

## **The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television**

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*Based on questionnaire responses from 412 undergraduate students, this study sought to examine specific perceptions (i.e., occupational roles, negative personality characteristics, low achieving status, and positive stereotypes) of African American portrayals on television. Results revealed that television viewers perceive the occupational roles and personality characteristics that African Americans portray on television as real or true to life. On the contrary, viewers do not perceive the low-achieving roles and positive stereotypes of African Americans on television as realistic or accurate. These findings support past research that suggests that television can affect the way viewers think about African Americans in general.*

*KEYTERMS African American portrayals, occupational roles, stereotype, television*

For years, the media have been criticized for their representations of African Americans on television (Corea, 1993; Dates, 1990; Mastro & Tropp, 2004; Stroman, Merritt, & Matabane, 1989). In general, the literature suggests that, although the quantity of African American images on television has increased, the quality of these images has not (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002; Mastro & Troop, 2004; Weigel, Kim, & Frost, 1995).

Communication research and theory suggest that the mass media are an important source of information about African Americans and media portrayals contribute to public perceptions of African Americans (Davis & Gandy, 1999; Gray, 1989; Matabane, 1988; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003). Dates (1990), for example, has argued that Black images on television may cause viewers to conceive, alter, or even reinforce their beliefs and opinions about Blacks.

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Research findings using college students' perceptions have consistently shown that negative exposure to African American portrayals in the media significantly influences the evaluations of African Americans in general (Ford, 1997; Mastro, & Tropp, 2004; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). Other research has shown that Black depictions on television have an effect on viewers of all ages and of all races (Bryant & Zillmann, 1994; Dates, 1980).

Several media researchers have expressed concern about the effects of negative African American portrayals on television audiences (Daniels, 2000; Rada, 2000; Stroman, 1984). Yet, little attention has looked at television audience members' perceived realism judgments about specific characteristics of African American portrayals on television and the effects of these images. Thus, the present study sought to examine specific realism perceptions concerning occupational roles, personality characteristics, low achieving status, and positive stereotypes of African American portrayals on television.

## AFRICAN-AMERICAN PORTRAYALS ON TELEVISION

Research on media portrayals of African Americans has found that African Americans have been frequently portrayed in stereotypical occupational roles (Seggar & Wheeler, 1973; Warren, 1988), with negative personality characteristics (Cosby, 1994), as low achievers (Bramlett-Solomon & Farwell, 1996; Seggar & Wheeler, 1973) and with positive stereotypes (Donagher, Poulos, Liebert, & Davidson, 1975; Gunter, 1998).

### Occupational Roles

After reviewing numerous television shows, Seggar and Wheeler (1973) found that African Americans on these programs were generally depicted in service or blue-collar occupations, such as a house cleaner or a postal worker. Similarly, in an extensive review of Blacks in the media, Warren (1988) found that the media often portrayed African Americans in occupational roles, such as a servant, a crook, a cook, an entertainer, a musician, a sad non-White person, an exhibitionist, an athlete, or a corrupt individual. Moreover, he affirmed that most stereotypes about Blacks are intensified by television portrayals. Likewise, Baptista-Fernandez and Greenberg (1980) discovered that African Americans on television were seldom depicted as having a highly recognizable occupation or a professional or supervisory position in comparison to White television characters.

### Negative Personality Characteristics

African Americans are frequently portrayed with personality characteristics that are stereotypically negative. In one of the earliest examinations of

African American portrayals, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) found that African American television portrayals typically depicted the following stereotypic personality characteristics: inferior, stupid, comical, immoral, and dishonest. Dates (1990) later noted that other stereotypes of African Americans existed, including disrespectful, violent, greedy, ignorant, and power-driven. After determining that Blacks in the media tended to be portrayed as menacing, untidy, rebellious, disrespectful, buffoonish, sexual, immoral, hopeless, untrained, uneducated, and noisy, Cosby (1994) concluded that most roles Blacks portrayed were negative and stereotypical.

### Low Achieving Status

In contrast to White characters, research indicates that African Americans have lower socioeconomic status (SES) roles on television than Anglo Americans (Segger & Wheeler, 1973). Reid (1979) noted substantial differences between Black and White female television characters; Black females were typically perceived as low achievers and White females were typically perceived as less dominant than Black female counterparts. She also discovered that the viewers' perception of a White character on a Black program, such as *The Jeffersons* was not positive. Reid argued that such perceptions regarding Black and White females are due to the stereotypic images that are portrayed on television. Likewise, Greenberg and Brand (1994) found that African Americans on television typically had lower status roles and were depicted as having lower educational levels than Whites.

### Positive Stereotypes

Not all studies dealing with Black portrayals in the media have been stereotypic. Performing a content analysis of 139 television series, Donagher et al. (1975) found that Black males were portrayed as a helper, a giver, and as cooperative and Black females were portrayed as virtuous. Similarly, Gunter (1998) analyzed portrayals between British television and American television. He observed that Whites were more likely to be aggressors than Blacks. In addition, he noticed that Whites were more likely to be victims than Blacks. Also, Atkin (1992) found that Blacks were more prominent in regulatory roles, such as law enforcement officers and depicted with more positive characteristics than before. Tamborini, Mastro, Chory-Assad, and Huang (2000) noticed that Black television characters had similar characteristics as their White television counterparts.

## EFFECTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PORTRAYALS IN THE MEDIA

Studies dealing with television portrayals of African Americans have also looked at the effects of viewing these images (e.g., Ford, 1997). Ford

contended that Anglo-Americans, who have high exposure to negative television portrayals of African Americans, are more inclined to make negative assumptions about other African Americans. Furthermore, Ford maintained that unfavorable portrayals of Blacks not only influenced Whites' perceptions, but African Americans' perceptions as well. Likewise, Fujioka (1999) contended that television portrayals (positive or negative) greatly influence viewers' stereotypes of African Americans. Also, Fujioka's study illustrated that when firsthand knowledge is not present, television images have a huge effect on viewers' perceptions. In addition, this study found cultural differences in responses to positive images of Blacks among Japanese and American students. American students tended to be more influenced by negative messages of Blacks than Japanese students. Fujioka's research affirmed that affective assessments of television portrayals of African Americans are highly related to the development of stereotypes.

Along similar lines, Armstrong, Neuendorf, and Bentar (1992) studied college students' perceptions of Blacks in the media. They discovered that media content type was associated with college students' perceptions of Black's SES. Furthermore, their findings suggested that college students, who watch enormous amounts of television, were more inclined to perceive Black Americans as relishing a relative higher SES than the average American household. Nonetheless, their findings also indicate that college students, who watched a larger amount of news programming, were more inclined to perceive Black Americans as surviving on a lower SES than the general public.

Lastly, previous research suggests that there are differences in how Blacks and the general public view certain character portrayals. For example, Page (1997) noted that certain Blacks roles, specifically those by Black males, were viewed as exemplary by the Black community, whereas the same roles seen by the general public were viewed as unfavorable and distasteful. Also, the miniseries, *Chaka Zulu*, was seen by Blacks as featuring a historic Zulu chief that had keen militaristic wit. However, the general public reported that the miniseries displayed a madman, who was hungry for blood (Page, 1997).

In summary, many programs do not display Blacks in very positive roles (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). Instead, African American portrayals on television often focus more on reaffirming negative stereotypes (Rada, 2000). Yet, the media shape and influence public perceptions of African Americans.

## PERCEIVED REALISM AND CULTIVATION THEORY

Cultivation research has been very abundant in the mass communication research literature over the years (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, & Shanahan, 2004), and most of the research using perceived realism as a variable involves cultivation theory. The cultivation hypothesis offers an

explanation for the way individuals organize social reality and make social judgments of the world (Perse, 1986), that is, our perceptions of reality are “cultivated” or developed by what we view in the media (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986). It is also the basis for the expectation that media exposure is linked to perceptions of African Americans.

Signorelli and Morgan (1990) emphasized that cultivation is not a linear relationship of television to its viewers; rather it is a continuous process among messages and contexts. They noted that heavy media viewers are more likely to give answers similar to what they see on television. Consequently, the authors also noted that watching television is unique to the individual because of certain lifestyles and cultural norms. In other words, one television program may make a person cry, but the same program can encourage a person to kill. At the same time, cultivation is based on individuals’ perceptions of realism of television portrayals.

Numerous studies have stressed the importance of perceived realism. In order to assess perceived realism, Greenberg (1972) created a three-item scale that asked viewers how realistic the images they saw on television were. Greenberg’s scale was positively worded. The items on his scale included: “The people I see on TV are just like people I meet in real life;” “The programs I see on TV tell about life the way it really is;” and “The same things that happen to people on TV happen to me in real life.”

Subsequent research has introduced modifications to Greenberg’s perceived realism scale. Rubin (1981) augmented Greenberg’s scale and incorporated negatively worded items. This modified scale was named the Perceived Realism Scale (PRS). The negatively worded items were “If I see something on TV, I can’t be sure it really is that way” and “TV does not show life as it really is.”

Perse (1994) pointed out that “although perceived TV realism has some evidence of construct validity, content-specific adaptations of the scale might be more valid measures of the construct” (p. 284). Moreover, Potter (1988) argued that, “the construction validation process requires that the important elements in the construct be clearly defined and that the relationships among these elements be discussed logically to establish face and content validity” (p. 23).

Also, Kerlinger (1992) asserted that items must be written explicitly rather than vaguely.

Thus, only specific themes relating television portrayals of African Americans were used for this study (i.e., occupational roles, personality characteristics, low achieving status, and positive stereotypes).

To increase validity, the abstract word *things* in the original scale was replaced with more concrete words, such as *negative personality characteristics of African Americans* and *occupational roles* in the scale. Thus, the more specific the content, the more valid the findings would be. The PRS is too broad, because it asks individuals to assess “things” on television,

which is erroneous and ambiguous. Individuals may vary in the types of programs they watch on television. Perse (1990) noted that perceived realism is something within individuals and not necessarily what television depicts. Hence, the themes used for this study were specific to past research findings on African Americans on television. Four themes from the research literature related to African Americans were created: occupational roles, negative personality characteristics, low achieving, and positive stereotypes. *Occupational roles* referred to the careers that African Americans were depicted as having on television. *Negative personality characteristics* referred to the unappealing stereotypic characteristics and mannerisms that African Americans portrayed on television. *Low achieving* referred to the perception that African Americans did not apply themselves to attain better situations on television. *Positive stereotypes* referred to the approving and/or beneficial characteristics African Americans portrayed on television.

This study was designed to analyze television viewers' perceived realism perceptions of specific themes concerning African Americans portrayals on television. Derived from the work on cultivation theory and the PRS, the research question inquired about viewers' perceptions of African Americans on television:

RQ1: What are viewers' realism perceptions concerning occupational roles, negative personality characteristics, low achieving status, and positive stereotypes of African American portrayals on television?

## METHODS

Participants in the present study were 412 students, enrolled in a basic communication course, from a large public university. Of the 412 participants, 164 (39.8%) were male, 225 (54.6%) were female, and 25 (5.6 %) did not indicate their gender. Thirty-eight (9%) were ages 18 or below, 320 (77%) were between 19 to 24, 30 (7%) were between 25 and 30, and 24 (6%) were over 30. One hundred forty-five (34%) were freshmen, 160 (38%) were sophomores, 85 (20%) were juniors, and 23 (6%) were seniors. Three hundred forty-seven (85%) were Caucasian, 24 (6%) were African American, and 36 (9%) were of other ethnic origins. The majority of the sample either watched at least 30 minutes to an hour of television a day (43%) or about an hour and a half to three hours a day (37%). Approximately a third of the sample (32%) reported that they enjoyed watching African American television programming.

The questionnaire was administered in a mass testing format. All participants received credit for their participation. Participants were told that their responses would remain confidential and their participation was voluntary.

## Measures

### PRS

The PRS was used for this study, because it has been the most frequently used instrument for measuring perceived realism on television (see Appendix A). The items on this scale included statements such as: “The people I see on TV are just like people I meet in real life;” “The programs I see on TV tell about life the way it really is;” and “The same things that happen to people on TV happen to me in real life.” For this questionnaire, the themes based on the research literature concerning African Americans on television were randomly placed into the original scale in place of “things.” For instance, revised items were statements such as: “Television lets me see positive stereotypes of African Americans” and “If I see occupational roles of African Americans on television, I can’t be sure that their occupational roles are really that way.” Then, the questionnaire with the original PRS and the adapted versions of the PRS was arranged together. Thereupon, items on the questionnaire were mixed, so that the participants would not answer in a consistent manner (see Appendix B for the modified version of the scale).

Participants completed the modified version of the television PRS. Nonspecific “things” in the modified version of the scale were replaced with the words *African Americans* and a specific term such as *occupational roles*, *negative personality characteristics*, *low-achieving*, or *positive stereotypes*. These terms were not defined specifically for the participants but were left to the participants’ discretion for interpretation because television portrayals of these terms are usually not specifically defined but left for the viewer to interpret. Responses were solicited using a 5-point, Likert-type scale than ranges from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Reverse-scored items were recoded prior to data analysis. Perse (1994) noted that PRS scores are generally added and then averaged to come up with a composite score. When all the items were combined together, the mean score was 3.44 ( $SD = .48$ ,  $N = 412$ ). The scores ranged from 1.6–5.0. Cronbach’s alpha for the composite adapted scale was .92.

To address the differences of reality and perceived reality, a factor analysis was conducted to see if the items clustered together. Factor analysis is useful for construct validation (Kerlinger, 1992). Because perceived reality is mainly linked with the receiver, participants were asked a variety of demographic questions concerning the amount of television they watch and how much they enjoy watching African-American television programming.

## RESULTS

The research question focused on what perceptions viewers have of perceived realism concerning specific themes of African Americans on

television. Reverse-scored items were recoded prior to data analysis. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The factor loadings are presented in Table 1. The scree plot and varimax rotation revealed that there were two distinct factors. Factor 1 accounted for 43.65% of the variance (eigenvalue = 26.44 ) and consisted of specifically phrased items. As indicated in Table 1, 8 of the items met the 50/30 criteria. Factor 2 accounted for 23.77% of the variance (eigenvalue = 11.16) and consisted of negatively worded items. Six items met the 50/30 criteria. All other items were discarded, because the items did not load heavily on one factor or the items did not meet the 50/30 requirement.

After factor analyses were conducted, Cronbach's alphas were performed for the two factors of the adapted PRS. The results of the reliability analysis are presented in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha for the first factor (Positively Worded Items) was .91. The Cronbach's alpha for the second

**TABLE 1** Factor Loadings for the Adapted Television Perceived Realism Scale

Perceived realism statements	Really see/presents	Can't be sure
Television presents African Americans' negative personality characteristics as they really are in life.	.844	
Television lets me really see the negative personality characteristics of African Americans.	.822	
Television lets me really see the occupational roles of African Americans.	.787	
Television lets me really see African Americans, who are low-achievers.	.744	
Television lets me see positive stereotypes of African Americans.	.711	
Television presents African Americans with occupational roles as they really are in life.	.662	
Television presents African Americans as low achievers, which they really are in life.	.560	
Television presents African Americans with positive stereotypes as they really are in life.	.842	
If I see African Americans as low achievers on TV, I can't be sure that they are really that way.		.871
If I see African Americans' negative personality characteristics on TV, I can't be sure their personality is really that way.		.823
If I see African-American with positive stereotypes on television, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way.		.781
If I see something on television, I can't be sure it is really that way.		.666
If I see occupational roles of African Americans on television, I can't be sure that their occupational roles are really that way.		.622
Eigenvalue	26.44	11.16
Cumulative variance explained	43.65	23.77

**TABLE 2** Reliability Analysis of the Adapted Television Perceived Realism Scale

Perceived realism statements	Corrected item total correlation	Squared multiple correlation	Alpha if item deleted
<i>Positively worded items</i> ( $\alpha = .91$ , <i>Cronbach's</i> $\alpha = .91$ )			
Television presents African Americans' negative personality characteristics as they really are in life.	.72	.41	.82
Television lets me really see negative personality characteristics of African Americans.	.66	.56	.81
Television lets me really see occupational roles of African Americans.	.63	.43	.80
Television lets me really see African Americans, who are low-achievers.	.74	.38	.84
Television lets me see positive stereotypes of African Americans.	.71	.56	.83
Television presents African Americans with occupational roles as they really are in life.	.66	.56	.81
Television presents African Americans as low achievers, which they really are in life.	.72	.58	.88
Television presents African Americans' positive stereotypes as they really are in life.	.65	.44	.80
<i>Negatively worded items</i> ( $\alpha = .86$ , <i>Cronbach's</i> $\alpha = .86$ )			
If I see how African Americans as low achievers on TV, I can't be sure that they are really that way.	.63	.42	.81
If I see African Americans' negative personality characteristics on TV, I can't be sure their personality is really that way.	.67	.46	.81
If I see African-American with positive stereotypes on television, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way.	.62	.41	.81
If I see something on television, I can't be sure it is really that way.	.64	.42	.81
If I see occupational roles of African Americans on television, I can't be sure that their occupational roles are really that way.	.60	.37	.82

factor (Negatively Worded Items) was .86. Both were considered to be acceptable levels of reliability.

Next, descriptive statistics were conducted to see the differences between the means of the PRS and each of the themes (i.e., occupational roles, personality characteristics, low achievers, and positive stereotypes) of the adapted PRS. The mean differences are reported on Table 3.

**TABLE 3** Descriptive Statistics Between the Subscales of the Adapted PRS

Scales	<i>Ms</i>	<i>SDs</i>	<i>n</i>
Occupational roles	4.11	.71	411
Personality characteristics	4.45	.57	412
Low achievers	2.11	.63	412
Positive portrayals	2.22	.44	410

The highest mean reported was for negative personality characteristics, which was 4.45 ( $SD = .57$ ) and lowest mean was low status achievers, which was 2.11 ( $SD = .63$ ). The lowest standard deviation occurred for positive stereotypes ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = .44$ ). This suggests that people do not vary on their perceptions of perceived realism of African American positive stereotypic behaviors on television. The highest standard deviation was for occupational roles ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = .71$ ). These results indicate that viewers have different realism perceptions of African American portrayals on television.

Further descriptive statistics were conducted to look at amount of television use and perceptions of African Americans. A *t* test was conducted looking that the differences between heavy television viewers and light television viewers. Results indicated that there were no differences between the television viewers. Heavy television viewers ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) did not differ from light television viewers ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .89$ ),  $t(409) = 66.32$ ,  $p < .37$ . Results revealed that there was not a significant difference between these two variables. In addition, independent *t* tests were conducted to see if there were differences between race and gender on participants' perceptions of perceived realism. Results indicated that there were no racial differences between the participants. Caucasian participants ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) had similar perceived realism ratings to non-Caucasian participants ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t(409) = 66.32$ ,  $p < .22$ . In addition, males ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) and females ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) had similar perceptions concerning the realism of African American portrayals on television ( $t(409) = 46.19$ ,  $p < .27$ ). The results revealed that there were no significant difference between race and gender on viewers' perceptions of perceived realism, which was consistent with Ford's (1997) study, which demonstrated no differences between Black and White viewers' perceptions of television portrayals.

## DISCUSSION

The present study presents a unique contribution to past research on perceived realism and specific themes concerning African American portrayals on television. By looking specifically at perceptions of perceived realism, results revealed that there were some significant differences in viewers'

perceptions of African-Americans on television. The findings indicated that viewers perceived the occupational roles and negative personality characteristics that African Americans portray on television as real or true to life. Viewers may feel that television depicts African Americans in jobs that are realistic and believable. African Americans are represented in a large number of careers and represent a widely diverse group of occupations. Greenberg et al. (2002) found an increase in the amount of African American portrayals on television. Moreover, Tamborini et al. (2002) discovered that Blacks were portrayed in more diverse occupational positions than previous research literature. Thus, viewers may feel that the occupations on television are realistic, because they actually see African Americans in positions similar to ones shown on television.

Bussell and Crandall (2002) noted that there were prominent media images of African American as being criminals or unemployed individuals. In accordance with these images, the viewers felt that the negative personality characteristics of African Americans that were shown on television were realistic images.

On the other hand, viewers did not perceive the low-achieving status roles and positive stereotypes of African Americans on television as real or accurate portrayals. Viewers may have felt that several African Americans in real life were achieving high status positions. For instance, Oprah Winfrey (talk show host), Tyra Banks (television personality/model), Bob Johnson (founder of Black Entertainment Television), Russell Simmons (producer/entrepreneur), and Condelezza Rice (Secretary of State) are all African Americans with high status and high profile positions. For that reason, television viewers may have felt that television portrayals did not accurately represent African Americans, because there are African Americans that have high status positions in society.

Similarly, in this study, viewers may have felt that positive stereotypes of African Americans were not very realistic because viewers also reported that negative personality characteristics were realistic. Busselle and Crandall (2002) noted that Black television portrayals are repeatedly negative and often influence viewers to perceive Blacks as unworthy of assistance or sympathy. Similar to Greenberg et al.'s (2002) findings concerning the continuation of negative portrayals of minorities on television, the media still have several negative portrayals of African Americans. These portrayals in turn have an effect on viewers' perceptions of them.

Overall, the findings suggest that portrayals of African Americans on television may have an influence on viewers and their perceptions about African Americans in general. As indicated by previous studies (e.g., Dixon, 2006; Mastro & Tropp, 2004), negative portrayals often lead to the continuation of stereotypes of African Americans in general. Wober and Gunter (1988) viewed television as, "producing 'influences' not as in a 'hypodermic' analogy, but as an interactive process," and that "viewers come

to what they see, and interpret what they see, both in the light of their own preconceptions and also as reinforcement of such notions" (p. 125). Wober and Gunter concluded, "it is in this sense that television apparently influences certain (adult) beliefs" (p. 125). Based on Wober and Gunter's conclusions, it is possible that viewers had some preconceived notions of African Americans that affected their perceived realism of African American portrayals on television. The low perceived realism ratings for low-achieving status roles and positive stereotypes of African Americans on television may indicate that viewers have preconceptions, such as negative stereotypes about African Americans while still perceiving African Americans to be frequently attaining high achieving status roles. The high perceived realism ratings for occupational roles and negative personality characteristics of African American portrayals on television may indicate that viewers' preconceived notions of African American occupational roles and negative personality characteristics are similar to those they view on television. Based on Slater and Elliott's (1982) research, these findings appear important because they provide some insight into viewers' preconceived notions of African Americans in real life experiences. In addition, based on Slater and Elliott's (1982) and Fujioka's (1999) research, it may be important to monitor current and future portrayals of African Americans on television to gain insight into the possible influence on viewers' social reality and the development and/or reinforcement of stereotypes regarding African Americans.

Thus, future research should look at what people perceive as most real and what effects it may cause viewers. Future research should also analyze what people do not perceive as real. This would be very interesting to see if perceptions are consistent between heavy and light viewers of television. Also, future research should analyze what types of content on specific programs are perceived as real. Moreover, future research should include more participants that are diverse to see if there are any differences (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, social economic status). For example, future studies concerning African American masculinity and femininity are also possible directions to investigate with the PRS.

By understanding individuals' perceived realism of television portrayals of African Americans on television, communication scholars can better examine associations between the media and its possible effects on interpersonal relationships, stereotypes, and perceptions. Based on the results, further studies should investigate the themes regarding African Americans on television. The findings indicated fairly moderate correlations among the themes. Future analyses are needed to distinguish any differences between gender, ethnicity, total TV viewing time, and enjoyment of African American television programming.

Despite the numerous research articles on African Americans in the media, researchers have noted more research should analyze and observe how more White families are watching prominent Black shows, such as *Everybody Hates*

*Chris*, *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *The Bernie Mac Show*, and *Girlfriends*. Also, more research should look at the presence of Blacks not only in television and commercials, but also in motion pictures and magazine advertisements. With the increase of more television dramas, researchers should investigate viewers' perceptions of Blacks in White dominated fields. For instance, *CSI*, *House*, *Without a Trace*, *ER*, and *Criminal Minds* all have a Black actor portrayed in a high status role. In addition, future research should analyze the difference between Black intimacy and White intimacy on shows that have an all-Black or all-White casts. For example, *That's so Raven* and *Hannah Montana* are two shows about high school girls but with different races. One could analyze how these two characters differ in their dating style and courtship behaviors. As a result, researchers could analyze viewers' effects, perceptions, and stereotypes from watching these types of programs.

Although this study provides important information about television viewers' perceptions of perceived realism concerning television portrayals of African Americans, a few limitations must be mentioned. First, this study was conducted in a mass testing format. An experimental research design might have produced different results. Secondly, participants were not asked specific questions about why they answered the way they did. It would be more beneficial to conduct follow-up interviews to gain more information about possible extraneous variables. Third, previous studies have used the PRS as a subscale rather than just a main scale. Perhaps, more questions concerning African American portrayals on television should have been asked in the questionnaire. Lastly, the participants in this study were college students. If a more representative group of television viewers were used the results may have been different.

In spite of these limitations, this research contributes to our understanding of how African Americans are portrayed on television and how television viewers perceive specific characteristics concerning African Americans. More importantly, it increases our understanding of the significance of media portrayal of African Americans.

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## APPENDIX A

**Directions:** Here are some statements people may make about television. For each statement please circle the number that best expresses your own feelings. If you strongly agree with the statement, circle a 5. If you agree, then circle a 4. If you agree some and disagree some, circle 3. If you disagree, circle a 2. If you strongly disagree, circle a 1.

1. Television presents things as they really are in life.
2. If I see something on TV, I can't be sure it really is that way.
3. Television lets me really see how other people live.
4. TV does not show life as it really is.
5. Television lets me see what happens in other places as if I were really there.

*Note.* Items 2 and 4 are reverse-coded for data analysis.

## APPENDIX B

**Directions:** Here are some statements people may make about television. For each statement, please indicate the letter that best represents your own feelings. Choose the letter from the following scale that best describes how you feel concerning each statement:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree some & Disagree some	Agree	Strongly agree
A	B	C	D	E

1. Television presents African Americans' negative personality characteristics as they really are in life.
2. Television presents things as they really are in life.
3. If I see African Americans' negative personality characteristics on TV, I can't be sure their personality is really that way.
4. Television presents African Americans with occupational roles as they really are in life.
5. Television lets me see African Americans with occupational roles as if I were really there.
6. Television lets me really see African Americans, who are low-achievers.
7. If I see African-American with positive stereotypes on television, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way.
8. Television lets me see positive stereotypes of African Americans.
9. Television lets me see positive stereotypes of African Americans as if I were really there.
10. TV does not show positive stereotypes of African Americans as they really are.
11. TV does not show life as it really is.
12. Television lets me really see the negative personality characteristics of African Americans.
13. TV does not show African Americans' negative personality characteristics as they really are.
14. If I see something on TV, I can't be sure it really is that way.
15. Television presents African Americans as low achievers, which they really are in life.
16. Television lets me see African Americans as low achievers as if I were really there.
17. TV does not show the occupational roles of African Americans as they really are.
18. Television lets me really see how other people live.
19. If I see occupational roles of African Americans on television, I can't be sure that their occupational roles are really that way.
20. Television lets me really see the occupational roles of African Americans.
21. Television presents African Americans with positive stereotypes as they really are in life.
22. If I see African Americans as low achievers on TV, I can't be sure that they are really that way.
23. Television lets me see what happens in other places as if I were really there.
24. TV does not show African Americans as low achievers as they really are.
25. Television lets me see African Americans' negative personality characteristics as if I were really there.

*Note:* Items 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, and 24 are reverse-coded for data analysis.

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