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It's All Relative: The Dual Role of Media Consumption and Media Literacy among Black Audiences

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ABSTRACT

Race-related media effects research often address the misrepresentations of Black characterizations and their relationship to non-Black audiences. However, very few studies center the relationship between Black audiences and protective strategies that may mitigate unfavorable outcomes. Likewise, scant research acknowledges shifts in distinct Black media representation. To address this, an exploration of media representations of Black individuals, tenets from cultivation theory, and media literacy are adopted to understand the relationship between media consumption and favorable group outcomes. Results reveal that Black viewers' media literacy skills and increased media consumption are positively associated with increased individual and racial group esteem, suggesting that Black consumers are not passive in their media consumption and may reap favorable benefits from their media viewing.

KEYWORDS

Media; race; cultivation theory; media literacy; esteem

There is an extensive and well-documented history of news and television's unfavorable representations of Black individuals and the subsequent influence of audiences' negative attitudes toward Black people (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). For example, research shows that viewing damaging media portrayals of Black communities increases viewers' racist stereotyping, including associating criminality with Black individuals (Mastro & Tropp, 2004) and supporting harsh policies, including the death penalty (Dixon, 2006). Collectively, the literature is warranted, given the history of interracial conflict and documented vilification of Black populations (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Yet, media effects research focusing on Black audiences and their relationship with mass media consumption, addressing the attenuation of unfavorable outcomes, is surprisingly underdeveloped (cf., Tukachinsky et al., 2017).

This lack of investigation is concerning as Black people are the largest consumers of mass media, consuming over 3 hours of television a day, compared to 2.7 hours among white individuals, 2.3 hours among Latino groups, and 1.9 hours among Asian audiences (Statista, 2020). Black audiences also prefer to consume television news programs than non-Black individuals (Atske et al., 2019). Likewise, Black media consumers are overrepresented in mass media depictions compared to their demographic representation in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2018). Critics and researchers also suggest media representation of Black individuals is shifting from solely negative depictions (Cox & Ward, 2019; Dixon, 2017; Lauzen, 2016). To illustrate, literature acknowledges that news media representations of Black individuals, including portrayals as victims, law enforcement, and perpetrators, are equal to that of white people (Dixon, 2017). The Directors Guild of America [DGA]'s (2019) released its annual inclusion report noting that underrepresented racial minorities directed half of all television shows during the 2018–2019 season, marking a milestone never achieved before. Of the number of nonwhite directors, Black directors accounted for 15%, exceeding their U.S. demographic representation of 13%

(U.S. Census, 2018). These numbers hint that increases in representation behind the camera and on-screen may correspond to the increases in favorable images of Black individuals in media.

To shift focus toward Black audiences and their media habits, the current study examines the relationship between Black viewers' media consumption, media literacy skills, self-esteem, racial group esteem, and perceptions of outgroup (i.e., white individuals) bias. The goals of the current study serve several functions. First, prior research indicates that consuming media depictions of Black individuals may attenuate or adversely impact evaluations among white audiences (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Yet, we understand very little about the extent to which this relationship applies to Black viewers (Fujioka, 2005). Second, media effects research explicitly examining Black populations extend racial representation within media effects literature (Stamps, 2020a). Finally, understanding Black audiences' media consumption, and its relationship to favorable outcomes, advance knowledge on the only nonwhite racial group whose representation in mass media is equal to or exceeds its current U.S. populace (Mastro & Stamps, 2018).

Equally important, this examination seeks to understand Black audiences' attention toward, and intellectual awareness of, media depictions. More specifically, this study examines media depictions via media consumption and how media may shape social and cultural factors. Accordingly, the study posits that increased esteem and an understanding of existing discrimination may impact interpersonal interactions and performance within social systems, including political and educational settings. From this point-of-view, Black audiences' positive self-esteem and acute awareness of outgroup bias may position individuals to accommodate persons that may cause bodily harm (e.g., law enforcement) or allow individuals the opportunity to assimilate in situational conditions (e.g., the workplace). Both choices, accommodation, and assimilation, enable Black individuals the chance to thrive in circumstances where their skin color may present challenges in the form of stereotypical beliefs and bias held by non-Black people. While not explicitly testing causality, this work's contributions examine the potential of a favorable relationship between media consumption and increases in esteem among Black media consumers, the latter of which may carry into real-world interactions.

Within the following text, a discussion of Black representation in media and its influence on Black audiences is presented. This section is followed by insights from cultivation theory and media literacy, both of which identify the role of media consumption and viewer processing of such content as influential regarding group-based outcomes. Lastly, the methodology for addressing the relationship among Black audiences' media consumption, media literacy skills, and esteem and outgroup bias, along with a discussion of results, are offered.

Black representation in media

Research establishes that Black individuals are often vilified and underrepresented as victims in the news (Dixon, 2006); however, research suggests an emerging change in the group's portrayals within news coverage. For example, Dixon's (2017) investigation acknowledges the increase in demographic representation in news portrayals of other nonwhite groups, namely Latino populations. Dixon asserts that Black depictions in news programming have shifted toward more equitable representation as portrayals and narratives of other nonwhite racial, ethnic, and religious groups are featured more often in news coverage.

Examinations that explore the relationship between Black audiences' news consumption and group-based outcomes are nearly absent. Studies that center Black individuals in the news vary, including assessments of colorism (Dixon & Maddox, 2005) and perceptions of activism featuring Black community members (Stamps & Mastro, 2019). Yet, these assessments primarily address the influence of Black news images on non-Black audiences. Bearing in mind that the current news media landscape offers equitable representations of Black individuals, investigating Black viewers' consumption of such content and outcomes related to the group now becomes a possibility.

Similar to news representations, existing literature documents an extensive history of problematic Black characterizations outside of news coverage, namely in television programs such as scripted

entertainment media (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Against this backdrop, however, literature, including content analyses and case studies, suggests that the quality and valence of Black characters in television varies across genres, thus presenting a picture that may not be entirely negative (Cox & Ward, 2019; Stamps, 2020b). This research accounts for television programming with Black characters that represent a diverse spectrum of class, social location, and education levels comparable to their non-Black counterparts (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). Cox and Ward (2019) work states that Black characters in scripted television, mainly Black women, are of late, portrayed in high-status occupations and leadership positions. Stamps (2020b) also offers varied examples of Black male television characters who are framed favorably, including individuals that demonstrate social support, confront mental illness, and actively recognize and combat racial discrimination.

Media's influence on Black audiences

For Black audiences, viewing unfavorable media portrayals has been a mainstay for decades, presenting a wide range of conclusions (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). For example, media viewing is often linked with undesirable psychological effects among Black audiences, including deflated self-esteem (Ward, 2004) and reduced career aspirations (Gordon, 2016). Likewise, research highlights relationships between viewing negative media characterizations and its influence on Black audiences' media selection (Abrams & Giles, 2007) and feelings toward non-Black individuals (Fujioka, 2005). Ward (2004) suggests that Black audiences' viewing varied types of content, including music videos and television programs, distort the group's favorable perceptions. Yet, within this research, characteristics such as adherence to racial identity and religiosity (the degree to which one identifies as religious) counter such effects. Jerald et al. (2017) research indicates that viewing unfavorable Black characters in entertainment media contributes to individuals' negative perceptions of the group. Nonetheless, their work also acknowledges that the degree to which racial identity was germane among Black viewers attenuated audiences' adverse judgment. This research highlights that for Black viewers, specific characteristics such as religiosity and racial identity may reduce the influence of negative media representations. However, this literature leaves open the questions of whether additional factors contribute to mitigating adverse outcomes and if a positive relationship between consuming favorable media depictions and affirmative influence exists.

The shift in representation of Black imagery in news and television, along with recent literature advancing the potential for positive outcomes among audiences, warrants continued investigation. Research attempting to address such conclusions is somewhat dated but highlights an underserved area of interrogation. McDermott and Greenberg (1984) found a positive association between viewing Black television characters and general esteem among Black audiences. Additionally, Stroman (1986) identified a positive relationship between young Black female viewers' self-concept and favorable attitudes toward media featuring Black characters. Yet, it must be noted that presently, the diversity among Black media consumers (e.g., gender, education level, political identity) and their media selection may contribute to a media diet that varies at the individual level. News media outlets such as FOX, and entertainment media platforms, including broadcast (e.g., National Broadcasting Company), streaming services (e.g., HULU), and cable networks (e.g., Showtime), provide a range of diverse programming (Stamps, 2020a). Moreover, these platforms present varied media depictions, and the perceptions of each characterization (negative or positive) are subjective to each viewer. Still, considering the quantity of news and television programs provides the opportunity to understand the potential underpinnings between media consumption and its relationship to audiences' well-being. Therefore, cultivation theory is discussed to illustrate media consumption and its relation to Black viewers.

Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory states that an increasing amount of television consumption may cause viewers to perceive media depictions in the same manner as reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The theory offers

a rationalization to describe how audiences organize social reality and uphold social judgments about groups via repeated media consumption (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Media messages often provide knowledge about the social world and contribute to cultural self-reflection, and typically this learning comes in the form of first-order and second-order cultivation (Potter, 2010).

First-order cultivation suggests a consideration of particular descriptions based on media messaging. For example, among Black audiences, viewing multiple group representations of figures in high-status positions (e.g., political leaders and medical professionals) creates a viewing experience that endorses these portrayals as reality. Furthermore, second-order cultivation illustrates the implicit meaning of such content and the audiences' inferences based on viewing this material. In the same example, for Black viewers, these high-status images may encourage beliefs in positive attributes among the group, elevating group member characteristics such as being career-driven and knowledgeable leaders in society.

If we consider the role of cultivation among Black audiences, viewing media depictions should be related to similar associations among viewers. This relationship is due to first-order cultivation creating perceptions of groups and second-order cultivation pinpointing the characteristics, attributes, and stereotypes associated with those images. Altogether, Black audiences consuming representative and favorable depictions in news media (Dixon, 2017) and viewing Black actors in high-status positions in scripted television (e.g., American Broadcasting Company's *Grey's Anatomy*) may lead to favorable outcomes among Black audiences. If these characterizations are equitable, diverse, and desirable, and the associated traits are equally positive, consuming this media may bolster individual and group perceptions.

With that said, Black individuals may be the most vulnerable to the cultivation effects of the media since Black audiences consume more media than their racial counterparts (Statista, 2020). Nevertheless, the consumption of media depictions of one's group, depending on the characteristics presented, may be related to audiences' esteem (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015).

Media's influence on esteem

Most individuals internalize their racial groups' values and qualities in various ways, and one of many contributing factors is viewing media representation of group members (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). When media messages threaten one's identity, the safeguarding of esteem is one mechanism that individuals employ to maintain a positive identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Likewise, if viewers encounter unbiased media representation or positive media depictions of their group, esteem may also increase. In the latter case, there may be a similar relationship between media consumption of these images and increased esteem as depictions promote or protect group identity.

Past research illustrates the relationship between media consumption of minority group portrayals and its relation to audiences' esteem (Schmader et al., 2015). Particularly among Black audiences, Fujioka (2005) demonstrates that viewing negative media imagery decreases Black audiences' self-esteem. Yet, within this research, Black participants reported an increase in support for policies that address equitable-based outcomes for Black communities, thus prompting protection of the group's identity. Stamps (2020c) found that particular identities among Black consumers, such as political affiliation, aid in weakening disparaging effects such as decreased esteem among viewers' news media consumption. This line of research leaves the quandary, are there additional protective factors that may be related to safeguarding audiences' esteem? One such factor is media literacy, and to this end, a discussion of media literacy is warranted.

Media literacy

Media literacy encompasses a wide array of methods that focus on providing audiences with information and critical thinking skills to assess, evaluate, analyze, and process media messages (Potter, 2010; Potter & Byrne, 2010; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Taking a cognitive-based approach,

media literacy equips audiences with the necessary skills to critically analyze media's format, content, production, and the social impact of various media messages (Livingstone, 2004). As viewers acquire media literacy skills, they become more knowledgeable and aware of media's possible influence and learn how to navigate the media to safeguard against the potential effects of messaging (Potter & Byrne, 2010).

According to Potter and Byrne (2010), medial literacy is often adopted by formal intervention or natural occurrence. Formal intervention includes structured media literacy discussions or lessons offered by researchers or academics to cognitively enhance the viewer's skills to mitigate or transform media messages' adverse effects (Erba et al., 2019). Likewise, media literacy may be attained via a natural intervention through laypeople, such as parents, mentors, or community members (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Within a natural intervention, individuals are often concerned about viewers' well-being, and anxieties are lessened through informal discussions that address the structure, content, and potential influence of media messages. Through either form of intervention, viewers enhance their cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral responses to various media imagery and messaging (Erba et al., 2019; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015).

Research has generally shown that acquired media literacy skills can successfully reduce harmful outcomes and produce favorable results, such as expanding audiences' knowledge of the structures, realism, and impact of media content (Jeong et al., 2012). Media literacy skills are useful across different contexts, including mitigating the influence of media messaging related to violence or drug and alcohol use (Potter, 2010). However, scant research examines media literacy among Black audiences and its relationship to their media consumption. Among the few existing studies examining media literacy and Black identity, each typically focuses on white audiences and stereotype reduction among that group (see Erba et al., 2019; Ramasubramanian, 2007). The lack of investigation concerning Black viewers is striking as scholars note that Black audiences are aware of media bias and media's promotion of Black stereotypes (Dixon, 2001). These biases include the knowledge of majority-white decision-makers (e.g., journalists, content creators) creating narratives that disparage Black communities or the erasure of various intersectional identities, including class and sexuality (Tukachinsky, 2015).

Media literacy and outgroup bias

Black audiences (and other racial minority groups) that demonstrate media literacy skills typically acknowledge bias and prejudicial practices often exhibited by media organizations, such as promoting racist caricatures or the erasure of cultural practices (Tukachinsky, 2015). As Dixon (2001) notes, Black individuals attribute negative feedback via media messages to white individuals' prejudice. This suggests that Black audiences recognize the extended history of creating and disseminating messages that promote group differences, positioning white people as superior to nonwhite individuals. Steele and Aronson (1995) suggest that Black consumers protect themselves from stereotypical Black media images by distinguishing and classifying various messages as propaganda for non-Black viewers (see Abrams & Giles, 2007). Accordingly, distancing Black identity from negative media imagery protects Black audiences' emotional and mental well-being (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The perception of outgroup bias from media organizations and content creators positions Black viewers to utilize media literacy skills to differentiate messaging that may harm esteem.

The current investigation situates the role of media literacy as a protective factor related to specific outcomes regarding Black audiences' consumption of news and television programming, specifically in the absence of favorable media representation. As Black audiences demonstrate increased media literacy skills, the assumption is that a positive relationship will exist between news and television consumption, increased esteem, and perceptions of outgroup bias regardless of favorable or disparaging media. These favorable relationships are due to Black audiences' understanding of the systemic structures that privilege certain racial groups' portrayals in the broader media landscape.

The current study

Theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence rooted in cultivation theory and media literacy suggest that a unique relationship exists between Black viewers and outcomes related to consuming mass media. Literature indicates that Black audiences' viewing of media representations can damage or bolster esteem depending on the quality of coverage, level of consumption, and additional protective factors (Ward, 2004). Based on a cultivation perspective, Black viewers' frequency of consuming media depictions would be associated with individual perceptions based on the quantity and quality of those depictions. As research suggests and centered on these expectations, increased media consumption, shifting toward more favorable depictions, would propose a positive relationship between increased media consumption, self-esteem, and racial group esteem.

Conversely, it is unlikely that Black audiences can bypass or forgo the viewing of disparaging group imagery. Yet, media consumption among Black viewers and the potential influence on esteem may be attenuated by viewers' media literacy skills and awareness of outgroup bias. From this integrated perspective, the following hypotheses and research question are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a-c: Among Black audiences, increased news media consumption, as well as the level of media literacy, will be positively related to increased (a) self-esteem, (b) racial group esteem, and (c) perceptions of outgroup bias.

Hypothesis 2a-c: Among Black audiences, increased television consumption, as well as the level of media literacy, will be positively related to increased (a) self-esteem, (b) racial group esteem, and (c) perceptions of outgroup bias.

Research Question: Will a positive relationship remain between media literacy, media consumption (news and television), and esteem among Black participants when controlling for demographic differences (i.e., age, gender, education)?

Method

Participants

A convenient voluntary response sample of one-hundred and fifty-nine self-identified Black participants were recruited anonymously through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Researchers acknowledge that third-party crowdsourcing platforms tend to have fundamental differences from the general population, including more educated and less religious samples. Scholars also recognize Amazon Mechanical Turk as a reliable and consistent tool compared to data collected from college samples that typically lack diversity regarding race and class (Goodman et al., 2013). Two participants were dropped from the study due to incomplete questionnaires or failure to correctly respond to attention check items, leaving a final sample of 157 participants with an average age of 32 ($SD = 8.63$). Among participants, 28% ($n = 43$) identified as female, 70% ($n = 110$) identified as male, and 2% ($n = 4$) identified as non-gender conforming. Of the sample, 73% reported attending some college or more, and 75% identified as religious (e.g., Baptist, Muslim).

Procedure

Participants responded to a study assessing media consumption, agreed to a consent form, and the study took place online. Participants were U.S. residents and were financially compensated for their time. Participants answered questions about their amount of television and news consumption, attitudes regarding racial groups, questions related to self and racial group esteem, and beliefs

regarding their level of media literacy skills. Lastly, demographic questions were presented. Participation in the study averaged 20 minutes.

Predictors

News consumption

Participants identified how often they read, watched, or listened to ten national news outlets (e.g., USA Today, MSNBC) daily on a 7-point scale from 1 “rarely” to 7 “very often.” Scores were summed and averaged to create a measure of news consumption ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.90$), with higher scores indicating increased news consumption.

Television consumption

Participants identified the number of hours per day in the morning, after work/school, after dinner, and on weekends that they watch television (outside of news programs) on any device (Mastro et al., 2007). These items were summed to create a measure of television consumption ($\alpha = .72$, $M = 2.94$ hours, $SD = 0.55$ minutes), with higher scores indicating increased television consumption.

Media literacy

Maksl et al. (2015) news media literacy scale was amended for the current study to gauge media literacy skills, including knowledge of media production, framing, and influence across news and television programming. The fifteen-item measure included statements such as, “People might view the same television program and get different information from it” and “The owner of a media company influences the content produced.” Responses ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). A composite measure of items was created ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 5.87$, $SD = 0.77$), with higher scores indicating increased media literacy skills.

Demographics

Closed-ended questions asked participants to mark their gender identity (i.e., male, female, non-gender conforming), religion, and education level, which included five options: a) some high school; b) high school graduate; c) some college; d) college graduate; and e) earned an advanced degree (e.g., MA, Ph.D., JD). Participants wrote, in an open response format, their age.

Outcome measures

Self-esteem

Heatherton and Polivy (1991) state self-esteem scale, specifically performance self-esteem measures, was adopted for the current study. The seven-item measure included statements such as, “I feel confident about my abilities” and “I feel as smart as others” and were scored from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). A composite measure of these items was created ($\alpha = .74$, $M = 5.81$, $SD = 0.82$), with higher scores indicating increased self-esteem.

Racial group esteem

Items from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) collective self-esteem scale were amended for the current study to assess private collective self-esteem. According to the authors, private collective self-esteem is the importance of one’s judgment regarding one’s social group. Questions within this examination were modified, including replacing the word „social,“ with “racial” for each item. The four-item measure included statements such as, “I feel good about the racial group I belong to” and “In general, belonging to my racial group is an important part of my self-image.” Each item was scored from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). A composite measure of these items was created for racial group esteem ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.01$), with higher scores indicating increased racial group esteem.

Outgroup bias

Items from Nora and Cabrera (1996) prejudice attitudes scale was used to measure participants' beliefs in nonracial minority discrimination and bias. The five-item scale included statements such as, "I feel there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among non-minorities," and items were scored from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). A composite measure of these items was created ($\alpha = .76$ $M = 5.63$, $SD = .96$), with higher scores indicating increased perceptions of outgroup bias.

Results

Descriptive and preliminary analyses

Zero-order correlations between the variables of interests are provided in Table 1. Several significant relationships emerged. News and television consumption was associated with increased self-esteem, racial group esteem, and outgroup bias. Likewise, media literacy skills were related to increased self-esteem, racial group esteem, and perceptions of outgroup bias. Also, as expected, self-esteem and racial group esteem were positively correlated with one another. There was not a significant relationship between media literacy and news media consumption.

To combat multicollinearity, variables were mean-centered before data analysis. Multiple regression and hierarchical regression analyses were used to test the relationships between variables. **H1** predicted that among Black audiences, increased news media consumption, as well as the level of media literacy, will be positively related to increased (a) self-esteem, (b) racial group esteem, and (c) perceptions of outgroup bias. The regression results indicated that both predictors, media literacy, and news media consumption, explained 14.1% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 146) = 11.99$, $p < .001$ regarding increased self-esteem. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased self-esteem ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), as was news media consumption ($\beta = .19$, $p = .015$). The results also indicated that both predictors, media literacy and news media consumption, explained 32.5% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .32$, $F(2, 146) = 35.18$, $p < .001$ regarding increased racial group esteem. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased racial group esteem ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$), as was news media consumption ($\beta = .20$, $p = .004$). Lastly, results indicated that both predictors, media literacy and news media consumption, explained 31.3% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .31$, $F(2, 147) = 33.41$, $p < .001$ regarding increased perceptions of outgroup bias. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased perceptions of outgroup bias ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$), as was news media consumption ($\beta = .19$, $p = .007$).

H2 predicted that among Black audiences, increased television consumption, as well as the level of media literacy, will be positively related to increased (a) self-esteem, (b) racial group esteem, and (c) perceptions of outgroup bias. Results from the regression indicated that both predictors, media literacy skills and television consumption, explained 17% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .17$, $F(2, 145) = 14.25$, $p < .001$ regarding increased self-esteem. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased self-esteem ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), as was television consumption ($\beta = .25$, $p = .002$). Likewise, results indicated that both predictors explained 32% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .31$, $F(2, 145) = 33.37$, $p < .001$ regarding increased racial group esteem. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased racial group esteem ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$), as was television consumption ($\beta = .17$, $p = .020$).

Table 1. Zero order correlations and descriptive statistics of variables (N = 157).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Media Literacy	5.87	.77	-	.15	.19*	.34**	.54*	.51**
2. News Consumption	3.30	.90		-	.57**	.26**	.29**	.28**
3. TV Consumption	2.94	.55			-	.31**	.28**	.31**
4. Self-Esteem	5.81	.82				-	.49**	.45**
5. Group Esteem	5.61	1.01					-	.57**
6. Perceived Outgroup Bias	5.63	.96						-

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Lastly, results indicated that both predictors explained 30% of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .30$, $F(2, 146) = 31.63$, $p < .001$ regarding increased perceptions of outgroup bias. Media literacy was positively related to participants' increased perceptions of outgroup bias ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$), as was television consumption ($\beta = .21$, $p = .003$).

Lastly, the research question asked will a positive relationship remain between media literacy, media consumption (news and television), and esteem among Black participants when controlling for demographic differences among the group? To address this question, hierarchical regressions were conducted. In the first step of the hierarchical regression, three predictors were entered: age, gender, and education level. Each variable was dummy coded before being entered into the first block. The model was not statistically significant, $F(4, 138) = 1.56$, $p = .182$, demonstrating that Black audiences' demographic differences were not significantly related to self and racial group esteem. The introduction of media literacy and media (news and television) consumption explained 19% of variance among participants, after controlling for age, gender, and education level, $\Delta R^2 \text{ Change} = .19$; $F(3, 135) = 7.32$; $p < .001$. In the final adjusted model all three predictor variables were statistically significant, with increased media literacy skills recording a higher beta value ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) than television consumption ($\beta = .25$, $p = .005$) and news media consumption ($\beta = .23$, $p = .013$).

Discussion

Overall, the findings here provide support for assumptions associated with cultivation theory and media literacy. The results yield evidence that upholds the notion of group evaluation derived from media consumption and its relationship to media literacy skills and increases in esteem among audiences. The process of viewers utilizing media literacy skills to protect self-esteem and racial group esteem may counter negative media consumption. Scholars note that historically vilified audiences within mass media are often at risk regarding adverse outcomes from viewing such material (see Fujioka, 2005; Gordon, 2016; Ward, 2004). Accordingly, gaining an understanding of these dynamics and exploring mechanisms that may attenuate these outcomes is imperative.

Black audiences and cultivation

One of cultivation theory's central tenets is that repeated media viewing may impact audiences' judgments about their social world (Gerbner et al., 2002). Considering this idea, if Black audiences consume large amounts of media, and these depictions are sympathetic toward the group, the viewer's judgments should lean toward the favorability of self and the group. These outcomes are expected due to particular features, including viewing favorable numerical representation (i.e., first-order cultivation) and consuming positive characteristics of the group, such as charismatic and prosperous depictions (i.e., second-order cultivation). For Black viewers, this means that media portrayals may shape interpretations of who they are, their individual and group potential, and perceptions of the group's social standing. The results presented here cautiously support this assertion, meaning that media consumption with the possibility that depictions are now more favorable than in the past is related to increased self-esteem and racial group esteem.

Black audiences and media literacy

The acknowledgment of media literacy skills among Black viewers demonstrates that Black audiences critically assess and evaluate media of all types, and more importantly, interrogate characterizations, storylines, and historical accounts instead of acting as passive media spectators (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). As a result, the ability to thoughtfully view media content may curtail the adverse impact of negative depictions of one's group (Ward, 2004). As Black audiences actively consume and critically assess media, Black viewers are provided with an opportunity to establish a more inclusive and positive viewing experience. Of course, results here acknowledge a potential

relationship among Black audiences' self-concept and media literacy skills; however, experimental examinations are needed to understand the processes that may impact viewers.

Black audiences' individual and group esteem

Literature addressing Black audiences' media consumption and its influence on esteem, while not abundant, consistently suggests that the quality of media representation (positive versus negative) will influence esteem in a conventional manner (Jerald et al., 2017). Tukachinsky (2015) advocates for fair representation in front of the camera, behind the camera (e.g., directors, writers), and consideration among media organizations not to promote Black individuals' misrepresentations. However, the process of equity within and across mass media may arguably continue to be slow. It is imperative to look for ways to address the relationship between media representation, media consumption, and their relation to some of the most vulnerable and vilified audiences.

To date, given the increased representation of Black directors and writers, and the noted shift in images across news and entertainment media, it is ambitious but necessary to report progress within this area. This advancement includes Black representation in various forms, including among content creators (e.g., Kenya Barris, Shonda Rhimes), lead actors (e.g., Regina King), and directors (e.g., Ava DuVernay). Considering these *wins* in representation, continued examination of Black audiences' media consumption and favorable outcomes are appropriate. Results here suggest that viewers are benefitting from such changes in presentation and content. More importantly, the favorable outcomes suggest that Black viewers may see themselves as valued and influential in a society that historically has minimized the groups' existence (Stamps, 2020b).

Black audiences and outgroup bias

The role of recognizing potential bias in media directed at Black communities further demonstrates Black viewers' consciousness of race and systems that perpetuate inequality. Collectively, understanding the media's history, including non-Black leadership within large-scale media companies, and how each may contribute to creating and distributing disturbing Black media images was demonstrated among participants. Audiences' media literacy skills address the ability to critically assess media content and understand how that material came into existence. Viewers' comprehension of outgroup bias creates space for Black audiences to see themselves as not solely reflective of other's interpretation (Dixon, 2001). The negative stereotypes perpetuated in news and entertainment media are not random, and the role of the individuals who create, disseminate, and arguably benefit from such misrepresentations must be considered. Black audiences' acknowledgment of outgroup bias suggests that individuals may be aware of mass media's various roles, including content creators' intentions with creating and promoting negative stereotypes. Yet, Black viewers' recognition of bias demonstrates a level of agency and intuitiveness shown among the group (Abrams & Giles, 2007).

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between news and television consumption on Black audiences' esteem and outgroup perceptions. This work marks a departure from, and advancement on, conventional approaches to race-related media effects scholarship that often centers intergroup engagement (Stamps, 2020a). The focus of examining media from an intragroup perspective of Black audiences deviates from the longstanding focus of outcomes on white audiences. The study aimed to understand the relationship between media literacy's potential to act as a protective factor that may guard Black audiences against the consumption of negative media depictions. Although the study's findings do not determine a causal relationship between variables, the outcomes presented here demonstrate a significant connection between media consumption, media literacy, and viewer well-being. This suggests that media literacy may be one of many essential components in understanding

how marginalized and vilified audiences thrive amid the consumption of potentially criminalizing media portrayals. Of course, further investigations are necessary to broaden the comprehension of these circumstances.

The investigation of media consumption among Black viewers and its relation to media literacy in bolstering individual and group esteem is not without limitations. The use of survey methods is not as robust as an experimental examination. As such, the findings do not warrant conclusions regarding causality. The outcomes here demonstrate significant relationships among Black audiences, media literacy skills, media consumption, and esteem; however, the direction is somewhat ambiguous. Second, the sample was representative of Black audiences regarding age, education level, and class status compared to college samples; yet this was a convenient voluntary response sample that was relatively small. These characteristics need to be addressed in future research, including more robust recruitment of participants and adopting other sampling techniques such as random or stratified sampling.

Similarly, there are limitations regarding self-reported television and news consumption, which would be better addressed in experimental designs. Measuring viewer media consumption may miss the mark in understanding what type of news or television program a viewer is watching. Open-ended questions requesting television preference or offering a list of programming for respondents to evaluate would be a solid next step for forthcoming studies. Future research may also consider manipulating different content types to assess which depictions and media outlets are directly related to Black audiences' esteem and what role, if any, media literacy contributes to those outcomes. Similarly, the outcome variables focused on esteem and group perceptions; while this is important, additional variables should be considered. Future research may also expand on concepts including vitality, behavioral tendencies, or support for social issues.

Despite the limitations, this study offers preliminary insights regarding the relationship between Black audiences' media consumption, media literacy, and viewers' esteem and perceptions of outgroup bias. Overall, the current research advances the realization of shifts in Black people's representation in mass media. Likewise, this work recognizes that Black audiences may experience favorable outcomes from mass media consumption, including news and television programming.

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