

*The Effects of Film Cast and Genre on Prejudice*

**An Honors Thesis (Honor 499)**

**by**

*Kyle Pittman*

**Thesis Advisor**

*Dr. Andrew Luttrell*

**Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana**

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## **Abstract**

Prejudicial views have long been an issue within the United States for a multitude of reasons. One such reason is the media that people consume that perpetuates or facilitates these prejudices. To test whether specific genres are more likely to produce a racial prejudice; a between subjects 2 [race] x 3 [genre] design was used. There are three primary hypotheses for this study. H1: Participants will rate films that feature predominantly white casts more favorably than those with predominantly black casts. H2: The preference for films with an all-white cast will be smaller (or reversed) for comedy films. H3: Participants who score low on external motivation to control prejudice will rate films featuring black casts less favorably than those scoring high on this motivation. Data were analyzed using a series of between-subjects factorial ANOVAs.

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## Process Analysis

For as long as I can remember, I have been absolutely enthralled by movies and television. So when the time came for me to start thinking about what I wanted to do for my thesis; I knew that I wanted to incorporate film in some way. I also felt that everyone can relate to the project in some way. Not everyone may be huge movie fans, but the prevalence of media within our everyday lives is undeniable. Therefore I feel like this project can be appreciated by a wide variety of people. After taking a prejudice and discrimination class as well as a reality television honors colloquium, I started to think about the ways in which media shapes our prejudices and how our prejudices shape the media landscape. My original idea involved showing one group of participants various clips from movies that perpetuated common stereotypes and having them take an implicit bias test. The control group would have been shown stereotype neutral clips and would also take the implicit bias test. The scores between the two groups would then be compared to see if films using stereotypes increased implicit bias. I ended up not going with this idea because I felt like it wouldn't challenge me enough creatively and intellectually. The original idea would have just demonstrated a correlational relationship but I wanted to discover something that was more complex while allowing me to express myself creatively. After meeting with my advisor, Dr. Luttrell, and pitching my original idea while still voicing my concerns over it, we began to reevaluate what I should do. After numerous zoom meetings and emails we finally landed on a final plan.

The primary research question changed from being “does biased media make it's audience more biased?” to “does the audience hold more bias for specific types of media?”. To answer this question, I looked at how the combination of cast race and film genre influence participants' perceptions of hypothetical media. Rather than showing clips from movies I

decided to create completely original movie posters. Creating these posters was the most enjoyable part of the whole thesis. I felt like I was really able to flex my creative abilities which the research portion of this project didn't allow me to utilize as much. Going into this project I had no experience with photoshop or principles of design so there was a substantial learning curve to overcome. I ended up using the free design website, Canva. After lots of trial and error I was able to create a finished product that I was really proud of. In total there were six possible cast and genre poster combinations that participants could have seen. The three genres were romance, comedy, and drama with each having two race conditions. Each genre featured either an all-black cast or an all-white cast. To get inspiration for these posters I looked up the top performing films of each genre and compiled a list of common elements seen throughout each of those posters. In addition to the posters I also created a plot synopsis for each genre. While these weren't long descriptions of the film, as I wrote I began to feel as if these could be real movies one day. I started thinking of character motivation and the plot structure. Throughout the creation of the film material I began to realize that when I am passionate about what I'm working on every detail is considered and accounted for. Throughout the rest of the thesis process I tried to keep up this detail-oriented nature.

While the research aspect of this project wasn't my favorite, I still really enjoyed seeing it all come together. There were times where I would get into a rut and the paper would feel disjointed. When that happened I would double down and look deeper for more research to support my study. My goal was to have the literature review tell a narrative rather than just a summary of studies past. I felt like just summarizing data was boring so to make it more interesting I had a story in mind that I was trying to tell and I hope readers pick up on the

narrative choices that I made. I realized that I enjoy telling and creating stories so I took every opportunity possible to do so in this project.

Throughout this project there were numerous ups and downs. There were several times where I had to pivot course or make significant edits. I had gone in with the hope that everything I did would be perfect on the first go. That obviously was not the case but I'm grateful that it wasn't. I've found that I learn best through a process of trial and error. When I was analyzing my data I would continually mess up the calculations or input the wrong variable. It was very frustrating but when I finally got the hang of it I felt so much more rewarded than if I had figured it out on the first attempt. Due to these initial errors and the way that I pushed myself to do better I created something that I am incredibly proud of. My project is by no means perfect but I think readers will find that a lot of passion was put into it.

## The Effects of Film Cast and Genre on Prejudice

In recent years, diversity within the film and television industry has become a hotly debated topic. Some feel that there is an insufficient amount of inclusivity. Others feel that the diversity we are seeing today is counterproductive. This may be due to minority actors playing stereotypical roles or filling roles that lack any real substance. One example of a popular black stereotype in cinema is the “angry black woman” who is frequently seen in sitcoms such as *Everybody Hates Chris* or *Parks and Recreation* (Pilgrim, 2008).

For a character to be nonsubstantive typically means they usually lack depth or nuance. They are stagnant and do not experience any change throughout the film. An example of a nonsubstantive stereotype role is the “magical Negro”. In this stereotypical role, the black character has some sort of magical ability that is typically used for the sole purpose of helping the white character. These characters have little to no characterization other than the fact that they have some magic power or ability the main character does not possess. While they are important to the plot, their sole purpose for being in the film is to support the main character and nothing else. Notable examples of this on screen are Morgan Freeman from the movie *Bruce Almighty* or Michael Clarke Duncan from *The Green Mile* (Nittle, 2020).

Additionally, many feel that diversity is too forced. For example, Disney recently unveiled their trailer for the live action remake of *The Little Mermaid* which features a black actress as the lead character Ariel. In the original animated film, Ariel was a white woman. Due to this change many have voiced outrage claiming that Disney is just trying to pander to a wider audience. Vox news deems this outrage over film diversification as a culture war (Romano, 2022). This “war” seems to break out again every time a beloved franchise features a predominantly black or female cast. Those against these castings will cite every reason why

these changes are bad aside from admitting they have racial prejudices. However not all who disagree with race-swapped remakes are overtly prejudiced. Some feel that instead of race swapping pre-established characters, movie studios should instead create films with original black characters and stories. Whether this would change people's viewpoints on film diversity is yet to be seen. I aimed to investigate whether there were internal or external motivators that influenced an individual's likelihood to view a film with a predominantly black cast.

### **Racial Bias & Discrimination**

The terms racial bias and discrimination are often used in regard to unfair treatment by law enforcement or by government officials. However, these are widespread phenomena that are present in nearly every facet of life. Simply put, a social bias is when a person holds a preference for a particular group of people over others (Payne et al., 2019). This could be on the basis of their gender, age, political ideology, or race to name a few. It is considered racial bias when preferences are held on the basis of a person's race.

There are two different types of bias, implicit and explicit. According to Daumeier et al. (2019), implicit biases are typically referred to as automatic or unconscious thoughts that emerge when a triggering stimulus is presented, while explicit biases are conscious beliefs and views people may have that they can verbally express. Daumeier and colleagues (2019) conducted three studies on accountability associated with implicit and explicit biases. They found that across all three studies, harmful actions attributed to implicit biases were deemed more forgivable than harmful actions motivated by explicit biases. This indicates that those who act due to implicit biases are held less accountable for their actions. This is a harmful mindset as it assumes implicit biases are an inevitable aspect of human nature that could lead to discrimination tolerance. What makes this mindset especially harmful is the extent to which it pervades society.



Nosek and colleagues (2007) conducted a large-scale study to investigate implicit bias using the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). The study contained a sample size of roughly 2.5 million participants. Of these 2.5 million participants 72% of them were white. The second largest racial demographic in this study were black individuals who made up 6.7% of the sample size. Data was gathered from three publicly accessible websites which featured various IATs. There were a total of seventeen different IAT topics available. To assess racial attitudes, one of the seventeen topics, black and white people were associated with either good or bad qualities. A quicker reaction time associating black people with bad qualities and white people with good qualities indicated an implicit preference for white. The results of the study found that 68% of all participants held an implicit preference for white over black individuals, as well as light skinned over dark-skinned individuals (Nosek et al., 2007). While this study is by no means representative of the entire United States population, the vastness of the sample size shows that implicit bias towards white over black individuals is a prevalent phenomenon.

Discrimination and bias are often used interchangeably; however, discrimination is more than just a set of beliefs or values. Discrimination is when a person is treated unjustly based on factors out of their control (Lee et al., 2019). In a study on racial discrimination prevalence in the United States, these researchers found that slightly less than half of all participants experienced some form of discrimination on a semiregular to regular basis. When those participants were divided into majority groups (white) and minority groups (black, Hispanic, and Asian), 63.10% of those from minority groups experienced discrimination regularly, while only 29.61% of white participants experienced discrimination at the same level (Lee et al., 2019). As with the implicit

bias study, only a small portion of the United States population is reflected. However, it still shows that racial bias and discrimination occur at a relatively high rate.

What makes racial bias and discrimination so widespread can be attributed to a number of factors. This could include factors such as the types of media someone consumes, the type of people one spends time with, and even firsthand interactions with the stimulus someone may be biased against. While the widespread nature of racial bias may seem bleak, there are studies that indicate it is possible to reduce one's implicit bias. A scale was developed to measure one's internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998). External motivations refer to social pressures to act in a non-prejudiced way (e.g., "I am concerned people will think of me as prejudiced"). These social pressures may be friends, coworkers, or even complete strangers. Internal motivation is the desire to view oneself as non-prejudiced (e.g., "I am disappointed in myself when I have a prejudicial thought or feeling"). Plant and Devine's (1998) scale includes a ten-item survey assessing these motivations. These ten questions are broken down into two scales of five questions, Internal Motivation to Control Prejudice (IMCP) and External Motivation to Control Prejudice (EMCP) scales. In order to test the validity and reliability of the measure they conducted a study in which participants were asked which stereotypes they endorsed. Half of the participants were given the questionnaire in private while the other half gave their responses orally. The results found that those who were high in external motivation endorsed the stereotypes more when in private than when they were asked in person. Those who were high in internal motivation scored similarly in both private and oral conditions. These findings are promising as they showed that people can decrease their prejudices when given sufficient motivation to do so.

### **Media Selection**

In the advent of streaming services and online news, almost any form of media is readily available. With that much content at our disposal, life becomes a series of choices. We have to decide between watching Netflix or Hulu, a movie or a television show, CNN or Fox News. The list could go on and on about the various media choices a person makes on a daily basis. Sometimes these are choices we actively think about, while other times our selections seem mindless. Some of these mindless decisions may not be so mindless after all. These “mindless” choices are likely caused by mental shortcuts our brain takes called heuristics (Dixon, 2019). These are quick judgements made that serve to prevent the brain from overworking itself. Without heuristics even the smallest decisions in life would have to be thought out in a complex manner. These heuristics can lead to biased decision-making, as it may lead a person to rely on what is comfortable through the use of stereotypes. This may include consuming media that predominantly portrays a person’s ingroup in a positive light or an outgroup in a negative one. Findings have shown that it only takes one example of a stereotype in media to create a connection between a social group and a stereotypic trait (Dixon, 2019). Oftentimes companies in the media industry will exploit this phenomenon and highlight stereotypes to boost viewership (Dixon, 2019). One example of this is that news outlets will often dedicate more coverage to stories of criminal behavior by black Americans than by white Americans (Dixon, 2019). White audiences may be more likely to watch these news stations because it paints their ingroup in a positive light and portrays an outgroup in a negative one.

However, it is not just news stations that are biased but rather the media landscape as a whole. Monk-Turner and colleagues (2010) analyzed the amount of diversity featured in primetime television. The primary goal was to analyze character depictions. The character variables analyzed were race, age, income, network, gender, and the prominence of their role.

The analysis was conducted during a two-week period. All shows airing from 8-10:00 pm on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox were analyzed. Results of the study found that 74% of actors were white with 16% being black and the final 10% being Latino, Asian American, or other.

A similar study by Mastro & Greenberg (2000) also found that 16% of actors on primetime television were black. This indicates that over the course of ten years, relatively little has changed in the way of increasing diversity. When character morality was analyzed black characters were found to be significantly more immoral than white characters (9% compared to 2%). Overall, the results of the study show that white characters appear more frequently and as more moral people than black characters.

A similar method to assess gender stereotypes in media was used by researchers Sink and Mastro (2016). Not only were women featured less than men (39.6 % to 60.4% respectively) but women were also shown to be less dominant and overly sexualized. These findings indicate that the media plays into the traditional gender stereotypes of men being more aggressive and stronger and women being weaker and more helpless. The media landscape is clearly biased as it continues to rely on stereotypic portrayals and an over-exaggeration of the prevalence of white males.

This warped perception of reality that the media portrays has the potential to have detrimental effects on society as a whole. This is because evidence shows that a biased media can create a biased public. Hansen and Hansen (1988) found that stereotypical gender portrayals tend to increase the use of sex-role stereotypes to interpret an individual's behavior. An additional study was conducted analyzing the effect stereotypic portrayals of black individuals had on a person's perception of that group (Ford, 1997). Participants were shown comedy skits from a popular television show which featured either stereotypical or neutral portrayals of black

individuals. After watching the skits participants were then asked to assess the guilt of a black or white individual accused of assaulting a student on a scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 11 (extremely strong). The results revealed that average guilt rankings of the accused black individual ( $M=6.05$ ) were significantly higher after watching the stereotypical skit than after watching the neutral skit ( $M=4.25$ ). Results for the level of the alleged white offender's guilt were not statistically significant. This study indicates that viewing stereotypical depictions on television can impact our decision-making abilities as well as our perceptions of those around us. Viewing biased media has the potential to make its viewers biased as well.

The media landscape is clearly biased and these biases can alter a viewer's own prejudices but this does not explain why the media is biased. One theoretical explanation is that by using these stereotypical depictions of various social groups our brains may have an easier time deciding what to watch because these stereotypes play into our heuristic processing (Dixon, 2019). This may indicate why the media landscape is still biased against minority groups. Ingroup viewers are less likely to watch movies predominantly featuring outgroup members. Those who do consume media depicting a stereotyped outgroup member have demonstrated a higher degree of ingroup favoritism (Mastro, 2003). Due to an increased level of ingroup favoritism, media that depicts an ingroup as worse than an outgroup, or is shown significantly less than an outgroup, will most likely be disregarded or ignored. These findings are distressing as it indicates ingroup members are highly likely to consume media that reaffirms their ingroup status by perpetuating racial stereotypes.

Movie and television studios may be aware of these findings and are concerned that increased representation will result in decreased profit. Grier, Brumbaugh, and Thornton (2006) analyzed the role of race in selective content. They found that white participants indicated less

intention to see a film featuring an ethnic outgroup than if it featured their ingroup. Meaning that when presented with two films white viewers are going to pick the film featuring white actors as opposed to a film featuring an actor of another race. Weaver's (2011) study sought to determine whether an individual's race would influence their choice of film when there was no dominant ethnic orientation. Twelve fake movie plot synopses were created and were rotated throughout the study so that each was shown an even number of times. These synopses were on a web page that also included names and pictures of the actors in the films. There were four race conditions, all white, all black, mostly white, and mostly black. For each racial condition, there was also a celebrity and non-celebrity condition. To assess racial attitudes the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) (Neville et al., 2000) measure was utilized. The results showed that the actors' race did not significantly affect one's desire to see the film. However, when individual racial attitudes were assessed, those high (vs. low) in CoBRAS were more interested in viewing movies with white casts than black casts.

Frequent movie viewers were also more likely to prefer all-white to mostly-white casts (Weaver, 2011). While this study found that cast member race did not affect white audiences' desire to see a film, racial attitudes were still a significant factor. With how prevalent negative racial attitudes are in the United States it makes sense as to why the media industry makes films with primarily white casts. Perhaps the media industry would make more diverse films if there was a stronger desire to see films of that nature.

### **Race and Film Genre**

As demonstrated, the media industry has a clear issue with minority representation whether it be stereotypical portrayals or just an overall lack of diversity. For example, in 2016, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science revealed that all of the nominees for the Oscars

that year were white. In 2013, black Americans made up roughly 13 to 25 percent of the population but only made up 6.7 percent of television lead roles and 16.7 percent of the lead roles in film (Yuen, 2017). The Oscars have had an extensive history of racial bias often snubbing films featuring black actors. Anecdotally, the films that are often in the running for best picture at the Oscars are either drama or romance. These genres consistently being in the running for best picture indicates that they are recognized as being a higher status genre. Not only are these genres viewed as having a higher status, but so are the actors within these films. The actors that often get parts in these films are primarily white. Due to this correlation, there may be a stronger pro-white bias when it comes to the demographic makeup of drama films.

Oftentimes one of the most overlooked genres in terms of awards and critical recognition are comedies. In an analysis of the 345 most popular television from the years 1987 to 2009, Tukachinsky et al. (2015) found that African Americans are cast in situational comedies more than any other genre. When they were cast in dramas, they typically only made up a small portion of an already diverse cast. One theory as to why black actors are so often cast in comedies is because comedies are often stereotype-confirming. This is because comedies often paint minorities in a disparaging light as if they are physical embodiments of popular stereotypes (Banjo et al., 2015). Oftentimes drama and romance films paint minorities in a more nuanced light instead of using stereotypes to develop these characters. This may explain why black actors are rarely seen in these genres. These movies are often stereotype disconfirming whereas comedies are more likely to confirm one's stereotypes.

### **Present Research**

Racial bias clearly affects the media a person consumes. These choices may be due to overt discrimination or due to implicit racial bias. Regardless of what influences a person's media

choices, the media industry perpetuates these biases through the use of stereotypical depictions of social groups. Studies have shown that internal and external motivations to control prejudice have helped in making nonbiased decisions. I aimed to discover whether these motivators are present when participants are choosing opt-in media content. Opt-in media refers to content found on streaming services where viewers are able to select from a number of different movies or shows. I also sought to investigate whether an individual's racial attitudes influence the type of movie genre they prefer in relation to the primary race of the cast. Participants were randomly assigned to see one movie poster that varies according to a 2 (race of character) x 3 (genre) between-subjects design. The poster advertised a movie that was either a romance, drama, or comedy film. The poster also showcased the film's cast, which was either predominantly white or predominantly black. Participants would answer questions regarding their personal interest in the film and their perceptions of the film's likely success. Following these questions, participants took the Internal and External Motivation to Control Prejudice scales (Plant & Devine, 1998) to assess their motivations to engage in more diverse material. Due to the widespread nature of prejudice and discrimination throughout the United States (Lee et al., 2019) as well as the current lack of diversity within Hollywood (Monk-Turner et al., 2010), my first hypothesis was that participants would rate films that feature predominantly white casts more favorably than those with predominantly black casts. My second hypothesis was that films featuring black actors would be ranked significantly lower than those with white actors; however, I did not predict that there would be a race effect for comedies. This is because black actors are featured in comedies significantly more than dramas (Tukachinsky et al., 2015). A potential reason for this could be that comedies are more likely to confirm offensive stereotypes than drama or romance films. My third hypothesis was that participants who scored low on external motivation would rate films



featuring black casts less favorably than those scoring high on the EMCP. I did not think there would be a difference between those who score high or low on IMCP. Plant and Devine's (1998) study found that those who were internally motivated to reduce prejudice were less likely to endorse stereotypes in both public and private settings.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through a variety of means. The primary recruitment method I used was the Ball State University Psychology SONA pool which consisted of all Ball State students enrolled in the introductory psychology course for that semester. Participants who took the survey through this avenue were granted course credit upon completion of the study. The second method of participant recruitment was printed flyers advertising the study. These flyers were posted at various locations around the Ball State University campus and had a QR code that directed them to the study. The final method of participant recruitment was through the social media app, Reddit. The survey link and description was posted to various subreddits such as r/takemysurvey and r/samplesizes. For these study methods, participants were not offered any form of compensation for completion of the survey.

A total of 102 participants completed the initial viewing of the hypothetical film poster. This sample was reduced to 78, with 24 participants being excluded from the final data due to failing attention checks and invalid age. Due to the nature of this study reflecting primarily on white participants' prejudices towards black individuals, all participants who did not indicate that they identified as Caucasian or part Caucasian were excluded from the final analysis. Of these 78 respondents, 64.1% were female (29.5% male, 6.4% non-binary/other). Ages ranged between 18 and 44 ( $M = 22.06$ ,  $SD = 6.25$ ). All descriptive statistics can be found in *Table 1*.

## **Independent Variables**

*Film Posters.* There were a total of six possible mock movie posters that participants were shown. Of these six posters, participants were only shown one and were not made aware that there were additional posters. There were three posters depicting an all-black cast and three posters depicting an all-white cast. The three different movie genres depicted were comedy, drama, and romance. In order to avoid further manipulation all posters contained the same elements with the only difference being the race of the characters. The ages and facial expressions were consistent between the two race conditions.

The drama posters depicted two young, teenage men looking somber with a city skyline in the background. The romance posters featured two characters embracing each other at sunset with the Eiffel Tower in the background. The comedy poster depicted two friends standing in front of a plain background. The facial expression of the friend conveys a sense of shock while the friend in the middle of the poster is shrugging with both hands in the air conveying a nonchalant attitude. The six film posters were created using the free to use website Canva. All photographic elements on the posters were stock images retrieved from online so no copyrights were violated. These sample posters are in Appendix B.

*Plot Synopsis.* There were three different plot synopses to accompany the three different movie genres portrayed. The three plot descriptions were written specifically for this study. The synopsis did not change depending on the race of the film's characters. These summaries were created specifically for the accompanying posters. They offered a brief idea of what the mock film was about to provide participants with enough information as to whether they would want to view the film or not.

The romance film synopsis detailed the story of how a young man and woman fall in love while spending a summer in Paris, France. The drama summary was about a young man and his brother who must navigate living in the city after being forced out of his home due to unfortunate circumstances. The comedy synopsis was about a friend who has to deal with his eccentric friend Emile, as his antics end them up in a variety of comedic disasters. To ensure there were no regional biases all characters featured in the synopses were from New York City. By making all of the characters from the same location it alleviated another potential outgroup variable. The full synopses can be found in Appendix B beneath their respective film posters.

### **Dependent Variables**

*Film Assessment Questionnaire.* After viewing the mock film poster and reading the synopsis, participants were asked a series of seven questions regarding their thoughts on the film poster and synopsis they were shown. Four questions were about the participants' personal feelings toward the film poster and synopsis ("personal liking"). For example, they were asked how likely they were to recommend the film and see the film. Another three items were constructed to assess the expected performance of the hypothetical film (e.g., "How likely is this film to be popular on a streaming platform (e.g., Netflix)?"). All items for personal liking ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and expected performance ( $\alpha = .68$ ) were measured on a five-point response format (1=very unlikely; 5=very likely). All items can be found in Appendix A.

### **Other Measured Variables**

*Internal and External Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scale.* The Internal and External Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scale (Plant and Devine, 1998) consists of two separate scales. One scale is the Internal Motivation to Control Prejudice Scale (IMCP). The other scale is the External Motivation to Control Prejudice Scale (EMCP). Each scale contains 5

items. All 10 items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item from the IMCP includes “Being non-prejudiced towards black people is important to my self-concept”. Remaining items can be located in Appendix C. All 10 IMCP and EMCP items were intermixed and presented in a randomized order. Plant and Devine (1998) report a reliability coefficient of both the IMCP and EMCP between  $\alpha = .76$  to  $.85$  across three samples. When divided into two separate measures the EMCP scale had solid reliability ( $\alpha = .76$ ) as did the IMCP ( $\alpha = .78$ ). The two scales also demonstrated acceptable test-retest reliability (IMS  $r = .77$ ; EMS  $r = .60$ ). Additionally Plant and Devine (1998) found that the two scales were relatively independent of each other ( $r = -.14$  to  $-.15$ ). This shows that the IMCP and EMCP scales measure two distinct forms of motivation with little to no overlap. For these two scales a median split was conducted which divided the IMCP and EMCP into two categories each. High and low EMCP distinctions as well as high and low IMCP distinctions.

*Attention Checks.* To account for the likelihood that some participants completing the online survey would not be paying careful attention to the materials, two questions were included in the survey. First, one item appeared among the IMCP and EMCP questions that asked: “To ensure data quality, please choose ‘disagree’ as your response to this question.”

Second, at the end of the survey, participants would see all three film titles and plot synopses and were asked to select the one they saw earlier in the study.

*Demographics.* Participants were asked a series of seven standard questions about their demographics such as age, race, and gender. See Appendix A for the full list of questions.

## **Procedure**

Participants who agreed to participate were directed to a brief excerpt about what the study entails. Participants read that the study was interested in gauging people's perceptions of a

hypothetical new movie. They were asked to imagine that they see this movie appear as a new release on Netflix. Following this, participants were randomly assigned to one of six possible film poster conditions. The poster genre was either romance, drama, or comedy. The race of the cast depicted on the poster was either black or white. These posters were accompanied by a brief plot synopsis describing the plot of the film shown. There was only one plot description for each genre regardless of the race depicted. Due to this being a between-subjects design, participants were only shown one test condition and were unaware of additional conditions. After viewing the poster and reading the film synopsis, participants were asked a series of questions on how successful the film will be as well as how likely they are to watch the film. The participants would then take the IMCP and EMCP scales (Plant and Devine, 1998). Lastly, participants would fill out a seven-item demographics survey. The study was expected to only take approximately ten minutes to complete. Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked for their participation and time and provided contact information in case of any questions.

## Results

### Personal Liking

A 2 (race) x 3 (genre) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects on how much people reported interest in seeing the film. Contrary to my first hypothesis, ANOVA results indicated that there were no significant main effects of race on personal liking. Personal liking was similar for both films featuring black ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) and white ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) casts,  $F(1,72) = .64$ ,  $p = .427$ . Additionally, there was no significant main effect of genre on personal liking but on average comedy ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) was liked more than drama ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) and romance ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $F(2,72) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .086$ , see *Table 2*. Contrary to my second hypothesis, there was no significant

interaction between race and genre on personal liking  $F(2,72) = .76, p = .472$ . Despite the lack of a significant interaction, the white drama ( $M = 3.17, SD = 0.95$ ) and white romance ( $M = 3.39, SD = 1.35$ ) films were liked more on average than black drama ( $M = 2.68, SD = 0.88$ ) and black romance ( $M = 2.98, SD = 1.30$ ) films, respectively. For the comedy films, the inverse effect was observed: the black comedy ( $M = 3.79, SD = 1.16$ ) was liked more than the white comedy ( $M = 3.55, SD = 1.25$ ). (See *Figure 1*).

### **Motivation to Control Prejudice**

To test my third hypothesis a 2 (race) x 2 (EMCP level) between-subjects ANOVA was utilized, which included two race conditions (black and white) and two external motivation conditions (high and low). It was hypothesized that participants ranking low on EMCP will rate films featuring black casts more negatively than those featuring white casts. Similar to the 2 (race) x 3 (genre) between-subjects ANOVA conducted on race and genre's influence on personal liking, there were no significant main effects for race alone,  $F(1,74) = 1.45, p = 0.232$ . There was also not a main effect of external motivation,  $F(1,74) = 1.49, p = 0.227$ . However, consistent with my hypothesis, the interaction between race and external motivation did have a significant effect on personal liking,  $F(1,74) = 5.52, p = 0.021$ . Participants who indicated low EMCP rated films featuring black actors ( $M = 3.01, SD = 1.38$ ) more negatively than films featuring white actors ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.10$ ) on average (See *Table 3 & Figure 2*). However, participants with high EMCP liked the films featuring black actors ( $M = 3.32, SD = 1.08$ ) slightly more than films featuring white actors ( $M = 3.01, SD = 1.14$ ).

A 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVA was utilized to analyze the relationship between race and IMCP. Unlike external motivation, there was no significant interaction between cast race and participant IMCP,  $F(1,74) = 0.33, p = 0.566$ . Those who indicated low IMCP rated their liking of

films featuring white ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) and black ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) casts similarly. Those who indicated high IMCP rated films featuring white casts ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) slightly more positively than films featuring black casts ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ), but this difference is not statistically larger than the difference between film casts among people lower in IMCP.

### **Expected Performance**

ANOVA models identical to the ones used above were utilized to test the effects on participants' expectations of the films' commercial performance. The results showed that there were no significant effects of race, genre, motivations to control prejudice, or their interactions on participants' expectations of how well the films would perform commercially,  $ps > .08$ .

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to discover potential reasons for the media industry's failure in diversity portrayal. One of the possible explanations for the lack of diverse representation within the media industry was due to audience preference. Prior research has shown that when presented with a variety of film casts ranging from very diverse to not diverse at all, those who indicated a high degree of racial prejudice significantly preferred films with white casts (Weaver, 2011). An additional study by Grier, Brumbaugh, and Thornton (2006) also revealed that people tend to prefer films that feature their ingroup and tend to avoid ones featuring outgroup members. Although my hypotheses were based on these studies, the results of my study did not support their findings.

My first hypothesis predicted that films featuring white casts would be rated more positively than films featuring black casts. The results showed that there was no significant difference in personal liking between race conditions. While my hypothesis was not supported the results indicate that there may not be as much bias when choosing films as was once thought.

The reasons for lack of media diversity may not lie solely in audience preference. So while my hypothesis was not supported, the lack of significant results is more promising to me as it shows film viewers may not be as biased as I once thought. This also shows that there could be potential unstudied reasons as to why the media landscape remains biased.

The study's second hypothesis was that the degree of racial bias would depend on genre. This hypothesis was based on the notion that comedies tend to utilize stereotypical depictions more so than drama or romance. This makes comedies more stereotype-confirming and would leave viewers feeling as if they experienced less stereotype threat (Banjo et al., 2015). Indeed, results showed that on average, comedies featuring black actors were more preferred than any other combination of genre and race (See *Figure 1*). While these findings were not statistically significant, perhaps the data would have supported the hypothesis significantly if the study had greater statistical. An additional explanation for the nonsignificant results could be that college-age participants generally prefer comedies. The comedy films were the most liked genre regardless of race, which to me indicates that people just enjoy these films more than the other two genres presented.

Of my three hypotheses, only the third one was supported by the data. I hypothesized that individuals low on EMCP would prefer films featuring white casts rather than films featuring black casts. This could indicate that individuals who do not have sufficient support systems or pressures to act in an unbiased manner will continue to endorse prejudicial views. These findings also show that if a person receives sufficient motivation to reduce prejudice from external factors, they may begin to have a more diverse and receptive mindset. These findings are promising because it indicates that there could be methods to reduce decisions made based on prejudice.



## **Limitations**

Due to the 2 x 3 between-subjects model utilized in this study there were six separate research conditions. As stated above there were a total of 78 valid participant responses. This means that there were roughly twelve respondents per condition. The limited sample size makes it difficult to find statistical support for hypotheses that may actually be true. Also, a majority of participants were recruited from an introductory psychology course; therefore, the sample is not representative of the entire country which makes it difficult to generalize this study to a wider audience. Lastly, the reliability scale for the expected performance scale was relatively low and should be used with caution.

## **Future Research**

While two out of three of my hypotheses were not supported, this study holds promise and poses an interesting question as to whether cast race and film genre have an effect on viewers. Future research could look at a variety of different genres such as the superhero genre, horror, noir, etc. I suggest future studies address the limitations of film preference measurements by refining the personal liking and expected performance scales. Both scales are relatively short and could be further adapted to provide a more reliable assessment of the hypothetical films. Additionally, I suggest looking further into measures of prejudice that more directly measure prejudice. The IMCP and EMCP scales used were worded in a way that assumed all of the participants had some form of prejudice. This is not always the case and could have been viewed as off-putting to the participants.

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## Appendix A

### City Lights Guide Us Home (Drama)



Plot Synopsis: After being kicked out of their home following a controversial incident at school; Carter and his brother Don must brave the streets of New York. With nothing but the city lights to guide them, the two brothers must learn the true meaning of home and what it takes to survive a world where everyone seems to be against you.

## Appendix A

### In the City of Love (Romance)



Plot Synopsis: Emily, a New York University graduate student studying fashion in Paris for the summer arrives in the city of love with a broken heart. When she meets Dylan, a fashion photographer and fellow New Yorker abroad, sparks fly but time is limited for Dylan whose work visa expires in a week.

## Appendix A

### What's the Deal with Emile (Comedy)



Plot Synopsis: When Eddy's eccentric best friend from high school, Emile, returns home to New York City for their high school reunion, the duo find themselves reliving their high school days but this time with adult repercussions.

## **Appendix B**

### Film Assessment Questionnaire

Responses will be measured on a 5-point response scale tailored specifically to each question

#### **Personal Liking**

1. How much do you think you would enjoy watching this film?
2. How interested are you in watching this film?
3. How likely would you be to watch this film on a streaming platform (e.g., Netflix)?
4. How likely would you be to recommend this film to a friend?

#### **Expected Performance**

1. How much do you think most other people would enjoy watching this film?
2. How likely is this film to be popular on a streaming platform (e.g., Netflix)?
3. How likely is this film to be nominated for an award (e.g., at the Oscars)?



## Appendix C

Internal and External Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scale (Plant & Devine, 1998)

Participants will rate responses on a seven-item response scale 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*)

### External Motivation Items

1. Because of today's PC (politically correct) standards I try to appear non prejudiced toward black people.
2. I try to hide any negative thoughts about black people in order to avoid negative reactions from others.
3. If I acted prejudiced toward black people, I would be concerned that others would be angry with me.
4. I attempt to appear non prejudiced toward black people in order to avoid disapproval from others.
5. I try to act non prejudiced toward black people because of pressure from others.

### Internal Motivation Items

1. I attempt to act in non-prejudiced ways toward black people because it is personally important to me.
2. According to my personal values, using stereotypes about black people is OK.
3. I am personally motivated by my beliefs to be non-prejudiced toward black people.
4. Because of my personal values, I believe that using stereotypes about black people is wrong.
5. Being non prejudiced toward black people is important to my self-concept

## Appendix D

### Demographics

**1. Please indicate which of the following you best identify with**

Male                  Female                  Transgender      Prefer Not to Say      Other:

**2. What is your age?**

18-23                  24-30                  31-40                  41 +

**3. What is your race/ethnicity?**

white                  black or African American                  Hispanic                  American  
 Indian or Alaskan Native      Asian                  Pacific Islander                  Two or more races  
 Race/ethnicity unknown                  Other (Please Specify):

**4. What is your marital status?**

Married                  Single                  Divorced                  Widowed                  Other:

**5. Which best describes your sexual orientation?**

Straight/heterosexual                  Homosexual                  Bisexual                  Asexual  
 Other:                  Prefer not to answer

**6. What is your highest education level attained?**

Less than a high school diploma                  high school diploma or equivalent                  Some  
 college                  Bachelor's degree                  Masters Degree                  Doctorate                  Other:

**7. What is your current employment status?**

Employed full time (40+ hours a week)                  Employed part-time (less than 40  
 hours a week)                  Unemployed (looking for work)                  Unemployed (Not seeking  
 work)                  Student                  Retired

Table 1

*Percents and Frequencies for Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
				Percent
Male	23	29.5	29.5	29.5
Female	50	64.1	64.1	93.6
Other	5	6.4	6.4	100.0

Table 2

*2 (Race) x 3(Genre) ANOVA on Personal Liking*

	Sum of					
	Squares	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>p</i>
Race	0.90	1	0.90	0.64	0.43	0.124
Genre	7.16	2	3.58	2.53	0.09	0.492
Race*Genre	2.14	2	1.07	0.76	0.47	0.174
Error	101.67	72	1.41			

Table 3

*2 (Race) x 2(External Motivation) ANOVA on Personal Liking*

	Sum of					
	Squares	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>p</i>
Race	1.99	1	1.99	1.45	0.23	0.221
EMCP	2.04	1	2.04	1.49	0.23	0.225
Race*EMCP	7.57	1	7.57	5.52	0.02	0.640
Error	101.38	74	1.37			

Figure 1

*Nonsignificant Interaction of Cast Race and Genre on Personal Liking*

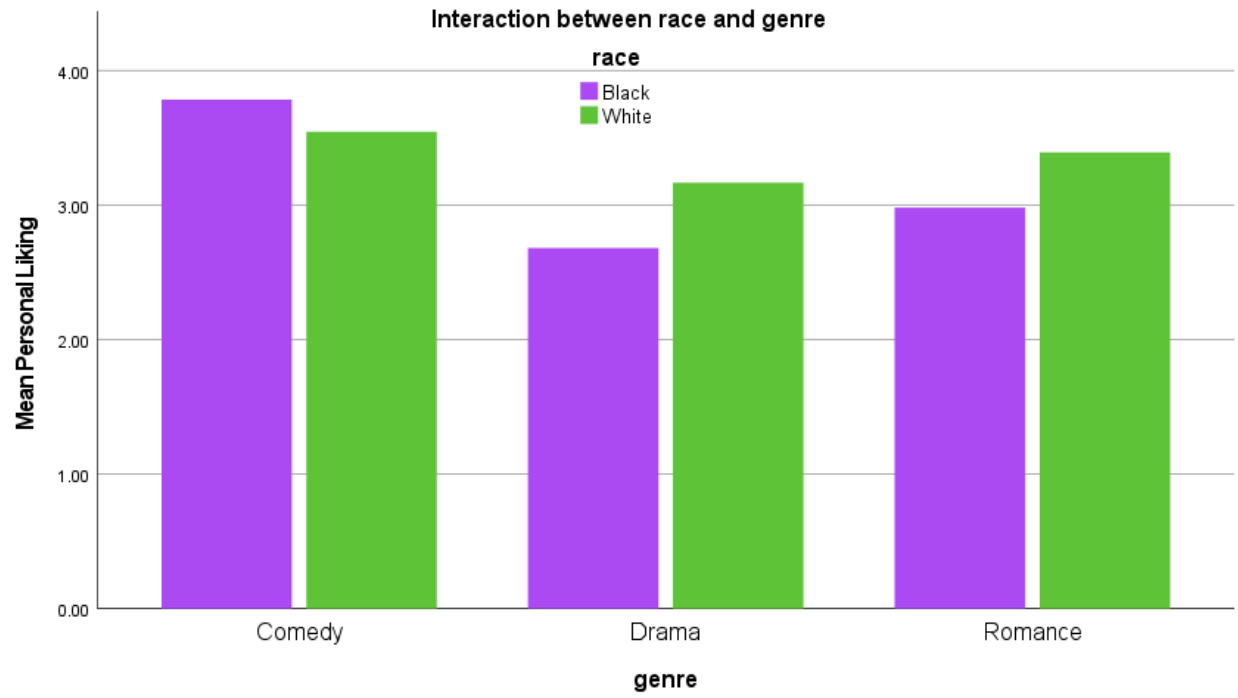


Figure 2

*Interaction Between External Motivation to Control Prejudice and Cast Race on Personal Liking*

