

Black and White Viewers' Perception and Recall of Occupational Characters on Television

By Osei Appiah

This study examined the differences in how Black and White viewers process messages based on the race of television characters representing 5 occupations. Black and White male viewers were exposed to either 5 Black or 5 White male television characters representing 5 different occupations (i.e., lawyer, doctor, professor, engineer, and business student). Findings from 81 male Black and White college students suggest that Black viewers have better recall of Black occupational characters on television than they do White occupational characters on television. Unexpectedly, the results show evidence that both Black and White viewers' perceptions of occupational characters were positively affected by the race of the Black character. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

Viewers' perceived similarity to a source is a critical determinant of message effectiveness (Basow & Howe, 1980; Feick & Higie, 1992), and cues that suggest that the source of a message is similar to the viewer is one of the most frequently used targeting devices (Basil, 1993; Pitts, Whalen, O'Keefe, & Murray, 1989). More and more marketers are targeting audiences with specific characteristics to increase message effectiveness (Basil, 1993).

Race of the model is an important and particularly salient cue with which a same-race viewer is most likely to identify (Whittler, 1989, 1991), particularly when the individual's ethnic group is part of a numeric minority (Aaker, Brumbaugh, & Grier, 2000; Deshpande & Stayman, 1994; McGuire, 1984). For Black viewers, for instance, skin color is an essential characteristic that facilitates identification. Television programs that contain Black characters may, therefore, strengthen Black viewers' attention and identification.

Research examining the effects of a model's race on White audiences' responses to media has not provided definitive conclusions. Although much of the research

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suggests that race of the model makes no difference for White viewers (Appiah, 2001a, 2001b; Bush, Hair, & Solomon, 1979; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972; Whittler, 1989), a body of research indicates that White respondents evaluate media with White models more favorably than they do with Black models (Block, 1972; Muse, 1971; Qualls & Moore, 1990).

The literature in this area seems to take for granted or completely ignore theoretical explanations of why race should make a difference in how viewers respond to media messages. This article provides a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and psychological mechanisms at work when viewers are exposed to Black and White models on television.

Theoretical Framework

Identification Theory

Identification theory (Kelman, 1961) maintains that people automatically assess their level of similarity with a source during an interaction and make similarity judgments (Hovland & Weis, 1951; Kelman, 1961). This process drives individuals to choose models based on perceived similarities between themselves and the model (Basow & Howe, 1980; Kelman, 1961). When viewers perceive that the source possesses characteristics, such as race, similar to their own, they begin to infer that the source will also share other characteristics, all of which lead to greater identification (Feick & Higie, 1992). Studies have shown that individuals who are more likely to identify with television characters are more affected by the media content in which those characters are engaged (Huesman, Eron, Klein, Brice, & Fischer, 1983).

Viewers who do not identify with television models based on race (i.e., skin color) may identify with other characteristics that the model possesses. Identification often occurs when individuals infer that their tastes and preferences are similar to those of the source (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978). Evidence shows that Whites are more attracted to Blacks with beliefs, values, and personalities similar to their own than they are to Whites who are different with respect to the same characteristics (Smedley & Bayton, 1978). White viewers may use occupational status or social class cues rather than racial cues to determine perceived similarity between themselves and a source. In fact, researchers (Coleman, Jussim, & Kelley, 1995) argue that characteristics such as personal appearance, dialect style, and SES have a greater impact on Whites' evaluations of a source than does the race of a source. In support, studies on race-class stereotypes reveal that the dominant criterion used by White subjects to evaluate people is occupational (Feldman, 1972) or social class status (Smedley & Bayton, 1978) and not race. For example, Smedley and Bayton discovered that White subjects rate middle-class Blacks and Whites equally favorably and rate lower-class Whites and Blacks equally less favorably. Similarly, Jackson, Hymes, and Sullivan (1987) found that when evaluating law school applicants, White subjects evaluated both White and Black applicants equally favorably.

White viewers are also likely to identify with and imitate attitudes or behaviors of Black models because the models are in a particular social group (e.g., doctor, lawyer, athlete) to which they aspire (see reference group theory, Siegel & Siegel, 1957) or the models are perceived to possess admirable qualities such as being cool, hip, musical, athletic, and fashionable. The simple presence of Black television characters may invoke certain race-based stereotypes that characterize Blacks as athletic and musical, as evidenced by research that shows White people perceive Blacks as more athletic, musical, and well-dressed than Whites (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Feldman, 1972; Plous & Williams, 1995).

By and large, Black viewers also choose models in the media when they observe some commonalities with these models. Unlike Whites, the most striking commonality for Blacks is often a physical attribute like skin color, as evidenced by research that shows Blacks use race as their primary criterion to evaluate people (Smedley & Bayton, 1978). Race of a source is especially significant for Blacks who are particularly concerned with racial issues and for whom racial identity is central to their self-concept.

Distinctiveness Theory

Distinctiveness theory suggests that a person's own distinctive traits (e.g., African American, red-headed, left-handed) will be more salient to him or her than more prevalent traits (e.g., Caucasian, brunette, right-handed) possessed by other people in his or her environment (McGuire, 1984; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). The theory predicts that ethnicity will be more salient for people whose ethnic group is part of a numeric minority in a social environment than it will be for members of an ethnic majority in a particular social environment. Black people, for instance, are a numeric minority in the United States and in the media. As a result, they should be highly aware and mindful of their race in personal and mediated situations.

Given their absence in social and mediated environments, Blacks are particularly mindful of their ethnicity. However, for Whites, their ethnicity is not readily available in their self-concept and is unlikely to grow in importance until they are no longer in the majority in specific settings (Phinney, 1992). As a given ethnic group becomes numerically more dominant in a social environment, ethnicity becomes progressively less salient in the self-concept of its members (McGuire et al., 1978). This is evident by research that shows majority Whites are significantly less likely than minority Blacks and Hispanics to mention their ethnicity when asked to define themselves (McGuire et al., 1978; Phinney, 1992). In fact, altering a White or Black person's social environment such that different physical characteristics become distinctive will lead to a change in a person's self-concept (McGuire et al., 1978). As McGuire and colleagues indicated, a Black woman in a large group of White women will be acutely aware of her race. When the same Black woman moves to a large group of Black men, her Blackness loses salience and she becomes more conscious of being a woman. Similarly, a White man entering a room full of Black men suddenly becomes mindful of his Whiteness. However, when the same White man enters a room full of White women, he is more conscious of his gender and not his ethnicity.

Studies examining ethnic minority groups' responses to mass communication support distinctiveness theory. Deshpande and Stayman (1994) found that Hispanic Americans living in Austin (where they are an ethnic minority) were more likely to believe that a Hispanic spokesperson was trustworthy than those Hispanics living in San Antonio (where they are an ethnic majority). Similarly, Aaker and colleagues (2000) found that Blacks (a minority group) had more favorable attitudes toward an ad featuring Black characters than Whites (a majority group) had toward an advertisement featuring White characters. These findings lend support to distinctiveness theory, which posits that media targeting White or Black audiences will be more effective when the racial group is a numeric minority (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994).

This discussion leads to the overall expectation that Black viewers' perceptions and recall will be more strongly affected by the race of the occupational characters than their White counterparts. More specifically:

H1: Black viewers—as members of a minority and distinctive group—will perceive Black television models posing in different occupations more favorably than they will White models posing in the same occupations.

H2: Black viewers—as members of a minority and distinctive group—will recall significantly more information from Black models posing in different occupations than they will from White models posing in the same occupations.

H3: White viewers—as members of a majority and nondistinctive group—will show no difference in their perception or recall of television models based on the race of the model.

Method

Subjects and Design

Eighty-one male Stanford University students (43 Black students, 38 White students, including 5 graduate students) participated in this study. Male subjects were used to control for known gender differences in response to media (Gould, 1987). They were recruited from courses in the Department of Communication and voluntarily participated in the study to fulfill a course requirement. The undergraduate students were communication majors or minors, and the graduate students were master's candidates in communication. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 31 (mean, 22).

A 2 (character's race: Black or White) x 2 (participant's race: Black or White) between-subjects design was used. The two primary independent variables were viewer's race and model's race. The dependent variables were perception of characters and amount of information recalled.

Stimulus Materials

Each participant was randomly assigned to watch either a videotape with Black characters or a videotape with White characters. The first videotape showed five Black male models from five different occupations, dressed in attire that repre-

sented their particular occupations (i.e., business student, lawyer, professor, doctor, engineer). The second videotape showed five White male models from the same five occupations, dressed in the same attire as the Black models depicted in the first videotape. Each video opened with all five characters facing the screen and lined up from left to right against a White backdrop. Beginning from left to right (and while standing) each character introduced himself, gave a brief explanation of his occupation, and mentioned something of personal interest. Each videotape presented the occupational characters in the following order: business student, lawyer, professor, doctor, and engineer. The characters recited this script:

Business student: Hi, my name is Todd. I am a student in the business school at Duke. After receiving my MBA in May, my wife and I plan to move to Atlanta, where I hope to work as a financial analyst for J. P. Morgan.

Lawyer: Hi, my name is Cecil. I am a corporate lawyer at the law firm Jones, Jones, and Johnson. Our biggest clients include Xerox, IBM, and Nissan. When I am not working I enjoy playing basketball with friends, and brewing my own beer.

Professor: Hi, I'm John. I am a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University. I teach courses in African societies and human origins. I enjoy traveling and meeting people from different countries, in fact, I am planning a trip to South Africa next fall.

Doctor: Hi, I'm Dr. James. I'm a pediatrician. I work at the UCLA Medical Center, where on a typical day I have about 40 patients. I am a major contributor to the Make a Wish Foundation, which grants wishes to terminally ill children.

Mechanical Engineer: Hi, my name is Walter. I am a mechanical engineer for Ford Motor Company in Detroit, MI. I enjoy going to jazz clubs and spending time with my two daughters.

Procedure

Each subject participated individually in a small classroom located in the Department of Communication. Participants were seated in front of a television monitor and asked to view a short 1-minute video that contained five people from five different occupations, then complete a questionnaire that pertained to the video. Prior to watching the video, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to learn about college students' career goals and their perceptions of certain occupations. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and told to place the completed questionnaire in a pile with other questionnaires. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to identify the racial or ethnic group with which they most closely identified. Participants who did not identify themselves as either Black or White (15 subjects) were excluded from further analysis. Eighty-one total participants qualified for and were included in the final analysis.

Instrument

The questionnaire assessed aided recall of specific visual and verbal aspects from the five models present in each video. A number of studies have used verbal and visual stimuli to measure recall (Choundhury & Schmid, 1974; Hunt & Mitchell, 1978; Light, Kayra-Stuart, & Hollander, 1979). Aided or cued recall is a commonly used technique in media research (e.g., Beattie & Mitchell, 1985; Gunter, Furnham, & Frost, 1994) and is mentioned as an effective way to measure attention and comprehension of specific media (Beattie & Mitchell, 1985).

The recall procedure used in this study was modeled after that used by Gunter and colleagues (1994). This procedure cued subjects with verbal and nonverbal aspects of the stimuli to probe recall of media content. Subjects were asked five recall questions for each model in the video. There were 25 questions in total that assessed aided recall of the five occupational characters. Participants were given one point for a correct reply and zero points for an incorrect answer. Thus, a total score of 25 points could be achieved.

Six indexes were created to measure viewers' recall of lawyers, doctors, professors, engineers, business students, and overall recall of all five models. The first index was developed to measure viewers' recall of doctors based on their responses to the five questions specific to the doctor. Responses to these five questions were summed to produce one recall index for doctor. This same method was used to develop recall indexes for each of the four other occupations: lawyer, professor, engineer, and business student. Lastly, recall scores from all five occupational characters were summed to produce an aggregate recall index.

After each set of recall questions for each occupational character, participants were asked to give their perception of the occupational character based on four traits: good, successful, intelligent, hardworking. These are traits Blacks and Whites frequently use in describing Blacks and Whites (Devine & Elliot, 1995), particularly in an occupational context (Coleman et al., 1995). These traits have been used in numerous studies to measure racial perceptions (e.g., Davis & Smith, 1990; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997). Each of the four traits measured viewers' perception of each model on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). The questions included these: "How good of an engineer is Walter?" "How successful will Walter be as an engineer?" "How hard do you think Walter had to work to become an engineer?" "How intelligent is Walter?" These questions were also used for the doctor: "How good of a doctor is Dr. James?" "How successful will he be as a doctor?" "How hard do you think Dr. James had to work to become a doctor?" "How intelligent is Dr. James?" These same four questions were repeated for the lawyer, professor, and business student.

Five scales were created to measure viewers' overall perception of each occupational character. That is, one perception scale was created for each of the five occupational characters by averaging the mean scores from the four perception items: good, successful, intelligent, hardworking. Cronbach's alphas were computed to obtain internal consistency estimates of reliability for all five perception scales. The Cronbach's alpha for the first scale, Perception of Lawyers, was .85. The alphas for the Perception of Doctors, Perception of Professors, Perception of Engineers, and Perception of Business Students scales were .88, .83, .87, and .84,

Table 1. Analysis of Variance for Race of Viewer and Race of Character on Perceptions of Character

	All characters		Lawyers		Doctors	
	df	F	df	F	df	F
Source of variance						
Viewer race (V)	1, 68	3.27	1, 71	1.43	1, 73	2.5
Character race (C)	1, 68	13.46***	1, 71	11.92***	1, 73	13.43***
V x C	1, 68	2.09	1, 71	0.27	1, 73	0.90
Within-group error	(.35)		(.54)		(.51)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

*** $p < .001$.

respectively. The alphas for these scales exceeded the recommended levels of .60 (Nunally, 1978), providing evidence that these measures possessed sufficient reliability to warrant further analysis. These five scales were then aggregated to create an Overall Character Perception scale, that is, the mean perception scores from the five scales were summed and divided by five to produce an aggregate perception scale ($\alpha = .90$).

Two different versions of the questionnaire were used. One version asked the subjects to recall information from the characters in the following order: lawyer, doctor, professor, engineer, and business student. The second version of the questionnaire reversed the character order. This was done to control for differences in recall based on the order in which subjects were asked to recall characters. No recall differences were found based on the presentation order of characters on the questionnaire.

Results

The results of the experiment are presented and discussed according to the hypotheses presented earlier. A series of two-way analyses of variance for all hypotheses is provided below with follow-up analyses conducted to examine significant findings. The same analyses were conducted for both dependent variables. Estimates of the proportion of variance and statistical power are reported. Using Cohen's (1988) guidelines for detecting small, medium, and large power estimates, I determined that the power estimates for the data that did not achieve conventional levels of significance fell within the small range.

Perception of Occupational TV Characters

Overall perception of all characters. The mean perception scores from all five occupational characters were summed and divided by five to produce an

Table 2. Analysis of Variance for Race of Viewer and Race of Character on Perceptions of Character Attributes

	Professors		Engineers		Business students	
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
Source of variance						
Viewer race (V)	1, 72	1.30	1, 70	4.40*	1, 72	1.30
Character race (C)	1, 72	8.36**	1, 70	11.32***	1, 72	10.95***
V x C	1, 72	3.06	1, 70	1.10	1, 72	3.45
Within-group error	(.50)		(.44)		(.55)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

aggregate perception scale. It was predicted that Black viewers would perceive Black models more favorably than they would White models, and White viewers' perceptions of occupational characters would not be affected by the race of the model. This same pattern was expected for each of the five occupational characters.

Table 1 indicates no significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race but a significant main effect for characters' race, $F(1, 68) = 13.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$, and a marginally significant main effect for viewers' race, $F(1, 68) = 3.27, p < .10, \eta^2 = .04, \text{power} = .43$. The character race main effect indicated that all viewers perceived Black occupational characters more favorably ($M = 4.76; SD = .11$) than the White occupational characters ($M = 4.23, SD = .09$). The subject race main effect indicated that Black viewers perceived all characters more favorably ($M = 4.63, SD = .10$) than the White viewers ($M = 4.37, SD = .11$). These results indicate that both Black and White viewers' perceptions of occupational characters were more positively affected by the race of the Black characters than they were the race of the White characters. These findings do not support the hypothesis that only Black viewers' perceptions would be affected by the race of the characters. This pattern of results was replicated for the lawyer, doctor, professor, engineer, and business student.

Overall perception of lawyers. The analysis shown in Table 1 indicates no significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race but a significant main effect for characters' race, $F(1, 71) = 11.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$. The character race main effect indicated that all viewers perceived the Black lawyer more favorably ($M = 4.63; SD = .14$) than the White lawyer ($M = 4.02; SD = .11$). Unexpectedly, both Black and White viewers' perceptions of lawyers were more positively affected by the race of the Black lawyer. These results do not support the hypothesis that only Black viewers' perceptions of lawyers would be affected by the race of the lawyer.

Overall perception of doctors. There was no significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race but a significant main effect was found for

Table 3. Means for Viewers' Perceptions of Occupational Television Characters

	White viewers		Black viewers	
	White character	Black character	White character	Black character
Perception of all characters	4.20	4.53	4.26	4.99
Overall lawyer perception	3.86	4.56	4.16	4.68
Overall doctor perception	4.53	4.98	4.64	5.40
Overall professor perception	4.33	4.52	4.23	5.00***
Overall engineer perception	4.10	4.46	4.26	4.96
Overall student perception	4.16	4.41	4.03	4.93***

Note. Within the Black viewers category, asterisks refer to mean pairs that are significantly different based on one-way analysis of variance, $N = 81$.

*** $p < .001$.

characters' race, $F(1, 73) = 13.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$). The character race main effect indicated that all viewers' perceived the Black television doctor more favorably ($M = 5.19$; $SD = .13$) than the White television doctor ($M = 4.59$, $SD = .11$). Again, both Black and White viewers' perceptions were positively affected by the race of the Black character. These results do not support the hypothesis that only Black viewers' perceptions of doctors would be affected by the race of the doctor.

Overall perception of professors. A marginally significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race, $F(1, 72) = 3.06$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .04$, power = .41, was found (see Table 2). Further examination of the means (see Table 3) showed that Black viewers perceived the Black professor more favorably ($M = 5.00$, $SD = .49$) than they did the White professor, $M = 4.23$, $SD = .79$; $F(1, 39) = 13.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$. These results marginally support the hypothesis that Black viewers' perceptions would be more positively affected by the Black professor than they would the White professor.

Overall perception of engineers. No significant interaction was found between characters' race and viewers' race, but significant main effects were found for characters' race, $F(1, 70) = 11.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, and viewers' race, $F(1, 70) = 4.40$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. The character race main effect indicated that all viewers perceived the Black engineer more favorably ($M = 4.71$; $SD = .12$) than the White engineer ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .10$). The viewer race main effect indicated that Black viewers perceived engineers more favorably ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .11$) than their White counterparts ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .12$). These results do not support the hypothesis that only Black viewers' perceptions of engineers would be affected by the race of the engineer.

Overall perception of business students. A marginally significant interaction be-

Table 4. Analysis of Variance for Race of Viewer and Race of Character on Recall of Character Attributes

	All characters		Lawyers		Doctors	
	df	F	df	F	df	F
Source of Variance						
Viewer race (V)	1, 77	4.43*	1, 77	5.11*	1, 77	3.73
Character race (C)	1, 77	8.31**	1, 77	2.85	1, 77	8.27**
V x C	1, 77	3.85*	1, 77	3.03	1, 77	2.64
Within-group error	(15.05)		(1.87)		(1.46)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

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

tween characters' race and subjects' race, $F(1, 72) = 3.45$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .04$, power = .50, was found. Closer examination of the means (see Table 3) indicated that Black viewers perceived the Black business student more favorably ($M = 4.93$, $SD = .62$) than the White business student, $M = 4.03$, $SD = .83$; $F(1, 38) = 14.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$. These findings marginally support the hypothesis that Black viewers' perceptions would be more positively influenced by the Black business student than they would the White business student.

Recall of Occupational TV Characters

Overall recall of all five occupational characters. It was predicted that Black viewers would recall more information from Black models than they would from White models, whereas White viewers' recall would not be affected by the race of the character. This same pattern was expected for each of the five occupational characters. The overall recall analysis supports the hypothesis that Black viewers' recall would be affected by race. However, the pattern of responses leading to this result was obtained only for the lawyer, doctor, and the business student, not for the professor or engineer. These findings provide only partial support for the hypothesis.

The two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race, $F(1, 77) = 3.85$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$ (see Table 4). An examination of the means indicated that Black viewers recalled significantly, $F(1, 41) = 10.53$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .20$, more information from the five Black models posing in different occupations ($M = 15.00$, $SD = 4.12$) than they did from the five White models posing in the same occupations ($M = 10.76$, $SD = 4.30$). In contrast, White viewers' recall was not affected by the race of the occupational models (see Table 5). These results support the hypothesis.

Recall of lawyers. A marginally significant interaction, $F(1, 77) = 3.03$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .03$, power = .41, was found between characters' race and viewers' race.

Table 5. Means for Viewers' Recall of Occupational Television Characters

	White viewers		Black viewers	
	White character	Black character	White character	Black character
Total recall of characters	14.32	15.13	10.76	15.00**
Recall of lawyers	2.95	2.94	1.72	2.78**
Recall of doctors	3.41	3.75	2.44	3.67**
Recall of professors	3.45	3.44	2.36	2.72
Recall of engineers	2.05	2.69	2.48	3.11
Recall of business student	2.45	2.31	1.76	2.72*

Note. Within the Black viewers category, asterisks refer to mean pairs that are significantly different based on one-way analysis of variance, $N = 81$.

* $p > .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Further examination of the means showed that Black viewers recalled more information from the Black lawyer, $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.48$, than they did from the White lawyer, $M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.21$; $F(1, 41) = 6.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$. These findings provide marginal support for the hypothesis that Blacks would recall more information from the Black lawyer than they would from the White lawyer.

Recall of doctors. For doctors, a marginally significant interaction between characters' race and viewers' race was found, $F(1, 77) = 2.64$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .03$, power = .36, although the size of the interaction effects were small. Examination of this interaction, $F(1, 41) = 10.06$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .20$, revealed that Black viewers were more likely to recall information from the Black doctor ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.24$) than they were from the White doctor ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.26$; see Table 5).

Recall of professors. As shown in Table 6, no interaction was found between characters' race and viewers' race but a main effect for viewers' race, $F(1, 77) = 10.10$, $p < .01$, $b^2 = .11$, indicated that White viewers remembered more information from professors ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .21$) than did Black viewers ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .20$). This did not support the hypothesis that race of character would affect Black viewers' recall of the professors.

Recall of engineers. A marginally significant main effect for characters' race, $F(1, 77) = 3.64$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .04$, power = .50, indicated that all viewers recalled more information from the Black engineer ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .25$) than they did from the White engineer ($M = 2.26$, $SD = .22$). Unexpectedly, both Black and White viewers' recall was positively affected by the race of the Black engineer. These results do not support the hypothesis that only Black viewers' recall of engineers would be affected by the race of the character.

Recall of business students. A significant interaction was found between characters' race and subjects' race, $F(1, 77) = 3.88$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Closer examination

Table 6. Analysis of Variance for Race of Viewer and Race of Character on Recall of Character Attributes

Source of Variance	Professors		Engineers		Business students	
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
Viewer race (V)	1, 77	10.10**	1, 77	1.66	1, 77	0.26
Character race (C)	1, 77	0.37	1, 77	3.64	1, 77	2.14
V x C	1, 77	0.44	1, 77	0.00	1, 77	3.88*
Within-group error	(1.59)		(2.19)		(1.55)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

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

of this interaction indicated that Black subjects recalled significantly, $F(1, 41) = 6.19, p < .05, \eta^2 = .13$, more information from the Black business student ($M = 2.72, SD = 1.23$) than they did from the White business student ($M = 1.76, SD = 1.27$). These findings support the hypothesis.

Discussion

The results of this study provide information on how viewers of different races respond to television models of different races. Black and White male viewers were exposed to either five Black or five White male television characters representing five different occupations (i.e., lawyer, doctor, professor, engineer, and business student). It was expected that Black viewers' perceptions and recall would be more affected by the race of the occupational characters than their White counterparts. Specifically, it was hypothesized that Black viewers would perceive more favorably and recall more information from Black occupational characters than they would White occupational characters. In contrast, it was hypothesized that White viewers' perceptions and recall would not be affected by the race of the occupational characters. The findings provide evidence that both Black and White viewers' perceptions of occupational characters were affected by the race of the character. Moreover, the results indicate that Black viewers have better recall of Black occupational characters than they do White occupational characters on television. These findings also seem to suggest that there are dual forces at work for Black audiences: (a) Blacks are more attentive to Black characters, as evidenced by their recall of Black characters, and (b) Blacks are less attentive to White characters, as evidenced by their lack of recall of White characters.

The findings marginally suggest that Black subjects perceived the Black professor and the Black business student more favorably than they did the White char-

acters in the same occupations. These results provide some support for the expectation that only Black viewers' perceptions of characters would be affected by the race of the occupational characters. However, unexpectedly, both Black and White viewers' perceptions of occupational characters were affected by the race of the lawyer, the doctor, and the engineer. The main effects indicated that Black and White viewers perceived the Black lawyer, the Black doctor, and the Black engineer more favorably than they did the White characters posing in the same occupations.

Findings for viewers' recall indicated that Black viewers recalled more information from Black characters in general than they did from White characters. In particular, there was some evidence that Black viewers recalled more information from the Black lawyer, the Black doctor, and the Black business student than they did from the White models in the same occupations. A particularly interesting finding was that Black participants' recall was substantially lower ($M = 10.76$) than that of White participants ($M = 14.72$) for White television characters. However, when the television characters were Black, Black participants' recall improved dramatically ($M = 15.00$), matching the recall level of White participants ($M = 14.32$). White viewers demonstrated no recall bias based on the race of the model.

These findings beg the question of why Blacks were less attentive to White media characters and Whites equally attentive to White and Black media characters. One explanation is that Blacks and Whites use different criteria when making similarity and evaluative judgments, which influence how much attention is given to a source. Although members of both groups may automatically assess their level of similarity with a source during an interaction (see identification theory, Hovland & Weis, 1951; Kelman, 1961), Whites use occupational or social status as their dominant criterion when making similarity and evaluative judgements (Feldman, 1972; Smedley & Bayton, 1978), whereas Blacks use race as their primary criterion (Smedley & Bayton, 1978). Therefore, because race was the only characteristic that separated these television occupational models, it was expected that White participants would show no difference in their perception and recall of characters based on race. In contrast, if Blacks were truly using race as their primary evaluative criterion, they should demonstrate perception and recall differences based on the characters' race.

The findings associated with Black viewers provide support for identification theory. Black viewers may have perceived themselves to be more similar to the Black models based in part on race. As a result, they were more likely to identify with Black models, pay more attention to Black models, perceive them more favorably (in some cases), and recall more information from Black models than they were from White models with whom they are less likely to identify. In fact, Black viewers may have even displayed a conscious and active form of "disidentification" with White models. Because they may not identify with many White models, Black viewers may have believed the content from White occupational models was personally irrelevant and not directed at them, causing them to immediately tune out. This notion is supported by some researchers who argue that Blacks often ignore television and advertising that is perceived to be targeted to primarily White audiences (Rossman, 1994). Unlike Whites, who may consider

both races equally relevant when learning about and evaluating occupational characters, Black subjects may regard only Black models as relevant and worthy of attention. The results seem to support research (Sewell & Martin, 1976) that suggests that when Blacks acquire career information and make career decisions, they look primarily to Black models to provide them with educational and occupation information, reinforcement, and validation.

Another explanation why Blacks paid more attention to Black characters than White characters may rest with the occupational distinctiveness of Blacks in high status professions. This would be consistent with distinctiveness theory (McGuire, 1984; McGuire et al., 1978), which posits that people notice about themselves characteristics that are distinctive from other people in their environment. For Black viewers, being part of a racial group that is a numeric minority in America and in the media causes them to be more conscious of their race and of Black models on television. Moreover, Blacks place higher importance on their race and ethnic identity than Whites. This is evidenced by research that shows Blacks are much more likely than Whites to indicate race or ethnicity as a characteristic when defining their self-concept (McGuire et al., 1978; Phinney, 1992). Therefore, it would be expected that Black viewers would spontaneously evoke their racial identities while watching television and, as a result, display more attention to and have better recall of Black characters than they do White characters.

Distinctiveness theory may also provide an explanation as to why White viewers displayed no preference for White occupational characters. The theory posits that an individual's distinctive traits will be more salient to him or her than more prevalent traits possessed by other people in the environment (McGuire, 1984). The theory also maintains that race or ethnicity will be more prominent in the self-concept of people whose racial or ethnic group is in the minority of their social environment than in people of the majority group (McGuire et al., 1978). Because Whites make up a racial majority socially and in the media, they may be less mindful of their race when viewing television and demonstrate no attention, perception, or recall preference for White characters. Until Whites are the minority in specific settings, awareness of their race is likely to remain low and an insignificant component of their self-concept (McGuire et al., 1978; Phinney, 1992).

It is also plausible that White subjects' perceptions were influenced by unexpected positive information about Black occupational characters. According to expectancy violation theory, when the source possesses characteristics that violate the evaluator's expectations, evaluations should be extreme in the direction of the expected violation (Dienstbier, 1970). That is, in accordance with the theory, Black occupational models who possess qualities that are more positive than expected should be rated more favorably than other characters (e.g., Whites) with similar characteristics who do not violate expectations. Many proponents of the theory (Coleman et al., 1995) argue that some Whites may even perceived racial discrimination as creating more obstacles to the social and occupational mobility of Blacks. This, in part, may have led White subjects who perceive it unusual to see Blacks in these white-collar occupations to exert more attention to and cognitive processing of these more distinct character, and to display heightened recall and more extreme favorable evaluations of the Black characters.

Some critics, however, may argue that positive information about Black occupational models might not be totally unexpected for this particular sample. More than most, Stanford University students may be accustomed to encountering Blacks in professional occupations and, through relationships with their Black classmates, they may regularly see Blacks prepare for these occupations. Working-class Whites and Blacks from the general population may not encounter Blacks preparing for or working in these prestigious professions as regularly as the current sample. This should lead the general population to respond even more unexpectedly and positively to Blacks in these professions than this unusual sample of subjects. Future research in this area should use a sample of working-class White and Black subjects from the general population to determine if they respond to these occupational models in a similar fashion.

There is also a chance that these White participants' perceptions of Black characters were influenced by modern or aversive racism (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986). Aversive racism theory asserts that most Whites hold egalitarian values and are quite concerned with maintaining their positive self-images of themselves and presenting to others a self-image that is fair and committed to racial equality for Blacks (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; White & Harkins, 1994). Out of this concern, Whites are likely to be highly sensitive in interracial situations and highly motivated to respond favorably to Black sources in an effort not to appear racist or unfair. The context of rating five Black characters in a research context may bring racial issues to mind and stimulate participants to make assumptions about the way in which their responses may be interpreted. In an effort to protect their own positive self-concept and prevent others from seeing them as prejudiced, White participants may have sought to avoid expressing negative attitudes about Blacks by responding very favorably toward Black characters in this study. Although there is no way of truly knowing whether White respondents felt a desire to respond in a socially desirable fashion, particularly without an assessment of racial prejudice, every effort was made to minimize such pressures. For example, participants were guaranteed anonymity whereby no particular questionnaire or response could be associated with any particular respondent. In another effort to prevent response biases, a between-subjects design was used that did not allow participants to compare their responses between Black and White sources.

These findings have practical implications for the design of communication campaigns and targeted advertisements. They suggest that when designing campaign messages planners should make use of Black models in order for Black viewers to best remember those messages. Campaign planners should also recognize the importance of the low memory scores for White characters by Black viewers, suggesting that White models may be a cue to Black viewers to actively tune off the stimulus. Therefore, the use of White models in media targeted to Black populations may be counterproductive. Planners can design and market messages that are effective in reaching targeted groups by discovering what messages and models are most attractive and appealing to specific audiences. The more attention-getting features a public service or product advertisement has (e.g., race) the more consumers will attend to, recall, comprehend, and be persuaded

by the message (Calvert, Huston, Watkins, & Wright, 1982) and the more affected consumers will be (Huesman et al., 1983).

The results of this study imply that the use of Black media characters will continue to appeal to White consumers. Although empirical research shows that White viewers seem just as likely to respond to Black media as they would to mainstream media (Appiah, 2001a; Pitts et al., 1989), race continues to be an important characteristic that guides attention, retention, and perception for Black audiences.

Future research in this area should consider using a measure of ethnic identification. The strength of one's ethnic identity may mediate the effects of mass media messages. Future research should also begin to look at the effects of culturally embedded messages on both Black (targeted) and White (nontargeted) audiences. Past research has simply examined the effects of Black models in culturally neutral environments (e.g., Bush et al., 1979; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972) rather than in those environments filled with Black cultural cues that are specifically targeted to Black audiences (e.g., Appiah, 2001a, 2001b).

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