thoughts and feelings that the case evoked for different people. We hope that an understanding of the processes that brought about the reactions to the verdict will promote a greater understanding of the world of the "other."

On October 3, 1995, Simpson was acquitted of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Reactions to the verdict came swiftly, and they were emotionally charged (Margolick, 1995). "It's about racism," explained a Black supporter of the verdict to the *New York Times* on the day of Simpson's acquittal, "today, racism took a solid blow." Those who disagreed expressed equally strong opinions. "With all the evidence against him, his history of abusing his wife," lamented a White man, "it's amazing." As easy as it may be to classify agreement and elation as the "Black" response and disagreement and dismay as the "White" response, however, such generalizations are unlikely to be useful in understanding people's reactions. An adequate explanation of this phenomenon requires an account of the process that brought about people's reactions to the verdict—one that *mediated* the relationship between skin color and reaction. Understanding this process allows us to take our explanation out of the Black vs. White dichotomy and enables us to make sense of those Whites who may have cheered and those Blacks who may have grieved, as well as those who were ambivalent.

We propose a dynamic model, based on Mischel and Shoda's (1995) Cognitive-Affective Systems Theory of Personality, to account for the many reactions to the verdict within a single, unifying framework. By integrating cumulative findings and models from personality and social psychology in general and research in social cognition in particular (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Bargh, 1994; Block, 1995; Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Cervone, 1991; Kihlstrom, 1990; Mischel & Shoda, 1994; Pervin, 1994; Ross & Nisbett, 1991), the model allows us to understand reactions to sociopolitical information in terms of the cognitions and affects such information activates within individuals. Guided by this model, we

present data from a study in which participants' reactions to the verdict were content analyzed for the hypothesized cognitions and affects.

Representing "Worlds": The Cognitive-Affective Processing System

Over the last decade, models of human information processing have shifted away from serial, centralized processing models based on the architecture of traditional digital computers to more sophisticated connectionist models in which large amounts of information are processed simultaneously within a parallel, distributed system (Read & Miller, in press). Although there are many specific variations within this direction, current models of cognition share the premise that information processing "units" (e.g., mental representations) are organized within a network of interrelationships that guides and constrains their activation (Anderson, 1988; Bower, 1978; Kunda & Thagard, 1996; Read & Miller, 1993; Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986). Applications of these information processing models to higher level phenomena, such as attitude change (Spellman, Ullman, & Holyoak, 1993), explanatory coherence (Thagard, 1989), and dispositional inference (Read & Miller, 1993) suggest a new, powerful way of understanding how human beings effectively process the large amounts of information with which they are constantly confronted.

Mischel and Shoda's (1995) Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) Theory is an approach to personality that integrates many insights from cognitive and social theories of social information processing (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bandura, 1986; Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Dodge, 1986; Hinton, McClelland, & Rumelhart, 1986; Mischel, 1973, 1990) within a comprehensive theoretical framework. As a connectionist model, it proposes that behavior is mediated by a set of *cognitive-affective units* (CAUs) organized within a stable activation network that reflects the individual's learning history. Table 1 summarizes the proposed CAUs, which have been identified as playing a role in social behavior generation (Alston, 1975; Read, Jones, & Miller, 1990; Pervin, 1989, 1994).

The model postulates that of all the beliefs, goals, values, encodings, and feelings one can potentially experience at any given time, only those activated can influence subsequent behavior. Although some cognitions are activated only when the immediate situation brings them to mind, recent research indicates that there may also be individual differences in the CAUs' accessibility—that is, in the degree of readiness with which constructs in memory can become activated (Bruner, 1957; Higgins, 1990, 1989; Higgins & King, 1981; Higgins & Chaires, 1980).

To understand the person fully, however, it is important to have an idea of how the person's mediating units relate to one another. The model conceptualizes the person not just as a list of CAUs; instead, it proposes that the units are organized into

Table 1. Types of Cognitive-Affective Units in the Personality Mediating System

1. ENCODINGS: Categories (constructs) for the self, people, events and situations (external and internal).
2. EXPECTATIONS AND BELIEFS: About the social world, about outcomes for behavior in particular situations, about one's self-efficacy.
3. AFFECTS: Feelings, emotions, and affective responses (including physiological reactions).
4. GOALS: Desirable outcomes and affective states, aversive outcomes and affective states, and goals and life projects.
5. COMPETENCIES AND SELF-REGULATORY PLANS: Potential behaviors and scripts that one can do as well as plans and strategies for organizing action and for affecting outcomes and one's own behavior and internal states.

Note: From "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariances in Personality Structures," by W. Mischel and Y. Shoda, 1995, *Psychological Review*, 102, p. 253. Copyright 1995 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

a unique network of interconnections that function as an organized whole. Positive (excitatory) connections to a CAU increase its activation level, whereas negative (inhibitory) connections to it decrease its activation level. Figure 1 shows a highly simplified, schematized version of a CAPS.

The figure illustrates a CAPS network's distinguishing characteristics. A person (the large outer circle in the middle of the diagram) is characterized by a particular subset of CAUs (the nodes within the larger circle) accessible to him or her as well as by the network of activation (solid arrows) and inhibition (broken arrows) among those units. When a person encounters a particular situation, the CAPS is sensitive to particular features of that situation, which become encoded and activate situation-relevant CAUs within the system. These units, in turn, make other cognitions and affects accessible while inhibiting others.

As the individual grows, learns, and gains life experience, an increasingly rich and complex network of CAUs develops. Whereas some CAUs are acquired through the individual's unique experience (Mischel, 1973, 1990; Mischel & Shoda, 1995), others seem to be shared and transmitted among members of cultural groups (Geertz, 1973; Gordon, 1982; Kluckhohn, 1965; Obeyeskere, 1981; Tylor, 1871). Thus, life experiences that members of a group share are likely to generate a culturally shared CAPS network embedded within an individual's processing system. If features of a situation activate this culturally shared network, individuals may generate similar reactions to that situation. We propose that the Simpson trial was one such situation.

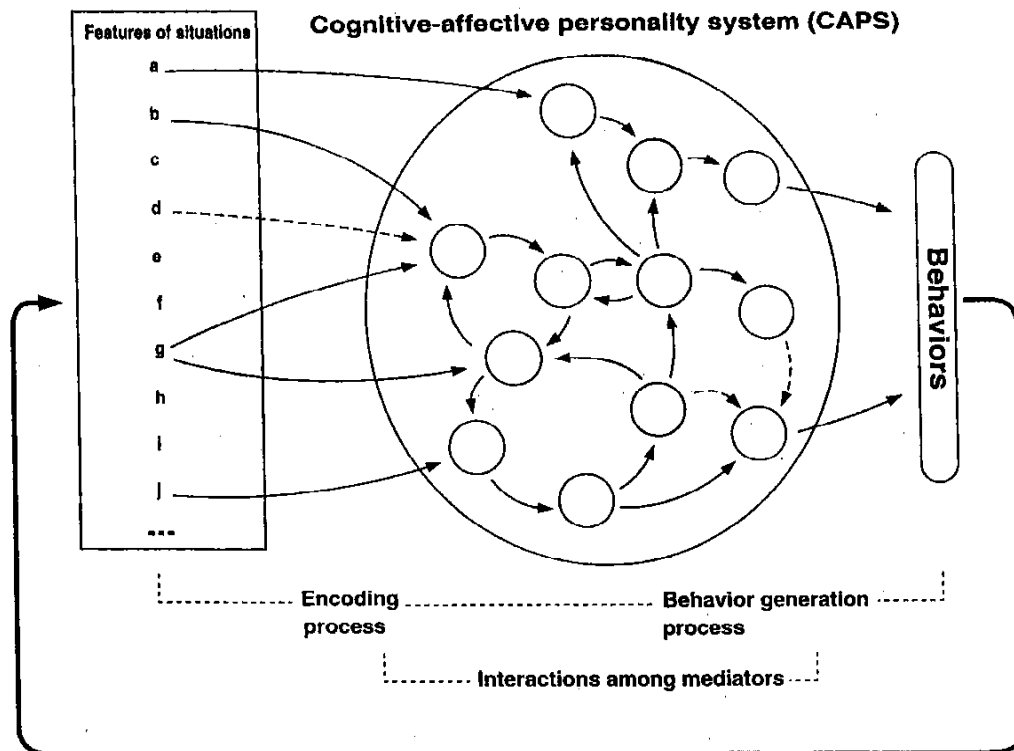


Fig. 1. Schematic illustration of the Cognitive-Affective Processing System. From "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structures," by W. Mischel and Y. Shoda, 1995, *Psychological Review*, 102, p. 254. Copyright 1995 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission of the authors.

A CAPS Model of Reactions to the Simpson Verdict

An informal review of reports in the media following the verdict suggested that Mark Fuhrman's racist attitudes, as well as a perception that Simpson was being treated unfairly because he was Black, led those who agreed with the verdict to believe it was correct. Among those who disagreed, on the other hand, dismay and disbelief were often accompanied by mention of the preponderance of the evidence against Simpson as well as Simpson's past history of spousal abuse.

We proposed that differences in the nature of and relations between CAUs within the processing system could account for the divergent reactions surrounding the Simpson verdict. We did not expect that race per se determined one's opinion to the verdict. Instead, we hypothesized that the role of race was mediated through the thoughts and affects that the case activated for different individuals. Specifically, we expected CAUs related to discrimination against Blacks to form part of the culturally shared CAPS network of a Black person, making racism by the police and the

courts more chronically accessible and highly affect laden. In contrast, we expected that for a White person, discrimination was more likely to be a "cool," abstract cognition (see Mischel, Shoda & Rodriguez, 1989) that might more easily be interpreted as having nothing to do with the case. As such, we postulated that among those for whom racism was not a highly affective, "hot" issue, cognitions about wife abuse and the "mountain of evidence" became the focus of the Simpson case. In addition, we expected that among those for whom abuse, evidence, and racism issues were equally accessible, the reaction to the verdict would fall somewhere between agreement and disagreement—namely, ambivalence toward the verdict.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a study in which participants were asked to describe their reactions to the verdict. We chose to have participants write their responses in a free-form essay format because that would allow us to detect the kinds of cognitions and affects that participants spontaneously generated as well as to examine the relations among CAUs the people would mention.

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirteen people (49 females and 64 males) who were either taking classes or working at Columbia University during the summer of 1996 participated in the study. 29.2% of the participants identified themselves as Caucasians, 33.6% as African Americans, 9.8% as Latinos, and 22.1% as Asians and Asian Americans. Participants from other backgrounds accounted for 5.3% of our sample. The mean age was 21.7 (range: 14 to 49). There were no differences in the mean age of participants among different racial/ethnic groups. Educational levels were 36.3% high school students, 37.2% college students and 24.8% graduate students, with 1.7% not currently students. Participants were paid \$5 for their participation.

Materials

Eighteen movie and sound clips related to the Simpson trial were downloaded from the CNN (<http://www.cnn.com>) and Court TV (<http://www.courttv.com>) World Wide Web sites onto a Power Macintosh 7500. The clips were specifically selected to recreate as vividly as possible the trial's most dramatic aspects in rough temporal sequence, from the Bronco chase to the presentation of the evidence to the verdict and the families' reactions to it (see Appendix A).

Procedure

Participants were recruited by way of flyers posted around the campus. Each participant first signed a consent form and was assured that his or her responses

would be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Participants were brought into a comfortable, softly lit room and were seated in front of a Macintosh computer. They then viewed each of the 18 clips from the trial in succession; this procedure took approximately five minutes. Having watched all the clips, participants were led to another room and were given a pen and a blank writing pad. They were instructed to write down their reactions to the verdict, with specific instructions to specify whether they agreed, disagreed, or were somehow ambivalent about the verdict. When they were done with their essays, they were debriefed and paid.

Coding Protocol and Intercoder Reliability

To identify the cognitive-affective units that participants spontaneously generated, their essays were subjected to content analysis following the procedure Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1993) outlined. Twenty-two representative cognitive-affective units as well as seven emotional reactions specific to the verdict were identified (see Table 2). Two independent judges coded each essay according to whether it mentioned each of the cognitive-affective units and/or emotional reactions. If a unit was not represented in an essay, that unit was coded 0. If it was mentioned only once, it was coded 1. If it was mentioned more than once within the same essay, it was coded 2. Each essay was also coded for agreement, disagreement, or ambivalence toward the verdict.

Intercoder reliability results revealed a high degree of agreement between the two coders (median Cohen's kappa = .84, range = .49 to 1.0). A third coder arbitrated any conflicting codings of the essays to generate the final coding, which was used in all subsequent analyses.

Operationalization of Accessibility and Activation Pathways

Accessibility of thoughts and affects was conceptualized in the present analysis as the frequency with which each CAU was mentioned among those who agreed with ($N = 45$), disagreed with ($N = 46$) or felt ambivalent about the verdict ($N = 22$). Only those CAUs that were differentially accessible to one group over the others, as revealed by chi-squares, were thought of as belonging to that group. The links between these accessible constructs were identified by way of correlations computed among all the constructs coded for. CAPS theory operates on the assumption that individual differences exist in accessibility of constructs, as well as differences in the networks of activation. In this article, we concentrate primarily on testing the first of these assumptions, while holding the second assumption constant. That is, as a first approximation, we assumed that relevant pathways are societally shared given the larger sociopolitical context. Therefore, correlations were computed using all participants. A positive correlation between two items was interpreted as an excitatory link, meaning that the activation of one construct

led to the activation of another. A negative correlation, by contrast, was interpreted as an inhibitory link; that is, the activation of one construct led to the inhibition of another.

Construction of Cognitive-Affective Domain Maps

Based on both the accessibility (frequency) and the activation pathway (inter-correlations) analyses, we modeled the CAPS that generated different emotional reactions to the verdict. Several rules were followed in constructing the domain maps. If a thought was significantly more accessible to one group than another, it was grounds for drawing it into the former's domain map. The darkness of each CAU node depicted the strength of accessibility of each CAU (i.e., the frequency with which it was mentioned within each group): the darker the node, the more accessible the construct. Inhibited nodes, by contrast, were depicted with dashed ovals. (Figures 2 through 4 present several of the maps constructed.)

In representing the activation pathways between the units, only those links significant below the .01 level in the correlation analyses were drawn into the domain maps. Solid arrows represented positive correlations between thoughts (i.e., excitatory links), whereas broken arrows represented negative correlations (i.e., inhibitory links). Even though the inhibited thoughts themselves had activation links to other cognitions, we chose not to draw them in, assuming that an inactive node does not influence other nodes in the system (see Shoda and Mischel, 1996, for a detailed discussion).

The only exception to the rule above involved the links to the nodes "the verdict is wrong," "the verdict is correct," and "I don't know whether to agree or disagree," for which a stricter criterion was applied. That is, only those links that significantly predicted agreement, disagreement, or ambivalence when controlling for all other factors (all CAUs accessible to the group) were drawn in as links to any of those nodes. Similarly, only those thoughts that significantly predicted the emotional reactions to the verdict when controlling for all other variables (all CAUs as well as the opinion itself) were drawn as behavioral output links.

The input to the processing system was operationalized as the video and sound clips presented to the participants. Those clips that represented similar aspects of the trial were grouped together as a "feature"; for example, the two CNN computer animations of the actual crime scene were grouped together as the "crime scene" feature. Similarly, the three audio clips in which the defense attorneys spoke were grouped together as "defense arguments." Because the study's design did not allow us to extrapolate the specific links between situational features and the cognitions and affects they directly activated, we have assumed those activation links based on the conceptual similarity between input features and the CAUs.

CAPS Analysis of Reactions to the Simpson Case

571

Results

Accessibility of CAUs

Chi-square analyses conducted on the frequency of CAUs across different groups revealed significant accessibility differences among those who agreed with the verdict (*the elated*), those who disagreed (*the dismayed*), and those who could not make up their minds (*the ambivalent*).

Table 2. Percentage of Participants for Whom Each Cognitive-Affective Unit and Emotional Reaction Was Accessible, as a Function of Their Opinion about the Verdict

Cognitive-Affective Units	Disagree (<i>dismayed</i>)	Agree (<i>elated</i>)	Ambivalent
Simpson was aggressive, abusive	57 _a	24 _b	36 _{a,b}
Simpson behaved as though guilty	48 _a	4 _b	18 _b
Court system long biased against Blacks	4 _a	22 _b	32 _b
Simpson assumed guilty because Black	0 _a	27 _b	9 _b
Jury was brave, correct	0 _a	13 _b	0 _{a,b}
Defense devious, played race card	26 _a	4 _b	9 _{a,b}
Racism no excuse for murder	46 _a	2 _b	27 _a
Simpson assumed innocent because famous	28 _a	4 _b	14 _{a,b}
If he did it, he'll answer to God	2 _a	13 _a	0 _a
Prosecution was good	2 _a	0 _a	5 _a
Defense was great	9 _a	22 _a	5 _a
He knows about the murders	2 _a	20 _b	0 _a
Money buys you freedom	30 _a	9 _b	18 _{a,b}
There is a mountain of evidence	74 _a	9 _b	32 _c
Abuse doesn't mean murder	2 _a	18 _b	5 _{a,b}
Evidence is questionable	0 _a	76 _b	23 _c
Mark Fuhrman/LAPD is racist	22 _a	44 _b	23 _{a,b}
Nicole Brown Simpson was no saint	0 _a	16 _b	5 _{a,b}
Jury was stupid	20 _a	0 _b	0 _b
The justice system sucks	35 _a	4 _b	18 _{a,b}
Victims and their families suffered	13 _{a,b}	9 _b	32 _a
Justice was done/Victory for Black people	0 _a	27 _b	9 _b
EMOTIONAL REACTIONS			
Angry	17 _a	7 _a	14 _a
Confused	0 _a	4 _a	0 _a
Happy	2 _a	27 _b	18 _b
Relieved	0 _a	20 _b	5 _{a,b}
Sad	9 _a	0 _b	18 _a
Shocked	11 _a	4 _a	14 _a
Upset	30 _a	4 _b	18 _{a,b}

Note: Percentages with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ by the chi-square significant difference test; chi-square comparisons of cells with small N may be unreliable.

As Table 2 shows, the elated accessed the cognitions "Court system long biased against Blacks," "Simpson assumed guilty because Black," and "Fuhrman/LAPD is racist" significantly more frequently than the dismayed. By contrast, the dismayed accessed "Racism no excuse for murder" and "Defense played race card" significantly more frequently than the elated. With respect to domestic abuse, "Simpson was aggressive, abusive" was more accessible to the dismayed than the elated, whereas "Abuse doesn't mean murder" was more accessible to the elated than the dismayed. Furthermore, the dismayed accessed "There is a mountain of evidence" more frequently than the elated. "The evidence is questionable" was highly accessible to the elated, yet nonexistent among the dismayed. The elated greeted the verdict with a combination of happiness and relief, whereas the dismayed were mostly upset.

The ambivalent, unlike the elated, recognized that the evidence overwhelmingly pointed at Simpson and that the victims and families suffered. Unlike the dismayed, however, they recognized that the court system has long been biased against Blacks. Moreover, the ambivalent felt that the evidence was questionable less often than the elated, but more often than the dismayed. The apparent conflict between the accessible cognitions of the ambivalent mirrored itself in their emotional reactions to the verdict. Happiness was more common for the ambivalent than the dismayed, whereas sadness was more accessible to them than it was to the elated.

Activation Pathways

Elated Activation Network. All the CAUs accessible to the elated were positively correlated with agreement with the verdict. However, to establish which CAUs played an independent role in activating agreement, we regressed agreement on the accessible cognitions within the system ($F(9, 103) = 14.3, R^2 = .56, p < .001$). Results revealed that, when controlling for the effects of other CAUs, recognition that the evidence was questionable predicted agreement with the verdict ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), in part because Simpson was perceived as prejudged ($\beta = .2, p < .05$). Additionally, the idea that Simpson may know something about the murders, even if he is not guilty, predicted agreement ($\beta = .37, p < .003$).

To determine which CAUs played an independent role in bringing about elation in response to the verdict, we regressed agreement together with all the other accessible constructs in the processing system both on relief and on happiness ($F(10, 102) = 3.85, R^2 = .27, p < .001$, and $F(10, 102) = 3.62, R^2 = .26, p < .001$, respectively). Results indicated that the elated felt relieved because Simpson was acquitted despite his being a Black man ($\beta = .2, p < .005$). On the other hand, perceiving the verdict as fulfillment of justice and a victory for Blacks predicted happiness in response to the verdict ($\beta = .28, p < .005$).

CAPS Analysis of Reactions to the Simpson Case

573

Dismayed Activation Network. All the CAUs accessible to the dismayed had positive correlations with disagreement. To establish which CAUs had an independent effect on disagreement, disagreement was regressed on the accessible cognitions in the system ($F(9, 103) = 14.8, R^2 = .56, p < .001$). Results indicated that thinking that the evidence was overwhelming ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), that Simpson's behavior was suspicious ($\beta = .15, p < .04$), that his celebrity status blinded people to his guilt ($\beta = .21, p < .03$), and that the jury was stupid ($\beta = .23, p < .03$) all predicted disagreement with the verdict. Subsequent regression analyses on being upset including disagreement as an independent variable ($F(10, 102) = 2.29, R^2 = .18, p < .02$) indicated that this reaction to the verdict was solely predicted by disagreement ($\beta = .24, p < .02$). The model was not significant for sadness.

Ambivalent Activation Network. To establish which CAUs had an independent effect on ambivalence, ambivalence was regressed on the accessible cognitions in the system ($F(8, 104) = 4.13, R^2 = .24, p < .001$). Results revealed that out of all the thoughts accessible to the ambivalent, only "There is a mountain of evidence" ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) and "The court system long biased against Blacks" ($\beta = .24, p < .02$) predicted ambivalence.

To determine which CAUs played an independent role in bringing about sadness on the one hand, and happiness, on the other hand, in response to the verdict, we regressed ambivalence together with all the other accessible constructs in the processing system both on sadness and on happiness ($F(9, 103) = 4.13, R^2 = .24, p < .001$ and $F(9, 103) = 3.63, R^2 = .24, p < .001$, respectively). Results indicated that the empathy the ambivalent felt for the victims and their families predicted the sadness they felt ($\beta = .27, p < .001$). On the other hand, the recognition that the verdict was a victory for Black people predicted their happiness ($\beta = .26, p < .004$).

Race and Opinions of the Verdict

Correlations between race and opinion of the verdict confirmed the popular view that being Black predicted agreement ($r = .54, p < .001$), whereas being White predicted disagreement ($r = .5, p < .001$). In our sample, being Black also predicted ambivalence toward the verdict ($r = .28, p < .03$). To investigate whether race (specifically, being Black or White) had an effect over and above the accessible CAUs in determining one's opinion on the verdict, the regressions reported above were also conducted including race as an independent variable. When controlling for all CAUs operating within each system, race was found to predict neither agreement ($\beta = .15, ns$), disagreement ($\beta = -.05, ns$), nor ambivalence ($\beta = .24, ns$).

Discussion

The results presented above support the idea that different cognitive-affective mediating units were accessible to people who showed different reactions to the Simpson verdict. Embedded within a network of activation pathways, the set of accessible units constituted a subnetwork that self-sustained these units' activation level. We illustrate these interactions using cognitive-affective domain maps. As Miller, Shoda, and Hurley (1996) have shown in the area of health-protective behavior, these maps allow us to understand the processing dynamics that mediate between situational features in the environment and people's responses to them.

As these illustrations indicate, the CAPS model includes, but goes beyond, simple overall differences in the reactions and emotions associated with each group. The model prompts us to take a closer look at what went on "inside the heads" of individuals as they processed information about the trial—as they thought about it, grappled with it, and resolved contradictions within it. The domain maps show how people reacted in accordance with the prominent thoughts and feelings in their personal worlds. In what follows, we trace the thought patterns among the dismayed, the elated, and the ambivalent, guiding the reader through each domain map. Statements in quotations are actual quotes from respondents in the study, and numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding arrow numbers within the maps being discussed. Note that in discussing the domain maps, we often talk about one thought activating or inhibiting another. We base these inferences on common sense, because our correlational analysis does not allow us to determine the directionality of activation.

The Dismayed

Figure 2 illustrates a CAPS that generated dismay in response to the verdict. The domain map shows that Simpson's escape in the Bronco, the physical evidence, and Simpson's past history of spousal abuse all positively activated thoughts that "O. J. Simpson is guilty, guilty, guilty" (1–4). These cognitions inhibited recognition of the argument that the evidence may have been questionable (5–7). With these cognitions strongly activated, information related to Mark Fuhrman easily led to thoughts that "the trial should not have been turned into a debate on racism" (8), which further strengthened the idea that the evidence was solid (9), but also inhibited the idea that the evidence may have been tainted (10). In light of all the evidence the prosecution presented, some respondents could only "blame the stupidity of the jury . . . they were probably just dumb" (11) and conclude that "the justice system is clearly in need of some restructuring" (12). The defense was encoded as having spent "a lot of time pulling dirty tricks" (13), which was related to thoughts that "American justice is for sale to the highest bidder" (14).

CAPS Analysis of Reactions to the Simpson Case

575

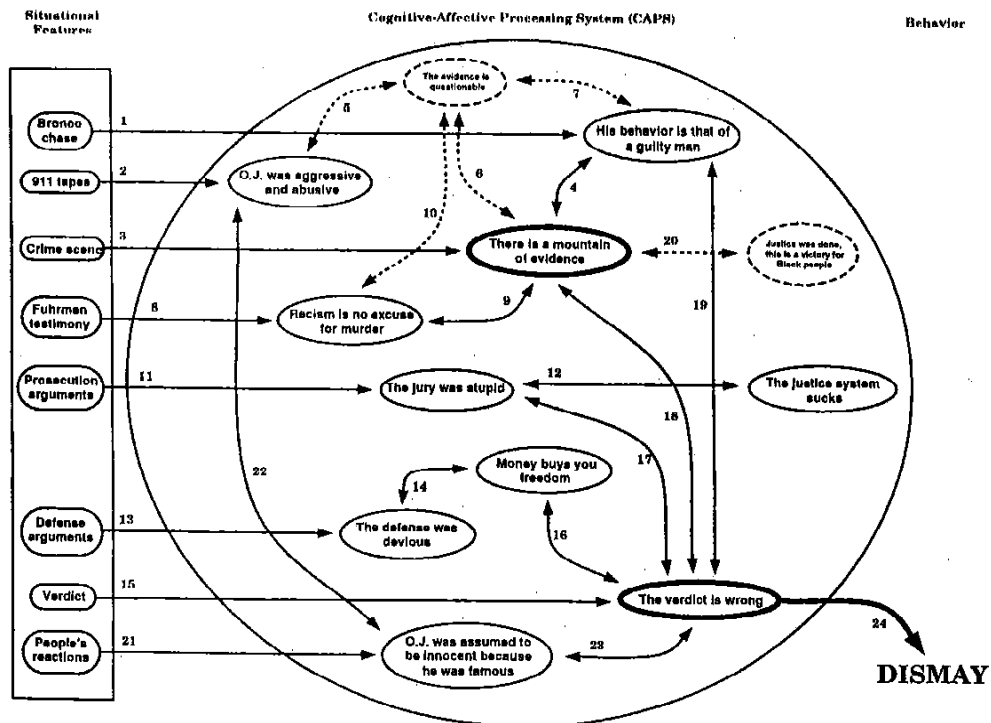


Fig. 2. CAPS associated with disagreement with the Simpson criminal trial verdict. Solid lines indicate positive (activating) relations among units; broken lines depict negative (deactivating) relations. A node's darkness indicates its strength of accessibility. Dashed nodes indicate inhibited thoughts in the system.

With ideas about the preponderance of the evidence, the jury's inability to understand it, and the defense's devious tactics all accessible, the verdict itself was greeted with disagreement (15–19), and a sense that this was in no way an expression of justice (20). Seeing people's reactions reminded the dismayed that "the fact that he was Black and famous in America exonerated him from wrongdoing" (21) and about his domestic abuse (22). This further strengthened the idea that the verdict was wrong (23), and led to dismay over it (24).

The Elated

Figure 3 shows a prototypical CAPS that generated elation in response to the verdict. The domain map makes it clear that the personal worlds of the elated and the dismayed differed substantially. Among the first of these differences are the thoughts related to the tapes of Nicole Brown Simpson's emergency calls. As one respondent noted, "I as well as everyone else did hear the 911 tapes. I feel that even though they had their marital problems, that would not be a concrete reason to kill someone" (1). Some respondents pointed out that Nicole Brown Simpson "had

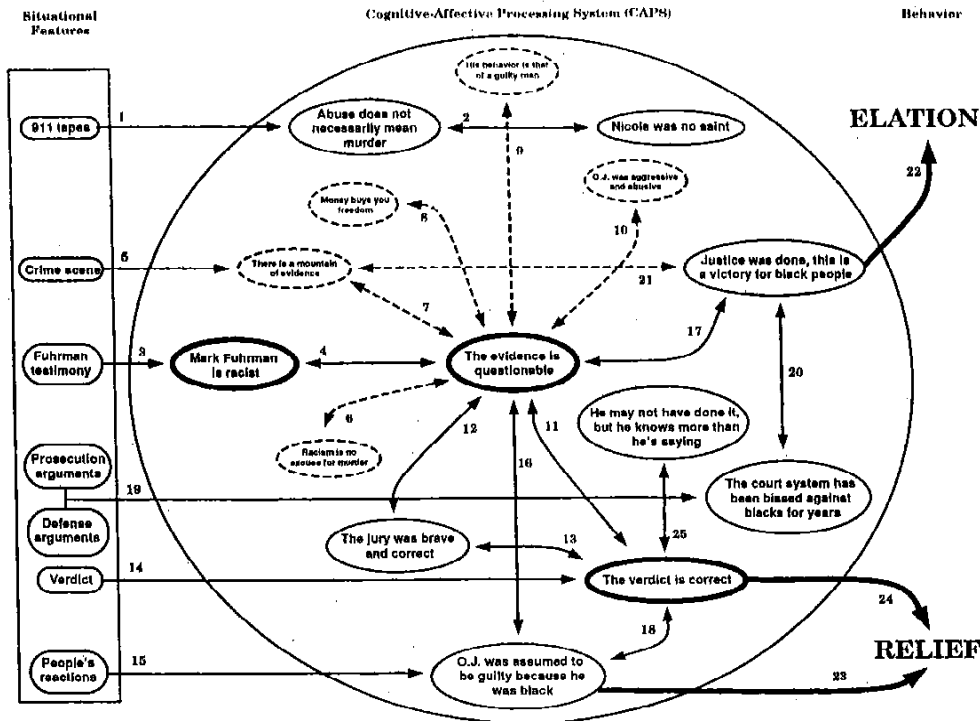


Fig. 3. CAPS associated with agreement with the Simpson criminal trial verdict. Solid lines indicate positive (activating) relations among units; broken lines depict negative (deactivating) relations. A node's darkness indicates its strength of accessibility. Dashed nodes indicate inhibited thoughts in the system.

always been using drugs, borrowing money, and drinking and sleeping around” (2). Mark Fuhrman, “a racist cop” (3), immediately rendered the evidence questionable: “[Fuhrman] was going home, and all of a sudden he decided to turn around and look for evidence and mysteriously found a bloody glove” (4). The crime scene, rather than activating thoughts about the “mountain of evidence,” led to questioning Simpson’s involvement in the crime. “Why would O. J.,” wrote one participant, “murder his wife, and, as any sensible person realize he would be a suspect, hide the bloody clothes in his own house?” (5). The idea that the evidence was questionable inhibited many of the thoughts that were highly accessible to the dismayed (6–10).

Thus the elated, many of whom were skeptical of the evidence, tended to feel that the verdict was just (11) and that the jury “made a brave decision” (12–13). In part because of “racist assumptions about the stupidity and barbarian temperament of Black men,” the verdict was also seen as “not just victory for one man, but a win for all people who have been prejudged.” All of these thoughts led to even stronger skepticism toward the evidence (14–18). The accessibility of these thoughts may help explain why the elated felt that Marcia Clark unfairly “tried her damnest to convict another Black man” (19–21).

CAPS Analysis of Reactions to the Simpson Case

The domain map also shows that two emotional reactions distinguished those who agreed with the verdict: elation and relief. Elation was associated with the sense that the acquittal was a victory for Black people (22). On the other hand, seeing Simpson acquitted, despite the prejudging of Black men, brought about relief (23–24), even if he “knows a hell of a lot more than he’s saying” (25).

The Ambivalent

Figure 4 shows a prototypical CAPS that generated ambivalence in response to the verdict. The figure allows us to appreciate the conflicted state of mind of the ambivalent. On the one hand, they felt that Simpson was guilty “because his behavior just after the bodies of Nicole and Goldman were discovered [was] extremely suspicious” and “because too many things point[ed] in that direction” (1–3). On the other hand, they recognized that “there was much reasonable doubt, Mark Fuhrman was just one of the reasonable doubts” (4). While they felt that the case shouldn’t have been “more about race than the murder” (5–6), they recognized that the acquittal of “a Black man killing a White woman in a town that was notorious for hatred from cops toward Negroes” was “cause for celebration” (7–10). The

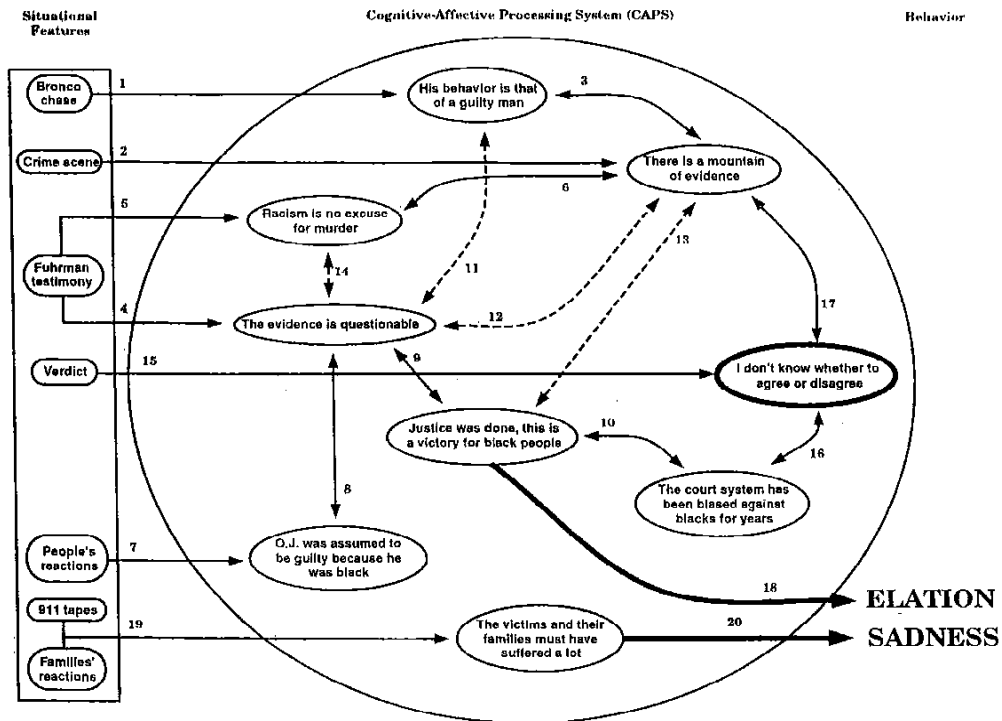


Fig. 4. CAPS associated with ambivalence toward the Simpson criminal trial verdict. Solid lines indicate positive (activating) relations among units; broken lines depict negative (deactivating) relations. A node’s darkness indicates its strength of accessibility. Dashed nodes indicate inhibited thoughts in the system.

conflicts and contradictions that revolved in the ambivalent mind (11–14) made either agreeing or disagreeing a difficult task (15–17).

These respondents' ambivalence is apparent not only in their cognitions, but also in their emotional reactions. They felt happy that justice for Black people was carried out (18), but the suffering of the victims and families (19) made them feel that the "the whole thing is a very sad event that no trial can really undo . . . it is sad for all parties involved" (20). The words of one participant seem to capture the ambivalent group best: "It's his case that on the whole represents something to me. It made me feel happy and sad, justice and injustice, most of all it drew color lines, it made me feel uncomfortable to speak of the case."

Conclusions

In this article, our principal aim was to take our understanding of the reactions to the Simpson verdict beyond the Black/White dichotomy. Guided by a unifying, state-of-the-art framework based on findings from social cognitive theory and research, we showed that it was not race per se that determined whether a person agreed or disagreed with the verdict, but rather the networks of cognitions and affects that information about the trial activated within individuals (see Fairchild & Cowan, this issue). The results, illustrated in selected cognitive-affective domain maps, depict the activation networks that determined how individuals felt about the verdict. The fact that many Black people agreed with the verdict was seen as reflecting a culturally shared network where discrimination is a "hot," chronically accessible issue resulting from minority status in America (Murray, Kaiser, & Taylor, this issue). Just as importantly, however, we have shown that independent of race, being sensitive to issues of discrimination made agreement with the verdict more likely. In the impassioned words of one respondent:

I believe very strongly he is innocent . . . I have been the victim of police lies and violence, so I can see it from the victim's [Simpson's] side. The prosecution should be indicted for conspiracy—they behaved miserably. They knew Fuhrman was racist. They put blood on socks. They lied.

This is the voice of a man who agreed with the verdict, and it is the voice of a White man. He reminds us that the prism through which we perceive the world is the result of a lifetime of experiences—some more painful than others, some private, and some shared.

In a multicultural society, such as the one where the Simpson trial played itself out, life experiences can vary from cultural group to cultural group. The CAPS model provides a novel methodology for looking through the prism of other experiences and cultures. With its emphasis on process, the model allows us to go beyond stereotypic conceptualizations of cultural differences toward a deeper appreciation of the beliefs, values, and interrelationships among them that members of a group may share (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Shweder, 1991). It encourages us to understand,

rather than judge, how other people see the world and to think about those situations in which different people may behave similarly, and similar people differently.

References

- Alston, W. P. (1975). Traits, consistency and conceptual alternatives for personality theory. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 5, 17–48.
- Anderson, J. R. (1983). *The architecture of cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Anderson, J. R. (1988). A spreading activation theory of memory. In A. Collins & E. E. Smith (Eds.), *Readings in cognitive science: A perspective from psychology and artificial intelligence* (pp. 138–154). San Mateo, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Inc.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bargh, J. A. (1994). The four horsemen of automaticity: Intention, awareness, efficiency, and control as separate issues in social cognition. In R. S. Wyer and T. K. Srull (Eds.), *Handbook of social cognition*, (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Block, J. (1995). A contrarian view of the five-factor approach to personality description. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 187–215.
- Bower, G. H. (1978). Interference paradigms for meaningful propositional memory. *American Journal of Psychology*, 91, 575–585.
- Bruner, J. S. (1957). On perceptual readiness. *Psychological Review*, 64, 123–152.
- Cantor, N., & Kihlstrom, J. F. (1987). *Personality and social intelligence*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1981). Self-consciousness and reactance. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 15, 16–29.
- Cervone, D. (1991). The two disciplines of personality psychology. *Psychological Science*, 2, 371–377.
- Dodge, K. A. (1986). A social information processing model of social competence in children. *Cognitive Perspectives on Children's Social Behavioral Development: The Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, 18, 77–125.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gordon, E. (1982). Culture and Ethnicity. In M. D. Levine, W. B. Cavey, A. C. Crocker, and R. Gross (Eds.), *Textbook of behavioral and developmental pediatrics* (pp. 187–192). Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Sanders.
- Higgins, E. T. (1989). Knowledge accessibility and activation: Subjectivity and suffering from unconscious sources. In J. S. Uleman and J. A. Bargh (Eds.), *Unintended thought* (pp. 75–123). New York: Guilford.
- Higgins, E. T. (1990). Personality, social psychology, and person-situation relations: Standards and knowledge activation as a common language. In A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 301–338). New York: Guilford.
- Higgins, E. T., & Chaires, W. M. (1980). Accessibility of interrelational constructs: Implications for stimulus encoding and creativity. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 51, 5–15.
- Higgins, E. T., & King, G. (1981). Accessibility of social constructs: Information processing consequences of individual and contextual variability. In N. Cantor & J. Kihlstrom (Eds.), *Personality, cognition, and social interaction* (pp. 69–121). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hinton, G. E., McClelland, J. L., & Rumelhart, D. E. (1986). Distributed representations. In D. E. Rumelhart & J. L. McClelland (Eds.), *Parallel distributed processing: Explorations in the microstructures of cognition* (Vol. 1: Foundations) (pp. 77–109). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books.
- Kihlstrom, J. F. (1990). The psychological unconscious. In L.A. Pervin (Ed.) *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 445–464). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kluckhohn, C. (1965). *Culture and behavior*. New York: Free Press.
- Kunda, Z., & Thagard, P. (1996). Forming impressions from stereotypes, traits, and behaviors: A parallel-constraint-satisfaction theory. *Psychological Review*, 103, 284–308.

- Lampert, M. D., & Ervin-Tripp, S. M. (1993). Structured coding for the study of language and social interaction. In J. A. Edwards & M. D. Lampert (Eds.), *Talking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research* (pp. 169–206). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Margolick, D. (1995, October 4). Jury clears Simpson in double murder: Spellbound nation divides on verdict. *The New York Times*, pp. A1, A10.
- Miller, S. M., Shoda, Y., & Hurley, K. (1996). Applying cognitive social theory to health protective behavior: Breast self-examination in cancer screening. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*, 70–94.
- Mischel, W. (1973). Toward a cognitive social learning reconceptualization of personality. *Psychological Review*, *80* (4), 252–283.
- Mischel, W. (1990). Personality dispositions revisited and revised: A view after three decades. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 111–134). New York: Guilford Press.
- Mischel, W., & Shoda, Y. (1994). Personality psychology has two goals: Must it be two fields? *Psychological Inquiry*, *5*, 156–159.
- Mischel, W., & Shoda, Y. (1995). A cognitive-affective system theory of personality: Reconceptualizing situations, dispositions, dynamics and invariance in personality structure. *Psychological Review*, *102*, 246–268.
- Mischel, W., Shoda, Y., & Rodriguez, M. L. (1989). Delay of gratification in children. *Science*, *244*, 933–938.
- Nisbett, R., & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Obeyeskere, G. (1981). *Medusa's hair: An essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pervin, L. A. (1989). Goal concepts: Themes, issues, and questions. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 473–479). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Pervin, L. A. (1994). A critical analysis of current trait theory. *Psychological Inquiry*, *5*, 103–113.
- Read, S. J., Jones, D. K., & Miller, L. C. (1990). Traits as goal-based categories: The importance of goals in the coherence of dispositional categories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*, 1048–1061.
- Read, S. J., & Miller, L. C. (1993). Rapist or “regular guy”: Explanatory coherence in the construction of mental models of others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *19*, 526–540.
- Read, S. J., & Miller, L. C. (Eds.). (In press). *Connectionist Models of Social Reasoning and Social Behavior*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ross, L., & Nisbett, R. E. (1991). *The person and the situation: Perspectives of social psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rumelhart, D. E., & McClelland, J. L. (1986). *Parallel distributed processing: Explorations in the microstructure of cognition* (Vol. 1: Foundations). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books.
- Shoda, Y., & Mischel, W. (1996). Toward a unified, intra-individual dynamic conception of personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *30*, 414–428.
- Shweder, R. A. (1991). *Thinking through cultures: Expeditions in cultural psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Spellman, B. A., Ullman, J. B., & Holyoak, K. J. (1993). A coherence model of cognitive consistency: Dynamics of attitude change during the Persian Gulf war. *Journal of Social Issues*, *49*, 147–165.
- Thagard, P. (1989). Explanatory coherence. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *12*, 435–467.
- Tylor, E. B. (1871). *The origins of culture*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.

RODOLFO MENDOZA-DENTON is currently a doctoral candidate at Columbia University. His research interests include stereotyping, cultural identity, and self-regulation.

OZLEM N. AYDUK is currently a doctoral candidate at Columbia University. Her research interests focus on gender identity and gender differences in intimate relationships.

CAPS Analysis of Reactions to the Simpson Case

581

YUICHI SHODA received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1990. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington.

WALTER MISCHEL, Niven Professor of Humane Letters in Psychology at Columbia University, was the recipient of a Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association in 1982. His longtime collaboration with Dr. Yuichi Shoda has recently resulted in the development of their Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality.

Appendix A: O. J. Simpson Sights and Sounds

- 1) O. J. Simpson's slow-speed car chase (June 17, 1994).
- 2) CNN computer-animated movie of the crime scene: Nicole Brown Simpson's body.
- 3) CNN computer-animated movie of the crime scene: Add Ron Goldman's body.
- 4) Excerpt from Christopher Darden's opening statement (January 24, 1995).
- 5) Excerpt from Johnnie Cochran's opening statement (January 25, 1995).
- 6) Detective Mark Fuhrman is cross-examined by the defense.
- 7) Excerpt from Laura Hart McKinney's testimony.
- 8) Nicole Brown Simpson's 911 call (1989).
- 9) Nicole Brown Simpson's 911 call (1993).
- 10) Marcia Clark argues for Simpson's guilt.
- 11) F. Lee Bailey raises questions about Mark Fuhrman's integrity (January 23, 1995).
- 12) Prosecution's closing argument (excerpt) (September 26, 1995).
- 13) Defense's closing argument (excerpt) (September 27, 1995).
- 14) Announcement of verdict (October 3, 1995).
- 15) Goldman family reaction to verdict.
- 16) Simpson family reaction to verdict.
- 17) Crowd, outside courtroom, reacts to verdict.
- 18) Simpson, a free man, returns to his estate and embraces Al Cowlings.