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Audiences' Mediated Contact with Black Characters in Scripted Television and Support for Racialized Social Issues

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ABSTRACT

Within scripted television programs, portrayals of Black characters have improved in both quantity and quality over the past few years. Research suggests that these various television characterizations may communicate an influential social standing of the group. Using a cross-sectional multicultural sample ($N = 206$) and applying mediated contact theories, the current research investigates audiences' consumption of Black scripted television, parasocial relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues. The results suggest that audiences' consumption of Black scripted television is positively related to favorable parasocial relationships with Black television characters. Positive parasocial relationships with Black television characters were associated with increased support for racialized social issues, particularly among viewers lacking interpersonal contact with Black individuals.

Race-centered media research suggests that audiences form their ideas regarding different racial groups based on their television consumption (D. Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Scholars note that viewing positive television depictions discourages bias directed at the represented groups and prompts healthy self-perceptions among audiences with shared identities (Fujioka, 2005; McKinley et al., 2014). Scholars also acknowledged an increase in the quantity and diversity of Black television characters (Cox & Ward, 2019; Dixon, 2017; Lauzen, 2016; Stamps, 2020b; Tukachinsky et al., 2015). At a time of ongoing racial tension and much-needed racial appeasement, examining the relationship between viewers' consumption of television content featuring Black individuals and the perceptions related to Black communities is critical.

Research has suggested that audiences' consumption of television programs depicting Black characters, depending on the characterizations, may weaken or strengthen negative perceptions of Black people (Mastro & Tropp, 2004). To date, the growth in the number of Black scripted television characters is noticeable, and the potential favorable relationship between audiences' mediated contact (i.e., television viewing) and perceptions of Black individuals is plausible (Stamps, 2020b). Likewise, examining viewers' increased support for racialized social issues (e.g., police brutality) is timely as there exists an increase in social unrest and demands for equitable treatment from Black communities (WBUR, 2020). To our knowledge, few studies have explicitly focused on the relationship between audiences'

consumption of Black television characters and favorable attitudes toward issues related to Black individuals. Using cross-sectional multicultural data (45% nonwhite), we explored the relationships among viewers' consumption of scripted television featuring Black characters, parasocial relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues.

This investigation makes several contributions to the race-related media literature. First, research has indicated that consuming television depictions of Black individuals may influence subsequent evaluations among White audiences (D. Mastro & Stamps, 2018). However, very little evidence is available regarding the relationship between viewing Black television depictions and attitudes among nonwhite audiences (cf., Fujioka, 1999). Second, researchers identify an increase in the range of Black characters in scripted television. However, there lacks an examination of positive relationships between audiences' consumption of this content and attitudes toward Black populations, thus shifting away from the concentration on unfavorable outcomes (see Stamps, 2020a). Finally, this work extends mediated contact literature by offering a distinct understanding of race-related media and its role in garnering support for racialized social issues that affect communities of color.

To best situate this research, we present a brief review of Black scripted television characters. Subsequently, we discuss tenets from mediated contact. Finally, we offer the methods used, results of the analyses, and implications of the findings.

Black Scripted Television Characters

Research has documented negative depictions of Black scripted television characters, which include portrayals that equate Black individuals with criminality and laziness (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008; Signorielli, 2009). However, recent literature has pointed out positive depictions of Black television characters and suggested that the groups' attributes and social status represented on television are comparable to those of other racial groups (Cox & Ward, 2019; Dixon, 2017; Lauzen, 2016). Specifically, quantitative and qualitative research has acknowledged Black television characters of various social classes and education levels (Cox & Ward, 2019; Stamps, 2020b). For example, Stamps (2017) identified Black scripted television characters across a 20-year span that personify middle and upper-class status and post-secondary education attainment, both of which counter negative stereotypes of Black individuals (D. Mastro & Stamps, 2018).

Journalists, media critics, and scholars have recognized a trend in the increasing diversity of Black characters in scripted television (Hunt et al., 2018; Stamps, 2020b). Nevertheless, Black characters in scripted television vary in representation across genres (e.g., comedy, drama). Black television characters are typically more prominent within situational comedies (sitcoms) than in dramas and reality television programs (Signorielli, 2009). However, dramatic television programming has shifted to include an increase in positive Black characters, particularly in white-collar professions (e.g., lawyers, doctors) that often mirror non-Black representation on-screen (Lauzen, 2016; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008).

The relationship between viewers' consumption of Black characters in scripted television and their perceptions of Black individuals is complicated. Depending on the viewer's real-world contact with Black individuals, existing beliefs about the Black community, and television consumption habits, this relationship may reinforce, attenuate, or exacerbate their views (positive or negative) toward Black individuals (D. Mastro & Stamps, 2018). For

example, research has indicated that audiences who report less prejudicial judgment of Black individuals also condemn unfavorable television portrayals and are less likely to generalize negative stereotypes toward Black people (Mastro & Tropp, 2004). Busselle and Crandall (2002) noted that audiences' consumption of Black characters in scripted television is related to a positive outlook of Black individuals' social class and increased positive perceptions of Black individuals' educational accomplishments.

Research has also identified relationships between the consumption of Black characters in scripted television and viewers' unfavorable judgments of Black people (Fujioka, 1999; Ramasubramanian, 2010). The inconsistent findings of previous research may be attributable to the types of measurement, such as vague questions that assess participants' recall of Black television representations. For example, questions that ask participants to think about Black people on television or consider Black individuals in the news create a homogenous view of Black characterizations and dismiss the distinct television portrayals on-screen (see Fujioka, 1999; Ramasubramanian, 2010). Currently, there is an ever-growing television landscape that includes commercial broadcast television, paid and basic cable television, streaming services, and digital platforms. Each type of program may offer diverse and accessible content that features Black characters (Stamps, 2020a). Considering current shifts in television formats and the accessibility of content, viewer's consumption of various Black television characters may shape their real-world beliefs about Black communities. To examine this assumption, a defined list of television programs that feature Black characters from multiple television platforms (e.g., streaming services, pay cable) is used to assess viewer consumption. Here, mediated contact offers insight into viewers' consumption of Black scripted television, their potential relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues.

Mediated Contact

Contact theory posits that face-to-face contact between groups improves intergroup attitudes, reduces prejudice, and increases the fondness of others (Allport, 1954). Allport theorized that face-to-face engagement among different groups is most effective when intergroup engagement is encouraged in society. Likewise, both parties should be of equal status, have common goals, and are portrayed as cooperative (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Scholars assert that in the same manner that face-to-face contact improves intergroup relations, mediated contact–that is, television consumption as a means of contact with other groups–may sway audiences' attitudes, and viewers may develop favorable connections with television characters (Park, 2012). In particular, viewing television may expose audiences to various groups they may not encounter in their everyday lives and with identities and characteristics that differ from their own (Joyce & Harwood, 2014). One-sided connections between consumers and television characters are recognized as parasocial relationships and are often influential in increasing positive intergroup comparisons (Dibble & Rosaen, 2011).

Audiences may view television characters' attributes, including a character's affirming social status or attractiveness, and favor these qualities, which creates an opportunity to strengthen positive attitudes and favorable social comparisons (Busselle & Crandall, 2002). From this perspective, the quality of Black television characters may represent the group's desirability within an intergroup context. Scripted television featuring Black characters may serve as an

instrument that promotes intergroup engagement (Mastro, 2015). Television consumption may also create the opportunity for group-based evaluations that result in favorable mediated relationships that manifest in real-world contexts. In other words, favorable group comparisons among viewers may bridge the gap between positive relationships with Black television characters and increased support for racialized social issues that affect Black communities.

Mediated contact is studied in two forms, depending on the character interaction represented in the media (Park, 2012). One form of contact involves audiences exclusively viewing portrayals of television characters representing outgroup members (i.e., individuals with different identities from the viewer), often referred to as parasocial contact (Schiappa et al., 2005). The other form of mediated contact involves audiences' exposure to engagement between television characters representing ingroup (i.e., individuals with the same identity as the viewer) and outgroup members, also known as vicarious contact (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Both forms of mediated contact consider the potential effects of outgroup representation on audiences' attitudes. Considering both forms of contact, people who consume television that feature distinct racial groups, such as Black individuals, may experience a shift in their beliefs about the group due to their exposure to diverse characters in a range of mediated intergroup interactions (Tukachinsky et al., 2015).

Parasocial contact occurs when audiences build relationships with television characters who demonstrate qualities and behaviors that resemble favorable social interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Work by Bond (2021) supports aspects of parasocial contact and revealed that viewers' favorable parasocial relationships with television characters could enhance positive attitudes toward the group portrayed on screen. Research has also demonstrated the inverse of this relationship and revealed a negative association between viewing unfavorable media depictions of particular groups and viewers' negative attitudes toward outgroups, including immigrants (Visintin et al., 2017) and refugees (Schemer & Meltzer, 2020).

Vicarious contact extends parasocial contact, concentrating on audiences' viewing of favorable interactions between outgroups and ingroup members within a mediated setting. In these scenarios, the viewer develops a relationship with outgroup members by witnessing favorable social interactions between outgroup and ingroup members. Exposure to television depicting positive intergroup interactions may counteract previous negative perceptions and reduce bias toward outgroups. This outcome is often attributed to the viewer perceiving themselves as similar to the ingroup member portrayed on screen (Schiappa et al., 2005). Viewers that observe positive vicarious contact are likely to infer that intergroup contact can be productive and positive in real life (Mazziotta et al., 2011). Moyer-Gusé et al. (2019) work supported the influence of vicarious contact by revealing that exposure to television programs depicting a positive intergroup engagement between Muslim and non-Muslim characters reduced viewers' anti-Muslim bias. Results from previous literature corroborate the effects of vicarious contact and its role in bias reduction. In particular, favorable vicarious contact is typically associated with positive attitudes toward outgroups, and research includes outcomes related to portrayals of undocumented individuals (Joyce & Harwood, 2014), migrant workers (Ju et al., 2016), and Arab groups (Murrar & Brauer, 2018).

Television depictions, including on-screen portrayals of outgroups intermingling with other outgroup members or in intergroup interactions, may influence viewers' attitudes directed at those different groups (Harwood et al., 2012). Individuals often rely on television

as a primary source of information about other individuals (D. Mastro & Stamps, 2018). To illustrate, scripted television shows that feature a large number of Black characters (e.g., American Broadcasting Company's *Blackish)* who engage with one another (i.e., parasocial contact) or programming that emphasize intergroup engagement (i.e., vicarious contact) between Black and non-Black characters (e.g., Columbia Broadcasting System's *SWAT)* may provide the potential for favorable mediated contact. Collectively, in the presence of ingroup members or even in the absence of ingroup members, consumption of favorable outgroup television characters may promote positive parasocial relationships between viewers and the characters presented on screen.

Mediated Contact, Black Television Characters, and Racialized Social Issues

The relationship between mediated contact with Black scripted television characters and viewers' judgment depends on the nature (positive or negative) of television representations, which may strengthen or weaken their prejudicial attitudes (Fujioka, 1999). Research has supported this claim and has noted examples of positive relationships between audiences' consumption of Black television characters and favorable judgment of Black individuals (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Research within this domain suggests that viewers' evaluations of likable outgroup members depicted on television are related to positive feelings toward those individuals (Bond, 2021; Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Ju et al., 2016). The consumption of Black scripted television, including the noted diverse array of options that comprises solely Black characters or intergroup engagement between Black characters and non-Black characters, should also positively affect viewers' parasocial relationships with the television characters. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H1: A positive relationship exists between the consumption of Black scripted television and viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters.

Television's influence on social issues is noteworthy as most viewers obtain information concerning social and political matters directly from the media (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Moreover, television depictions can disproportionately sway viewers' public opinions on social issues (Saleem et al., 2016). For example, using an experimental design, Ramasubramanian (2011) demonstrated that audiences who are shown images of Black celebrities expressed favorable opinions on racialized social issues.

Black individuals' well-being is often associated with racialized social issues pertaining to the groups' social status, their treatment in educational and workplace settings, and their representation in influential spaces, such as government officials. Racialized social issues may include but are not limited to affirmative action (Ramasubramanian, 2011) and voting rights (Hajnal et al., 2017). However, individual support for racialized social issues has rarely been examined in the context of audiences' mediated contact with television characters (cf., Fujioka, 2005). Fujioka's (2005) examination of Black audiences' consumption of Black media and the viewer's perceptions of racialized social issues demonstrated that viewing negative portrayals of Black individuals was correlated with affirmative action endorsement. Fujioka argued that unfavorable group representation was related to sympathy toward individuals, and participant's responses were aligned with increasing opportunities for ingroup members. This literature hints at a budding relationship between audiences' support

or distancing from racialized social issues depending on the type (positive or negative) of media consumed. However, the relationship between non-Black viewers' consumption of Black scripted television and support for racialized social issues remains overlooked. Research has indicated that the consumption of television that depicts other marginalized groups (e.g., sexual minorities) promotes viewers' favorable perceptions of on-screen characters and increases support for policies concerning the equal treatment of those groups (Bond, 2021).

The associations between viewers' television consumption, positive parasocial relationships with television characters, and support for racialized social issues are often stronger for viewers who lack interpersonal contact with outgroup members (Schiappa et al., 2005). Entman and Rojecki (2000, p. 49) state that "lacking much opportunity for repeated close contact with a wide variety of Blacks, Whites depend heavily on cultural material, especially media images, for cataloging Blacks." In other words, when individuals have minimal direct contact with Black individuals, television may influence their attitudes toward Black people (Cox & Ward, 2019). Accordingly, we predict that viewers who lack direct contact with Black people outside of a mediated context will exhibit increased parasocial relationships with Black television characters, which would be related to increased support for racialized social issues. Thus, a second hypothesis is proposed:

H2a-b: (a) A positive relationship exists between viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters and support for racialized social issues, and (b) this relationship is stronger among participants with less interpersonal contact with Black individuals than those with increased interpersonal contact with Black individuals.

To our knowledge, a common theme of the literature on mediated contact is comparisons between White audiences and their relationship with mediated depictions of racial, sexual, and religious minorities (see Bond, 2021; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019; Murrar & Brauer, 2018). However, Bond and Compton (2015) argue that viewers' racial similarities with television characters are an important aspect of mediated relationships. However, mediated contact research rarely examines viewers' positive parasocial relationship with television characters, particularly when the viewer's racial identity is affiliated to that of the characters depicted on screen. Novel frameworks, including the critical media effects framework, note the importance of considering race, gender, sexuality, and class among audiences and media subjects (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2020). Audience identity is a multifaceted topic, and to that end, we attempt to draw attention to viewers' various racial identities as one example. Explicitly, we argue that racial identity may act as a bridge in building a shared bond between viewers' underrepresented racial identities (e.g., Asian) and television characters belonging to racial minority groups. Research that examines minority identities (e.g., race, sexuality) has suggested that when viewers perceive themselves as similar to television characters, audiences are likely to experience positive mediated contact and endorse social issues related to the groups depicted on screen (Bond & Compton, 2015; Schiappa et al., 2005). Fittingly, it is expected that a positive connection will exist between communities of color parasocial relationships with Black television characters and increased support for racialized social issues due to their shared identities as a racial minority group. To this end, we propose an additional hypothesis to examine the relationship between parasocial relationships and support for racialized social issues among viewers with diverse racial identities.

H3: The positive relationship between viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters and support for racialized social issues is stronger among non-Black racial minorities than White audiences.

Method

Participants

A total of 206 volunteers from a large U.S. west coast university were recruited for anonymous participation in this study. The average age of the sample was 20.57 years old (SD = 1.34). Fifty-five percent of participants self-identified as White (n = 114), 21% as Latinx (n = 44), 14% mixed-race (n = 28), 4% Black/African American (n = 8), 2% Asian (n = 4), 2% Middle Eastern (n = 4), and 2% did not report their racial identity (n = 4). Of the participants, 64% (n = 132) and 36% (n = 74) self-identified as women and men, respectively. All participants correctly answered the attention check question (e.g., "Thank you for participating in this survey, please check 'strongly agree' for this question").

Procedures

Participants were told they would participate in a survey to examine their television consumption of scripted programming and feelings regarding the television show's main characters. Each person was informed that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were awarded extra credit for participation. Hard copies of the surveys were administered, and completion ranged from 20 to 25 minutes. Participants answered randomized questions regarding their interpersonal contact with various groups (including groups categorized according to race, gender, sexuality, religion, and class), consumption of scripted television shows that portray Black characters, and attitudes toward the television characters from these scripted television programs. Participants also answered questions that assessed their support for various social issues related to race, gender, class, and the environment and provided demographic information.

Measures

Consumption of Black Scripted Television

A list of scripted television shows featuring Black characters was created for this study (see Table 1). The featured characters varied in their vocation, class status, gender identity, and geographic location. Each of the television shows featured a Black main character or a large number of Black cast members, and the characters played prominent roles throughout the show's storylines. The television shows in the survey aired during the 2017–2018 television season (including non-traditional summer months). Participants rated their consumption of each Black scripted television show on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *never watched*, 7 = *watch all the time*; α = .81, M = 1.68, SD = .83). A composite measure of items was created, and higher scores indicated increased consumption of Black scripted television (see Endnote 1).

Table 1. List of scripted television shows used to measuring overall consumption.

Television Shows	Network	Run Date (in Years)
1. Atlanta	FX	2016-current
2. How To Get Away With Murder	ABC	2014–2020
3. Grownish	Freeform	2018-current
4. Orange Is The New Black	Netflix	2013–2019
5. The Chi	Showtime	2018-current
6. Power	Starz	2014–2020
7. Queen Sugar	OWN	2016-current
8. Insecure	HBO	2016-current
9. Blackish	ABC	2014-current
10. Black Lightening	The CW	2018-current
11. All American	The CW	2018-current

Demographic Variables

Participants were asked to indicate their gender identity, age and mark their racial identity from a list that included White, Black, Latinx, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, and mixed-race.

Interpersonal Contact

A series of questions about interpersonal contact with outgroup members was amended from prior mediated contact research (see Bond & Compton, 2015). The questions assessed interpersonal contact with Black individuals, including personal relationships with friends, coworkers, classmates, and family members. The five-item measure included the statements "I have several Black people as personal friends" and "I have multiple close friends who I can call on that are Black." Participants rated their agreement or disagreement with the statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; α = .87, M = 4.42, SD = 1.75). A composite measure of items was created, and higher scores indicated increased interpersonal contact with Black individuals.

Parasocial Relationships

The social and parasocial intimacy scale developed by Perse and Rubin (1989) was used to measure participants' parasocial relationships with the Black television characters from the list of TV shows in Table 1. The 10-item measure included the statements "The main characters in these shows remind me of myself" and "The main characters have similar traits to my social groups, including friends, co-workers, and classmates." Participants rated their agreement or disagreement with the statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; α = .91, M = 3.04, SD = 1.55). A composite measure of items was created, and higher scores indicated increased positive parasocial relationships with the Black television characters from the list of shows included in the study.

Racialized Social Issues

Previous measures that examined attitudes toward racialized social issues were adapted from race-related media research (see Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2010). The racialized social issues included in this study were affirmative action, fair housing, criminal justice reform, voting rights, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Each question asked participants to rate their level of support for each racialized social issue

on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *unsupportive*, 7 = *fully supportive*; α = .78, *M* = 5.37, *SD* = 1.08). A composite measure of the items was created, and higher scores indicated increased support for racialized social issues.

Results

Zero-order correlations between the variables of interest are detailed in Table 2 and revealed several significant relationships. The consumption of Black scripted television was positively correlated with viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters, support for racialized social issues, and interpersonal contact with Black individuals. Support for racialized social issues was positively correlated with viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters and interpersonal contact with Black individuals.

Initial linear regressions and path analysis (see Figure 1) were conducted to examine the proposed hypotheses using a maximum likelihood estimator. The significance of the indirect effect was tested by using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval.

The first hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between increased consumption of Black scripted television and viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters. A linear regression was conducted, and the results demonstrated that a significant

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables (N = 206).

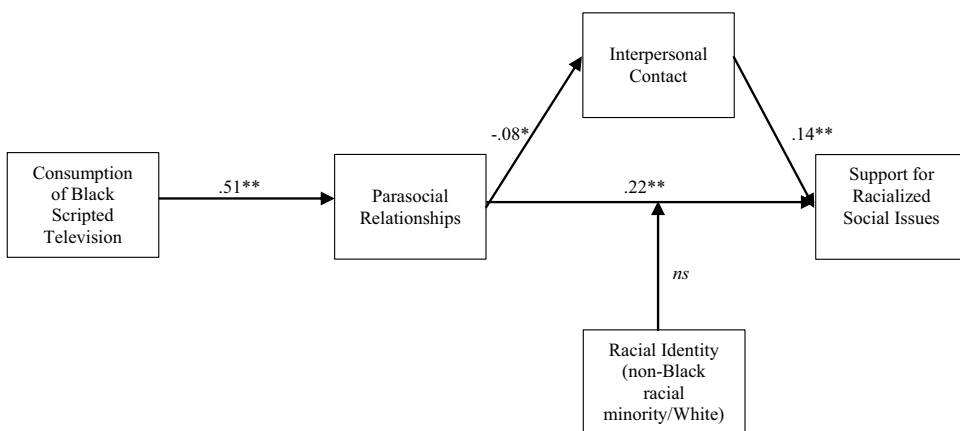| Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Black Scripted Television Consumption	1.68	.83	-	.50**	.25*	.25*
2. Parasocial Relationships	3.36	1.60		-	.06	.34**
3. Interpersonal Contact	4.42	1.75			-	.19**
4. Racialized Social Issues	5.60	1.10				-

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Figure 1. Model testing the relationship between consumption of black scripted television, parasocial relationships with black television characters, interpersonal contact with black individuals, racial identity, and support for racialized social issues. Only significant paths shown. *p < .05. **p < .01.

relationship existed between the consumption of Black scripted television and viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters ($b = .98$, $SE = .14$, $\beta = .51$, $p < .001$). The first hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters and support for racialized social issues. Also, this relationship would be stronger among participants with less interpersonal contact with Black individuals. For this analysis, racialized social issues were the dependent variable. Three predictors were used: parasocial relationships with Black television characters, interpersonal contact with Black individuals, and the interaction between parasocial relationships with Black television characters and interpersonal contact with Black individuals. Parasocial relationships with Black television characters were associated with greater support for racialized social issues ($b = .22$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = .32$, $p < .001$). Interpersonal contact with Black individuals was also associated with greater support for racialized social issues ($b = .14$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = .21$, $p = .006$). A significant interaction was also observed between parasocial relationships with Black television characters and interpersonal contact with Black individuals ($b = -.08$, $SE = .03$, $\beta = -.19$, $p = .010$).

To further examine this interaction, a simple slopes analysis was performed. To test the interaction, interpersonal contact with Black individuals was centered at either 1 standard deviation above the mean (i.e., high interpersonal contact) or 1 standard deviation below the mean (i.e., low interpersonal contact). Interaction terms were then recalculated for high and low interpersonal contact with Black individuals. At high levels of interpersonal contact with Black individuals, parasocial relationships with Black television characters were not significantly related to support for racialized social issues ($b = .10$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .14$, $p = .139$). At low levels of interpersonal contact with Black individuals, parasocial relationships with Black television characters were associated with greater support for racialized social issues ($b = .36$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .52$, $p < .001$). The second hypothesis was supported.

The third hypothesis stated a more positive relationship between parasocial relationships with Black television characters and support for racialized social issues among non-Black racial minorities than White individuals. The third hypothesis was not supported (see Endnote 2). However, a statistically significant three-way interaction between parasocial relationships with Black television characters, interpersonal contact with Black individuals, and the race of the viewer emerged ($b = .22$, $SE = .60$, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). The interaction between parasocial relationships with Black television characters and interpersonal contact with Black individuals was not statistically significant among non-Black racial minorities ($b = -.01$, $SE = .03$, $\beta = - .03$, $p = .699$) but was statistically significant among White participants ($b = -.21$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = -.43$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Based on mediated contact research, the present study examined the relationships among viewers' consumption of Black scripted television, parasocial relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues. Similar to previous research, we proposed that viewers' consumption of Black scripted television is related to their perceptions of Black individuals and, depending on the nature of the depictions, may be related to their attitudes toward racialized social issues (Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Mastro & Tropp, 2004; Ramasubramanian, 2010). The results presented here mirror previous

examinations and demonstrate a positive relationship between television consumption and viewers' favorable parasocial relationships with television characters (Bond, 2021). Likewise, this work extends mediated contact to include support for racialized social issues that concern the group represented on screen. Notably, viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters were unique. The Black television characters varied in terms of their occupation, social settings, and socioeconomic background. Additionally, many of these characters interacted with a diverse group of non-Black individuals (i.e., vicarious contact). This finding suggests that the tenets of mediated contact, including parasocial and vicarious contact, may extend to favorable intergroup attitudes toward Black individuals with various identities and characteristics (Park, 2012).

The outcome of support for racialized social issues that resulted from Black scripted television consumption should not be overlooked. Society has an insensitive history of implementing policies that overwhelmingly affect Black individuals. Such policies include the promotion of violence (e.g., the stand your ground statute) and attempts to limit individual's access to human rights (e.g., restrictions to the Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative in Florida), and these are not exclusive to the US (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019). The potential for a favorable relationship between mediated contact and support for racialized social issues that may mitigate adverse outcomes for Black individuals is encouraging. Another notable finding of the present study is the internal consistency of audiences' consumption of Black scripted television, which suggests that viewers do not seek out such programs as a one-time or singular occurrence. Viewers who watch Black television shows with prominent Black characters may seek additional programs featuring Black characters, thus increasing the opportunity to form positive parasocial relationships. Accordingly, this could be connected to viewers' support for racialized social issues. Audiences' awareness of racialized social issues and increased support for race-based policies may indicate an inclusive mentality among participants and promote favorable intergroup engagement. At this point, this is speculative but promising, nonetheless.

The results of the third hypothesis, although not exclusively significant, provide insight into the relationship between viewers' racial identity, interpersonal engagement with Black individuals, and consumption of Black scripted television. As mentioned, we believe that viewers' television consumption and viewers' likeness, or lack thereof, to television characters may be related to whether they develop favorable parasocial relationships. Different types of identity, including sexuality, gender, ability, and class, while not examined here due to limitations with the sample population, deserve consideration in future investigations. This novel area of inquiry is promising as race-related media effects researchers encourage thoughtful examinations of nonwhite media depictions and their relationship to nonwhite audiences (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2020; Stamps, 2021).

Limitations and Implications

Consumption of Black scripted television shows may contribute to viewers' perceptions of Black individuals as the content may further extend their knowledge of Black narratives (Stamps, 2020b). An increase in television programs featuring Black characters and the expanding television landscape, which includes streaming and digital outlets, offers an opportunity for consumers to form favorable parasocial relationships with Black television characters. However, the investigation of viewers' consumption of Black scripted television,

parasocial relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues are subject to certain limitations. First, the study depended on self-report assessments, and the results may be biased by participants' efforts to present socially desirable responses. Although controlling for all accounts of validity may be difficult, we aimed to address social desirability bias and potential order effects by including questions that examine nonracial groups and randomizing items to disguise the study's intent.

The sample population of college-age individuals utilized for the study is another limiting factor as the age range reduces the generalizability of the findings to other populations. However, college-age individuals are at a developmental stage in which they are more aware of and amendable to specific values, beliefs, and situational contexts (e.g., racial injustice). This population is also characteristically more emboldened due to their socialization in collegiate settings and the affordance of opportunities to discuss and critically engage in dialogue about social issues. College-age individuals may see themselves as potential agents of change, and for this examination, this was important as the social issues surveyed are universal and affect society.

Third, as with all correlational studies, the results cannot reveal a causal relationship between variables. Viewers' consumption of Black scripted television, parasocial relationships with Black television characters, and support for racialized social issues were measured simultaneously, and therefore, the direction of influence is somewhat ambiguous. Participants who consumed Black television shows may have been driven to support racialized social issues that they deemed inclusive. However, people who support racialized social issues may have an affinity for watching these types of television programs. Experimental research is necessary for clarifying these particular outcomes. Finally, the social and parasocial intimacy scale developed by Perse and Rubin (1989), which measures viewers' intimate attachment and socioemotional bond with television characters, was used to gauge general parasocial relationships across multiple television characters (see Bond & Drogos, 2014). However, the results obtained from assessing a general sense of attraction toward Black scripted television characters are not as explicit as those obtained from gauging viewers' parasocial relationship with a single identified television character. Moving forward, researchers may wish to focus on individual television characters and draw attention to the character's class, gender, and social location, in addition to their racial identity, to better understand parasocial relationships among viewers.

Despite the limitations, the introduction of racialized social issues was fundamental to the current work. Racial tension and group threat are commonplace in society. Likewise, collective action that aims to address vulnerable and underrepresented populations and the various social issues they face, including voting rights and police reform, is ever-present. The tension between racial groups and a lack of sensitivity toward racial justice is seemingly attributable to the absence of understanding different lived experiences, cultural practices, and anti-assimilative exercises involving social unrest (Stamps & Mastro, 2020). To this point, consideration of Black individuals' experiences with anti-Blackness and racial discrimination may help increase empathy toward the detrimental outcomes many Black people encounter (Byington et al., 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). To illustrate, unarmed Black people are more likely to experience verbal and physical abuse and 3.5 times more likely to be murdered by law enforcement officials than their White counterparts (Ross, 2015). Numerous judicial outcomes have shown that actions by the state toward Black individuals (e.g., chokeholds) are often justified by law enforcement agencies and upheld by juries (Fryer, 2019). However, the disparate reactions toward crimes committed by individuals from different racial groups lack merit as engagement in illegal activity is in equal parity across racial communities (Fryer, 2019).

The positive association between viewers' parasocial relationships with Black television characters and increased support for racialized social issues suggests the potential to attenuate unfounded beliefs about Black individuals, sway support for racial equity, and encourage intergroup engagement. The current study offers preliminary insight into the potential for people's consumption of Black scripted television to act as a mechanism of increasing their support for racialized social issues, each of which upholds inclusion and equality for all groups, including Black communities.,[12]

Notes

1. In response to a reviewer comment, descriptive statistics for the Black scripted television consumption measure included 11 items (α = .81, M = 1.68, SD = .83; see Table 1). In line with previous research (e.g., Bond & Drogos, 2014), we amended a series of questions that resulted in the eleven-item Black scripted television consumption measure. The application of this measure was appropriate, as indicated by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as each item loaded above .600. Perse and Rubin's (1989) social and parasocial intimacy scale (α = .91, M = 3.04, SD = 1.55) was used to assess participant's parasocial relationship with the main characters of each television show (based on the previous measure). The social and parasocial intimacy measure is not commonly applied across multiple characters; however, this was a successful determinate to examine the proposed relationships (again, see Bond & Drogos, 2014 for previous application). To aid with full disclosure of the variables of interests, materials, including the Black scripted television consumption measure, social and parasocial intimacy measure, the full dataset and CFA results from both are available in an open-access depository: https://osf.io/yqah2/ and https://www.doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/YQAH2 .
2. In response to a reviewer comment, H3 examined the relationship between viewer parasocial relationships with Black television characters and support for racialized social issues. We also posited that the association would be stronger for non-Black racial minorities than racial majority (i.e., White) individuals. Analyses for the proposed hypothesis were conducted with Black participants included and Black participants removed from the analysis. Due to the low number of Black participants (n = 8), the results remained unchanged.

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