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The Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

“What’s Race Got to do With It?” An Investigation into the Differences Between  
Self-Reported Television Exposure and Self-Reported Attitudes Towards Interracial Dating

by

Kimberly Reeb

*A thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

June 22, 2015

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“WHAT’S RACE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE  
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF-REPORTED TELEVISION EXPOSURE AND  
SELF-REPORTED ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERRACIAL DATING

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School of Communication

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Master of Science in Communication & Media Technologies

Term Degree Awarded: Summer 2015 Term (2148)

Abstract

Television has the power to suggest what its viewers should think about and to impact individuals’ attitudes towards controversial topics. The present study examined the differences between individuals’ self-reported television exposure and self-reported interracial dating attitudes (IDA). Television viewing habits and demographics were also analyzed. A survey distributed via social media and email collected 216 responses. Cultivation theory suggests heavy viewers are likely to have more negative perceptions and attitudes. Analysis of differences for IDA between viewers was not statistically significant, but the IDA score was slightly more negative for heavy viewers. Overall, IDA scores were positive, however individuals’ attitude scores were more negative concerning engaging in Interracial Dating (IRD) with a significant difference between light and heavy viewers. Findings present the idea that viewing television may negatively impact an individual’s beliefs that they are willing to engage in IRD.

*Keywords:* interracial dating, anti-miscegenation, cultivation theory, attitudes

“What’s Race Got to do With It?” An Investigation into the Differences Between  
Self-Reported Television Exposure and Self-Reported Attitudes Towards Interracial Dating

On September 29, 1967, a Black male named Guy Gibson Smith and a White female named Margaret Elizabeth Rusk were married (*Time*, 1967). Their wedding pictures made the front cover of *Time Magazine* because at the time, interracial marriage was controversial. The *Time Magazine* cover was important because the laws that prevented marriage between individuals of different race, known as “Anti-Miscegenation laws,” were slowly being removed from the law books. Anti-miscegenation laws resulted in a lack of portrayal of interracial relationships on television as well. Hollywood’s production code “forbade the depiction of ‘miscegenation’ (sex relationships between the White and Black races) from 1930 to 1956” (Courtney, 2005, p. 5). Beeman (2007) suggests that anti-miscegenation laws may have been the beginning of emotional segregation, “the lack of empathy that exists between African Americans and Whites, which is supported by the institutional structures and a history of systematic racism in the United States” (p. 690). After anti-miscegenation laws were ruled to be unjust, interracial marriage slowly became more present. The 2010 U.S. Census reported that there were 5.4 million interracial or interethnic married-couple households representing 9.5 percent of married-couple households (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). This was a noticeable increase from the 2000 census where 7.4 percent of married couples reported were interracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Once it was no longer illegal to portray an interracial couple on television, producers slowly began including interactions between characters of different races in television shows. However, the use of visual representations of interracial relationships and families in television,

film, and advertising has been found to be limited (Gandy, 1998). Although the media presents its audience with a dominant representation of all-White marriages and families, and all-Black marriages and families, interracial marriages and families are seldom represented (Beeman, 2007). In addition, Mastro and Stern (2003) found that individuals of varying racial classifications are portrayed in different context when compared to each other on television. Progress was made during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in representation of interracial relations on television and helped lay groundwork for 21<sup>st</sup> century media to continue the progress.

Cultivation theory presents the framework for the assumption to be made that if television can impact viewers' real world beliefs about violence in society, then it can also impact how viewers look at race and their beliefs about ways they should interact with members of other races. The mass media creates and cultivates specific messages as we grow up through the use of portrayals of individuals from different races. This reinforces our pre-existing beliefs about race (Gandy, 1998). Cultivation theory offers an opportunity to test hypotheses derived from theory and assists in creating explanations about why race is presented in specific ways and how it may impact social change today. George Gerbner designed cultivation theory in a two-step process: first, he analyzed the media content on television, and second, he surveyed the television viewers, who are also referred to as society. In the second step of conducting the theory, society must be surveyed about their television viewing habits and the perceptions that they have about "social reality" (Nabi & Riddle, 2008). Morgan and Shanahan (2010) summarize the most familiar version of "the cultivation hypothesis" as "those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the world of fictional television" (p. 337).



Although research has focused on comparing the differences in racial presentation of characters on television (Maher, Herbst, Childs, & Finn, 2008), specifically looking at the presentation differences between same-race and interracial relationships has been ignored; thus, this study measures current attitudes towards interracial dating and the impact of media consumption on these attitudes. The literature demonstrates that race is portrayed in various ways in specific genres of television and film. The study also examines the type of television shows individuals watch and how their attitudes differ with each genre. Finally, in addition to investigating individuals' frequency-of-media consumption and the subjects' attitudes towards interracial relationships, the study asks about television viewing habits and if the subjects would engage in an interracial dating relationship.

### **Research Questions**

To investigate the differences between individuals' attitudes towards interracial dating, whether television exposure impacts these attitudes, and if there is a difference between interracial dating attitudes when comparing various groupings of individuals, two groups of research questions were created. The first group of questions focuses on the differences between types of television viewers and individuals' attitudes towards interracial dating score. The second group of questions focuses on whether an individuals' attitude score towards interracial dating is different across various groupings of individuals.

### **Variables: Viewer Type, Attitude Score, and Willingness to Engage in IRD**

Three questions were formulated to look at differences between heavy and light viewers. The first question addresses the type of viewer and their attitude score. The next two questions address type of viewer and their attitude response towards engaging in an interracial relationship.

RQ1: Are there differences between heavy and light viewers of television and their interracial relationship attitude score?

RQ2: Are there differences between heavy and light viewers' attitude responses to the question "I would not pursue a relationship with someone of a different race regardless of my feelings for him/her"?

RQ3: Are there differences between heavy and light viewers' attitude responses towards the question "I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship with someone of another race"?

#### **Variables: Attitude Score and Demographics**

Three questions were formulated that ask if there are differences in attitude score towards interracial dating between different demographical groupings.

RQ4: Are there differences between an individual's generation they were born in and their attitude score?

RQ5: Is there a difference between gender and interracial dating attitude scores?

RQ6: Are there differences in reported attitude score between those who identified as dating interracially and those who identified dating same-race?

#### **Variables: Attitude Score, TV Show Content, Medium Used for Viewing, and Genre**

Three questions were formulated to ask if there are differences between individuals' attitude score and television viewing behavior. Specifically, the questions explore if there are differences in attitude while viewing shows containing interracial dating, the types of medium used for viewing, and among the genres of shows viewed.

RQ7: Are there differences between those who view television shows that include interracial dating between characters and their attitude score?

RQ8: Are there differences between the attitude score and the medium that the viewer watches television shows on other than a TV: Desktop, Laptop, Tablet, and a Smart TV (e.g., Internet apps: Netflix, Hulu)?

RQ9: Are there differences between each genre (drama, news, PBS, reality TV, and crime) of television shows viewed and the participant's attitude towards interracial relationships?

### **Variables: Attitude and Perceptions**

Three questions were formulated to look at the differences between individuals' attitudes toward interracial dating and their perceptions towards engaging in interracial relationships.

RQ10: Is there a difference between those who answered 1 or 7 to the question "I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship with someone of another race" and the average attitude score?

RQ11: Are there differences between the individuals' attitude and response to "Do you feel society is accepting of interracial relationships portrayed on television?"

RQ12: Are there differences between those who answered yes or no to "Do you believe that interracial relationships consisting of a White male and Black female are more accepted in society than a couple consisting of a Black male and a White female" and attitude score?

### **Rationale**

#### **Social**

Racial beliefs presented on television have the ability to be cultivated and reinforced today through their presentation in the media. The use of these messages may impact diversity and overall positive communication and cooperation among races in society. Furthermore, the acceptance of interracial dating, interracial couples, and their children by society may impact the possibility for individuals that fall into the interracial category to be successful in society and

life. Measuring the ways that interracial dating is presented on television allows for further understanding about how people are impacted by the positive and negative representations of interracial dating in the media. This understanding will help to educate society about working with, living with, dating, and interacting with individuals from different ethnicities in a successful and accepted manner.

### **Scholarly**

There is a great deal of research on the many ways that different racial groups are represented in the media, or the lack of, or mis-representation of racial groups (Auletta & Hammerback, 1985; Beeman, 2007; Graves, 1999; Larson, 2002). Research is limited when it comes to evaluating interracial relationships and whether frequency of media consumption impacts these beliefs. This study provides answers to questions that have not been addressed in previous research about individuals' attitudes towards interracial dating and question whether television consumption impacts the attitudes. As previously stated, research has found that when individuals of different races are exposed to and interact with each other, the benefits are endless. This suggests that if television and major motion film media include more equal representations of race and interracial dating relationships that it may lower the fear of interracial dating. The present study lays the groundwork for more in-depth investigation into the need for more interracial relationship representation within television shows in order to positively impact beliefs and acceptance towards these relationships.

### **Literature Review**

Television and films present their audiences with stories of characters. Without knowing, while the audience watches, they engage in the act of cultivation. Oxford Dictionaries online defines the word "cultivate," when used as an object, to "prepare and use (land) for crops or

gardening” (2015). Keeping in mind the reviewed research findings of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and specific character portrayals of racial groups, the audience seems to be the crop and the continuous institutionalized messages of race are the continuous tilling of the growth of societies’ beliefs about racial groups in society. The literature that follows explores the various ways that race is presented to its audience through on-screen media and findings of cultivation research on individuals’ perceptions and views.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory investigates the impact of television on its audience, depending upon the amount of hours the audience views. The theory defines the television audience as heavy viewers and light viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1980). Gerbner started his research in the 1960s, and he and his associates found that exposure to violent images for four hours or more resulted in the audience believing that the world is a dangerous place and that they had an increased chance of being attacked in the streets. Light viewers, however, who viewed TV for 4 hours or less were found not to be impacted like the heavy viewers were (Baran & Davis, 2009). One example of the impact that cultivation has on TV exposure is that it leads to first-order and second-order effects because it makes TV images and themes readily accessible in memory (Shrum, 1995).

Shrum (1995) explains that first order and second order judgments are broken down into two categories. First-order effects are “those that indicate a person’s perceptions of the prevalence of things, and second-order effects are those that indicate a person’s attitudes and beliefs” (p. 404). To understand these effects better, Gerbner’s research on violence is used to demonstrate the difference between first and second-order effects. The images and messages that a person views leads to the perception that crime occurs frequently, resulting in a first-order

effect. Second-order effects result in the person believing that they are likely to be a victim and that the world is a dangerous place. Baron and Davis (2009) describe how the media have become a primary means by which many of us experience or learn about many aspects of the world around us. Even when we don't learn about these things directly from the media, we learn about them from other people who get their ideas of the world from media (p. 200).

Cultivation theory can be applied to other areas that investigate television content and its presentation of characters to an audience. Although the majority of cultivation research has focused on what perceptions individuals have towards violence based on their television viewing habits (Shrum, 1995), this paper uses a hybrid approach to test whether there is a difference between heavy and light TV viewers' attitudes towards interracial dating. This study asks about different genres of television shows viewed and individuals' attitudes towards interracial dating. The impact of the shows and how they impact their audience will briefly be mentioned in this literature review, but it is not the main focus. Over the years, cultivation analysis research has evolved from its original main focus on violence on television to the various ways that characters are portrayed. Specifically, the presentation of race has been investigated again and again (Beeman, 2007; Graves, 1999; Larson, 2002). However, throughout the history of cultivation research, little attention has been paid to the differences in the portrayal of race when looking at interracial relationships. Studies that focus on the differences of presentation of race between characters in television shows, television commercials, and films have been reviewed.

### **Anti-Miscegenation in the Media: Past and Present**

**Television.** In 2009, The Neilson Company published a report on the increased use of technology to view media. Specifically, the report found that

the number of people watching mobile video increased 70% from last year and people

who watch video online increased their viewing by 46% compared to a year ago. In addition, the average American TV consumption remains at an all-time high (141 hours per month) compared to the same time frame last year. (The Nielsen Company, 2009, para. 1)

Access to television and film has evolved since 2009 with the introduction of Netflix, Hulu, and cable company video-on-demand services. Neilson Ratings reports “Over 40% of U.S. Homes had access to a Subscription-based Video On Demand (SVOD) as of November 2014 and 13% of homes boasted multiple streaming services in their homes” (2014, p. 3). The homes that have greater access to media using different mediums to watch the messages were found to have the greatest usage with “nearly 50 minutes more than a typical TV home” (Nielsen Ratings, 2014, p. 3). This shift has impacted the amount of time individuals spend in front of the actual television, and results in a slight drop in viewing over the years: however, with the power of the Internet, media messages sent through television shows and films are more accessible now than ever before. The concern is whether these messages are supporting pre-existing historical beliefs or creating positive racial views of society.

Once the TV is turned on we tune in and begin absorbing messages consciously and unconsciously. Graves (1999) explains that as “a ‘window on the world’ television can be seen as a vehicle for providing children and youth with experiences and information otherwise not available to them, their families or communities” (p. 707). Television is seen as a socializing agent by many, especially marketers and politicians, and “in the case of race relations, television is a key socializing agent” (Graves, 1999, p. 707).

The literature presented demonstrates the repeated findings that television content portrays characters of different racial demographics in various ways through different genres and programming on television including TV comedies, dramas, and advertising.

**Comedies.** Television was found to present race strategically and historically. Specifically, use of race representation in television comedies presents a foundation of research devoted to exposing the negative representations of race and common themes found in racial stereotypes that are reinforced. One common theme that arose was the lack of Black characters with leading roles (Reid, 1979). In fact, since *I Love Lucy* first aired in 1951, there has not been an interracial lead couple in any TV show (Bramlett-Solomon, 2007). Although *I Love Lucy* had its main lead characters as an interracial couple, it is important to note that Lucy was Caucasian and her husband, Desi, was Cuban American which made them appear as a same-race couple because Desi's skin was passable as Caucasian.

Due to the lack of interracial relationships in television, research has focused on comparing differences in portrayal between White and Black characters in TV (Reid, 1979). The primary purpose of Reid's research was "to determine whether Blacks were portrayed as behaving differently from Whites on television programs" (1979, p. 466). In preparation for his research, Reid conducted a preliminary survey of commercial television programs that focused on dramas and situation comedies (1979, p. 466). The preliminary survey concluded that in White-dominated programs, Black characters were placed in secondary roles, while the only major Black roles appeared in Black dominated programs consisting of characters from different racial groups, and that a limited number of Black characters appeared in regularly scheduled comedy programming. Overall, the data revealed, "there were no dramatic programs dominated by Blacks or with a Black character in the major role" (Reid, 1979, p. 466). At this time only one



Black dominated show was found to have regularly appearing White characters: *The Jeffersons*. In order to analyze Black characters in the late 70s, Reid had to use comedies because of the findings of the preliminary survey. The shows used to conduct the study were four Black programs (*The Jeffersons*, *Good Times*, *Sanford & Sons*, and *What's Happening*), three White programs (*All in the Family*, *Happy Days*, and *One Day at a Time*), and three mixed programs (*Chico and The Man*, *Fish*, and *Welcome Back, Kotter*; Reid, 1979, p. 467).

In addition to the preliminary survey revealing a lack of diversity of main characters in television, Reid's (1979) content analysis revealed that race and sexual behaviors were used differently to portray characters in the White, Black, and mixed comedy programs. In summary, Reid's (1979) research inferred from the data "a pattern in which Whites on Black programs are depicted as generally unpleasant and possessing undesirable characteristics. White characters on Black programs were more aggressive and more active than Whites on other types of programs" (p. 470). Black female characters were rated as especially low on achievement, succorance, and self-recognition and high on dominance and nurturance, whereas White female characters appeared submissive, helpless, and were rated low in dominance and succorance (Reid, 1979).

In order to further understand how race communicates messages there is a need to look at how interracial communication takes place. When people are not exposed to anyone outside of their own race, they do not know how to communicate with another person of a different race (Auletta & Hammerback, 1985). Television provides people with a way to learn about members of other races, but if the representations of the racial groups are negative and false, then their beliefs will become false.

Overall, Black characters were found to be dependant on others, represented as working for other people and not in business for themselves (Auletta & Hammerback, 1985). Black

characters are also presented as entertainers of White members of society through forms of music and comedy, and as taking vacation a great deal more than Whites (Klein & Shiffman, 2006).

When viewing television shows that contain stereotypical content, it is found that pre-existing stereotypical beliefs about interracial contact may allow for those beliefs to be confirmed (Mastro & Tropp, 2004). This is important to note because those pre-existing beliefs may have been cultivated when the individual was growing up through viewing media messages.

**Commercials.** Television commercials directed towards children have a strong impact in creating the pre-existing beliefs that impact a person's ability to think either positively or negatively about members of other races. Commercials construct many racial stereotypes and beliefs. Specifically, commercials shown during prime-time programming found that Latinos are found to be in commercials for soap and deodorant, Blacks are shown in financial service and food commercials, Whites are shown in food commercials, and both Whites and Asians are shown in technology commercials (Mastro & Stern, 2003). The context that these commercials are set in is as follows: Latinos and Blacks are presented outside, Asians are at work, and Whites are at home (p. 643).

Furthermore, Asians and Whites are presented in sophisticated ads (Maher et al., 2008). Maher, Herbst, Childs, and Finn's (2008) results found that the ethnic representations in the major metropolitan city in which the advertisements appear are disproportional. Additionally, the study found that positive portrayals were more common among Caucasians and Asians, and negative for African Americans and Hispanics. Commercials that advertised items such as "toys, electronics, and magazines" are classified as positive portrayals, while negative commercials classified as advertising food are described as less sophisticated (p. 88). In addition, Caucasians and Asians appeared in more major roles and interacted less often with African American and

Hispanic characters. This is useful because they found that the amount of television watched by Caucasians is less than African Americans, implying that negative portrayals are reinforced to their own represented race (Maher et al., 2008). Consistent with other research (Larson, 2002; Mastro & Stern, 2003), Whites are overrepresented and Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians are underrepresented.

Building on the investigation of portrayal of race in food advertising, Baumann and Ho (2014) focused their research on food and dining advertising and whether individuals of specific race are presented differently in the commercials. Their research analyzed a sample of prime time Canadian television advertising to “identify cultural schemas for what it means to be White, Black, and East/Southeast Asian” (p. 152). Their quantitative results found systematic differences in the types of foods associated with the three racial groups. It is interesting to note that their research is consistent with the recurring theme of overrepresentation of White individuals and underrepresentation of Black individuals.

As a result of the overwhelming difference in quantity of characters from each racial category, the study also conducted a qualitative analysis to explain their findings further. Six comparison categories were identified: “four pertain to Whites, one to Blacks and one to East/Southeast Asians” (Baumann & Ho, p. 160). The schemas agree with previous findings of Maestro and Stern (2003) on presentation of race in commercials and television. Whites were classified as nostalgic in nature, high cultural and economic capital benefits, and presenting a wholesome family that eats dinner together. In contrast to the four White schemas, the one Black schema was the “Black Blue Collar” schema (p. 162). Within the limited presentation/inclusion of Blacks in commercials the presentation of the characters was presented in a “variety of blue-collar work settings, most prominently in factories and auto body shops” (p. 163). The “Asian

Technocrat” schema is also consistent with Mastro and Stern’s (2003) findings that Asians are shown as “unemotional overachievers who respond to any and all situations in a robotic way” (p. 163), always expected to achieve straight A’s in school and exceed their parents high and sometimes unrealistic expectations.

**Films.** The most common finding among research done on race portrayal in films is how relationships are presented. In both romantic and friendship relationships there is an underlying theme of different gender characteristics displayed (Angel, 2007; Beeman, 2007; Rowe, 2007). *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Monster’s Ball* are films that use interracial relationships consisting of different gender combinations to portray racial stereotypes. In 1967, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* presented one of the first interracial couples on screen that consisted of a Black male and a White female. This was at the same time that lingering anti-miscegenation laws were being removed from the law books. The film was criticized for not representing the challenges that interracial couples faced during the 1960s. However, it began a visual presence of interracial marriage on film that opened the door for future films to explore interracial relationships (Harris & Toplin, 2007).

*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* laid the foundation for future movies to touch upon similar challenges interracial relationships face. In 2001, the film *Monster’s Ball* was released in theaters. This film used an interracial relationship between a White male and a Black female to present White power beliefs, Black beliefs of poverty and crime, and yet in the end shows the couple working through their different backgrounds and coming together (Rowe, 2007). Although this film was praised for its effort in portraying an interracial relationship, the construction of the relationship being of a White male and a Black female still suggests White power.

Similarly, other criticism of interracial marriages presented in film centers on the fact that these films do not show the presence of a mixed-race child (Angel, 2007), which creates an idea that interracial couples lack a normal family structure. Overall, the portrayals of White relationships, Black relationships, and interracial relationships in film attempt to send messages about intimate relationships and what race they need to be in order to be successful. White relationships are shown as being successful longer with a stronger emotional connection; Black relationships are the next successful relationship to be portrayed. However, Black male and White female relationships are shown to lack emotional connection and to end quickly (Beeman, 2007). Sexual characteristics and ability to emotionally connect appear to be the main differences between race and their relationship styles presented in films including whether the relationship is central to the film's plot (p. 703).

Johnson and Holmes (2009) specifically investigated the romantic content of a sample of romantic comedy films. Although their study did not use the variable of race to analyze differences in relationship portrayal, their findings lend support to the assumption that specific portrayals of real life scenarios can impact its audience. Their study revealed that "films appeared to depict relationships as progressing quickly into something emotionally meaningful and significant, but there was little shown to explain how or why this was the case" (p. 368). Unrealistic relationship portrayal can lead to a negative impact on the audience. This possible impact is important to note because it leads individuals to believe that relationships will easily be established. As a result, when they are more difficult than the media depicted, the individual might not pursue the relationship further. More in-depth research investigating attitudes towards romantic relationships is needed, specifically comparing how individuals of different races are portrayed when dating outside of their racial groups. Johnson and Holmes' research lends

support to the negative impact that portraying interracial dating consisting of only a sexual connection and not an emotional, family-like structure might have: Heavy viewers of TV may tend to think this is how their relationships will be if they are interracial.

### **Generational Attitudes**

The media continues to evolve throughout each generation. Research has found individuals from different classified generations “share a different set of values and attitudes, as a result of shared events and experiences” (Parry & Urwin, 2011, p. 80). Strauss and Howe (1991) classify those born between 1925-1942 as the “Veteran” generation, also known as the “Silent” Generation; “Baby Boomers” born between 1943-1960, “Generation X” born between 1961-1981, and “Generation Y” born between 1982 and present” (p. 32). This study modified the birth years slightly. The present study questions whether there are generational differences in responses to the IDA scale.

### **Literature Review Summary**

Cultivation theory demonstrates that the messages sent through television and other mediums have an impact on an individual’s perception of the world, including their beliefs and attitudes about those who they co-exist with. By expanding upon the cultivation theory’s main focus of violence on television, scholars can explore other forms of content viewed by society. The present study applies the basis of cultivation theory and the findings of content analysis on the presentation of race on television. The study expands upon media presentation further by investigating the differences between heavy and light television viewers’ attitudes towards interracial dating and viewers’ attitude towards engaging in an interracial dating relationship. After reviewing how race is used to send a variety of messages through television and films, it is important to note that portrayals of race are consistent among the many channels that they are

being sent through. Whether it is children's television commercials or shows, prime-time viewing or films, individuals who are of other race categories are repeatedly represented differently when compared to White individuals (Reid, 1979). Furthermore, the presentations of African Americans and other non-White individuals are unfavorable, especially when an interracial relationship is included in the story. Race should not be the defining aspect of individuals in America, yet it is possible, based on cultivation theory research, to suggest that the media cultivates its audience to believe it is.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Of the 217 participants in the convenience sample, 8% were born between 1930 and 1959, 11% between 1960-1979, and 81% between 1980-1999. One incomplete survey was eliminated from the attitude scale section. The attitude score was  $M = 1.40$  with a  $SD = .57$ , suggesting positive attitude towards interracial dating. The largest demographic group to respond was Caucasian (78%), with Black being the next largest (6%), and 5% identified as other. Some of the respondents indicated they choose other because they identify themselves as more than one race. There were 55 male respondents, 161 female respondents, and one whom did not answer.

### **Procedures**

Participants were asked to complete a survey through the use of email and social media. All responses remained anonymous. The survey consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions broken up into three sections (see Appendix B). The qualitative questions were not used in the analysis.

The first section asks the participant to respond to different questions about interracial dating. The attitude survey uses a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Interracial Dating Attitude Scale consists of 20 questions. The first 17 are negatively worded and the last three are positively worded. The last three have to be reverse scored. To ensure accuracy in the reverse scoring, the researcher chose to complete the reverse scoring and then used Excel to run an equation on each survey response to add up the responses and divide them by 20. The result of the equation is each participant's attitude score.

The second section asks about television viewing habits, genres viewed, and which television shows they view. There were a few questions that asked about acceptance of interracial dating portrayal on television and if they felt media portrayed race equally.

The third section asks demographical information for analysis purposes.

### **Measures**

Three main variables are measured using the survey. The first variable measured is the attitude an individual has towards interracial dating relationships. The individual's attitude score is the dependent variable. The participant's attitude is measured using the Attitudes toward Interracial Dating scale (Whatley, 2004). The second dependant variable focuses on the participant's willingness to engage in interracial relationships and interactions. Two questions from the attitude scale are used to compare responses for heavy and light viewers: "I would not pursue a relationship with someone of a different race regardless of my feelings for him/her" and "I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship with someone of another race."

The main independent variable is the amount of hours the television viewer watches. This is measured using George Gerbner's cultivation theory viewer classification of heavy and light viewers. Participants will report how often they view television; their responses will be



categorized into light (less than 2 hours) and heavy viewers (4 or more hours). In addition to these three main variables, survey questions seven through twelve ask questions used to measure if there are differences between attitude score when compared to TV content, medium used for viewing, and perceptions towards interracial dating. A few demographic questions are used to compare attitude score between gender, year born, and relationship classification (i.e., same race or interracial).

To analyze whether there were differences between TV show content viewed and attitude score, television shows are selected from a list of Nielson's highest ratings along with recent shows and a few shows from past generations. The *Jeffersons*, *All in the Family*, and *Happy Days* were selected from Reid's (1979) research that identified the three shows as having a cast consisting of one race. To identify current television shows that include interracial relationships, an article presenting 22 recent television shows that have a story line that includes an interracial relationship is referenced (Moore, 2013). Out of the 22 shows identified in the article, 15 are selected based on higher viewership and popularity for current and older shows.

### **Results**

The data was processed using SPSS 23 for Mac. A standard alpha of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance using independent *t*-tests and uses the *p*-value where equal variances are not assumed. Research question four was analyzed using an ANOVA test and significance was determined using the *Tukey* post-hoc test. Using this approach to analyze the data takes into account that the samples sizes are not equal.

#### **Variables: Viewer Type, Attitude Score, and Willingness to Engage in IRD**

The main research question that was formulated based on cultivation theory did not reveal any significant difference between heavy ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = .692$ ) and light viewers ( $M =$

1.35,  $SD = .522$ ) and attitude score. Type of television viewer findings reveal the sample average to be in-between light and moderate viewers ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = .798$ ). Heavy viewers are identified as viewing TV four or more hours a day and light viewers are identified as viewing TV less than two hours a day. Out of the 216 responses, 45% reported being light viewers, 32% moderate viewers, and 23% heavy viewers. The data comparing attitude between heavy and light viewers approached significance at the  $p = .16$  level. However, when comparing differences between type of viewer and willingness to engage in an interracial relationship, the findings revealed a significant difference between heavy and light viewers.

*RQ2:* A significant difference was found between heavy ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) and light viewers' ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = .838$ ) attitude responses to the question "I would not pursue a relationship with someone of a different race regardless of my feelings for him/her,"  $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  $df = 66.6$  (see Table 1). Individual responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Light viewers responded more positively by disagreeing with the statement more than heavy viewers who responded more negatively by agreeing with the statement more.

*RQ3:* When the same viewers responded to the question "I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship with someone of another race,"  $t = 2.28$ ,  $p = .025$ ,  $df = 77.5$ , the results revealed a significant difference between heavy ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ ) and light ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) viewers (see Table 1). Research question three was asked with a positive approach, which required it to be reverse scored. Those who responded with a 1 (*strongly disagreed*) were then scored with a seven. The same followed for two through seven. A one was replaced with a seven, a two was replaced with a six, and a three was replaced with a 5 and vice versa. This was done to match up with the scale's definition of more positive scores leaning towards one and more negative scores towards seven.

Table 1

*Heavy and Light Viewers' Overall Attitude Score and Attitude Towards Responding About Willingness to Think They Will Date Interracially*

Measures	<u>Light Viewer</u>		<u>Heavy Viewer</u>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>n</i> = 97		<i>n</i> = 50				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Engage in IRR: "Would not pursue regardless of feelings."	1.28	.838	1.82	1.43	2.45	*.017	66.6
Engage in IRR: "I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship."	2.35	1.72	3.20	2.32	2.28	*.025	77.5
Interracial dating attitude score	1.35	.52	1.51	.098	1.41	.16	78.53

*Note.* \* Indicates significance at the  $p = < .05$  alpha level.

**Variables: Attitude Score and Demographics**

Out of the three research questions comparing attitude towards interracial dating and demographical groupings, only one analysis revealed significance: RQ6. A statistically significant difference was found between attitude towards interracial dating and the classification of an individual's relationship ( $t = 4.29, p = .00, df = 193.430$ ). Individuals who reported their dating relationship to be interracial revealed a more positive attitude ( $M = 1.20, SD = .315$ ) than those who reported their dating relationship to be same-race ( $M = 1.48, SD = .635$ ; see Figure 1).

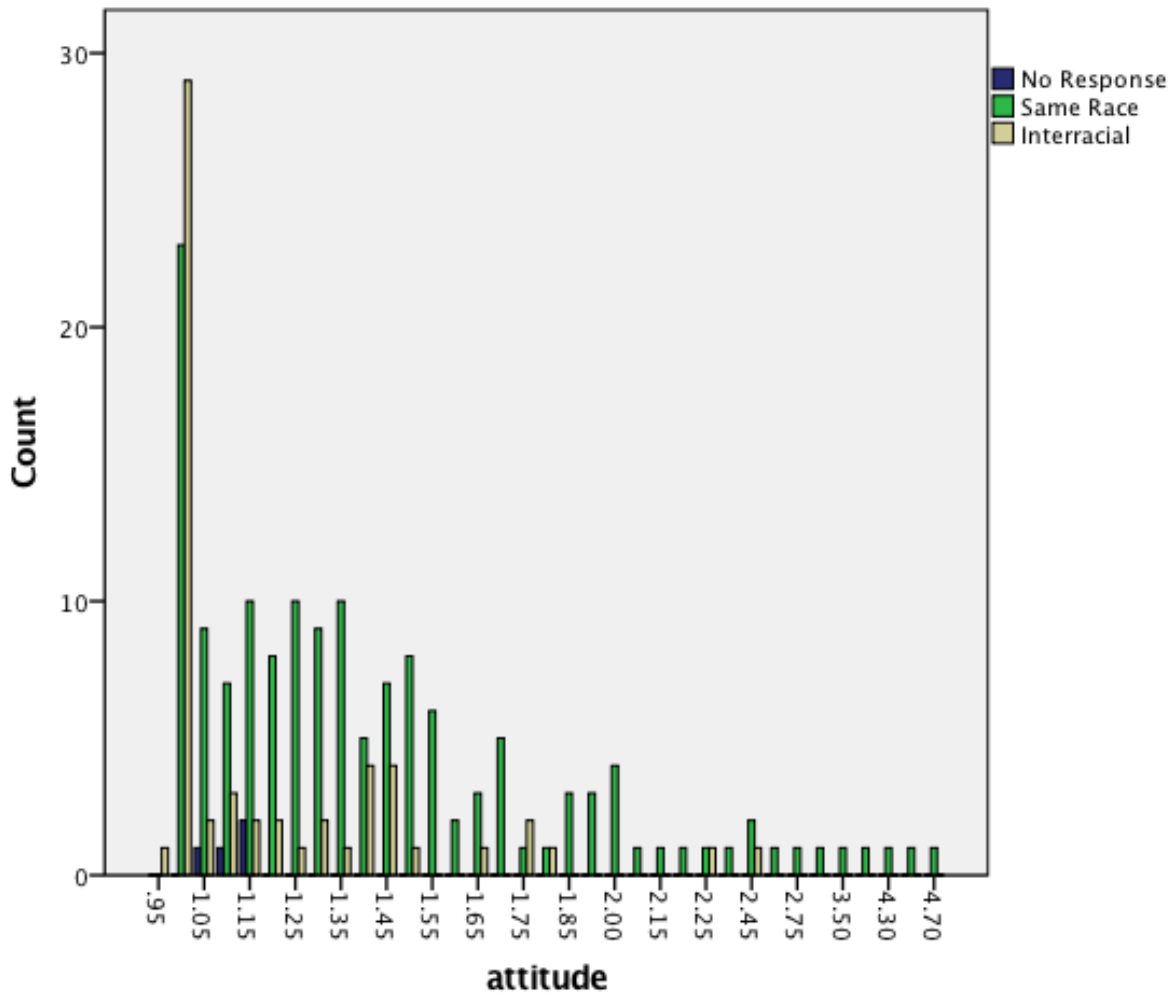


Figure 1. Difference in attitude between individuals in an interracial dating relationship and those that are in a same-race dating relationship.

**Variables: Attitude Score, TV Show Content, Medium Used for Viewing, and Genre**

In comparing attitude score towards interracial dating between those who responded yes and no to viewing specific genres of television, specific television shows, and the medium used to view television only TV Show Content revealed significant findings (RQ7). Out of the 22 shows identified as presenting an interracial relationship in their plot, two revealed significant differences between viewers and non-viewers.

The *t*-test analyzing the data for research question seven demonstrated statistically significant differences between the two groups and attitudes,  $t = 2.29$ ,  $p = .038$ ,  $df = 13.91$ , between individuals who have watched ( $M = 1.2$ ,  $SD = .25$ ) the TV show *Girlfriends* and those who have not ( $M = 1.4$ ,  $SD = .58$ ). This suggests that those who viewed the TV show *Girlfriends* have a more positive attitude towards interracial dating than those who are non-viewers.

The *t*-test analyzing the data for viewers and non-viewers of the television show *Lincoln Heights* revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups and attitudes,  $t = 2.08$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $df = 25.37$ , between individuals who have watched ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = .37$ ) the TV show *Lincoln Heights* and those who have not ( $M = 1.41$ ,  $SD = .58$ ). Findings for both television shows suggest that viewers of both television shows have a more positive attitude towards interracial dating than non-viewers.

**Variables: Attitude and Perception**

Of the three questions asked that compare participants' attitude score and whether it was more negative or positive in comparison to responses towards perceptions towards interracial dating, one revealed significant difference: RQ10. A *t*-test was conducted,  $t = 4.65$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $df = 20.78$ , comparing the attitude difference between those who answered 1 and 7 to the statement: "I can imagine myself in a long term relationship with someone of another race." Findings reveal

a significant difference between those who responded with 1 ( $n = 99$ ,  $M = 1.13$ ) and those who responded with a 7 ( $n = 21$ ,  $M = 2.15$ ). The mean for all 216 responses ranging from one through seven is 2.69. This survey item received the broadest range of responses indicating that the level of certainty that the respondent would date outside their race was not as easy to respond with a 1 or a 7. In summary of the findings, this question received the most four responses of all the attitude scale questions. The frequency of each response was 1 ( $n = 99$ ), 2 ( $n = 32$ ), 3 ( $n = 20$ ), 4 ( $n = 20$ ), 5 ( $n = 13$ ), 6 ( $n = 11$ ), and 7 ( $n = 21$ ). While 9.7% of individuals strongly disagreed with this survey item, 45.6% strongly agreed. This survey question was reverse scored due to its positive context.

### **Discussion**

The current study argues that media, specifically television shows, have the ability to influence its viewers negatively. The theory presents that there are possible differing outcomes for heavy and light television viewers. Viewers may or may not present different levels of positive and negative attitudes towards interracial dating. Although the finding is not statistically different between heavy and light viewers, there is a slight difference in attitude between the two groups. The study lends support to cultivation theory and the result of second-order effects that viewing more hours of TV results in a more negative attitude; in the present study the negative attitude is towards interracial dating. Previous research has found race and interracial relationships to be portrayed in ways that support existing negative stereotypes which may allow for an individual's existing beliefs to be confirmed (Mastro & Troop, 2004). The present study offers a different type of support to cultivation theory in that heavy television viewers presented more negative attitudes towards the idea of themselves dating interracially than light viewers.

An interesting finding of this study is the significant difference between heavy and light viewers' attitude towards interracial dating compared to their specific responses towards engaging in an interracial dating relationship themselves. Graves (1999) summarized TV as being "seen as a socializing agent by many, especially marketers and politicians" and considered as a "window on the world" (p. 707). Light viewers appear to have been exposed less to the socializing agent of TV by overall presenting a more positive attitude towards interracial dating and towards themselves dating interracially.

The literature presents the case of historically constructed negativity towards interracial dating. Those who were born before the 1960s lived during the time of anti-miscegenation laws and a time where television and film was forbidden to present interracial love and dating to the audience. It could be suspected that there would have been a strong significant difference between each generation's identified attitude towards interracial dating, indicating improved attitudes over time; however, this is not found to be true. Attitudes between the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers (1930-1959,  $M = 1.53$ ), and Generation X (1960-1979,  $M = 1.53$ ), are equal with only a slight difference between Generation X (1960-1979,  $M = 1.53$ ) and the Millennial Generation (1980-1999,  $M = 1.36$ ). The generation data is not significant and does not offer support for Parry and Urwin's (2011) viewpoint that each generation "share a different set of values and attitudes, as a result of shared events and experiences" (p. 80).

With the focus of the present study being on media and television, one summary could be that the attitudes of Generation X do not differ between early generations due to a greater exposure to television. At the time of their childhood they were exposed to race riots and war propaganda. The slight, but not statistically significant difference between generations, and the improved attitudes of the Millennial Generation, lend support to previous research that over time



interracial dating has become more present in film (Harris & Toplin, 2007; Rowe, 2007). To better investigate changing attitudes from generation to generation the sample would benefit from larger and more equal samples from each generation.

Previous research shows that comedy presents race more frequently than other genres. Comedy is also the first genre that allowed races other than Caucasian to obtain lead roles (Reid, 1979). Findings did not reveal a significant difference between the attitudes of those that are viewers of comedy versus those that are not.

Analysis comparing the difference between an individual's attitude score and their response to the statement "I can imagine myself in a long term relationship with someone of a different race" revealed significant findings. This suggests that the respondents are accepting of others engaging in interracial dating relationships but that they, themselves, would not consider dating outside of their own race. The significant findings for a more positive attitude towards interracial dating by those currently in an interracial relationship compared to those in a same race relationship lend support to the prior statement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a positive attitude towards interracial dating. In contrast to the positive attitude towards interracial dating ( $m = 1.44$ ), when individuals are asked if they themselves could imagine themselves in an interracial relationship, their responses to both survey questions have the most negative responses. The difference between viewer responses to whether they "would pursue dating an individual of a different race" and whether they "could imagine themselves dating interracially long-term" is significantly different. The significant difference between heavy and light viewers and their responses to these two questions suggest that heavy viewers are less likely to engage in interracial dating. The findings reveal that survey respondents have a positive attitude towards others dating interracially but they, themselves,

have negative feelings towards dating individuals outside their race. Perhaps this suggests that maybe we, as a society, have learned to accept others dating interracially; but when it comes to individuals themselves engaging in dating outside of their race, they are not as comfortable towards it. It is important to note that the viewer classification asked for average television viewing as a whole and did not specify which TV shows they watched during those hours. This is important because cultivation theory tends to focus on asking how many hours a specific genre is viewed, and then compares the attitude and perceptions between heavy and light viewers.

The research suggests that cultivation theory may have shifted from impacting overall attitudes and perceptions from viewing television content to the content impacting individuals' own attitudes about themselves. The findings also present support for positive and frequent representation of interracial relationships, including the presentation of both dating and friendships, to increase in television shows to help break existing stereotypes that are currently kept alive through existing television programming.

### **Limitations and Strengths**

The two main measurements used in the survey offer strength for the study, however, it is important to note that limitations are present. The first main measurement used to measure interracial beliefs was developed and tested for validity (Whately, 2004), and the second measurement of George Gerbner's established classification of heavy and light viewers was used to measure the type of viewer. The limitations of the study present some challenges to the results. The data was self-reported and collected using a hybrid sample that combined convenience and snowball methods to collect responses for the survey. Self-reported data relies on the individuals to be honest and if not, could skew the results. The hybrid snowball sample limited the ability to ensure an equal representation of individuals from varying demographics. This resulted in a

sample consisting of a majority of individuals born after 1980 and a racial representation of mainly the majority, lacking minority representation. This method limited the ability to control survey respondents but hoped to allow for a greater reach to older and younger generations of varying racial classifications. One last limitation is that individuals were not asked whom and what impacts their attitudes towards race and interracial dating.

### **Future Research**

The use of cultivation analysis as a basis for this research provides specific direction for theoretical inquiry. Once a content analysis is completed the next step calls for creation of research questions based on its findings. Using the present findings about interracial attitudes and the difference in positive and negative attitudes found between heavy and light viewers of TV, future research can investigate deeper into the foundation of attitudes towards race, such as whom and what mediums influence individuals. In addition, to further the investigation into television effects and decrease the risk for the limitations to be present, other mediums of messages need to be investigated to update the theory. Continued research into the importance of positive representation of interracial relationships on television and other mediums is needed in order to urge the mass media to represent society in a more positive and realistic manner. An updated content analysis on the presentation and representation of interracial dating, marriage, and families with children in television and film is needed to expand upon the current research. A larger demographic sample of individuals from each generation, in addition to a vast representation of the north, south, east, and west regions will enrich future findings. Adding questions about whom and what impact individuals' attitudes towards race and interracial dating will also add to the explanation of results.

### **Conclusion**

The present study sheds light on current attitudes towards IRD. The finding that heavy TV viewers hold more negative attitudes towards engaging in IRD themselves when compared to light viewers lends minimal support to cultivation theory. The overall positive attitude individuals have towards others engaging in interracial dating, in contrast to the negative attitude they hold towards themselves, reveals that television viewing may result in society gaining more tolerance of controversial topics. The present study found a positive attitude in the context of others dating interracially, but when individuals were asked about themselves dating interracially, their attitude is negative.

Cultivation theory was developed before the explosion and invasion of television and before media was so dominant in our daily lives. As media presence increases from generation to generation, it may impact the theory. As a result, an updated theory focusing on heavy viewing of television, the acceptance or tolerance level towards others engaging in controversial actions, and whether individuals feel it is acceptable for them to engage in controversial actions themselves could be developed.

In summary, when television is not consistent with the world that it broadcasts to, there can be serious repercussions. If television fails to accurately portray individuals in society, it may result in misleading beliefs and views about those we co-exist with. The present study is the beginning of an investigation into the power that television exposure has on acceptance of interracial dating and overall attitudes towards interactions with individuals outside of one's own racial group.

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## Appendix A

## Search Procedures

Years Searched: 1960 to present. It is important to note that the terms searched have a deep history. It was important to not limit the search to a specific timeframe to allow the researcher to become the expert.

## Databases Searched:

- EBSCO Host
- JSTOR
- ProQuest
- Jade Publications
- Sage Journals

## Terms Searched:

- Interracial Relationships
- Media Portrayal
- Race Representations in media
- Miscegenation and the media
- Cultivation of race
- Mixed race families and relationships
- Bi-racial relationships and families
- Interpersonal communication
- Cultivation of families
- Television families
- Bi-racial relationships
- Cultivation of TV relationships
- Racial Stereotypes
- Cultivation theory and media
- Content analysis on television characters

## Appendix B

## Survey Tool

*Attitudes, Beliefs and Acceptance towards Interracial Relationships***Instructions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate individual's attitudes and beliefs towards interracial dating and marriage.

The study will also investigate how individuals feel after watching television clips involving couples.

This survey should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. All personal information will remain confidential and anonymous.

A risk of this research is that for some people answering the survey questions may cause discomfort. The likelihood of that is not great, and if you do feel uncomfortable and want to discuss this with a professional you can access the RIT Counseling Center. Their information is at the end of the survey. If you are not affiliated with RIT the counseling center can refer you to a local practice.

The survey will help understand how individuals feel today towards interracial dating and marriage. Understanding the attitudes, beliefs, and acceptance towards interracial relationships will allow for further investigation into ways to improve society's acceptance of interracial relationships, marriage, and married families with children.

Please read carefully and answer all items in the survey. The data collected is confidential and includes demographic questions. There are no right or wrong answers. You may stop taking the survey at anytime without penalty.

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*Interracial Dating Attitudes Survey*

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**Directions**

Interracial dating or marrying is the dating of two people from different races. The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of what people think and feel about interracial relationships.

Please read each item carefully and consider how you feel about each statement. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements. Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

- \_\_\_ 1. I believe that interracial couples date outside their race to get attention.
- \_\_\_ 2. I feel that interracial couples have little in common.
- \_\_\_ 3. When I see an interracial couple I find myself evaluation them negatively.
- \_\_\_ 4. People date outside their own race because they feel inferior.
- \_\_\_ 5. Dating interracially shows a lack of respect for one's own race.
- \_\_\_ 6. I would be upset with a family member who dated outside his/her race.
- \_\_\_ 7. I would be upset with a close friend who dated outside his/her race.
- \_\_\_ 8. I feel uneasy around an interracial couple.
- \_\_\_ 9. People of different races should associate together only in non-dating settings.
- \_\_\_ 10. I am offended when I see an interracial couple.
- \_\_\_ 11. Interracial couples are more likely to have low self-esteem.
- \_\_\_ 12. Interracial dating interferes with my fundamental beliefs.
- \_\_\_ 13. People should date only within their race.
- \_\_\_ 14. I dislike seeing interracial couples together.

\_\_\_ 15. I would not pursue a relationship with someone of a different race regardless of my feelings for them.

\_\_\_ 16. Interracial dating interferes with my concept of cultural identity.

\_\_\_ 17. I support dating between people with the same skin color, but not with a different skin color.

\_\_\_ 18. I can imagine myself in a long-term relationship with someone of another race.

\_\_\_ 19. As long as the people involved love each other, I do not have a problem with Interracial dating.

\_\_\_ 20. I think interracial dating is a good thing.

## **Section II**

### **Television Survey**

1. How many hours do you spend watching TV a day currently?

Less than 1    1-2    2-3    3-4    More than 4

2. How many hours did you spend watching TV during your childhood (Age 18 and under)?

Less than 1    1-2    2-3    3-4    More than 4

2. How many TV's do you currently have in your house?

Less than 1    1-2    2-3    3-4    More than 4

3. How many TVs did you have in your house during your childhood?

Less than 1    1-2    2-3    3-4    More than 4

4. Do you watch your shows on a device other than a TV?

\_\_\_ Desktop Computer

\_\_\_ Laptop Computer

\_\_\_ Tablet

\_\_\_ Smart Phone

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5. What type of shows do you watch?

Comedy

Drama

News

PBS

Reality TV

Crime

Sci-fi

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you watch movies rather than television shows?

YES

NO

7. Do you feel that society is accepting of interracial relationships portrayed on television?

YES

NO

Please explain why you feel this way?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you believe that interracial relationships consisting of a White male and Black female are more accepted in society than a couple consisting of a Black male and a White female?

YES

NO

Please explain why you choose yes/no?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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9. Do you feel that the media represents race equally with a diverse cast?

YES

NO

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**10. Please check which shows you watch or have watched:**

The Big Bang Theory

Modern Family

Grey's Anatomy

Private Practice

The Blacklist

How I Met Your Mother

Scandal

Criminal Minds

NCIS

Once Upon a Time

2 Broke Girls

The Millers

Chicago Fire

Two and a Half Men

Mike and Molly

Revenge

Bones

New Girl

Parenthood

The Middle

Archie

All in the Family

The Jefferson's

In Living Color

I Love Lucy



**Section III**  
**Demographics**

1. What is your sex?

Male       Female

2. What year were you born?

1930-1939

1940-1959

1960-1979

1980-1989

1990-1999

3. What ethnicity describes you best?

Asian / Pacific Islander

White / Caucasian

Black / African American

Hispanic or Latino

Native American or American Indian

Other

4. What is our total household income in US dollars?

\$10,000-20,000

\$20,000-30,000

\$30,000-40,000

\$40,000-50,000

\$50,000-60,000

\$60,000-70,000

\$70,000-80,000

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No schooling completed

Nursery school to 8th grade

Some high school, no diploma

High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

Some college credit, no degree

Trade/technical/vocational training

Associate degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate degree

6. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married  
 Married or domestic partnership  
 Widowed  
 Divorced  
 Separated

7. How would you classify the relationship you are currently in with your significant other, or the most recent relationship you had?

- Same Race                       Interracial

THE END

Thank you for completing the survey. Your time is appreciated. If you would like to receive the results of this study or have any further questions please email Kimberly at [ksr5439@rit.edu](mailto:ksr5439@rit.edu).

#### Counseling Information

The RIT Counseling Center is available to all students:  
<http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/counseling/index.php>

Hours: Regular hours for the Counseling Center are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, and Friday, and 8:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, except during finals weeks, break weeks, and summer quarter. During those periods, the hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Location 2100 August Center (building 23A), second floor Address Counseling Center Rochester Institute of Technology 114 Lomb Memorial Drive Rochester, NY 14623-5608 Phone (585) 475-2261 (V/TTY) Fax (585) 475-6548

RIT Counseling Center Emergency Contacts: For psychological emergencies during Institute business hours, contact the Counseling Center at 475-2261 (V/TTY) / 475-6897 (TTY) or go directly to Room 2100, August Center (second floor). For psychological emergencies that cannot wait for business hours, call Public Safety at 475-3333 (V/TTY) and ask to speak with the counselor who is on-call. Note: Do not use e-mail in an emergency situation, since you cannot be assured that a counselor will open it at your time of need.

The RIT counseling center can refer you to a local counselor if needed.

You can search for a counselor in your area at: <http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/>