

Co-Viewing Effects of Ethnic-Oriented Programming: An Examination of In-Group Bias and Racial Comedy Exposure

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Abstract

Entertainment consumption is often shared with others, whether friends or strangers. Whereas most co-viewing scholarship has examined parent–child viewing, few have examined viewing among in-group and out-group members. The present study explores in-group and out-group responses to racial comedy featuring disparaging information about the in-group. Findings suggest that Blacks report a more positive attitude, greater perceived similarity, and identification when viewing racially charged comedy with Black in-group members than when viewing with White out-group members. White viewers display no differences in their responses to television comedy based on whether they were viewing with in-group members or out-group members. Implications are discussed.

Keywords

co-viewing, racial comedy, social identity

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Ethnic-oriented programming featuring multicultural casts has increased in recent years (Johnson, 2010). Many of these programs are primarily within the comedy genre, and thus feature a significant amount of disparagement humor that targets racial and ethnic groups. A number of studies have problematized the use of disparaging humor as having implications for stereotyping and discrimination (Ford, 1997; Ford, Fitzgerald, Armstrong, & Edel, 2008). Furthermore, many studies have confirmed that stereotypical representations in mainstream media affect majority viewers' social and political attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2010). However, these studies do not examine the influence of disparaging portrayals in contexts where racial or ethnic minorities are the majority.

Generally, the notion of "mainstream" media assumes a White target audience and, thus, can include content that typically features unbalanced portrayals of marginalized ethnic groups (Chidester, 2008; Gray, 1995). Ethnic-oriented entertainment and Black-oriented programming specifically is distinguished by its cultural thematic content (Appiah, 2002; Reid, 2005) and may also feature unfavorable representations through the use of disparaging humor (Ford, 1997; Watkins, 2002).

Reactions to disparaging racial humor are ambivalent. For example, *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, as well as *Family Guy* creator, Seth McFarlane, have enjoyed market success but received much flak for their politically incorrect humor messages about sex, ability, and race (Hughley & Muradi, 2009). Black cartoonist, Aaron McGruder, has also been criticized for his portrayals of Blacks in the cable program, *The Boondocks*, which features majority Black characters and situates Black urban youth in White suburbia (Cornwell & Orbe, 2002).

Black audiences are especially sensitive to portrayals of their group that appear before mainstream audiences. Although programming may feature a specific in-group member, out-group members are not prevented from sharing in the viewing experience, especially when the ethnic-oriented comedy program is available on a major network. *The Boondocks* is one of the highest rated programs on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim channel, which targets young men between the ages 18 and 34 and whose audience is comprised of mostly White men (Lee, 2013). Research shows that Blacks are aware of Whites' stereotypes of Blacks and are generally concerned about being viewed through the lens of stereotypes, and fear doing something that would inadvertently reinforce social perceptions of Blacks (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

In the privacy of one's home, an individual may be exposed to racial programs and choose to watch it alone or with in-group members. Although mixed viewing situations can occur in private spaces (e.g., visiting an interracial friend's home), they are more common in public spaces where people may share in the viewing experience with both in-group and out-group members (e.g., bar, movie theater, etc.). The purpose of this study is to examine viewers' responses to race-specific comedy based on the presence of in-group and out-group members. Mixed viewing situations of racially charged humor illustrate that the *context* in which the *content* is viewed may play a role in interpretations (Hunt, 1997) and overall media enjoyment.

Co-Viewing and Media Enjoyment

Uses and gratifications research purport that television viewing is often a social experience (Lull, 1980; Rubin, 1993). Co-viewing is the shared consumption of an entertainment product whether in public with a stranger or privately with a friend, and has many implications for how viewers select and respond to entertainment. For example, Haridakis and Hanson (2009) found that co-viewing predicted YouTube users' viewing habits and selection. Other research has shown that viewers who consume an entertainment product with at least one other person are likely to be more attentive, more engaged, and experience more emotional gratification than if they viewed alone (Yang, Zhao, Erdem, & Zhao, 2010). Mora, Ho, and Krider (2011) found that individuals within a co-viewing group were also more likely to spend more time consuming entertainment than those who viewed alone. These studies seem to demonstrate that co-viewing is a positive experience. However, the available literature has not taken into account the effects of viewing a program with a member of an out-group.

As an overwhelming amount of the research on co-viewing influence has focused on family viewing, explorations of social viewing—that is, viewing with friends or with strangers—are lacking. There are a number of classic studies on humor appreciation and the laughter behavior of others, but the “others” in these studies have usually been operationalized as a recorded laugh track (Bore, 2011; Platow et al., 2005), instead of the actual physical presence of another person.

In contrast to previous studies that purport that co-viewing environments foster greater emotional gratification, Harris and Cook (2010) contend that the presence of others in a viewing situation may actually inhibit emotional reactions, thereby disrupting the enjoyment experience. More importantly, the authors found meaningful interactions between *content* and *context*, concluding that personal reactions to films were both dependent on the type of co-viewer and the content. For example, while participants reported experiencing moderate discomfort with sexual content, they also reported greater discomfort when thinking about viewing sexual content with their parents. Thus, viewers' social relationships with those watching with them play a significant role on how viewers' respond to content that is potentially uncomfortable. Furthermore, Harris and Cook (2010) found greater co-viewing impacts with comedy more than with any other genre, suggesting that watching racial comedies with socially distinct others might elicit discomfort. In this study, we investigate the impact of racial disparaging humor on viewers' excitement or anxiety as a measure of media enjoyment.

Social Identity and Racial Humor

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is an appropriate framework through which to examine the dynamics of racial humor in co-viewing contexts in part because racial comedy inherently emphasizes racial differences (Boskin, 1997), and intergroup interactions generally prime awareness of individuals' social distinctions (Brewer, 1991). As stated by Ferguson and Ford (2008), “Intergroup settings elicit comparisons with out-groups on valued dimension” (p. 297). Thus, the contexts of viewing

situations have implications for how individual group members respond to humorous racial messages when viewing with in-group versus out-group members.

Blacks may be very concerned about how they appear to Whites in interracial interactions, because of uncomplimentary stereotypes about Blacks (see Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). These unfavorable stereotypes are problematic as they can reinforce self-perpetuating expectations about Blacks, which direct attention to information consistent with the stereotypes and ignore information inconsistent with the stereotypes (Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996).

The thought that Whites may view a program that could possibly reinforce certain Black cultural stereotypes may lead Blacks to feel threatened by Whites. That is, when in-group members perceive their social identity is threatened, individuals are particularly motivated to positively distinguish themselves from other groups (Mastro, 2003; Vignoles, Chrysochoou, & Breakwell, 2000). Drawing on social identity theory, the type of threat to one's identity can occur when they: (a) perceive out-group members are threatening their overall well-being or way of life, (b) detect negative views and expectations directed at them by out-group members, or (c) expect prejudice or objectionable behavior during an interaction with out-group members (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Watching a Black-oriented comedy program alongside White viewers is likely to elicit all these feelings of threat among Black viewers. When considering Black comedies, we can infer that Black audiences will be concerned about their group image when viewing with White audiences. This may lead them to feel uncomfortable during the viewing experience and have less positive attitudes about the show than they would if viewing the show with only their own group. Based on previous literature, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Black viewers will report greater excitement when viewing a Black-oriented comedy with in-group members than they will when viewing with out-group members.

Hypothesis 2: Black viewers will report more favorable attitudes toward a Black-oriented comedy when viewing with in-group members than when viewing with out-group members.

Hypothesis 3: Black viewers will report greater absorption in the program when viewing a Black-oriented comedy with in-group members than with out-group members.

White Self-Concept and Racial Messages

Scholars indicate that the self-concept develops through interactions with others and is often a reflection of those others' evaluations of oneself (Crocker & Major, 1989). It has been argued that oppressed and economically disadvantaged groups such as Blacks run the risk of internalizing the negative impressions and attitudes many Whites hold of them. Given Blacks are particularly aware of and concerned about Whites' negative impressions, Blacks may feel uncomfortable viewing a race-specific program around White individuals.

In contrast, Whites may not sense any threat to their self-concept when viewing a race-specific program alongside Blacks. Whites may believe that Blacks' exposure to a race-specific program would have little impact on Blacks' overall attitudes toward

Whites. Given Whites dominant status in society economically, politically, educationally, and numerically, they may be comfortable with their social standing in society and do not perceive Blacks as possessing any significant threat or competition to their social hierarchy. As a result, White viewers may be less aware of and concerned about Blacks' impressions of them when co-viewing a race-specific program. Moreover, Whites do not necessarily identify with their racial group because they do not think of themselves as distinctly part of a specific racial group (Phinney, 1992; Royce, 1982), which results in race playing little importance in defining their self-concept (Jaret & Reitzes, 1999) or in their evaluations of race-specific programs.

In Rockler's (2002) focus group study on Whites' interpretations of Black-oriented comic strips, she found that many White participants preferred the "race-deflective" comic—that is, content that did not require them to consider race or racial discriminatory issues. In support, empirical studies consistently demonstrate that Whites select, evaluate, recall, identify with, and respond to Black media content and characters no differently than they do to White media and characters (Appiah, 2003; Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick, Alter, 2013). For example, Black and White participants navigated through either a Black- or White-targeted professionally designed news website (Appiah, 2003). Both news sites were identical with the exception of the race of the characters featured in the news site. Whites displayed no difference in their overall navigation time on the site or on each story based on the race of the character featured on the site or in the story. Moreover, Whites displayed no difference in their overall evaluation of the news site or their recall of news information based on whether the characters featured on the site were Black or White. Hence, for Whites, it is expected that, given they display no in-group preference for racial groups, they will respond no differently based on the racial makeup of the co-viewing environment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Whites will display no difference in their (a) level of excitement toward Black-oriented comedy, (b) attitudes toward the Black-oriented comedy, and (c) level of program absorption based on the racial makeup of the co-viewing context.

Perceived Similarity, Identification, and Ethnic-Oriented Programming

Mora et al. (2011) suggest that people who are similar in values and traits are likely to view together, and thus experience greater gratification than those with whom there is a mismatch among their "psychographic profiles." Both perceived similarity and identification support this supposition, as a host of scholarship has shown that television use is influenced by an individual's similarity and identification with a social group (Abrams & Giles, 2007; Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, & Neundorf, 2011).

According to Kelman (1961), the process of identification drives individuals to choose a source based on perceived similarities between themselves and the source. When individuals perceive that a source possesses a specific characteristic similar to their own (e.g., race), they begin to infer that the source will also share other

characteristics (Feick & Higie, 1992). Identification with one's own race is a particularly important component of the self-concept for minority group members but is of little importance to majority group members (Phinney, 1992). Among Whites, racial similarity plays little if any role in how they respond to media with White or Black characters (Appiah, 2003). As mentioned above, Whites do not generally think of themselves as distinctly part of a specific ethnic group, and as such have been found to consistently place significantly lower importance on their racial and ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). Studies show that Whites perceive themselves equally similar to and identify equally with Black characters and White characters in the media (Hoplamazian & Appiah, 2013).

In contrast, the race of a character may be particularly instrumental in inducing Blacks to infer or perceive similarity or dissimilarity, which has been shown to influence their responses to racially similar–dissimilar characters (Appiah, 2004). When Black audiences are exposed to racially similar characters, they demonstrate more in-group preference. This is evident by studies that show Black audiences are more attracted to media with Black characters, rate Black characters more positively (Appiah, 2002; Whittler, 1991), and develop more favorable attitudes toward Black-oriented media (Appiah, 2007) than they do White characters and White media.

Studies examining identification also indicate that the more an individual identifies with a character, the more likely an individual will be affected by the character, or the representations of the characters. For example, Murphy (2011) found that Blacks reported greater perceived similarity and wishful identification when viewing a Black-oriented program. Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier (2000) contend that individuals are likely to experience a stronger sense of connection when the differences between group memberships are clear, such as in the category of race. Therefore, this study examines how viewing situations influences viewers' identification and perceived similarity.

Hypothesis 5a: Black viewers will report stronger perceived similarity with Black-oriented programming when viewing with in-group members than when viewing with out-group members.

Hypothesis 5b: Whites will report no difference in their level of perceived similarity or identification based on the racial makeup of the co-viewing context.

Hypothesis 6a: Blacks will report stronger identification with Black-oriented programming when viewing with in-group members than when viewing with out-group members.

Hypothesis 6b: Whites will report no difference in their level of identification with Black characters based on the racial makeup of the co-viewing context.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 112 students (53 Blacks, 59 Whites; 76 females; 18 to 32 years old, median age 21) from a large, public Midwestern university participated in the study. These

participants were recruited from communication courses and the Office of Minority Affairs, and they voluntarily participated in the study for either extra course credit or for US \$15.

The study employed a 2 (Co-viewing Environment: in-group, out-group) \times 2 (Participant Race: Black, White) between-subjects design to test the hypotheses. The five dependent variables were (a) perceived similarity to characters, (b) identification with characters, (c) attitudes toward the show, (d) felt excitement, and (e) felt absorption in the show.

Stimulus Materials

The Boondocks is a Black-oriented animated comedy program based on the syndicated comic strip by Aaron McGruder. The show centers on two inner-city kids (Huey and Riley) from the south side of Chicago who move to the suburbs to live with their grandfather. The specific episode used for the study, "Return of the King," is one of McGruder's most controversial episodes (Whaley, 2013). This 22-min episode centers on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his apparent awakening from a 32-year-long coma. Dr. King meets Huey and Riley who, to his dismay, introduce him to popular Black culture and the current state of affairs with the Black community.

Procedure

In a lab, participants individually viewed *The Boondocks* episode. Each participant viewed the program on a television set in a small room with three chairs. Participants were seated between either two confederates from their racial group (e.g., Black participant alongside two Black viewers—one male and one female) or two confederates from another racial group (e.g., Black participant alongside two White viewers—one male and one female). The confederates had been preexposed to the video and were trained to chuckle at three significant points throughout the episode to simulate an actual viewing experience and to validate comfort with the racially charged content. The confederates were instructed to arrive at the lab during the time scheduled for the participant so that they would appear as a fellow participant. Prior to viewing the program, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate their level of enjoyment and reactions to humorous animated television programs. After viewing the program with the confederates, the participants were told that there was insufficient space in the small television room for all three of them to answer the post-exposure questionnaires and, thus, they would need to complete the questionnaires in different rooms.

Measurement Instrument

This study examines different aspects of the enjoyment experience and, thus, focuses on five dependent variables: (a) perceived similarity to characters, (b) identification with characters, (c) attitudes toward the show, (d) felt excitement, and (e) felt absorption in the show.

Perceived similarity with characters. Similarity was measured by having participants rate their degree of similarity to the main characters (Riley, Huey, and the grandfather) featured in the television show on five different dimensions: lifestyle, cultural background, dress, appearance, and basic values (Torres & Briggs, 2007). Ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all similar*) to 7 (*very similar*). For example, participants were asked, "How similar are you to the main characters (i.e., Riley, Huey, and the grandfather) in the TV show on cultural background?" A single similarity index was created by computing the mean score of the five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Identification with characters. Identification was measured by having participants indicate their level of agreement with the following three items: (a) the main characters *The Boondocks* are the sort of people I want to be like, (b) the main characters in *The Boondocks* are my type of people, and (c) the main characters in *The Boondocks* are people who speak for a group of which I am a member (Whittler & Spira, 2002). Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A single identification index was created by computing the mean score of the three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Attitude toward the show. Participants were asked to provide their attitudes toward the show. An attitude towards the show scale was developed based on seven, 7-point semantic differential scales, which included boring/interesting, bad/good, negative/positive, dislike/like, poor/outstanding, weak/strong, not for me/for me (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). These items have been used in previous studies (e.g., Appiah, 2007).

Felt excitement. Participants were asked to indicate how they felt while watching *The Boondocks* program. An index was created by averaging the scores of six, 7-point semantic differential scales: relaxed/stimulated, calm/excited, sluggish/frenzied, dull/jittery, sleepy/wide-awake, and unaroused/aroused (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; Mehrabian & Russell, 1977).

Felt absorption in the show. Participants were asked to describe how absorbed they were in the show based on the following: (a) I felt absorbed by this TV show, (b) this TV show held my attention, (c) I felt like I was part of the TV show, (d) I was caught up in the TV show, and (e) I enjoyed watching the TV show (Mehrabian & Russell, 1977). An index was created by averaging the mean scores of five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Race of participants. Participants were given a list of racial and ethnic groups from which to choose. Only participants who indicated their identification with either Black/African American or White/Caucasian were included in the analysis.

Results

It was expected that for Black participants but not for White participants, their perceived similarity with characters, identification with characters, attitudes toward the

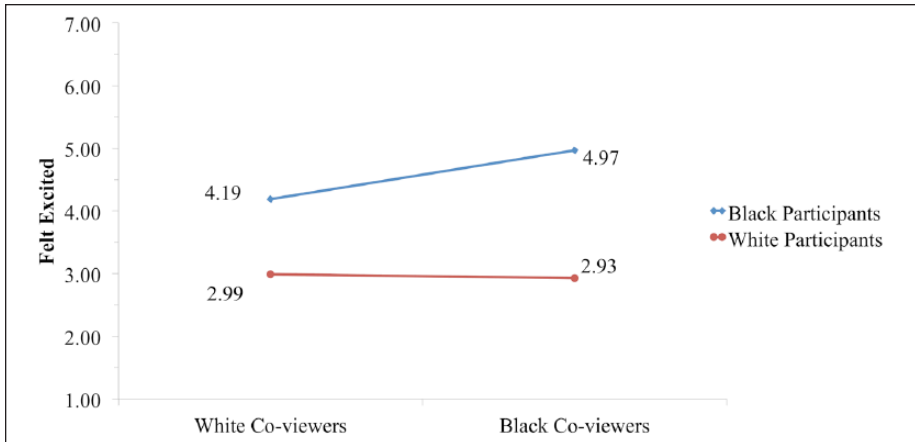


Figure 1. Felt Excited when watching *The Boondocks* by Participant Race and Co-viewing Condition.

show, excitement, and immersion in the show would differ based on whether participants were in a viewing condition with their in-group (e.g., one Black person watching with two Black people) or in a viewing condition with their out-group (e.g., one Black person watching with two White people).

A 2 (Co-viewing Environment: in-group, out-group) \times 2 (Participant Race: Black, White) factorial ANOVA was conducted on each dependent variable: felt excitement, attitudes toward the show, absorption, perceived similarity, and identification.

Felt Excitement

Hypothesis 1 proposed that Blacks would report greater excitement when watching Black-oriented programming with in-group members than when watching with out-group members. Hypothesis 4a proposed that Whites would display no difference in their level of excitement based on the co-viewing context. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for participants' race, $F(1, 108) = 26.56, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .21$, such that Blacks felt more excited when watching *The Boondocks* ($M = 4.58$) than did Whites ($M = 2.98$). Although from Figure 1, it appears that Blacks were affected by the co-viewing context, no interaction effects were found. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was not supported although the means were in the predicted directions, and Hypothesis 4a was supported.

Attitude Toward the Show

Hypothesis 2 proposed that Black viewers would display more positive attitudes toward *The Boondocks* program while viewing with in-group members vis-à-vis

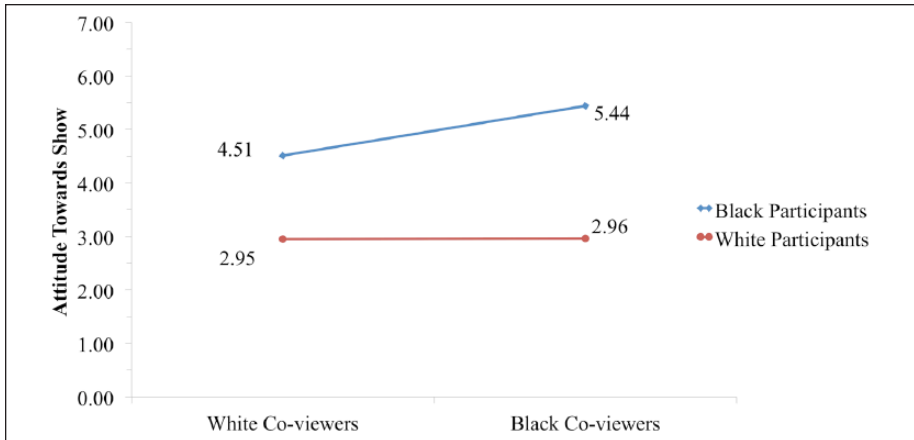


Figure 2. Attitudes toward *The Boondocks* by Participant Race and Co-viewing Condition.

out-group members. Also, Hypothesis 4b stated that White viewers would display no difference in their attitudes toward the show based on the co-viewing context. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for participants' race, $F(1, 103) = 51.76$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .34$. This indicates Black participants had more positive attitudes toward *The Boondocks* episode ($M = 4.98$) than did White participants ($M = 2.96$). Again, although from Figure 2, it appears that Blacks' attitudes toward the show were affected by the co-viewing context, no significant interaction effects were found. Hence, Hypothesis 2 was not supported although the means were in the predicted directions, and Hypothesis 4b was supported.

Felt Absorbed in the Show

Hypothesis 3 stated that Black viewers would report greater absorption, especially when viewing with in-group members. Hypothesis 4c stated that White viewers would not display any difference in their level of absorption in the show. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for participants' race, $F(1, 108) = 40.50$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .28$, such that Blacks felt more absorbed in *The Boondocks* episode ($M = 4.37$) than did Whites ($M = 2.73$). No significant interaction effects were found although the means were in the predicted direction (see Figure 3).

Perceived Similarity

Hypothesis 5a predicted that Blacks would experience more perceived similarity with characters in *The Boondocks*, especially while viewing with in-group members. Hypothesis 5b indicated that Whites would display no difference in their level of similarity with characters from the show based on the co-viewing context. The ANOVA

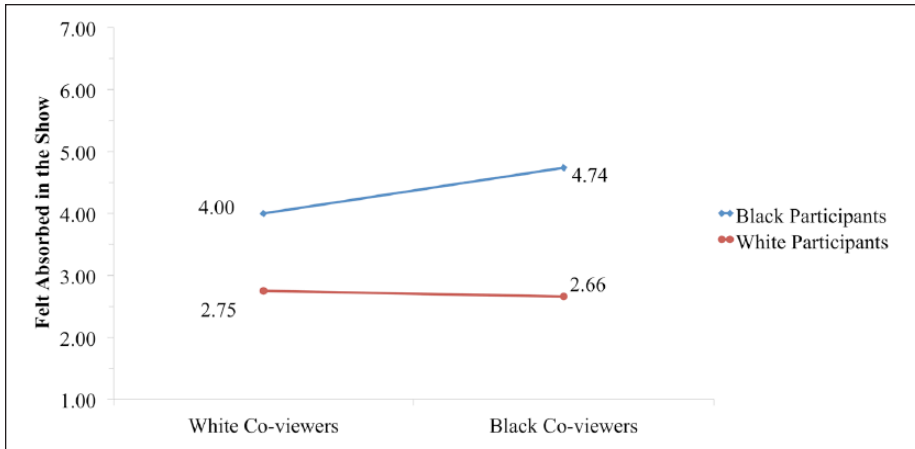


Figure 3. Felt Absorbed in *The Boondocks* by Participant Race and Co-viewing Condition.

indicated significant main effects for participants' race, $F(1, 103) = 180.98, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .64$, and viewing condition $F(1, 103) = 9.57, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. This suggests that Black participants perceived themselves to be more similar to the characters in *The Boondocks* episode ($M = 4.50$) than did White participants ($M = 1.76, p < .05$). In addition, it showed that participants overall perceived themselves more similar to characters in *The Boondocks* when watching with Black viewers ($M = 3.45$) than when watching with White viewers ($M = 2.82$).

In addition, there was an interaction between participants' race and viewing condition, $F(1, 103) = 15.99, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$. Post hoc analyses indicated that Blacks perceived themselves more similar to the characters in *The Boondocks* (see Figure 4) when they watched the show with Black viewers ($M = 5.23, SD = 0.84$) than they did when watching with White viewers ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 44) = 12.74, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. In contrast, White participants demonstrated no difference in their perception of similarity with characters based on whether they watched the show with White viewers ($M = 1.85, SD = 0.72$) or with Black viewers ($M = 1.67, SD = 0.64$), $F(1, 58) = 1.02, p = .32$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The findings support both Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

Identification With Characters

Hypothesis 6a predicted that Black viewers would display more identification with characters from the show when viewing the show with in-group members than they would with out-group members. Hypothesis 6b suggested that White viewers would display no difference in their level of identification with characters in the show based on the co-viewing context. The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for participants' race, $F(1, 103) = 64.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .39$. This indicates that Black

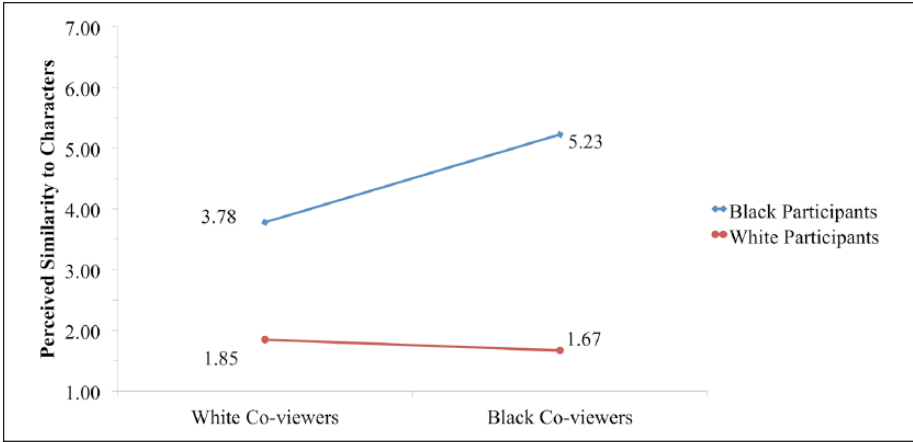


Figure 4. Perceived Similarity with Characters in *The Boondocks* by Participant Race and Co-viewing Condition.

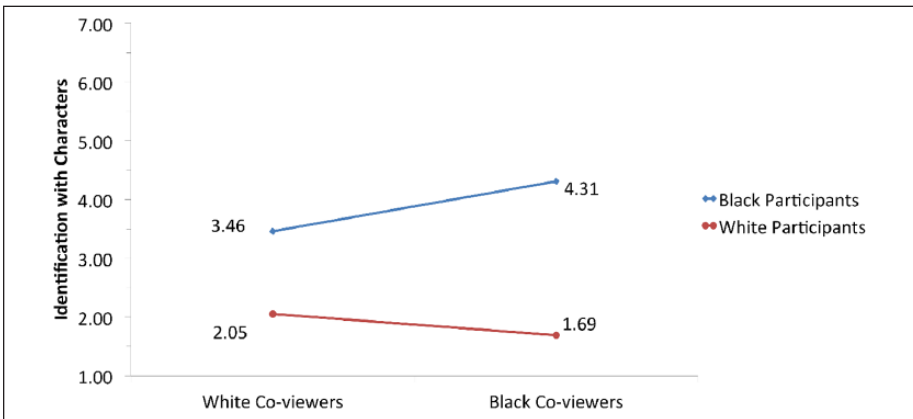


Figure 5. Perceived Identification with Characters in *The Boondocks* by Participant Race and Co-viewing Condition.

participants identified more with characters in *The Boondocks* episode ($M = 3.88$) than did White participants ($M = 1.87$).

Again, as predicted, there was a significant interaction between participants' race and viewing condition, $F(1, 103) = 5.80, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Post hoc analyses of this relationship demonstrate that Blacks identified more with the characters in *The Boondocks* episode (see Figure 5) when they watched the show with Black viewers ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.18$) than when they watched the show among White viewers ($M = 3.46, SD = 1.59$), $F(1, 44) = 3.39, p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. In contrast, White participants displayed no difference in their identification with characters from the show

based on whether they watched with White viewers ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.03$) or with Black viewers ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.92$), $F(1, 58) = 1.84$, $p = .18$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. These findings support Hypotheses 6a and 6b.

Discussion

Unlike print media, entertainment is generally a social event. Motivated by a need for interaction and sharing, audiences are likely to find themselves in situations where they are viewing and experiencing entertainment with other people (e.g., movie theater, concert, stand-up comedy show, dorm lounge, airport)—and in some cases, with people who are different or simply strangers. In such viewing situations, it is probable that viewers will be exposed to controversial messages or program content. The present study examined the interaction between *content* and *context* with an emphasis on viewership of a television comedy that pokes fun at and occasionally disparages Black in-group members. Specifically, this study centers on the interactions between viewing situation and exposure to Black-oriented entertainment—that is, entertainment written, produced, and/or directed by Blacks. Few prior studies have examined and manipulated the viewing situations of entertainment, and racial comedy specifically. For this study, we used *The Boondocks*, a satire featured on a popular cable network station, which is viewed and equally enjoyed by both Black and White audiences.

Based on the social identity literature, we argued that Black viewers would report more discomfort and less positive attitudes toward a Black-oriented program when viewing with White out-group members. We also suggested Black viewers would experience more identification and perceived similarity when viewing with Black in-group members than when watching with White-in-group members. Last, we contended, based on Harris and Cook's (2010) work, that the mere presence of others would result in greater excitement and arousal, and more so when viewing with members from one's own group. In contrast, we expected Whites to respond no differently to the show based on whether the viewing context featured primarily in-group members or primarily out-group members. This was expected, in part, because Whites do not feel their social standing in society is threatened by perceptions Blacks may hold of them. In addition, Whites may not necessarily feel uncomfortable viewing race-specific humor that disparages out-group members. Last, the literature on Whites' responses to Black vis-à-vis White media and content shows a consistent pattern across a variety of contexts that Whites display no response difference.

Findings revealed that Black participants reported more positive excitement, attitudes, and absorption than did Whites toward the program. However, viewing condition did not have any significant impact on Blacks' absorption, attitudes, and excitement toward the program. These results require more investigation. Nonetheless, there were two significant impacts of co-viewing condition as Black viewers reported more identification and perceived similarity when viewing with in-group members, as expected. For all of the dependent measures, White participants did not demonstrate any significant results, and viewing condition did not make a difference. The findings for Whites were consistent with the literature (see Appiah, 2002, 2003, 2007; Hoplamazian &

Appiah, 2013). Our research confirms that Black viewers generally have a more rewarding experience viewing ethnic-oriented programming than do their White counterparts. Moreover, Black viewers demonstrate greater perceived similarity to and identification with characters in Black-oriented media when viewing with in-group members than with out-group members.

Implications for Research

This study attempts to empirically explore the social dynamics of television viewing, and takes into consideration the conflict between controversial messages and viewing situation. The purpose of this study was multifold. A primary motivation for this line of research was to include the concept of co-viewing in media effects literature. Bryant and Davies (2006) note that media effects research has often overlooked the role that others play in our overall entertainment experience. While cultural studies scholars have examined these dynamics with greater depth, this study purposed to situate social dynamics into classic concepts such as selective exposure and media enjoyment.

Second, this study aims to address assumptions of postracialism, which assumes all groups regardless of race have equal opportunities, and therefore making jest of cultural differences and “past” injustices is deemed acceptable. However, given the recent controversial issues surrounding the value of Black male lives (e.g., Jordan Davis and Trayvon Martin), it is clear that there is a disconnect between postracial assumptions and the lived experiences of Black individuals, and, thus, could facilitate conflicting interpretations of racial messages for Black and White viewers. This study sought to examine whether exposure to controversial racial content while viewing with majority members would mitigate or foster negative emotions for Black viewers.

This study also attempted to explain whether or not negative emotional reactions to programs created by Black media creators can be explained by Blacks’ concern about out-group viewers. As Sigelman and Tuch (1997) argued, Blacks are concerned with being viewed unfavorably by White out-group members. Rockler (2002) specifically examined Black and White reactions to the program, *The Boondocks*, and found that Black participants expressed concern about the impact of the program on White viewers. In a similar co-viewing study, Banjo (2013) also found that Black participants were more likely to report concerns of Whites’ perceptions of Blacks when they viewed Black-oriented programming with White co-viewers. Therefore, it was expected that Black viewers might display more negative emotions while viewing with an out-group than when viewing with the in-group.

This line of research also has implications for media effects researchers interested in gender or politics. That is, researchers interested in gender may be able to explore and explain women’s enjoyment of romantic comedies when watching with women compared with men. Similarly, scholars interested in determining viewers’ enjoyment and effects of a political speech by a Democrat may be able to better predict and explain these effects based on whether the viewer is a Democrat or Republican watching the speech with either Republicans or other Democrats. It is probable that the

enjoyment process will be different, and perhaps the evaluations will differ. This research begins the conversation regarding enjoyment processes and viewing situation, which can prove useful for media scholars and media creators alike.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. First, a stronger case could be made for co-viewing effects with the addition of an alone condition. Future research should include an alone condition as a comparison to determine the singular effects of co-viewing on the enjoyment experience. In addition, our sample size may be smaller than ideal given the paucity of potential Black respondents on mainstream college campuses. Therefore, future research should include a larger sample of Black (and White) participants, which may result in more definitive conclusions.

Second, the study's use of satirical comedy. Satire is often fused with sociopolitical messages that are not easily discernible by all people. Although the message in the episode occasionally ridiculed Blacks as a cultural group, it also subliminally questioned the impact of the civil rights movement on Black consciousness. It is not clear whether participants perceived the meanings of the content or what interpretations they drew at all. Future research should consider these constraints by including measures that assess enjoyment of satire. Also, future research should experiment with different types of humor such as parody, as seen in sketch comedies or slapstick. Even more interesting would be to use a White mainstream comedy similar to that of *The Boondocks* (e.g., *South Park*), or programming featuring a multicultural cast (e.g., *Community*), and compare findings across shows.

It should be noted that ethnic identity can play a role in audiences' psychological responses to race-specific media content such as that in a co-viewing environment. Research on race and identity has documented individual variability in strength of ethnic identification among minorities (Phinney, 1990). Studies on ethnic identity have shown its utility for predicting minorities' communication and social interaction preferences and behaviors (Appiah, 2004; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Not incorporating a measure of ethnic identity is a limitation of this study. Also, as different age groups have different levels of ethnic identity (Marcia, 1987) and are likely to respond differently, future research should consider comparing young adults with older adults. In addition, the present study employed social identity theory to explain in-group bias; however, future research may consider self-presentation theory (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987), which helps to explain or predict how individuals calibrate their behavior with other's expectations when in the presence of other people. It is possible that both Black and White participants' responses were influenced by sanctions or other social expectations.

The use of real television shows and the authenticity of an experimental design in creating a natural group-viewing situation may be questionable for some. However, we contend that viewing situations with unexpected strangers are not improbable. For example, viewing programming at a doctor's office or student union allows for anyone to be exposed to racially humorous messages. Nonetheless, future research should

consider examining co-viewing outcomes when viewing with friends and strangers who are both considered in-group and out-group. Future research should also consider other methodologies to unpack the physiological effects of co-viewing. For example, findings revealed no effect of co-viewing situation on White viewers' reactions. Perhaps psychophysiological methods including galvanic skin response or electrocardiography can generate more insights that could result in more conclusive findings regarding White viewers' response to ethnic-oriented programming in co-viewing situations.

Co-viewing effects are integral to the advancement of media effects scholarship for at least two reasons. First, entertainment is a social genre, and continues to be with the growth of user-created material in video streaming sites, such as YouTube. Second, while uses and gratifications and cultural studies research describe the social experience of entertainment consumption, each paradigm lacks in interrogating the psychological impact of co-presence on the viewing experience, especially of controversial material. The formation and sometimes-rapid death of racialized programming is a barometer of societies' readiness to deal with interracial problems. If messages about real racial problems can only be enjoyed among our racial silos, then we may have a problem. Co-viewing studies may shed some light into the utility of certain types of racial comedies.

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