EFFECTS OF DIVERSIFYING MEDIA NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of race-neutral narratives with diverse casts on perceptions of attitudes towards Black People among media consumers. Given the historical context of racial bias and stereotyping in media, the study explores whether race-neutral representations can mitigate these biases and foster positive attitudes towards Black individuals and minority individuals. Drawing on Self-Categorization Theory and Contact Theory, the study hypothesizes that exposure to race-neutral narratives featuring Black characters will lead to more favorable evaluations of Black people. Additionally, the study investigates the role of narrative engagement, specifically transportation and boundary expansion, in moderating these effects. The initial hypotheses were not supported in this study; however, findings suggest that race-neutral narratives hold potential for enhancing the self-perception of minority groups, highlighting the importance of diverse media representation beyond race-centric narratives. This research contributes to the broader discourse on media diversity and its implications for societal attitudes towards racial minorities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of racial bias and stereotyping is a continued concern in media effects research. The issue is often viewed through the lens of diversity in media, and the effects of stereotypical narratives. Although the current entertainment media landscape remains predominantly White, there have been gains in racial and ethnic diversity. The 2022 Hollywood Diversity Report found that the percentage of major theatrical and streaming motion pictures with minority leads has reached 38.9% (Hunt & Ramon, 2022). Despite this increase, the type of narratives that contain minority casts remains relatively limited, with characters often limited to specific genres or types of narratives (Mastro & Robinson, 2000; Tukachinsky et al., 2015; Fabregat & Kperogi 2018; Scharrer et al., 2022). While minority leads continue to rise, especially in streaming and broadcast television, most minority talent is contained in media that are "race- centric" or "race-adjacent" (Dunn et al., 2021). These narratives focus on the race of the character as one of (if not the only) defining plot device. This remains problematic for both minority viewers and minority talent in media since 68% of top films are what is described by McKinsey & Company as "race-agnostic", meaning the narrative is not driven by the minority character race (Dunn et al., 2021). For the purposes of our line of research we prefer to refer to these narratives as "race neutral," a phrase we believe indicates that while race is not the central topic, racial identity is not unimportant to the character. This discrepancy indicates that the majority of entertainment media that viewers have access to in the US will not contain racially diverse casts, and those that do are presented as media "about race." This divide can contribute to the othering of minority individuals.

Race Centricity and Race Neutrality

The term "race-neutrality" has been used within the legal and social justice fields in reference to instances race is not intended to be central foundation to a given issue or policy. Within the fields of criminal and social justice, the concept of race neutrality is often a contentious one; well-intentioned but ultimately harmful in the assumption the experiences of those from marginalized racial groups face the same challenges as those from the privileged group, denying the existence of a system that disadvantages racial minorities (Ugwudike, 2020; Sundquist, 2022). The concept of race neutrality was applied in media effects research by Weaver (2011) to explore selective exposure to diverse casting in race neutral films. Further exploration of this concept and use of this phrase has been limited in media research literature. In 2021 a content analysis conducted by the consulting group McKinsey and Company conducted a content analysis to explore the diversity of the media production teams of media they describe as "race specific", "race adjacent", or "race agnostic" (Dunn et al., 2021). These studies have demonstrated the value of evaluating the degree of race centricity or neutrality of media, but evaluations of how these constructs effect outgroup attitudes remains under-explored.

Amongst marginalized communities, however, there have been on-going discussions regarding how the narrative of a given piece of media can portray a character in a manner in which the character's minority or marginalized identity is central to a story, or harmful to the perception of said group; this is outlined in the subsequent paragraphs by the numerous media evaluative measures proposed by prominent figures in media spaces. One notable example of these discussions is the emergence of the "Bechdel Test;" the test, named for the woman who conceptualized it, evaluates how women are portrayed in popular media. The test has three central criteria for "passing"; 1) the movie must have at least two women in it, 2) who talk to

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each other, 3) about something other than a man (Bechdel, 1985; Ulaby et al., 2008). This test highlights that the presence of female leading characters in a piece of media is insufficient, demanding that these characters provide something to the audience beyond their mere presence. The criteria outlined demonstrates that the presence of a female character is the first, and minimum, requirement for the piece of media, while the remaining criteria insist that the female characters exist beyond silent background pieces that are defined by men. The Bechdel test speaks to the existing social power dynamics hierarchical group structures that exist within our conceptualization of gender. Allison Bechdel calls to mitigate the perpetuation of these dynamics in our narrative media through presenting these criteria to scholars and the public at large through her comic. The dynamics of social power and media representation emphasized by Bechdel in her test extend to marginalized groups beyond gender.

As our media has become increasingly diverse, similar demands are made of characters from other marginalized communities. The Bechdel Test has become foundational to discourse around media and representation as filmmakers and critics develop their own tests of media representation, as evidenced by film critic Manohla Dargis reference to the Bechdel test as she coins the DuVernay Test. The Duvernay Test, named for the director Ava DuVernay, proposes the single criteria "in which African Americans and other minorities have fully realized lives rather than serve as scenery in white stories" (Dargis, 2016). Similarly, TV critic Eric Deggans has coined a rule, later named the Deggans rule, during an interview regarding the Bechdel Test stipulating the criteria that there are "at least two characters who are not white who are on shows where the main focus isn't race" (Ulaby, 2008). Within the disability community similar such media test was proposed by scholar and author Kenny Fries with the requirements that "Does a work have more than one disabled character? Do the disabled characters have their own narrative

purpose other than the education and profit of a nondisabled character? Is the character's disability not eradicated either by curing or killing?" (Fries, 2017) Bechdel also inspired the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) to create a rule to evaluate portrayals of LGBTQIA+ characters in media, stipulating that 1)"The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender", 2) "That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity", and 3) "The LGBTQ character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect" (GLAAD, 2023).

In contrast to discussions regarding race-neutrality in social justice spheres being equated to a lack of cultural awareness, the implication of media tests such as the one proposed by Deggans and the GLAAD organization is that centricity of minority status should be minimized in the future media landscape. The gap between the desire for this style of representation is highlighted by an industry report by McKenzie and Company found that Black professionals are largely shut out of what the authors identify as "Race -Agnostic" productions, broadly defined as media pieces not about race, and that Black professionals only make up 3% of these types of productions. This report, and similar diversity reports such as the Annual Hollywood Diversity report, have often been used to indicate representation concerns from the stand-point of employment discrimination. Concerns for limited roles and casting for actors from marginalized communities is a prescient concern, but it is important to note that the lack of diversity in roles available to minority actors has additional effects on media audiences. In a study by Andrew Weaver regarding diverse casting in race-neutral films, it was demonstrated that White viewers hold different evaluations for films that include minority main characters in certain genres. These narratives can be seen as inherently about Blackness or as meant for Black audiences regardless

of the race-neutrality of the content. Weaver highlights that studios believe that the presence of minority characters in these movies will not appeal to predominantly white audiences, but Weaver found that "White audiences perceive romantic films with minorities as ''not for them'' because they seldom see minorities in race-neutral romantic roles." (p.383, Weaver, 2011).

These media tests act as "pop theories" making several predictions. The importance of media that passes these tests is multifaceted. One argument is that more media that passes these tests will allow for more roles for minority actors. Another reason this type of inclusion is valuable is the potential esteem-boosting effects of inclusion. Minority viewers seldom see themselves reflected in entertainment. Finally, it is believed that these can reduce bias against the represented minority groups. All of these potential effects are valuable in themselves, though the present work aims to investigate the latter claim. Given the assumptions associated with the media tests proposed by critics, the researchers seek to answer the following research question:

RQ: *Does viewing minority characters in race neutral narratives have mitigating effects on bias?*

The manner in which minority groups are represented in past research has demonstrated the ability of media to impact perceptions of various outgroups. Media literature has identified that media representations of racial minority groups can perpetuate the negative effects towards and within the groups depicted. Systems of media production play a role in maintaining power and racism, both with direct intentions to maintain the status quo and as an unintentional extension of societal norms and expectations (Fabregat & Kperogi, 2019). Unintentional and intentional perpetuation of stereotypes within media depictions can result in negative attitudes and behaviors towards minority groups, (Mastro, 2009; Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Saleem, & Ramasubramanian, 2019). These stereotypic portrayals can additionally have negative impacts

on the self-perception of minority groups (Schmader et al., 2015). However, the ability of media to effect attitudes is not limited to negative effects. Media has the potential to improve perceptions of outgroups (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Ellithorpe et al., 2015; Lienemann & Stopp, 2013) and can elevate esteem and create value for racial minority in-groups (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2017). Given the pop theories outlined and the wealth of research demonstrating media's ability to effect attitudes, we make the following prediction:

H1: *Race-neutral narratives will result in more positive evaluations of racial minority groups, and Black people specifically*

We expect effects could be a result of one, or multiple, of the mechanisms that have been demonstrated to predict shifts in attitudes after exposure to media in past research.

Self-Categorization Theory

Self- Categorization Theory (SCT) is often the foundation used to understand manners in which prejudice can be reduced (Paluck, Porat, Clark, & Green, 2021). Self-Categorization Theory relies on some of the basic assumptions of Social Identification Theory; as individuals we tend to group ourselves into smaller social ingroups. Those not a part of our ingroups become our outgroup, and the theory predicts that individuals often view the outgroup less favorably than their ingroup (Ellithorpe et al., 2015).

Self-Categorization Theory builds upon this idea by specifying that all individuals hold multiple abstractions of identities that are hierarchical in nature. The theory identifies three basic levels of categorization; the first is the interpersonal level, or self; intergroup level; and the superordinate level; on this level individuals view themselves as part of a broader population set. It is on this highest level that an individual will view the ingroup as more diverse (Yao, 2020). The salience of a given identity is what results in shifts in an individual's identity level, in turn

creating the potential to shift attitudes towards groups and the individuals that represent them. The salience of the group identity is identified as the primary influence of when we identify at the various levels, and with which subgroup we identify with at the time (Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Due to media's ability to influence the salience of themes through their discussion and depiction, this theory can be applied to media effects research contexts. The characters and narrative themes of a given piece of media can increase the salience of a group identity. Additionally, media can provide information about the ingroup and the outgroup that can influence a viewer's conceptualization of group, and identification with, groups (Trepte & Roy, 2017). Mastro and Kopacz demonstrated that SCT can be extended to media contexts in a study of how the degree to which depictions of outgroup member that is prototypical to the ingroup can predict stereotypic behavior. The findings suggest that individuals incorporate individuals who are highly prototypical to the ingroup into the ingroup identity, even if they are of an ethnic outgroup. This suggests group depictions in media can be incorporated by viewers into their conceptualization of ingroups and outgroups, demonstrating that SCT does not only apply to real world intergroup interactions (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). Similarly, Ellithorpe and colleagues demonstrated that depictions of outgroup members in media of the supernatural genre depicting a clash between humans and non-humans can lead viewers to include the racial out group in their conceptualization of the ingroup. These findings further indicate the applicability to SCT to media contexts (Ellithorpe et al., 2015).

Research on in-group and out-group identification have investigated the effects both of recategorization, the process of shifting to expand the ingroup to account for other groups, and decategorization, the process of reducing the salience of in-group and out-group identities in

their ability to reduce the negative effects of group identities like prejudice (Levine & Hogg, 2010; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007). Decategorization refers to the process of reducing the salience of in-group and out-group identities. This would lower the level of abstraction with which one views themselves, situating them within the interpersonal, or self, level. Due to the reduced distinctions between groups, operating on this level can similarly reduce negative results of group identification (Levine & Hogg, 2010).

Contact Theory

Intergroup Contact theory is one of the primary theoretical approaches to reducing intergroup bias. Within the frameworks for Allport's theory, contact between groups can reduce the negative effects of group prejudice. Allport in his theory outlines four conditions for which contact would reduce intergroup prejudice as follows: equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authority (Pettigrew, 1998). The mechanism through which this phenomenon is stated to occur is dissonance; the assumption being made is that individuals hold implicit biases towards outgroups that can be reduced through contact that raises dissonance. As research into improving intergroup relations has continued, scientists have continued to expand upon this theory resulting in a number of extensions that apply to media content.

Mediated Contact

Past research has identified that contact might not be limited to true interpersonal interactions. It is clear that contact with outgroup members can occur through consuming diverse media. The term Mediated Contact was developed to refer to contact that does not occur directly but occurs through some form of media. This tends to be used as an umbrella term for other types of mediated contact (Joyce, 2017).

Parasocial Contact. Parasocial Contact Theory was developed by Schiappa and colleagues and is one manner in which mediated contact is understood. Parasocial Contact theory explores the concepts of the original theory as applied to simulated contact through parasocial interactions and relationships in mass-media (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). While the theory is based on Allport's theory, the limited information available in consuming narrative media renders it difficult to meet all of the conditions outlined in Allport's contact theory (Shippa et al., 2005). In place of the conditions, frequently the only condition considered for parasocial contact was the fact that the media representation of the outgroup individual is positive in the media (Bond, 2020). Parasocial contact differs from other forms of mediated contact due to its reliance on the viewer developing a parasocial relationship to, or interaction with, a character from the viewers social outgroup. Due to the formation of parasocial bonds typically being dependent on longer or repeated exposure to characters (Schippa et al., 2005) we do not predict that parasocial contact will be a mechanism of attitude change in this study, though a parasocial relationship and interaction scale was included on an exploratory basis.

Vicarious Contact. While not limited to contact that occurs through media, vicarious contact can be expanded to include media representations. Vicarious contact looks at contact through Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, stating that simply viewing others engage in intergroup contact can have positive effects on attitudes towards outgroups (Joyce & Harwood, 2012). Vicarious contact relies on viewers observing others engage in intergroup contact, thus engaging with it vicariously as opposed to directly. Our study included two conditions in which two characters of different races interact creating the potential for vicarious contact to occur. Due to parasocial relationships or bonds requiring time to cultivate, the present study relies on vicarious contact to make the following prediction:

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H2: *Race-neutral narratives displaying contact between two characters of differing racial groups; (i.e., one white character and one Black character.) will be most effective at reducing bias as a result of vicarious contact.*

Narrative Engagement

Narrative engagement, encompassing constructs such as transportation and boundary expansion, plays a critical role in understanding the impact of media on audience perceptions and attitudes.

Transportation

Transportation is one measure of narrative engagement that describes the immersion in a story. Higher levels of transportation in stories have been shown to be related to higher narrative persuasion (Appel & Ritcher, 2010). Within the context of the current study, we believe that higher level of transportation would relate to greater ease of change in level of social categorization.

Boundary Expansion

Within the theoretical framework of Temporary Expansion of the Boundaries of the Self (TEBOTS), boundary expansion refers to the phenomenon in which one utilizes narratives to build and maintain one's own self-concept. Through narratives, one can temporarily suspend their existing social role and adopt ones outside of the roles typically held. While still being investigated, it is suggested by Slater and colleagues that boundary expansion may result in changed attitudes towards individuals "stigmatized in a given society." (p. 450, Slater et al., 2014) Given the ongoing marginalization of ethnic minorities in the US, it is possible that boundary expansion experienced while consuming media depictions of marginalized ethnic

groups may result in a change in attitude towards those groups. With these considerations we expect:

H3: *Boundary Expansion and Transportation will moderate effects of the narrative, such that viewers who are more transported and report greater boundary expansion will report more positive attitudes towards Black people.*

Attitudes About Race

Within the fields of psychology and sociology there is a wealth of scales intended to measure racism, intergroup bias, and various attitudes and beliefs about race. Due to the sensitivity of the topic of race, social desirability concerns have been raised regarding participants' ability to self-report on issues of race when asked directly.

This differs from implicit and explicit attitudes. Implicit and explicit attitudes about race are "separate but related" concepts. The best way to measure explicit attitudes is to ask directly, implicit measures are still good but often measure something else. Many scales are outdated, measure politically motivated racial attitudes, or measure stereotyped beliefs, thus asking about racial attitudes directly will get answers that most correlate with accessibility measures like the IAT (Axt, 2017). One measure often used to measure explicit group attitudes is a "feeling thermometer" that asks individuals to express degree of liking towards a group on a scale of 1 to 100. This scale is frequently used by massive national panels such as the Annual National Election Study (ANES).

To explore the research question and test hypotheses, the researchers conducted an experiment where participants were asked to watch a short film. The films varied on two dimensions: the narrative type (race centric or race neutral), and the race of the characters (featuring Black characters, White characters, or both Black and White characters).

CREATING STIMULUS VIDEOS

To control for as many factors as possible, researchers opted to create a unique piece of media that meets the standards of race centricity and race neutrality as described above. The stimuli were created using AI (Artificial Intelligence) generated characters that were either Black or White, and an adapted script from an existing race centric TV show. To identify the appropriate piece of media from which to pull material, a list was curated using descriptions from IMDB and Wikipedia of movies and tv series about race. For consideration, the piece of audio-visual media (film or tv) had to be a narrative piece of entertainment media. Consequently, this designation would exclude pieces of media such as documentaries or news reports. After watching and analyzing scripts of multiple pieces of media, the researchers selected Season 1, Episode 4 of Dear White People on Netflix as the appropriate source material for the stimuli due to it being a race centric script that included a plot that was easily adjustable to be primarily driven by an interpersonal conflict that is not racially motivated. AI generated images were then organized into a slideshow-style, storyboarded video with images that align with the events described in the adapted script.

To ensure the stimuli created were both perceived as intended and to control for as many factors between conditions, pre-tests were conducted on both the scripts and the AI generated character images.

Pre-Test 1: Testing Character Faces

A pre-test was conducted to "cast" for the stimuli created to select for characters who do not differ significantly in their perceived attractiveness, likability, and realism. By selecting characters in this manner, we reduce the likelihood that significant differences in these qualities do not alter the perception of the stimuli in conditions differing in race and gender. To create

characters for the stimuli, approximately 200 photorealistic images were generated using Midjourney AI with prompt phrases such as "college student, photorealistic, HD" modified to generate the desired race, gender, hair color and texture, and eye color. The researchers desired to control for perceived attractiveness, likableness, and realism of the AI generated characters.

Method

The goal of pretesting character images was to further reduce the selection of character images to two characters per condition, while controlling for several factors. The initial pool of AI generated images was reduced to 6 for each race (black, white) and gender (male, female) condition. Researchers selected these final 24 images from the larger pool by visually evaluating them and selecting the most attractive and realistic images generated while also selecting a diverse range of features within categories.

Participants (*N*=80) aged 18 and older (*M* = 40.57, *SD* = 14.83) were recruited through the online research platform Prolific to take the 15-minute study. The researchers recruited a sample that was split evenly by gender (half male, half female), and evenly by race (half white, half black). Due to challenges in screening, the 2 participants who identified outside the traditional gender binary were recruited and not included in final analysis. Additionally, 2 mixed race participants were not included in the final analysis. The pretesting followed a within-subjects design, as participants viewed all generated images in a random order to be rated multiple factors.

Procedure. Participants were first asked to fill out questions to self-identify their race and gender before being shown the images in random order. Alongside each image shown, participants were asked to rate the image on an 11-point bipolar scale on the characteristics of "attractive", "likable", and "realistic" from -5 (not at all) to +5 (extremely). As a manipulation

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check, participants were asked to select the most likely race of the character pictured in each image to ensure that the characters are perceived as the race intended by researchers.

Analysis

To assess responses to the manipulation check for each image frequencies of suspected race depicted were analyzed for each image. Of the six images that were intended to depict White women, only three were correctly identified as White by 95% or more of respondents. Of the six images of white men, five of the images were consistently identified as White. Of images intended to depict Black women, five of the six images were consistently identified as Black by participants. All of the images of Black men were consistently identified as Black by participants.

Table 1
Accuracy of Perceived Race

White Female 1	100	Black Female 1	98.6	White Male 1	100	Black Male 1	97.2
White Female 2	97.6	Black Female 2	100	White Male 2	89.2[a]	Black Male 2	100
White Female 3	96.0	Black Female 3	98.6	White Male 3	98.6	Black Male 3	97.3
White Female 4	87.7[a]	Black Female 4	93.2[a]	White Male 4	97.3	Black Male 4	98.6
White Female 5	91.9[a]	Black Female 5	97.3	White Male 5	100	Black Male 5	100
White Female 6	94.4[a]	Black Female 6	98.6	White Male 6	98.6	Black Male 6	100

[a] Indicates character race was identified with accuracy below 95% and thus was removed from consideration as final character selected for stimulus

Within-subjects MANOVA of all the character images was run separately on male and female participants with participant race as an independent variable to identify significant differences between characters on the attractiveness item and repeated for the likable and realistic items. Pairwise comparisons between the ratings of each character on each of the three rating items (attractive, likable, and realistic) were observed to identify which characters had ratings that were significantly higher or lower than other characters at the 95% confidence level

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(i.e. p = 0.5). Characters who were rated significantly differently were removed and the process was repeated. The final selection involved an iterative process of repeating these analyses and removing characters until the pool of images was reduced to eight characters who did not differ significantly in rating on the three items (two per condition).

Figure 1
Final Images Selected

White Female 1 Mean Ratings Attractive: 3.22 Likable: 2.39 Realistic: 2.96	**White Female 3 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 2.89 Likable: 2.99 Realistic: 2.89	**Black Female 2 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 3.48 Likable: 3.01 Realistic: 2.92	**Black Female 6 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 2.91 Likable: 2.61 Realistic: 2.97
White Male 1 Mean Ratings Attractive: 2.75 Likable: 2.58 Realistic: 2.86	**White Male 6 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 2.41 Likable: 2.38 Realistic: 2.85	**Black Male 4 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 2.57 Likable: 2.47 Realistic: 3.10	**Black Male 5 Mean Ratings** Attractive: 2.56 Likable: 2.39 Realistic: 3.06

Note. Figure depicts the final images selected from the pretest and the mean scores of attractiveness, likability, and realism. Above means are taken from all respondents in the sample.

Final Image Selection

Characters who were rated significantly differently by Black and White participants were removed from consideration for final selections. Characters that were significantly higher or lower than others on the desired scales were removed. Significant differences between male and female participant ratings were disregarded in final selection process because participants were

not shown characters of the opposite gender in the final experiment. Final images selected are depicted in Figure 1.

Pre-Test 2: Testing Story Scripts

To create a script, researchers selected the 4th episode of the race-centric show Dear White People on Netflix. The selected episode follows two Black women in college as their struggle with their racial identity drives them to interpersonal conflicts with each other, further driven by their varying commitments to activism and social connectedness. The script was then reduced in length and modified to remove identifiable features of the script to prevent familiarity with the show from being a confounding factor. Character names were changed and selected by picking the 15th and 16th most popular baby names from 2003 for each gender.

To create the race-neutral script, the modified Dear White People, Episode 4, script was edited to remove references to race and substituted race-based activism with non-race-based activism (e.g., gender rights or environmental activism). Two race-neutral scripts were created, and researchers wanted to determine which would be most comparable in transportation and identification to the race centric script. Additionally, researchers wished to determine whether the audience perceived scripts as about race or not about race as was intended. Three scripts were created for each gender condition, resulting in 6 scripts total.

Method

Participants (*N*=120) aged 18 and older (*M* = 41.40, *SD* =13.704) were recruited through the platform Prolific and were compensated $4 for their participation in the 30-minute study. A sample was recruited split evenly by race (black and white) and gender (male and female). The pretest followed a between-subjects design; participants were randomly assigned one of three scripts based that align with their reported gender identity.

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Measures. Two measures were included to assess the narrative engagement of participants as they read the scripts. Narrative engagement may play a moderating role in media effects, thus, to control for this, the following scales were included:

Identification. This scale was included to ensure there are no significant differences between how well readers identify with each of the two characters, and that identification with characters did not vary significantly across script conditions. Identification scales were found to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.917$) and responses to scale items were averaged.

Transportation. The short form transportation scale from Appel, Gnambs, Richter & Green (2015) evaluates level of transportation using 6 items on a 7-point scale. This scale was included to ensure that transportation is not significantly different across conditions. Transportation scales were also found to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.914$) and responses to scale items were averaged.

Manipulation Checks. Two manipulation checks were created to evaluate whether the scripts were perceived as race-centric or race-neutral as intended. First, participants were asked on a 5-point scale how important, from "not at all important" to "very important how important", several factors were to the story they just read. These factors of interest included race, gender, and environment. Distractor items were included as well (i.e., Labor unions, loyalty).

Since the scripts did not include racial descriptors of either of the main characters, researchers wanted to ensure that race of character was not salient in the race neutral conditions. To test this, participants were asked to rate how likely the characters were to be a given race on a 7-point scale. For each main character, participants were asked to rate the likelihood that the character was white and black as well as several distractor items (Hispanic, Asian).

Procedure. Participants were first asked to complete basic demographic information. After reading the script participants were asked to complete manipulation check questions and identification scales for each of the two characters to ensure that there is consistency across conditions. Additionally, a transportation scale was used to determine consistency in transportation across conditions to ensure that they are equally transported in the race neutral and race centric conditions.

Analysis

A one-way ANOVA across narrative conditions was conducted to observe responses to the race-centricity manipulation check ($F = 41.503$, $p < 0.001$) which asked participants how relevant race was to the story they just read. The average score on the race centricity manipulation check for race centric conditions was higher ($M = 3.988$, $SD = 0.986$) than the gender rights ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.334$) and environmental activism ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.222$) race neutral scripts.

Two one-way ANOVAs for the perceived race manipulation check were conducted to determine if there were any differences between conditions. An ANOVA assessing the perceived likelihood Character 1 was white in each condition ($F = 5.828$, $p = 0.004$) indicated that Character 1 was perceived as less likely to be White ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.362$) in the race centric condition than the race neutral conditions ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.972$; $M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.236$). Similarly, ANOVA assessing the perceived likelihood Character 2 was white ($F = 23.422$, $p < 0.001$) indicated that Character 2 was perceived as less likely to be white in the race centric condition ($M = 2.324$, $SD = 1.396$) compared to both race neutral conditions ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.988$; $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.983$).

Conversely, ANOVAs to assess the perceived likelihood Character 1 was Black indicated that Character 1 ($F = 7.061$, $p = 0.001$) was more likely to be Black in the race centric condition (M = 3.62, SD = 1.320) than the race neutral conditions ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.191$; $M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.230$). The ANOVA for the perceived likelihood Character 2 is Black (F = 17.105, p < 0.001) also indicated that Character 2 was more likely to be Black in the race centric condition (M = 4.19, SD = 1.221) than in the race neutral conditions ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.255$; $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.175$).

A 2(participant gender) x 3(script) ANOVA for transportation across the narrative conditions ($F = 1.812$, $p = 0.117$) indicated no significant differences overall, and no significant effects for gender ($F = 0.008$, $p = 0.930$) or script condition ($F = 1.846$, $p = 0.163$).

ANOVA for identification with Character 1 across conditions showed no significant differences ($F = 1.638$, $p = 0.199$). An ANOVA for identification with Character 2 ($F = 4.493$, $p = 0.013$) indicated that readers reported significantly less identification with Character 2 in the gender rights version ($M = 4.556$, $SD = 1.462$) than the environmental activism ($M = 5.072$, $SD = 0.980$) version of the race neutral narrative and the race centric ($M = 5.309$, $SD = 0.801$) version of the script.

Selecting script

Through analyzing the race-centricity manipulation check it was determined that the race centric script was perceived as about race while both versions of the race neutral scripts were perceived as not about race. Analysis of the perception of the character races showed that the participants believed it was more likely that the characters were Black in the race centric condition and more likely that they were White in the race neutral condition. This aligns with the Whiteness theory that states that within US culture, the default is assumed to be Whiteness until

presented with cues to the contrary (Sue, 2006; Ramirez, 20015). We believe that these findings further support the effectiveness of the scripts in eliciting perceived race centricity and race neutrality.

Since identification was lower with character 2 in the gender rights condition, it was determined that the race-neutral script for the final video would be the environmental activism condition.

Final Stimuli

Scripts selected from pretest were recorded using a 25-year-old female voice actor. The actor recorded all condition scripts in one sitting to control for sound quality and tone. Scripts were later edited to create separate audio files for each condition.

Character images selected from the pretest were used to generate images of characters in scenes consistent with the events of the script using Midjourney command "--cref" followed by the image file. To control for scene settings, the same image was used for all conditions and the Midjourney command "vary region" was used to change only the region of the photo that contained the character.

The videos were then edited using the software Adobe Premier Pro to create a slideshow-like video that is voiced over with the recorded script. The final video was 13 minutes and 51 seconds in length. A total of 6 videos with female characters were created (2 (narrative condition) by 3 (character race)).

For male videos, the image generation process was repeated using the character images selected in pretesting. The voice over for the male conditions was created by using AI voice alteration to alter the recorded voice of the female voice actor. This was done to maintain the

tone and delivery of the script in gender conditions. The male version of the stimulus is to be

used with an all-male sample in a future study.

EXPERIMENT

After the creation of the stimuli videos, an online survey experiment was conducted to test the hypotheses. Due to gender being a group identity with the potential to confound results, the researchers elected to use the stimulus videos with female characters and voice over, with a gender matched sample to reduce the potential confounds.

Method

The study was conducted entirely online, using Prolific to recruit participants. Prior to data collection an a-priori power analysis assuming an effect size of 0.16 using GPower recommended a sample size 380 for 80% power for both the male and female conditions. The GPower analysis was conducted assuming the use of an ANOVA with 24 conditions. We hope to have a final sample size of 400 split evenly between male and female participants. The final experiment was conducted only on the female sample; thus, the final sample size was 200.

Participants

The study was conducted entirely online using the participant recruitment platform Prolific to acquire a convenience sample. The sample (N=200) consisted of US-based, English-speaking women, aged 18 to 73 (M= 39.84, SD=12.169). Recruitment was conducted to ensure equal recruitment of Black (N=97) and White (N=97), however due to challenges in screening, the sample included a limited number of mixed-race participants (N= 6) participants. Upon completion of the 25-minute study, participants were awarded $6.

Design

To investigate the hypotheses, the study followed a 2 (participant race) by 2 (narrative type) by 3 (character race) factorial design recruiting only participants who identify as female to control for gender effects. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the 6 videos. For

the experimental manipulation, participants were shown an approximately 14-minute video made from the pretested scripts and characters. Characters and audio were matched to participants' gender to control for perceptions of gender as a group identity.

Measures

Transportation. The short form transportation scale from Appel, Gnambs, Richter & Green (2015) was included in the experimental measures to determine whether transportation may play a moderating role in any observed effects. The scale evaluates level of transportation using 6 items on a 11-point scale from -5 "strongly disagree" to +5 "strongly agree" The Transportation Scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.913).

Parasocial Interaction and Relationships Scale. To assess whether parasocial relationships are formed by the participants with the characters in the media they engage in may play a role in how the exposure to the films is processed by participants, a modified scale by Slater, Ewoldsen, and Wood (2018) was implemented. This 11-point scale has participants rate their level of agreement with 10 statements from -5 "strongly disagree" to +5 "strongly agree". The Parasocial Relationships and Interactions scale also demonstrated a strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.920).

Boundary Expansion. The boundary expansion scale (Johnson et al., 2016) was included as an additional narrative engagement measure to observe whether other narrative engagement measures may play a moderating role in effects. This measure asked participants to indicate agreement with 10 items on a 10-point scale from 1 "not at all" to 10 "very much". The Boundary Expansion Scale also showed strong internal consistency (α = 0.927).

Attitudes Towards Racial Groups. To measure our dependent variable of interest, we utilized a "feeling thermometer" for the primary racial group of interest (Black people) as well as

a number of other racial minority groups. The scale used was modified from the ANES times series study (ANES, 2009). Participants were asked to score affect from 0 (highly dislike) to 100 (highly like) for the listed groups. To see the full list of groups included, see Appendix A.

Manipulation Check. To determine whether the stimulus was perceived as intended, the race centricity manipulation check utilized in the script pretest study was also included in the experiment measures.

Procedure

After recruiting an all-female sample, participants were randomly assigned to one of the six video conditions (2 narrative conditions (race centric; race neutral) x 3 character race conditions (two Black; two White; one Black and one White character)). All videos included female voice overs and characters, thus ensuring that the character gender was matched to that of the participant. Prior to viewing the video, participants were asked to complete some demographic information. After viewing the video, the above measures were administered to participants in random order. Participants were then asked questions from the Transportation Scale (Appel et al., 2015) and the Boundary Expansion Scale (Johnson et al., 2016) to evaluate as moderators. Additionally, to investigate alternative mechanisms a modified scale of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships was administered (Slater et al., 2018). Finally, the participants were asked to respond to a "Feeling Thermometer" towards minority groups.

Data cleaning

Data cleaning was conducted to remove participants who indicated low attention or engagement with the study. Straightlining and time spent on essential portions of the study were used to determine if participants were likely not engaged in the study.

Participants were removed if the time they spent watching the video was greater than one standard deviation away from the average time spent (M=895.9, SD=266.1) (Video length= 831 Seconds). Participants who spent too little time on the video were assumed to have skipped portions of the video or moved on before completing the video in its entirety. Because the video was the principal component of the study, participants who did not complete the video were removed. As a result, 10 cases were removed due to too little time spent on the video page. Because participants were able to move through the study at their own pace, those who remained on the video page significantly longer than the length of the video were believed not to have been paying attention to notice when the video ended. Due to the possibility that participants may have rewound portions for comprehension, the researchers found it appropriate to remove participants that were one standard deviation higher than the mean. 16 cases were removed due to spending too much time on the videos page. A total of 26 participants were ultimately removed from analysis due to their spending too little, or too much, time on the video page.

Additionally, participants were removed for excessive straightlining due to it being an indicator of poor attention. Participants who straightlined on more than half, 3 or more, of the included scales were removed from the analysis. Straightlining was determined through calculating the variance of responses on scale items for each individual case. Cases in which variance was equal to 0.00 were marked as having straight lined on the scale. Due to the fact that it is plausible for an individual's sentiment to be consistent on all scale items on some included scales, a single instance of straightlining was not considered an indicator of bad data, however, researchers determined that persistent straight lining on more than half of the scales was likely indicative of a lack of attention. Thus, those cases were removed from analysis, which resulted in the removal of 2 participants.

If participants engaged in straightlining through distractor items in the manipulation check they were removed, resulting in the removal of 3 participants. Distractors were determined to be sufficiently irrelevant to the script to indicate that users straightlining the manipulation check were providing bad data or not paying attention.

Manipulation check

A 2 (narrative type) x3(character race) ANOVA (See Table 2) to test the effects of the narrative and character race conditions on perception of race centricity was conducted and revealed that there were large and statistically significant differences in reported perception of race centricity ($F = 54.65$, $p < 0.001$). A significant and strong main effect of narrative type ($F = 270.3$, $p < 0.001$) was found indicating that the respondents rated the race neutral condition as less about race than the race centric conditions. No significant main effect was found for character race ($F = 2.191$, $p = 0.151$). The ANOVA additionally found no significant interaction effect between character race and narrative type ($F = 0.320$, $p = 0.727$). This demonstrates that the narrative type explains most of the variance in rating of how much the narrative was perceived to be about race, regardless of the race of the characters.

Table 2

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: Manipulation Check

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	273.090[a]	5	54.618	54.648	<.001
Intercept	1588.257	1	1588.593	1589.471	<.001
Narrative Type	270.168	1	270.168	270.317	<.001
Character Race	4.379	2	2.190	2.191	.151
Narrative Type * Character Race	.639	2	.320	.320	.727
Error	162.910	163	1.034		
Total	2117.000	169			
Corrected Total	436.000	168			

a. R Squared = .608 (Adjusted R Squared = .596)

After determining the manipulation was effective, participants who indicated they did not experience the manipulation as expected, by either rating the race neutral condition as about race or the race centric condition as not about race, were removed from analysis. This resulted in the removal of 13 total cases: 4 from the race centric condition, and 9 from the race neutral condition. Researchers believe that these participants' responses were likely anomalies, thus their responses were removed to maintain the integrity of experimental conditions during analysis.

Analysis

Of the 200 participants who completed the study through prolific, 44 participants were removed from analysis during data cleaning. After data cleaning, analysis was done on the remaining 156 cases (151 cases in analyses evaluating participant race) using the SPSS statistics software by IBM. A 2 (participant race) x 2 (narrative type) x 3 (character race) ANOVA with participant age as a covariate was conducted on attitudes towards black people as reported through the feeling thermometer. The overall model was significant ($F = 2.784$, $p = 0.002$) with significant main effect of participant race ($F = 22.08$, $p < 0.001$) with Black participants rating Black people more positively ($M = 89.94$, $SD = 14.77$) than White participants did ($M = 74.90$, $SD = 23.14$). There were no significant main effects for narrative type ($F = 0.491$, $p = 0.485$) or character race ($F = 0.666$, $p = 0.515$).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Feeling Thermometer Black

		Participant Race								
		White			Black			Total		
Narrative Type	Character Race	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Race Centric	Black x Black	77.31	26.132	13	83.60	22.844	15	80.68	24.172	28
	White x White	64.00	24.642	17	96.00	5.500	9	75.08	25.285	26
	Black x White	81.46	19.169	13	88.81	13.987	16	85.52	16.617	29
	Total	73.30	24.332	43	88.48	17.059	40	80.61	22.357	83

Note. Table does not include estimated marginal means from models including covariates.

Table 3 (Cont.)

Race Neutral	Black x Black	79.65	22.187	17	97.14	7.559	7	84.75	20.575	24
	White x White	73.09	23.687	11	88.22	13.516	9	79.90	20.782	20
	Black x White	75.54	21.531	13	92.09	8.408	11	83.13	18.536	24
	Total	76.59	21.999	41	92.11	10.423	27	82.75	19.740	68
Total	Black x Black	78.63	23.570	30	87.91	20.147	22	82.56	22.460	52
	White x White	67.57	24.251	28	92.11	10.781	18	77.17	23.311	46
	Black x White	78.50	20.200	26	90.15	11.948	27	84.43	17.381	53
	Total	74.90	23.142	84	89.94	14.765	67	81.58	21.176	151

Pairwise comparison indicated that character race only had significant effects on white participants in the race centric narrative condition. White participants had significantly lower attitudes towards Black people ($p = 0.016$) when viewing the video with two White characters ($M = 63.987$, $SD = 24.64$) compared to the condition with one White and one Black character ($M = 81.923$, $SD = 19.17$).

A 2 (participant race) x 2 (narrative type) x 3 (character race) ANOVA was repeated with participant age, boundary expansion, parasocial relationships, and transportation as covariates. The model was once again significant ($F = 3.025$, $p < 0.001$). The main effect of participant race was strong and statistically significant ($F = 19.627$, $p < 0.001$) with Black participants rating Black people more positively ($M = 89.94$, $SD = 14.77$) than White participants did ($M = 74.90$, $SD = 23.14$). Covariates returned no significant effects.

To evaluate stimulus effects on attitudes towards White people a 2 (participant race) x 2 (narrative type) x 3 (character race) ANOVA with participant age as a covariate was run to evaluate feeling thermometer responses to White people (see Table 5). The model was not significant ($F = 1.623$, $p = 0.092$) with no significant main or interaction effects. The models remained nonsignificant after the inclusion of boundary expansion, transportation, and parasocial interaction as covariates.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Feeling Thermometer White

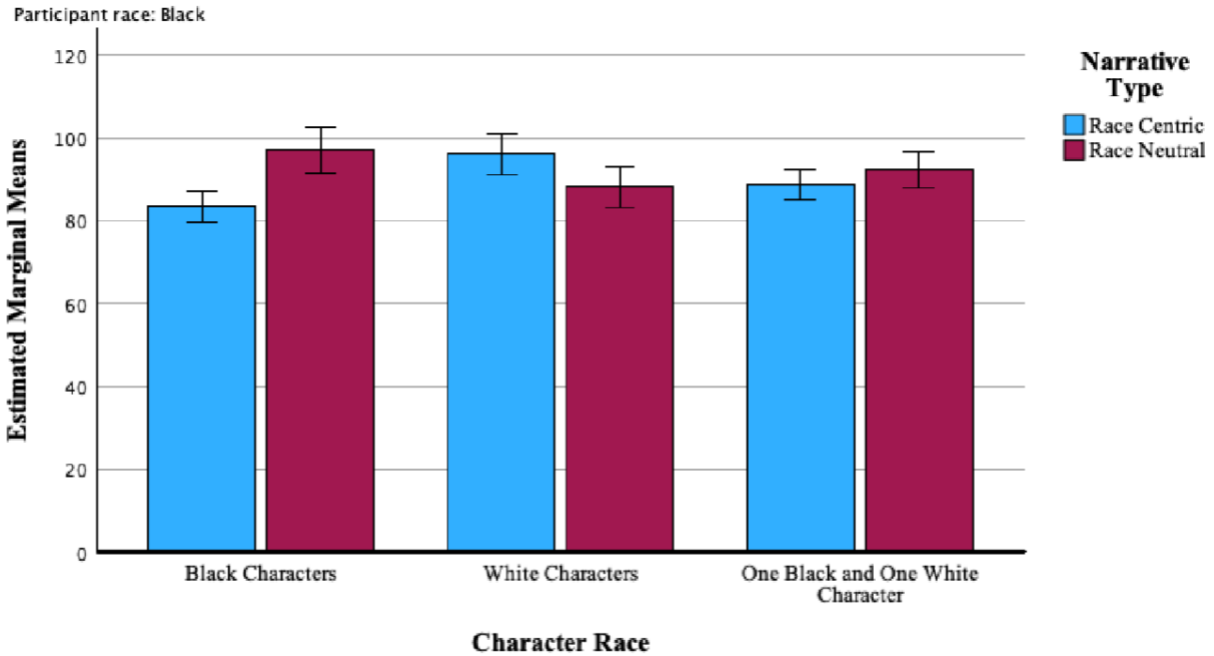| | | Participant Race | | | | | | | | |
| | | White | | | Black | | | Total | | |
Narrative Type	Character Race	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Race Centric	Black x Black	82.08	20.184	13	70.93	29.877	15	76.11	25.999	28
	White x White	58.53	20.710	17	61.56	27.04	9	59.58	22.598	26
	Black x White	74.23	22.091	13	56.75	33.48	16	64.59	29.799	29
	Total	70.40	22.869	43	63.15	30.697	40	66.90	27.006	83
Race Neutral	Black x Black	81.00	19.529	17	70.57	30.506	7	77.96	23.055	24
	White x White	72.45	21.933	11	77.11	23.040	9	74.55	21.963	20
	Black x White	64.15	24.058	13	68.91	24.821	11	66.33	23.994	24
	Total	73.37	22.339	41	72.07	25.074	27	72.85	23.287	68
Total	Black x Black	81.47	19.475	30	70.82	29.343	22	76.96	24.463	52
	White x White	64.00	21.916	28	69.33	25.652	18	66.09	23.317	46
	Black x White	69.19	23.205	26	61.70	30.344	27	65.38	27.084	53
	Total	71.85	22.525	84	66.75	28.704	67	69.58	25.490	151

Note. Table does not include estimated marginal means from models including covariates

Pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between responses in character race conditions only among white participants in the race centric condition. Attitudes towards white people were significantly higher ($p = 0.009$) when White participants viewed the video with only white characters ($M = 82.08$, $SD = 20.18$) when compared to viewing the video with two black characters ($M = 58.53$, $SD = 20.71$).

A 2 (narrative type) x3 (character race) ANOVA was run separately on White and Black participants controlling for age. The model was not significant on either White ($F = 1.129$, $p = 0.353$) or Black participants ($F = 1.106$, $p = 0.369$). There were no significant main or interaction effects for narrative type or character race, however pairwise comparisons of Black participants in the two black character condition showed that there were significant ($p = 0.047$) differences in attitudes towards Black people between viewers of the race-centric ($M = 83.60$, $SD = 22.84$) and race-neutral ($M = 97.14$, $SD = 7.559$) narratives.

Figure 2

Estimated Marginal Means of Feelings Towards Black People

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: age = 38.73
Error bars: +/- 1 SE

Note: Figure of chart depicting mean ratings of feelings towards Black people among Black participants between stimulus conditions.

Additionally, pairwise comparisons indicated significant differences between character race conditions within the race-centric narrative condition. Similarly to the pairwise comparisons in the 2x2x3 ANOVA, the pairwise comparisons of the 2x3 ANOVA for White participants in the race centric condition had significantly lower attitudes towards black people ($p = 0.034$) when viewing the video with two white characters ($M = 63.987$, $SD = 24.64$) compared to the condition with one white and one black character ($M = 81.923$, $SD = 19.17$). Additionally, the pairwise comparisons of the 2x3 ANOVA for Black participants in the race centric condition had significantly higher ($p = 0.046$) attitudes towards Black people in the condition with two White characters ($M = 83.60$, $SD = 22.84$) when compared to the condition with two Black characters ($M = 96.00$, $SD = 5.500$).

A 2 (participant race) x 2 (narrative type) x 3 (character race) MANOVA of feeling thermometer scores for other minority groups to evaluate whether attitudes towards minority

groups not depicted in the stimuli were affected. No significant results were returned in the

analysis results are pictured in Table 6.

Table 5

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects On Minority Groups

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Arabs	8502.980[a]	12	708.582	.911	.538
	Latinos	6527.045[b]	12	543.920	.974	.476
	Asians	8717.153[c]	12	726.429	1.380	.183
Intercept	Arabs	71400.565	1	71400.565	91.783	<.001
	Latinos	80465.039	1	80465.039	144.138	<.001
	Asians	78027.021	1	78027.021	148.183	<.001
age	Arabs	865.255	1	865.255	1.112	.293
	Latinos	248.335	1	248.335	.445	.506
	Asians	233.152	1	233.152	.443	.507
Participant Race	Arabs	245.762	1	245.762	.316	.575
	Latinos	153.275	1	153.275	.275	.601
	Asians	131.253	1	131.253	.249	.618
Narrative Type	Arabs	686.880	1	686.880	.883	.349
	Latinos	1277.684	1	1277.684	2.289	.133
	Asians	1182.544	1	1182.544	2.246	.136
Character Race	Arabs	838.879	2	419.440	.539	.584
	Latinos	37.802	2	18.901	.034	.967
	Asians	1102.340	2	551.170	1.047	.354
Participant Race * Narrative Type	Arabs	751.883	1	751.883	.967	.327
	Latinos	39.106	1	39.106	.070	.792
	Asians	152.341	1	152.341	.289	.592
Participant Race * Character Race	Arabs	1898.942	2	949.471	1.221	.298
	Latinos	2039.892	2	1019.946	1.827	.165
	Asians	3094.925	2	1547.463	2.939	.056
Narrative Type * Character Race	Arabs	361.272	2	180.636	.232	.793
	Latinos	132.376	2	66.188	.119	.888
	Asians	239.597	2	119.799	.228	.797
Participant Race * Narrative Type * Character Race	Arabs	1875.144	2	937.572	1.205	.303
	Latinos	1464.967	2	732.483	1.312	.273
	Asians	877.884	2	438.942	.834	.437
Error	Arabs	107353.960	138	777.927		
	Latinos	77038.504	138	558.250		
	Asians	72665.244	138	526.560		
Total	Arabs	793294.000	151			
	Latinos	920834.000	151			
	Asians	900433.000	151			
Corrected Total	Arabs	115856.940	150			
	Latinos	83565.550	150			
	Asians	81382.397	150			

a. R Squared = .073 (Adjusted R Squared = -.007)
b. R Squared = .078 (Adjusted R Squared = -.002)
c. R Squared = .107 (Adjusted R Squared = .029)

To evaluate boundary expansion and transportation on the relationship between exposure to the stimuli and participants' evaluations of racial groups, we conducted a series of moderation analyses using Model 2 of the PROCESS Macro by Hayes. First, an analysis of the relationship between narrative type and evaluations of Black people including boundary expansion and transportation as moderators. Narrative type was dummy coded such that the race centric conditions were coded as -0.5 and the race neutral conditions were coded as 0.5. The overall model was found to be significant ($F = 3.213$, $p = 0.008$) indicating that the predictors and their interactions explain a significant portion of the variance in feelings towards Black people. Narrative type had a positive but nonsignificant main effect on attitudes towards Black people (Effect = 12.963, $p = 0.1743$). Transportation was found to have significant main effects in the model (Effect = 1.7208, $p = 0.03$), indicating that participants who experienced higher transportation rated Black people more positively. The interaction effect of narrative type and transportation was also significant (Effect = 3.188, $p = 0.048$), showing that increased transportation has a positive effect on the relationship between narrative type and attitudes towards Black people. There were no significant main (Effect = 1.221, $p = 0.224$) or interaction (Effect = -2.017, $p = 0.247$) effects for boundary expansion.

The Model 2 PROCESS analysis was repeated with the independent variable of character race as the predictor variable in the model. Due to character race being a categorical variable with three levels, the model was repeated twice-more to accurately compare across variable levels; once to dummy code for the comparison between the two white characters condition (coded as -0.5) and the one white character and one black character condition (coded as +0.5), and once to dummy code for the comparison between the one White Character and one Black Character condition (coded as -0.5) and the two Black character condition (coded as +0.5). As

such, the one Black and one White character condition was included in both models to compare

the complete absence of a Black or White character to the condition where both are present.

Neither model was significant, nor did either model indicate moderation effects for boundary

expansion or transportation.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the concept of race neutral and race centric narratives in pieces of media with racial minorities. This exploration of narrative types in this manner revealed that participants were able to identify media as race centric regardless of the presence or absence of racial minority characters, and more importantly were able to recognize when narratives were race neutral despite the presence of racial minority characters.

H1: Race-neutral narratives with diverse casts will result in more positive evaluations of racial minority groups, and Black people specifically

Our hypothesis, H1, predicted that race-neutral narratives featuring diverse casts would lead to more positive evaluations of racial minority groups, particularly Black individuals. However, our findings did not support this hypothesis. There was no difference in attitudes towards Black people in the race-neutral narratives compared to the race centric condition. Similarly, there were no significant changes in attitudes towards other outgroups.

Interestingly, while analyzing Black participants independently, a pattern other than the one predicted emerged. Black participants gave Black people more positive evaluations on the feeling thermometer after exposure to the race neutral story with two black characters when compared to their evaluation after viewing the race centric story cast with the same two black characters. Thus, this suggests that the race neutral depiction likely impacts the depicted groups evaluation of their own ingroup.

Race-neutral narratives may have a more nuanced effect than initially expected, primarily for the depicted racial group. This could be because race neutral narratives may allow Black viewers to see their own racial group in a broader range of roles and contexts, which could lead to more positive self-perception and ingroup evaluation. The benefits of Black participants

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viewing Black characters in race-neutral narratives are significant. Black viewers likely do not see their own racial ingroup frequently in race neutral depictions due to the overall underrepresentation of minority actors in casting (Hunt & Ramon, 2022) and the limited roles they are permitted to hold (Dunn et al., 2021). These representations can serve as a powerful form of social validation and identity affirmation. However, the lack of overall effects on evaluations of Black people and racial minority groups, suggests that race neutral narratives with diverse casting may have limited effects on reducing racial bias targeted towards marginalized communities or improving intergroup evaluations.

H2: Race-neutral narratives displaying contact between two characters of differing racial groups; (i.e., one white character and one Black character.) will be most effective at reducing bias as a result of vicarious contact.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the race neutral condition that depicted an intergroup relationship between a Black and White character would be effective in garnering more positive evaluations of Black people in accordance with Mediated Contact theories. This lack of effect indicates that simply presenting interracial contact in a race-neutral narrative may not be sufficient to shift attitudes towards Black individuals. Our findings in this study did not appear to align with past research that suggests that depictions of positive intergroup contact in media improving intergroup attitudes. This could be due, in part, to the events that occur in the story depicting an interpersonal conflict between two individuals of different races.

H3: Boundary Expansion and Transportation will moderate effects of the narrative, such that viewers who are more transported and report greater boundary expansion will report more positive attitudes towards Black people.

Hypothesis H3 predicts that Boundary Expansion and Transportation will play a moderating role in evaluations of Black people. The moderation analyses revealed that neither boundary expansion nor transportation significantly moderated the relationship between character type and participants' evaluations of racial groups. Transportation did appear to significantly moderate the relationship between narrative type and evaluations of Black people. These findings suggest that while boundary expansion and transportation are both important factors in narrative engagement, only transportation appears to alter the effect of narrative type on participants' attitudes towards racial groups in this study. The hypothesis is only partially supported due to the moderating effect of transportation on the relationship between narrative type and attitudes towards Black people.

Although results did not show any significant main effects of race centric or race neutral media on attitudes towards racial groups, the prevalence of calls for race neutral media amongst Black film critics and scholars as highlighted in the literature review indicates that there is demand for these narratives. As highlighted in past researchers, the producers of media industry are often wary to cast actors of racial or ethnic minorities in race neutral productions for fear of white audiences feeling disengaged (Weaver, 2011; Dunn et al., 2021). The findings of this study are consistent with that of Weaver and suggests that transportation was not a significant covariate across conditions for White female audiences. Paired with the existing demand for an increase in race neutral depictions of racial minorities, and the potential appeal for minority audiences, it would not be harmful, and may be beneficial, for media companies to produce and release trace neutral media with diverse casts. Diversifying the media landscape in this manner appears not to negatively impact the engagement of White audience and may have an attracting appeal to non-White audiences.

Future Directions

  The present findings suggest evaluations of one's own group may be improved by viewing one's group in race neutral contexts. This may indicate an ability of race neutral depictions to increase self-esteem or feelings of elevation amongst members of the depicted group. Existing research of elevation after exposure to stereotypical and counter stereotypical media depictions indicate that viewers can feel emotional elevation as a result of viewing media related to race(Oliver et al., 2015; Ash, 2017) , however researchers have indicated that the research tends to focus on the responses of white audiences, and research assessing responses of racial minority audiences to depictions of their own groups remains limited (Schmader et al., 2015). Future research could further explore elevation and increased self-esteem as a result of viewing race neutral depictions of one's own minoritized or marginalized ingroup.

  This study focused on the effects of consuming a single short piece of media, however one's views and beliefs are based on years of experience and consumption of media (cite). Weaver has described that the scarcity of minority leads in race neutral stories results in differing expectations in viewers (Weaver, 2011) however, no investigation has been done to explore whether viewers who consume more race neutral media with minority casts hold different attitudes than viewers who consume more race neutral media with White casts or more race centric media. Past research has demonstrated that consistent exposure to certain genres or types of media can change views and beliefs (Parrott & Parrot, 2015; Hermann et al., 2021). Future research could explore whether cultivation effects exist.

  Exploring narratives that are neutral to minority identity could be valuable for understanding the broader impacts of media representation. Further exploration of the concepts of race centricity and race neutrality could be approached by evaluating the audience enjoyment

of and impact of popular race neutral stories with racially diverse casts. For example, an exploration of audience responses to the 2023 recreation of Disney classic The Little Mermaid which consisted of a racially diverse cast could allow for an understanding of the marketability of diverse, race neutral stories. Furthermore, this concept could be expanded to similarly explore degree of centrality of other group-based identities such as gender, sexuality, religious minorities (e.g., Muslim hijabis), and other minoritized or marginalized communities.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is the potential influence of pre-existing attitudes and biases that participants bring to the viewing experience. Findings suggest that participants' race was the primary determinant of their attitude towards racial groups, suggesting there may have been existing engrained attitudes regarding race. These pre-existing attitudes might have mitigated any potential impact of the narratives in this case. These results suggest that a measure of group attitudes may be needed both prior to and after exposure to stimulus to more accurately assess whether race neutral media is effective in changing outgroup attitudes.

Additionally, the context and content of the story used in this study could play a crucial role in shaping viewers' attitudes, which was not deeply explored in this study. An unresolved interpersonal conflict between the characters in the stimuli may be interpreted differently by different participants. Rich, qualitative investigations of the script themes and impact were not conducted in the present study.

Initial conceptualization of the present study hoped to directly test the mechanisms of decategorization and recategorization of Self Categorization Theory utilizing a modified version of the Inclusion of the Outgroup in the Self Scale (IOS), as a mediating factor between race neutral depictions of minority characters and attitudes towards racial groups. The scale was

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developed by Tropp and Wright to assess the level of self-categorization identity relying on the ingroup identity model (2001). This scale was to be used as a measure related to the Common Ingroup Identity Model, an extension to Self-Categorization Theory, which suggests that the flexibility of salient group identities can be harnessed to include the outgroup within a higher level ingroup (i.e. two individuals of different races can have the common ingroup of "American") can be used to mitigate negative outgroup effects (Gaertner, 2014). Using this foundation, the researchers wanted to assess whether the level of identity most salient to viewers was higher among diverse, race neutral conditions. Due to coding errors, the scale was unable to be used in analysis and the related mediated model was not tested. The researchers hope to conduct future research utilizing the stimuli created in the present study to evaluate the potential of decategorization or recategorization as a result of exposure to race neutral media.

The present study was conducted entirely online due to the benefits of online studies in their ability to collect more racially diverse samples than traditional college student sample pools. Despite the many advantages of online experiments, conducting a study entirely online has a number of disadvantages. The lack of a researcher present at the time of data collection can increase the chances of poor comprehension and attention (Peer et al.,2021) resulting in poor data quality (Decieux, 2022).

The present study also had limitations related to the demographic make-up of the sample. The sample of the present study only included female participants thus should not be generalized to other genders. The study should be repeated with a mixed gender sample or with an all-male participant sample and male stimuli in order to confirm generalizability of the findings in this study.

Limitations related to conceptualization of race also may impact the quality of our findings. While it is common and accepted practice in psychology and media research to treat race as a categorical variable, there are challenges in approaching race and ethnicity as a categorical variable rather than dimensional. While using categorical variables for race and ethnicity is a common and straightforward, and often necessary method, it fails to capture the full complexity and richness of these identities, such as intersectional identities (Phinney, 1996). Future research would benefit from adopting a dimensional approach, as suggested by Phinney and others, to better understand the multifaceted nature of racial and ethnic identity and its implications for individuals' experiences and behaviors.

Conclusion

The present study did not find that a race neutral narrative with minority characters effect explicit outgroup attitudes, however, it did reveal several findings of value. Pretesting of the stimulus created for this study indicates that it was perceived by viewers in the manner intended by the researchers. The effectiveness of these novel stimuli is beneficial for future research. These stimuli can be used and adjusted for future work that investigates the topic of race centricity in entertainment media. Manipulation checks during the creation of the stimulus as well as during the experiment indicated that the audience was able to distinguish, with consistency, whether the story was race centric or race neutral regardless of the racial make-up of the characters. This finding is important because it counters the assumption that audiences will automatically view a narrative through racial framing when racial minority characters are present. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate potential benefits of race neutral narratives around one's own racial group. This creates an avenue for future research on elevation, while also highlighting the social benefits of race neutral media. Overall, our study

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contributes to the ongoing conversation about the role of media in shaping social perceptions and highlights the potential benefits and limitations of race-neutral narratives in promoting diversity and inclusion. Further exploration and innovative approaches are necessary to harness the full potential of entertainment and narrative media as a tool to address intergroup bias.

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APPENDIX A: SCALES USED

Boundary Expansion Scale

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

0 = not at all to 10 = very much.

When you watched the story, did you experience…

1. …Relationships between people that are different from relationships in your life?

2. …What it might be like to relate others in ways different that you normally do yourself?

3. …Getting to know people you would never otherwise know?

4. …What it would be like to have skills and abilities that are different from your own?

5. …What it would be like to have emotional and interpersonal skills that are different from your own?

6. …Doing things the characters did, that you haven't done before?

7. …Being in a time or place other than where you are now?

8. …Facing situations and challenges other than those in your own life?

9. …What it was like to have someone else's thoughts and feelings?

10. …What it was like to be someone else (that is, one or more of the characters in the story)?

Note. Consists of dimensions of affiliation (items 1-3), agency (items 4-6), and autonomy (items 7-10) satisfaction.

Transportation Scale

Please answer the following questions regarding the clip that you just watched. Use a scale from -5 to +5 with -5 meaning "Strongly disagree" and +5 meaning "strongly agree".

1. I got mentally involved in the story.

2. I was emotionally affected by what I watched.

3. I identified with at least one character.

4. I found myself feeling what the characters may be feeling.

5. What I watched had an impact on the way I see things.

6. I sometimes felt as if I was part of the story.

Identification Scale

Reflect on [Character 1] in the story you just read. Express your level of agreement with the following statements

Scored 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

1. While reading the story, I felt as if I was part of the action.

2. While reading the story, I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.

3. I was able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar to that in which [Character 1] understood them.

4. I think I have a good understanding of [Character 1].

5. I tend to understand the reasons why [Character 1] does what they do.

6. While viewing the show I could feel the emotions [Character 1] portrayed

7. During viewing, I felt I could really get inside [Character 1]'s head.

8. While viewing the program, I wanted [Character 1] to succeed in achieving his or her goals.

9. When [Character 1] succeeded I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad.

Scale repeated for Character 2

Feeling Thermometer

Please rate how you feel about each of the following groups on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 meaning "strongly dislike" and 100 meaning "strongly like".

1. Arabs

2. Latinos

3. Illegal immigrants

4. Atheists

5. Women

6. Asians

7. Women

8. White

9. College Students

10. Black

Parasocial Relationship and Interaction Scale

Using a scale from -5 to +5 with -5 meaning "Strongly disagree" and +5 meaning "strongly agree".

Rate your level of agreement with the statements below:

1. I like to imagine my favorite TV show or movie characters as people I know personally.

2. I often feel like characters from my favorite TV shows or movies are people I know and care about.

3. I like to talk to others about what my favorite TV show or movie characters are like as people.

4. I like to imagine my favorite actors or actresses as people I know personally.

5. I sometimes imagine my favorite actors or actresses as my friends or romantic partners in the setting of the TV show or movie.

6. I like to talk to others about what my favorite actors or actresses are like as people.

7. imagined you were one of the characters in the story, but having different interactions or having different experiences than actually happened in the story you saw

8. imagined that you were one of the characters from the story as you went about some activity from your own life

9. imagined a character from one show that you watch in a different setting than that TV show or movie (e.g., such as in another TV show or movie or in actual life)?

10. imagined having conversations or other interactions with the characters in a show or movie?

Pretest Images

Figure 3
Images used in character pretest

Black Characters					
Black Male 1	Black Male 2	Black Male 3	Black Male 4	Black Male 5	Black Male 6
Black Female 1	Black Female 2	Black Female 3	Black Female 4	Black Female 5	Black Female 6
White Characters					
White Male 1	White Male 2	White Male 3	White Male 4	White Male 5	White Male 6
White Female 1	White Female 2	White Female 3	White Female 4	White Female 5	White Female 6

Note. Figure depicts images of AI generated, Black and White, college-aged individuals generated using Midjourney AI.

Script

This is a story about two people who once were friends but split apart by how different they have become.

Fade in on freeze frame of two college students, one in a campus lounge, the other in a recording booth

Believe it or not, these two used to be best friends. The cranky looking one on the right is Bianca/Ryan: intense, driven, and haunted by a past that she/ he won't even let herself process. The frustrated looking one on the left is Grace/Alex: desperate, eager to please, and so lonely that her/his need for attention will suffocate you from ten feet away. Grace/Alex is sitting with their popular, but somewhat shallow friends in a campus lounge, while Bianca is busy working on their popular-- yet controversial -- podcast about the university's failure to confront racism on campus (podcast about the university's failure to confront the climate crisis).

Zoom in on Grace's side of the screen

Grace/Alex has been simmering for ages over what she/he has dubbed to be Bianca's /Ryan's "faux-revolutionary, reactionary drivel". How could she/he continue to prioritize this thing she/he has no control of over her/his real tangible friendships?

Zoom back out and zoom in on Bianca's side of the screen

But Grace/Alex is not the only one who has reached their limit; After many years of fighting for racial justice/ environmental justice, Bianca/Ryan has become fed up with her/his once good friend Grace's/Alex's comfort with the status quo. And fed up with the shallow friend group Grace/Alex has surrounded herself with.

These two former friends have repeatedly found themselves at odds, wondering how they ever managed to get along in the first place.

To understand the ideological chasm gaping between them, though, we need to rewind a couple of years to that fateful day when they met... Let's take a glimpse into the start of their now broken friendship, starting with their first day of college.

Rewinding sound effect and visuals, etc., and we drop into a dorm room.

Welcome to Carter Hall! Bianca/Ryan is on the right again. Her/his comfort with her/his identity and purpose have had some drastic swings over the last few years, but she/he has a feeling that she/he is about to find her/his place.

Grace/Alex is on the left again. She/he is also ready for a fresh new start: Goodbye cringing in the shadows at the edge of the in-group, hello friends, and parties, and friends, and rush week, and did I mention friends?

Grace/Alex is wearing the most expensive set of clothes she's/he's ever owned and is trying to act like she/he wears clothes like this every day. She/he moves carefully to make sure she/he doesn't pop the tags she/he tactfully tucked away. As she/he paces she/he is muttering to herself/himself over the fact that she/he was assigned the one dorm building she/he wanted least

"I literally crossed Carter Hall out on my registration form, how did this happen?" She/he says under her/his breath looking frustratedly at her/his welcome packet.

Bianca/Ryan, on the other hand, was overjoyed at being assigned to the historically black dorm/ historic dorm. Lost in her excitement, she walks right into Grace/ Alex.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry!" Bianca/Ryan exclaims "Hi I'm Bianca/Ryan!" She/he glances down at the packet in Grace's/ Alex's hands "We're you assigned to Carter Hall too?"

Unenthused Grace/Alex responds, "It seems that way" She/he plasters on a smile deciding to make the best out of the situation "Hi, I'm Grace/ Alex. Nice to meet you!"

The two quickly hit it off despite the fact that Grace/ Alex seems to dislike the assigned dorm building. The two compare their welcome packets. "It looks like we're going to be roommates" Exclaims Bianca/ Ryan

"Well, that helps redeem this dorm assignment slightly" says Grace/ Alex "but I was really hoping for Hawkins Hall"

Bianca attempts to comfort Grace/ Alex "Don't worry I hear this place is great, full of life and culture. You'll love it I promise!"

Fade out

Fade in on dining hall

While Bianca/Ryan is lamenting about the curriculum of one their classes being far to focused on the white perspective/ male perspective/ industry perspective, Grace is lamenting about their lack of popularity and social clout and wanting to join a sorority/fraternity.

"I mean look at them" Grace/Alex nods over to the table of attractive Pi Pi Psi sorority girls/ fraternity boys "men/women are hanging on their every word" Grace/Alex says "we are far too smart and attractive to still be sitting by ourselves this far into the semester" Bianca/Ryan seems uninterested and her/his gaze drifts across the room.

"Oh look, they're from the Black Student Union (The Coalition Against Misogyny/ Sunrise

Movement, that environmental organization)" Bianca/Ryan says excitedly as a group of students

walk into the hall "We could go sit with them!"

The two walk over to try and be social but immediately the group put bags and jackets in the

spare chairs "Sorry, this table is reserved for members only" the president says as the remaining

members rudely wave Grace and Bianca away/ Alex and Ryan away.

"Ugh, this is a bust." Grace/Alex says as the two sheepishly walk out the dining hall "why don't

you join me tonight to try to meet people at the Midsummer Night's Dream party"

"Oh my god, you mean that party where you try to find another freshman to screw in the middle

of the quad." Bianca/Ryan laughs

"You kiss them! The screwing in the quad party is next month" Grace/ Alex jokes back "Come

on, join! All the coolest people on campus go"

"I think I will pass, not my thing. But you have fun!"

Cut to Grace and friends on the quad

Grace/Alex has high hopes for the Midsummer Night's Dream party. Finally this is a chance not

only to meet people, but to prove to everyone (and herself/ and himself) that she/he is desirable,

a hottie… whatever the kids are saying these days.

Quick montage showing Grace's friends walking away with girls, one after the other until Grace

is sitting alone.

But to her/his dismay, she/he found herself/ himself once again alone. She/he felt suddenly so

exposed, like she/he was back in middle school and all eyes were on her/he. Grace/ Alex jumps

up to rush home, desperate to make sure no one else sees her/him undesirable, rejected, and

alone.

Cut to dorm at Carter Hall

"Worst night ever" Grace/Alex mutters as she walks through the door.

"I know, I can't stop reading about it" Responds Bianca/Ryan, whose face is buried in her/his

phone.

Grace/ Alex is filled with sudden overwhelming confusion and fear. Was it possible that people

were already talking about the humiliation she/he just endured at the Midsummer Night's Dream

party. "People are talking about it already?" She/he asks in disbelief

As Grace/ Alex moves closer to Bianca/ Ryan she/he hears the muffled sounds of a news report

coming out of the phone. It becomes clear that Bianca/Ryan was referring to the newest police

brutality incident that resulted in the murder of a local unarmed black man (was referring to a

new incident of a local woman being murdered by her boyfriend for trying to leave him /was

referring to a local climate activist who was attacked and murdered while protesting). Grace's/

Alex's concerns about the party now seemed trivial.

The frustration and sadness is apparent on Bianca's/ Ryan's face "It's a tragedy… they didn't

deserve to die…" She/he has always been a bleeding heart but this incident hit particularly close

to home.

"Ugh, can you turn that news off." Grace/ Alex on the other hand, has long been numb to the tragedies of the world "I hate hearing about this stuff"

"No, we have to stay aware of injustice" Bianca/Ryan leaves the coverage on, eyes glued to the phone screen

"It's not like we can do anything about it, though" scoffs Grace/ Alex as she settles into bed

Lights are turned out scene cuts to black

The following morning Grace/ Alex begrudgingly agrees to go to a club meeting with Bianca/ Ryan for the Black Student Union/ the Coalition Against Misogyny/ the Sunrise Movement.

Fade in on a conference room with many students at a round table

As members passionately discuss a sit-in at the University president's office, Grace/ Alex is skeptical

"These people have convinced themselves that a sleepover in the president's office is going to help anyone" she whispers to Bianca/ Ryan.

"How do you know it won't" Bianca/ Ryan timidly stands up and addresses the room "Hi, I just wanted to say these things happen way too often. Kids here don't think things like this have anything to do with them. But, as hopeless as it seems, we have a responsibility to make them see it does."

People murmur in agreement.

Fade to hallway in Carter Hall

"It's still not gonna change anything" Grace/Alex mutters to Bianca/Ryan as they walk down the hall together

"I wish you would stop saying that" Bianca/Ryan begins to argue before they are stopped by a group of Pi Pi Psi sisters/brothers stepping in their path

"Wow! That was quite the speech" the chapter president says to Bianca/Ryan "you should definitely come check out our sorority/ fraternity, rush starts soon, and we could always use motivated, bright people like yourselves." She/he hands Bianca/Ryan and Grace/Alex each a flier and walks of.

The two exchange a glance "No" Bianca/Ryan says pointedly to Grace/Alex.

"Why not?!" Grace/Alex responds "This will open so many doors for us! And besides, haven't you seen how men/women basically worship them? Whatever voodoo shit they do to make that happen, I want in."

Grace's/ Alex's excitement sways Bianca/Ryan "Fine. I'll give it a shot, but I don't promise I'll like it."

"Yes! Dynamic duo at Pi Pi Psi!"

Cut to their dorm room the night before the first Pi Pi Psi meeting

Grace/Alex tries on a series of new outfits and repeatedly fixes her/his hair in the mirror. Bianca/ Ryan doesn't like how Grace/Alex is trying so hard to change themselves to fit into the sorority/fraternity, and why should she/he, her/his friend should not feel the need to become someone else.

"This new look will change. My. Life." Grace/Alex says admiring herself/himself in the mirror

"Man you need to relax," Bianca/Ryan crosses over to stand next to Grace/Alex in front of the mirror "stop stressing so much about what other people think"

"I won't have to once I get into the sorority/fraternity" She/he strikes a pose in the mirror " and I just know this will get people's attention"

"Chill" Bianca/Ryan laughs "I know what will get your mind off all this popularity stuff"

Bianca/Ryan pulls out a joint out of their jacket pocket

Cut to the two laying on the ground with smoke swirling around them

Laughing together hysterically, they don't realize that this will be the last time they really get along…

"Look... maybe you don't have to come with me to Pi Pi Psi. I know you're not into that stuff." Grace/Ryan says between one of their fits of laughter "How about you just do your thing, and I'll just do my thing, and we'll just make sure to hang out and study together and watch movies and everything when we're not doing club and sorority things."

Bianca/Ryan is caught of guard by this declaration of independence "But... will we still have time to hang out? It would suck if we...you know, didn't."

"We can do it! We're the dynamic duo, remember?" Grace/Alex reassures her/him "If any friendship can survive a sorority/fraternity and a club in one piece, it's ours."

Ah, the innocence of youth… Well, you can imagine what happens next. Bianca/Ryan dives into the world of fighting racial injustice/ environmental injustice, and Grace/Alex rushes Pi Pi Psi, an equally noble cause in her/his eyes. As they get more invested in their organizations, they seem to have less time, and less tolerance, for each other.

3 weeks later

"You really should join Bianca" Grace has now gotten into the habit of rambling about their involvement in the sorority over the course of weeks of pledging "We do so much for the Black community and disadvantaged Black youth/ the community and disadvantaged youth."

Bianca rolls her eyes "I already do all that with the Black Student Union/ the Sunrise movement, and without adhering to regressive gender roles"

"Ugh, enough. I don't need another one of your lectures" Grace/Alex moans

"Not to mention all the fees and the pledging" before Bianca/Ryan can continue, Grace/Alex interjects

"What is the fee to get you to shut the fuck up" Grace storms out and goes to join her line sisters/ his line brothers

Grace/Alex looks over and sees Bianca/Ryan head over to join a group of people in the Black Student Union/The Sunrise Movement.

For some time, Grace/Alex and Bianca/Ryan would hardly see each other. Each one busy with their own groups, each one too stubborn to try and understand the other. Unspoken, but mutually understood coldness continues to grow between them. All this tension comes to a head when

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Grace's sorority wanted to book the same ballroom as the Black Student Union/ The Coalition Against Misogyny/ The Sunrise Movement. Bianca/Ryan may have booked the room for a fundraiser weeks ago, but not securing this SPECIFIC ballroom will mean the end of the world for Grace/Alex.

"Why can't you find another venue Grace/Alex?" Bianca/Ryan says, dismissing Grace's/Alex's pleas for her/him to change venues "we already sold a bunch of tickets for the fundraiser"

"Bianca/Ryan, please. I am begging you. The sisters/brothers will have my head if I don't get this room for the alumni lunch" Grace/Alex grovels "You have to understand, Bianca/Ryan, the place and the time are, like, seriously important. The Pi Pi Psi and Pie Party has been held in the Grand Ballroom on the 21st at 7pm for, like, fourteen years."

"Look my hands are tied, why don't you have your alumni lunch somewhere else. We are actually trying to make a difference with our event" Bianca/Ryan retorts with a snarky tone "Not some silly 'pie party'"

"We?" says Grace/Alex "Just a few months ago they weren't even letting you sit with them. Now you're a 'we'? You've changed and I am not liking this new you"

"I've changed? Look at you! Obsessed with your hair and clothes, changing yourself for some shallow-ass sorority/Fraternity" Bianca/Ryan gestures up and down at Grace/Alex "maybe I have changed but at least I changed for the better. I care about helping others."

"You're doing this for you, not for the world! I'm here, asking for your help, and you do nothing but judge me. You're selfish and I don't want to live with you anymore" This utterance became proverbial nail in the coffin of their friendship. Bianca's/Ryan's silence is almost tangible. "You

want to be a freedom fighter? Fine. Go ahead. But newsflash, no one in this school gives a fuck, you're wasting your time. And mine."

Grace/Alex slams the door behind her.

Grace/Alex walks down a hall to go explain the events that just happened to her sorority sisters/his fraternity brothers. She/he might not have the ballroom yet, but she'll/he'll make damn sure she/he gets it. Oh, the respect they'll heap upon her/him when they learned of the gallant battle she's/ he's waged on their behalf! The attention! As Grace/Alex goes to open the door to inform her sisters/ his brothers that they will not be getting the venue, she/he overhears them talking about her/him.

"That Grace/Alex kid… she/he is so fake"

"I know, I wish we got that Bianca girl/ Ryan guy. She's/He's going places"

And just like that something inside Grace/Alex snaps. She/he boils with rage and throws the door open.

"You got some nerve! Sisterhood/Brotherhood, huh? Well if you all were not legacy you would all be flight attendants on Spirit Airlines. I quit, take your stupid pin. Oh, and by the way Stacey, Mike left you because you smell like musty socks (Oh, and by the way Mike, Stacey left you because you smell like musty socks)"

Grace/Alex breathes a sign of relief as she/he walks out of the room. It's a new feeling for her/him, both being alone but feeling free of the pressures and expectations of perfection. She/ he can't forgive Bianca/Ryan, but finally she/he can find her/his own way.

Present day side by side view of Grace and Bianca in separate rooms

Do both Grace/Alex and Bianca/Ryan feel the twingiest twinge of regret about the things they have said and done? Yes. They do. But neither of them are one to admit wrongdoing.

You may be comforted to know, despite being leagues apart, both Bianca/Ryan and Grace/Alex got exactly what they wanted. Bianca/Ryan has finally settled in her/his identity. As the new president of the Black Student Union/ The Coalition Against Misogyny/ The Sunrise Movement she/he finally feels like she/he has found her/his place in the world, and what she/he was meant to do. Grace/Alex never did rush again, she/he no longer feels the need. Settled into a friend group, with an invitation to an exclusive party, she/he has the social acceptance she/he always craved.

APPENDIX C: FINAL STUMULI

Video Stimuli

Summary. These videos follow two female college roommates who stop being friends because of disagreements around political activism and desire for social connectedness.

Video 1:

- **Condition:** Black Characters Race Centric
- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds
- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/BF_Race_Centric_short/1_rwv2unwt

Video 2:

- **Condition:** White Characters Race Centric
- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds
- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/WF_Race_Centric_Short/1_dsafti69

Video 3:

- **Condition:** Mixed Characters Race Centric
- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds
- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/MixF_Race_Centric_Short/1_b7gerswk

Video 4:

- **Condition:** Black Characters Race Neutral
- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds
- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/BF_Race_Neutral_Short/1_fd1r8i0t

Video 5:

- **Condition:** White Characters Race Neutral

- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds

- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/WF_Race_Neutral_Short/1_r6kxs0kt

Video 6:

- **Condition:** White Characters Race Neutral

- **Duration:** 13 minutes, 51 seconds

- **Link:** https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/MixF_Race_Neutral_Short.mp4/1_ibzvsujk