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THE IMPACT OF SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS ON RELATIONSHIP QUALITY
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLES

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Impact of Sociocultural Factors on Relationship Quality for African American

Couples

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Compared to their White counterparts, African Americans have higher never-married and divorce rates, greater complaints of negative partner behavior, and lower relationship quality (e.g. Philips & Sweeney, 2005), and this instability is not solely attributable to structural factors such as socioeconomic status (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). The current study examined internalized racism and television media, sociocultural factors theorized to play a unique role in relationship quality for Black couples. It was hypothesized that internalized racism would predict lower relationship quality. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that greater television viewing would predict lower relationship quality, and proportions of Black-oriented and mainstream programming viewed by participants were examined to explore the impact, if any, of race. The sample was comprised of 112 African Americans in a romantic relationship ($n = 22$ couples or 44 participants of the total 112 sample), and the data were examined for dependency of participant scores. No significant differences between coupled and non-coupled participants were found, allowing for the use of the full sample. Consistent with previous research and expectations, hierarchical linear regressions revealed that internalized racism was a significant predictor of poorer relationship quality. However, contrary to predictions and

emerging research, no television viewing variables significantly predicted relationship quality. Implications of the aforementioned findings, study limitations, and future directions are discussed.

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The Impact of Sociocultural Factors on Relationship Quality for African American Couples

Compared to their White counterparts, African Americans have higher never-married and divorce rates, greater complaints of negative partner behavior, and lower relationship quality (e.g. Philips & Sweeney, 2005). Marital instability is predictive of individual mental and physical health problems, child problems, crime and other social ills (e.g. Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008; Sampson, Laub, & Wimer, 2006). For African Americans, this instability is not solely attributable to structural factors such as socioeconomic status (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Thus, African Americans are at risk for poorer relationship quality in ways that are unique and warrant further study.

It is theorized that this unexplained instability experienced by African American couples might be accounted for by sociocultural factors such as racism and discrimination (Bryant et al., 2010). Indeed, African American couples disproportionately experience many stressors known to negatively impact relationships, such as financial strain and racial stress (Bryant et al., 2010), experiences, and these disparities have historical origins. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of specific sociocultural factors, namely internalized racism, television media consumption, and neighborhood disadvantage, on relationship quality for African American couples. Research regarding each of these constructs, particularly related to relationship quality will be reviewed in more detail below, followed by the goals and hypotheses of the current study.

Historical Treatment of African Americans and Negative Stereotypes

The institution of slavery and racial discrimination resulted in pervasive negative beliefs about African Americans that persist into the present. Negative stereotypes of

African Americans arose out of slavery, dehumanizing African slaves and perpetuating views of them as inferior to justify enslaving and mistreating them (e.g. Bogle, 2001; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; Stephen & Phillips, 2003). For example, African slaves were labeled as lazy and weak, as justification for the need of a slave master and harsh treatment. Similarly, slaves were also labeled as hypersexual in order to justify Black women being raped by White slave masters, as well as being bred with Black slave men so that slave masters could profit from their slave children (Stephen & Phillips, 2003). These negative stereotypes, among others, served to maintain and justify racist practices against African Americans including slavery, segregation, and discrimination, promoting an overall myth of inferiority that persists into the present (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Newer stereotypes of African Americans also fit with maintaining oppressive practices. For example, the *Welfare Mother* stereotype portrays African American women as lazy non-working mothers on welfare (Stephens & Phillips, 2003), to justify denying them the government assistance programs intended for White women widowed by war (Sklar, 1995). Due to the pervasive nature of these beliefs even today, some African Americans may endorse such stereotypes as representative of their own group (e.g. Kelly, 2004; Speight, 2007), referred to as internalized racism (Cokley, 2002).

Internalized Racism and Relationship Functioning

Despite a growing body of literature on negative associations between internalized racism and the mental and physical health of African Americans (e.g. Chae, Lincoln, Adler, & Syme, 2010; Kelly, 2004), little is known about how such beliefs impact African American relationships. A few studies have examined the potential impact of internalized racism within African American couples, with preliminary

evidence suggesting that internalized negative images have a detrimental impact on adult relationships (e.g. Taylor, 1990; Taylor & Zhang, 1990). For example, in a sample of 96 African American couples, Taylor (1990) found that husbands and wives' endorsement of internalized racism predicted their own marital satisfaction but not the satisfaction of their partner.

Kelly and Floyd (2001) investigated the relationship between in-group beliefs and dyadic trust and adjustment in a sample of 73 Black couples who were in their relationship for an average of 9.8 years, 75% of whom were married. They examined Afrocentricity, defined as an awareness of one's Black identity, participation in the development of Blacks as a community, and the recognition of oppression (e.g. Bell, Bouie, & Baldwin, 1990). In addition to Afrocentricity, Kelly and Floyd (2001) also explored the impact of internalized negative stereotypes. In examining potential interactions of internalized negative stereotypes and an Afrocentric worldview on couple trust and dyadic adjustment, findings provided some support for the expected harmful effects of internalized negative stereotypes. Specifically, women's endorsement of negative stereotypes was positively associated with their reports that their partners were undependable. For men who were highly Afrocentric, greater endorsement of negative stereotypes was associated with lower relationship satisfaction for themselves, and a lack of consensus for both partners.

In a similar study on the impact of anti-African American and pro-African American race-related beliefs on marital trust and adjustment for 93 married African American couples, religious well-being and socioeconomic status (SES) were examined as contextual moderators (Kelly & Floyd, 2006a). Anti-Black beliefs included negative

in-group stereotypes, and pro-Black beliefs included those representing a positive Black identity. An anti-Black perspective was negatively associated with couple functioning for husbands. Also, a mixed pro- and anti- Black perspective was negatively associated with marital trust for husbands, whereas a pro-Black perspective was positively associated with marital trust, although only for those husbands with low levels of religious well being (Kelly & Floyd, 2006a). These findings highlight some ways in which internalized beliefs about one's racial group can impact aspects of relationship quality for African American couples. Moreover, hierarchical regression analyses showed that anti-Black perspectives predicted significant variance in the levels of trust and/or relationship quality of both partners, beyond the variance already attributable to demographic factors such as marital and socioeconomic status (Kelly & Floyd, 2006b). Taken together, findings suggest that negative views of African Americans reflect historical, oppression-maintaining stereotypes about them, and such constructs have a unique negative influence on African American couple functioning.

As a replication and extension of work by Kelly and Floyd (2001, 2006a, 2006b), one study utilized exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of Stereotype Scale scores, the measure of in-group stereotypical beliefs used by Kelly and Floyd (2001, 2006a, 2006b), within two separate samples of African American men and women in order to examine the factor structure of the scale, and the convergent and external validity of factors identified with variables like relationship quality (Wesley, Kelly, & Chestnut, 2015). Wesley and colleagues (2015) utilized a combined dataset from Kelly and Floyd's studies (2001, 2006a), and a geographically separate, new dataset in order to compare factor structure across samples. The EFA identified a unidimensional factor that was

statistically equivalent across samples, representing greater endorsement of negative in-group stereotypes and less endorsement of positive stereotypes, accounting for 30% of the variance in scale scores for each sample (Wesley et al., 2015). They concluded that the unidimensional scale should be utilized in lieu of total scores from the Stereotype Scale. In addition, a six-factor model was derived from the Michigan sample ($N = 329$; accounting for 48% of the variance) whereas a five-factor model was derived from the Pennsylvania sample ($N = 142$; 45% of the variance), models that were similar but not equivalent in content across samples (Wesley et al., 2015). Factors scores for the six- and five-factor models of in-group stereotypes captured long-held, negative, oppression-justifying beliefs that may be internalized by African Americans, such as Blacks as lazy and hypersexual, as well as factors that captured positively valenced, culturally related views, such as the believe that African Americans are community oriented. Validity findings indicated that almost all factor scores derived from the Stereotype Scale were negatively associated with poorer relationship quality, but only in one sample (Wesley et al., 2015), and thus further research is needed. An additional limitation of all of the prior studies of stereotypes is that they all relied on participants' self-reported endorsement of in-group stereotypical content. Also, it is important to understand the mechanisms by which African Americans take in these negative in-group stereotypes.

Prominent Television Media Portrayals of African Americans

Television media, and portrayals of African Americans in programming, may represent one mechanism by which in-group beliefs are internalized, as television is a key method through which dominant perceptions of various groups in the United States are displayed and transmitted. In particular, it is likely that television media plays an

important role in the development of internalized racism, as viewing television media may shape beliefs about African Americans that can then be internalized. Historically, portrayals of African Americans in the media have been negative and stereotypical. Common stereotypes of African American women include the *Jezebel*, a sexually aggressive woman who wants sex without an emotional attachment, and the *Matriarch*, a controlling, emasculating woman who only needs a man for providing children (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Common stereotypes African American men include the *Buck*, a big, savage, and oversexed man, and the lazy and unreliable *Coon* (Bogle, 2001). In addition, stereotypes of African Americans also tend to be more negative than the stereotypes applied to other ethnic groups, as one study found that White male college undergraduates perceived Black female rape victims as more promiscuous than their White counterparts, and incorrectly rated Black males as most likely to rape a White woman (Donovan, 2007). Research also supports persistent associations between African Americans and criminality (Torres-Harding, Andrade Jr., & Romero Diaz, 2012), particularly in television news media (e.g. Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003).

In addition to the prevalence of negative stereotypes of African Americans, research suggests that television viewers can perceive such negative portrayals as realistic. In a study of 412 college students representing a number of racial and ethnic backgrounds, Punyanunt-Carter (2008) examined the perceived realism of various portrayals of African Americans on television. Results indicated that viewers perceived portrayals of African Americans in occupational roles, such as in service or blue-collar occupations, and portrayals of negative personality characteristics as real or true to life.

In contrast, viewers did not perceive portrayals of African Americans in low-achieving status roles or portrayals of positive stereotypes of African Americans as true to life (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Notably, results did not significantly differ by amount of television viewing (e.g. high versus low viewers), race, or gender. Thus, research suggests that portrayals of African Americans on television can color perceptions of this group in both negative and positive ways. Furthermore, given that results did not vary by race, findings are consistent with conceptualizations of internalized racism, such that African Americans were also susceptible to perceiving the portrayals of their racial group on television as realistic.

Given the historically negative portrayals of African Americans on television, it is believed that negative *perceptions* of African Americans would be prevalent. One study examined television-viewing patterns of 450 college students, assessing their perceptions of Caucasians, Asians, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans (Lee, Bichard, Irely, Walt, & Carlson, 2009). Perceptions of the various ethnic groups were categorized and assessed using the Big-Five personality traits of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Findings indicated that viewers attributed both positive and negative attributes to African Americans. Specifically, heavy viewers of entertainment television rated African Americans as less extroverted and less agreeable, heavy viewers of drama and informational programming rated African Americans higher on openness, and heavy viewers of reality television rated African Americans lower on neuroticism (Lee et al., 2009). Taken together, these findings indicated that while modern perceptions of African Americans are more mixed, negative views still persist.

As research indicates that views of African Americans are mixed and include positive and negative beliefs, many negative, gender-specific stereotypes that are internalized by African Americans could relate directly to and fuel conflict within the relationship, such as stereotypical perceptions of Black women as domineering toward Black men, or Black men as lazy (e.g. Kelly & Floyd, 2001; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). Furthermore, evidence shows that African American youth's internalization of negative images of women from rap videos predicts a greater endorsement of adversarial beliefs about relationships, in areas deemed to cause significant conflict in African American relationships. This relationship was particularly salient for youth who endorsed watching rap videos to "stay up" on the latest trends or because of their entertainment value (Bryant, 2008). Thus, the examination of television media consumption may be a critical link toward understanding how racist beliefs are internalized and how they impact African American couples.

Television Media Consumption and its Mental Health Correlates

Two prominent theories in the literature provide conceptualizations and hypotheses regarding the ways in which media, in particular television media, impacts its viewers. The cultivation theory posits that continued and frequent media exposure leads to altered perceptions of reality, as one begins to view media images as reflective of reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). As a result, stereotypical portrayals or the underrepresentation of certain groups in television media could be perceived as reflective of real world conditions. In contrast, the social cognitive theory primarily focuses on the ways in which viewers engage with media content (Bandura, 2001). In particular, this theory posits that personal characteristics and one's connection

to media images influences the salience of those images. Thus, according to social cognitive theory, viewer identification and individual engagement with media content directly impacts whether or not exposure to particular images would be internalized and or harmful. Both theories inform the methodology of many studies examining the relationship between television viewing and mental health for African Americans.

In light of theory regarding the psychological impact of television viewing, a body of literature has grown around examining key correlates of mental health outcomes, with the bulk of current research in this area focusing primarily on television viewing and its impact on African American children and adolescents. Although other forms of media such as mobile devices and computers are increasingly important for youth across all racial and ethnic backgrounds, television still consumes the majority of sedentary behavior during leisure time for boys and girls (Sission & Broyles, 2012). Racial and ethnic minority youth also tend to watch more television than their White counterparts, with studies finding that African American youth consume the most television (Sission & Broyles, 2012). Thus, findings from these studies provide an important framework for understanding the ways in which television media consumption may impact relationship quality for African Americans as adults.

As African American youth consume more television than other racial and ethnic groups, a number of studies have critically examined the role of television media on self-esteem and health-related behaviors of African American youth. In a study on the impact of television viewing on self-esteem among 156 African American high school students, findings indicated that the kinds of genres watched impacted the effect television viewing had on self-esteem. In particular, greater consumption of sports programming and music

videos had consistent negative associations with self-esteem (Ward, 2004). Similarly, consumption of specific genres of television programming has also been linked with attitudes related to gender and sex for African American youth. For example, in a review of the literature on sexual socialization and media influences for African American youth, Ward (2003) noted that greater exposure and engagement with genres that are more sexually oriented, such as music videos and soap operas, were associated with more causal attitudes about sex, and in some studies with more risky sexual behaviors. In addition, one study found that more frequent viewing of music videos in particular was related to more traditional views about gender and sexual relationships (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). As African American couples tend to espouse and engage in more egalitarian roles in romantic relationships (e.g. Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997), heavy viewing of such media and the internalization of more traditional gender roles could become a source of conflict for African Americans as adults in romantic relationships.

Studies on television media consumption among African American youth have also examined factors that may mitigate the impact of television viewing. In a study of 221 middle school students, researchers explored participants' endorsements of the perceived realism of television images. Results indicated no significant difference between African American and White students in perceived realism of media, suggesting that although Black youth may engage in high levels of television viewing, this does not seem to significantly impact how realistic such images appear, relative to their White counterparts. In addition, there were no significant differences between African American and White children in their parental involvement regarding media use, as both groups

were equally likely to have limits on their use (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, studies indicate that cultural factors may impact television-viewing and its effects, as African American youth who received affirming racial socialization messages were better able to discern and identify negative and positive stereotypes of Blacks, without endorsing negative depictions as valid (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014). For example, scores indicating receipt of more affirming racial socialization messages were significantly and positively correlated with scores indicating a stronger agreement with positive Black media images. Furthermore, scores indicating high levels of Black history knowledge were positively correlated with scores indicating an acknowledgment of a higher frequency of negative stereotypes of Blacks in the media (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). In sum, research on African American youth indicate that this population represents the highest consumers of television media, however the impact of such consumption on mental health and attitudes depends on a number of factors, namely the genre viewed and racial socialization. Thus, for African American adults and particularly couples, the impact of television consumption on relationship quality would likely vary in similar ways, however no studies have examined such links.

A number of studies have also examined associations between television viewing and mental health for adults, finding poor mental and physical health outcomes for those who spend more time watching television (e.g. Hamer, Stamatakis, & Mishra, 2010). For example, in a study of 189 African American and Caucasian women, researchers assessed television viewing and its relationship with physical activity, eating behaviors, and quality of life (Granner & Mburia-Mwalili, 2010). Controlling for race, results indicated that increased television viewing was positively associated with feelings of depression

and anxiety, eating meals/snacks while watching television, greater body mass index (BMI), and negatively associated with self-rated health (Granner & Mburia-Mwalili, 2010). In another study examining the impact of watching television on alcohol consumption among African American and White adult males, results indicated that watching television had a significant, positive effect on alcohol use, but only in the absence of religiosity, with no significant effect of race (Miller, Lykens, & Quinn, 2007). Thus, given the associations between greater consumption of television and poorer mental health, it is likely that higher rates of television consumption would impact relationship quality similarly. Such impact may occur through a direct effect on relationship quality, and or through poorer mental and physical health, which research has shown has negative associations with relationship quality (e.g. Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008). For African American couples, this effect may be particularly salient given high rates of television viewing for African American children and adolescents, setting the stage for viewing habits that may persist into adulthood and shape in-group beliefs. In sum, research indicates that a number of factors, such as genre and racial socialization, impact how television media consumption affects viewers, however in general greater television media consumption is associated with poorer outcomes.

Television Viewing and Romantic Relationships

Despite research on the impact of television viewing on various correlates of mental health, few studies have critically examined how television viewing impacts romantic interactions or relationship quality beyond its negative impact on the general attitudes toward relationships or future intentions (Osborn, 2012). In a study of 188 Israeli college students in romantic relationships, total television viewing time predicted

self-reported lower commitment to the relationship (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). Furthermore, more time spent specifically viewing family drama and sitcoms predicted lower self-reported relationship satisfaction and a greater endorsement of tendencies toward relationship conflict, whereas consumption of other media types such as internet or newspapers did not (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). However, this study was conducted outside of the United States with an Israeli sample, and did not systematically examine data from both partners. Thus, it is unclear if these findings would generalize to African American couples. In another study of 392 married couples, (85% White, 3.3% African American), greater television viewing and a greater self-reported belief in the portrayals of relationships on television significantly predicted relationship variables above the relative influence of control variables such as relationship length, sex, and age (Osborn, 2012). Specifically, media variables predicted higher perceived costs of the relationship, lower commitment, and more positive perceptions of alternative partners outside of the relationship (Osborn, 2012). Taken together, preliminary data indicates television viewing impacts relationship constructs negatively for more than one racial/ethnic group. It is likely this negative relationship between television viewing and romantic relationships is stronger for African Americans due a longstanding history of negative, stereotypical depictions of Black people in the media. However, no known studies have examined the role of television media viewing within the romantic context for African Americans, a group that also watches more television as children and adolescents, and is uniquely at risk for relationship distress and discord as adults.

It is also unknown what television media consumption means in terms of race, specifically the degree to which viewing members of one's own racial group may matter

for constructs like relationship quality. This is an important gap, as research indicates the impact of racial constructs are necessary considerations for understanding African American relationships. One study explored how viewing of mainstream, or programming with predominately White casts, Black-oriented, or programming with predominately Black casts, and Spanish-language television programs impacted body satisfaction for Latina girls ages 11 to 17 (Schooler, 2008). For participants who were more acculturated to mainstream American culture, viewing of mainstream television was associated with less body satisfaction, whereas viewing Black-oriented television was associated with greater body satisfaction. Schooler (2008) posits that given the value of “thick” or curvy women in African American and Latino culture, Black-oriented television is more likely to highlight women who meet this body image, rather than the thinner body ideal that dominates mainstream American television. As a result, body image satisfaction seems to be related to the race of the casts within programming watched as well as individual acculturation levels, indicating that the examination of race as well as cultural factors are important toward understanding the impact of television for this group. However, no known studies have examined the role of race in television programming with African American adults, and no known studies to date have examined race in television programming in relation to romantic relationships and related constructs.

The Impact of Neighborhood Factors on Relationship Quality

Similarly with television media, neighborhood factors may be another mechanism by which African Americans internalize racist beliefs (Taylor, 1990). Theory indicates *mood spillover* can occur, in which negative or positive perceptions outside the home can

impact one's mood inside the home (e.g. Menaghan, 1991). Data show that couples and families in neighborhoods characterized by community decay and disorder, such as crime and noise, are vulnerable to experiencing stress and negative moods from such neighborhood level experiences (Wickrama, Bryant, & Wickrama, 2010). Data indicates the negative mood spillovers are more likely than positive ones (e.g. Williams & Alliger, 1994). Furthermore, perceptions of community disorder foster negative emotions, such as anger and mistrust, and negative interpersonal interactions, such as swearing and yelling, which inhibit closeness (Cutrona et al., 2003; Ross & Mirowsky, 2009; Wickrama et al., 2010). Thus, the neighborhoods in which African American couples live could impact the degree to which they endorse stereotypical in-group beliefs, and in turn impact relationship quality (Taylor, 1990). For example, African American couples who live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods high in crime may be more prone to endorse beliefs that Blacks are untrustworthy and prone to criminality, and such negative beliefs could spillover into the relationship, negatively impacting relationship quality (e.g. Taylor, 1990). Given research indicating ongoing residential segregation and higher rates of poverty experienced by African Americans (e.g. Massey, 2004), the neighborhood context is critical toward understanding relationship quality for African American couples, who are at greater risk for experiencing neighborhood related stressors than other racial and ethnic groups.

Research highlights that adverse community characteristics negatively impact mental and physical health, and that romantic relationships are impacted similarly across racial and ethnic groups. Neighborhood problems, typically conceptualized by factors such as vandalism, vacant buildings, and perceptions of crime, have been associated with

higher levels of psychological distress (Cutrona et al., 2005; Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005; Kotchick, Dorsey, & Heller, 2005) and poorer physical health (Wickrama, Wickrama, & Bryant, 2006). Similarly, neighborhood problems and low neighborhood cohesion have been linked to higher levels of family conflict (Deng et al., 2006; Duncan, Strycker, Duncan, & Okut, 2002), whereas viewing one's neighborhood as a good place to live and raise children predicted higher levels of marital satisfaction for both men and women (Mannon & Brooks, 2006). Thus the neighborhood context and perceptions of one's own neighborhood conditions are important to investigate in order to fully and adequately capture the context in which couple relationships operate.

For African American couples, neighborhood factors predict relationship quality, even after controlling for individual level demographic factors. For example, in a study of 540 African American husbands and wives, perceptions of community disorder, such as endorsements of too much noise, graffiti and or crime, predicted husbands' hostile behavior toward their wives, and husbands' and wives' perceptions of community disorder were strongly and positively associated with each other (Wickrama et al., 2010). In another study of 202 married African American couples from a range of neighborhoods, family financial strain, neighborhood level economic disadvantage and state of residence were examined as predictors of relationship quality, and observed warmth and hostility between partners (Cutrona et al., 2003). Controlling for individual demographic characteristics, neighborhood level economic disadvantage predicted lower warmth but surprisingly higher marital quality (Cutrona et al., 2003). Taken together, such studies indicate that neighborhood factors may uniquely impact relationship quality and also interact with other dyadic behaviors to impact relationship quality. However, the

lack of associations between perceived community disorder and hostile behaviors for African American wives in the study by Wickrama and colleagues (2010), and the unexpected finding that neighborhood economic disadvantage predicted higher relationship quality in the Cutrona et al. (2003) study indicate that a greater understanding of the role of neighborhood context in relationship quality is needed to fully parse out its influence. Furthermore, given theory indicating that neighborhood disadvantage may support the internalization of racist in-group beliefs (Taylor, 1990), a greater understanding the relationship between neighborhood factors and internalized racism is needed.

The Current Study

The current study is a replication and extension of work conducted by Kelly and Floyd (2001, 2006a, 2006b) and Wesley and colleagues (2015), in order to examine the role of internalized racism, television media, and neighborhood disadvantage in predicting relationship quality for African American couples. The examination of internalized racism in conjunction with television media and neighborhood factors addresses important gaps in the literature on relationship quality, as these variables represent sociocultural factors that are theorized to account for the poorer relationship quality experienced by African American couples that has not been adequately explained by demographic factors. It is hypothesized that internalized racism, television media consumption, and neighborhood factors will each account for a significant and unique portion of the variance in relationship quality for African American couples. In particular, it is hypothesized that higher scores indicating more internalized negative stereotypes will predict lower relationship quality, consistent with research indicating negative

associations between internalized racism and relationship quality for African American couples (e.g. Kelly & Floyd, 2001; Kelly & Floyd, 2006a; Kelly & Floyd, 2006b; Wesley et al., 2015). Next, current research indicates greater television consumption is associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes (e.g. Granner & Mburia-Mwalili, 2010), which themselves are associated with poorer relationship quality (e.g. Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008) across racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, preliminary research also indicates greater television viewing predicts poorer outcomes on measures of relationship-related constructs across racial and ethnic groups (e.g. Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014; Osborn, 2012). In light of such research, it is hypothesized that greater television viewing will predict lower relationship quality among African American couples. This hypothesis is also consistent with cultivation theory, indicating that more exposure to television media increases the likelihood that those images will be perceived as realistic and valid. As most of the aforementioned studies on the relationship between television and relationship constructs were not conducted with African American samples, analyses will specifically examine the relative proportions of viewing Black programming, or shows with predominately Black cast or a Black lead, and proportions of mainstream programming viewing, shows with a predominately White cast, similar to Schooler's 2008 study. This enables exploration of any potential differences between types of programming by the race of cast members in predicting relationship quality, given research that portrayals of African Americans are more often negative (e.g. Dixon & Azocar, 2007), and that perceptions of African Americans related to television viewing are mixed (Lee et al., 2009). Lastly, as data indicates neighborhoods factors can impact couple and family relationships (e.g. Cutrona et al., 2003; Deng et al., 2006; Duncan et

al., 2002; Mannon & Brooks, 2006), and it theorized to impact the internalization of racist in-group beliefs (e.g. Taylor, 1990), it is hypothesized that couples who reside in more disadvantaged neighborhoods will experience poorer relationship quality.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Eligible participants included self-identified (as at least second generation) African American/Black heterosexual couples aged 18 or older in a committed relationship for at least six months. Participants were recruited using multiple methods, including the posting of study flyers in the surrounding community, local university campus, and on Craigslist in various cities, networking with Black student organizations on university campuses, and social media networks such as Facebook (both personal postings and paid Facebook advertisements), Instagram, and Twitter. Email listservs were also utilized as a recruitment tool, including community listservs for young Black professionals, university listservs and personal forwarding of study information through faculty at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities).

The aforementioned methods yielded few participants. Thus, in person and personalized recruitment methods were utilized. This included networking with Black churches, Black couple ministries, and Black women's ministries, and well as personal calls and messages to friends, families, and neighbors, encouraging greater participation through word of mouth. This approach served to address recruitment barriers related to cultural mistrust of researchers within the African American community (e.g. Scharff et al., 2010). Lastly, participants were also recruited through the Healthier Black Elder Program at Wayne State University, through which researchers can receive contact

information for members of the program interested in participating in research. As an incentive for their participation, all participants' names were entered into a \$100 lottery drawing. Qualtrics, an online survey program, was used to administer the informed consent and self-report questionnaire packets online, however hard copies were available for participants who did not have internet access and/or a computer, or preferred to fill out a hard copy of the packet. A unique ID code was given to each participant, with a joint code to link responses submitted by each partner of a couple.

The aforementioned recruitment methods yielded a sample of 112 participants ($n = 77$ women, 35 men), with 44 participants (22 couples) providing couple data, or data from both partners in the romantic relationship. Married couples represented 71% of the sample, with the remainder of the sample seriously dating (23%), living together (5%), or engaged (1%). Table 1 highlights means and standard deviations for demographic, sociocultural variables, and total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores.

Measures

Demographic Information. Participants completed basic demographic information including age, gender, education level, income, and length of relationship.

Internalized Racism. The Stereotype Scale assesses the degree to which one endorses negative in-group beliefs about Black people (Kelly & Floyd, 2001). The 52-item scale is comprised of three checklists of adjectives representing positive or negative stereotypes of Blacks in general (14 items), Black men (19 items), and Black women (19 items). Kelly and Floyd (2001) adapted the Stereotype Scale from Allen and Hatchett's 10-item Black Group Perception Scale (BGPS; 1986) by adding four additional general stereotype items, asking the same 14 items separately for Black men and women, and

adding five additional items to each gendered list representing common stereotypes specifically of Black men and women respectively. Furthermore, the additional items reflected more positive stereotypes in addition to the solely negative ones used in the BGPS. Sample items include, “Most Black people are community oriented,” “Most Black people are lazy,” “Black men neglect their families,” and “Black women are intelligent,” with negative adjectives reverse scored. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 *strongly agree* to 5 *strongly disagree*. Published Cronbach’s alphas for the scale were as follows for men’s and women’s reports respectively: .83 and .84 for Blacks in general, .87 and .87 for ratings of Black men, and .79 and .84 for ratings of Black women, indicating good internal consistency (Kelly & Floyd, 2001). Given that a psychometric analysis of the Stereotype Scale indicated that only a unidimensional factor was equivalent across two distinct samples of African Americans (Wesley et al., 2015), only this model will be utilized in analyses in lieu of the original total scale and subscale scores (e.g. general stereotypes, stereotypes for women and men). The unidimensional model is comprised of 35 items representing positively and negatively valence items across Blacks in general, Black women, and Black men. Cronbach’s alphas for the unidimensional model were .94 and .72 across two distinct samples (Wesley et al., 2015). The Cronbach’s alpha for the unidimensional model in the current study was .94.

Television Media Consumption. Based on methodology used in other studies examining television viewing habits among ethnic minority groups (e.g. Schooler, 2008), participants were asked about television media consumption. A list of primetime television programs was generated according to Nielsen ratings and programming available on major networks ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox during the 2015-2016 season.

Participants were asked to indicate if they viewed each primetime program, and then asked to indicate on a five point Likert scale how often they watched programming for that particular network (never/not this season, a few times a month, once a week, a couple of times a week, and almost daily). For each program participants were asked if the program was viewed on television, or through streaming sites such as Hulu or Netflix, in order to facilitate accuracy in reporting. Using the frequency of viewing by program, and the program's overall length and airing schedule, responses were scaled into an estimate of viewing hours per week for each program. Then two sum scores were computed for each participant. One score indicated total weekly hours of Black programming, defined as programs with a predominantly Black cast, or programs with a Black lead character, defined as shows where the lead character is Black but the cast is not predominately Black. The second score indicated total amount of weekly mainstream television viewing (Schooler, 2008), defined as programming in which the cast is predominately White. In addition, proportions of viewing each type of programming were calculated by dividing the number of programs endorsed in that category (e.g. Black-oriented or mainstream) over the total number of programs watched for each participant.

Using a procedure outlined by Harrison (2000) and Martins and Harrison (2012), participants were also asked to indicate their overall hours of television viewing in the preceding weekday at three points: in the morning before lunch, in the afternoon before dinner, and after dinner before bed. Participants were asked to anchor their television viewing along the same time points for the most recent Saturday and Sunday, with an average weekly television viewing index computed by multiplying the total weekday hours reported by five, and adding in television viewing hours for Saturday and Sunday

(Harrison, 2000; Martins & Harrison, 2012). Only total weekly viewing hours and proportions of Black-oriented and mainstream programming were used in the primary analyses.

Neighborhood Disadvantage Factors. To assess the degree of overall disadvantage in the neighborhood, census data variables were aggregated at the block group level, including percent of adult males/females without a high school diploma, percent non-white, percent living below the poverty line, percent of male/female unemployment, and percent of vacant buildings. The variables were standardized then summed into a scale, with higher scores indicating greater disadvantage. These variables reflect common census data collected across geographic areas, and fit with common indicators of neighborhood disadvantage in the literature (e.g. Cutrona et al., 2005; Gutman et al., 2005; Kotchick et al., 2005). Given the priority for recent intensive recruitment efforts to increase sample size and maximize overall statistical power, data were unable to be compiled for neighborhood disadvantage factors. Thus, neighborhood disadvantage was not included in analyses as a predictor variable.

Relationship Quality. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier 1976) is a 32 item self-report measure designed to assess global relationship functioning as well as four domains, namely satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, and affectional expression. The DAS includes responses on a Likert-type scale for some items, such as agreement between partners on the handling of finances or values, as well as items such as, “How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?” and dichotomous “yes” or “no” response items. A total score of 107 generally indicates a cutoff between “happy or non-distressed” and “unhappy or distressed” couples, with scores ranging from 0 to 151, and the DAS has

well-established validity and reliability in distinguishing distressed from nondistressed couples, both married and unmarried, across racial and ethnic groups (e.g. Graham, Yenling, & Jeziorski, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha for the DAS in the current study was .93.

Results

Data Analysis Plan

First, relationships between total Stereotype Scale scores, total weekly viewing hours, proportions of Black-oriented programming, proportions of mainstream programming, and total dyadic adjustment scores were examined using Pearson's *r* correlational analyses. Given the priority for recent intensive recruitment efforts to increase sample size and maximize overall statistical power, data were unable to be compiled for neighborhood disadvantage. Thus, neighborhood disadvantage was not included in analyses. Next, as couples comprised 44 participants ($n = 22$ couples) in the sample, an ANOVA was utilized to rule out potential dependency effects between male and female couple participants (participants who participated along with their romantic partner) and male and female individual participants (participants who met the inclusion criterion of being in a relationship but whose partners were not a part of the study) on Stereotype Scale scores, the three television viewing variables, and dyadic adjustment scores. Results of this analysis dictated whether the full sample was used for hierarchical linear regression analyses due to no indication of dependency issues, or if dependency issues warranted the use of data from only women ($n = 76$) in the sample. Before running primary analyses, diagnostic analyses were conducted on predictive variables to examine their appropriateness for regression analyses. In particular, all variables of interest were

assessed for normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and unusual cases or outliers that could skew estimates in the model.

Primary Analyses

Table 2 highlights Pearson's r correlational analyses among sociocultural variables and total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores. Results indicated Stereotype Scale scores were significantly and negatively correlated with total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores. In addition, results indicated a significant negative relationship between proportions of mainstream programming and proportions of Black-oriented programming. No other correlations examined were significant.

In examining potential dependency issues among Stereotype Scale scores, results indicated no significant differences between couple participants ($M = 109.40$, $SD = 20.47$ for women; $M = 114.54$, $SD = 12.04$ for men) and individual participants ($M = 109.40$, $SD = 20.47$ for women; $M = 114.54$, $SD = 12.04$ for men), $F(3, 108) = .430$, $p = .732$. Lastly, results indicated no significant differences between couple participants ($M = 114.59$, $SD = 13.20$ for women; $M = 116.14$, $SD = 15.51$ for men) and individual participants ($M = 109.40$, $SD = 20.47$ for women; $M = 114.54$, $SD = 12.04$ for men) in total dyadic adjustment scores, $F(3, 108) = 1.052$, $p = .373$.

Similarly, for television viewing variables, no significant differences were indicated between couple participants ($M = 23.94$ hours, $SD = 15.45$ hours for women; $M = 20.74$ hours, $SD = 12.13$ hours for men) and individual participants ($M = 25.73$ hours, $SD = 16.55$ hours for women; $M = 29.60$ hours, $SD = 16.02$ hours for men) in overall weekly television viewing hours, $F(3, 108) = 1.002$, $p = .395$. In addition, no significant differences were indicated between couple participants ($M = 35.18$ percent, $SD = 24.82$

for women; $M = 22.46$ percent, $SD = 21.36$ for men) and individual participants ($M = 34.27$ percent, $SD = 21.95$ for women; $M = 26.07$ percent, $SD = 28.20$ for men) in proportions of Black-oriented programming, $F(3, 108) = 1.791, p = .153$. In examining proportions of mainstream programming, results indicated no significant differences between couple participants ($M = 64.82$ percent, $SD = 24.82$ for women; $M = 63.90$ percent, $SD = 32.38$ for men) and individual participants ($M = 63.92$ percent, $SD = 23.17$ for women; $M = 43.16$ percent, $SD = 36.95$ for men), $F(3, 108) = 2.267, p = .085$. However, the Levene's Test of Equality of Variances was significant at $p = .006$, indicated that homogeneity of variances across groups could not be assumed. Thus, the ANOVA results for proportions of mainstream programming must be interpreted with caution.

Given no evidence of significant dependency issues in the variables of interest, hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted with the full sample of 112 participants. It was hypothesized that higher Stereotype Scale scores indicating a greater endorsement of negative stereotypes would predict poorer relationship quality. In addition, it was hypothesized that greater television consumption (assessed in total weekly viewing hours) would predict poorer relationship quality. The racial composition of the cast (assessed in proportions of viewing Black-oriented and mainstream programming) was examined in an exploratory fashion to determine the relative impact, if any, of race. Preliminary analyses of normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and unusual cases or outliers that could skew estimates in the model indicated no extreme violations. Results of regression analyses indicated that Stereotype Scale scores were a significant predictor of relationship quality ($F(1, 110) = 4.615, p = .034$ with $R^2 = .032$).

Specifically, a unit increase in Stereotype Scale scores predicted a .192 decrease in total dyadic adjustment scores. However, the addition of total weekly viewing hours ($R^2 = .026, p = .52$), proportion of Black-oriented programming ($R^2 = .027, p = .311$), and proportion of mainstream programming ($R^2 = .018, p = .984$), as predictors of relationship quality did not significantly influence the fit of the model.

Further Exploratory Analyses

Additional exploratory regression analyses were conducted to examine predictors of interest while controlling for demographic variables known to impact relationship quality (age and length of relationship; e.g., Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Results indicated that age ($R^2 = .025, p = .097$) and length of relationship ($R^2 = .055, p = .066$) were not significant predictors of relationship quality. The addition of Stereotype Scale scores significantly influenced the fit of model, $F(1, 107) = 4.146, p = .044$ with $R^2 = .090$, predicting a .187 decrease in dyadic adjustment scores for every unit increase in Stereotype Scale scores above the influence of demographic variables. However, the addition of total weekly viewing hours ($R^2 = .091, p = .776$), proportion of Black-oriented programming ($R^2 = .095, p = .481$), and proportion of mainstream programming ($R^2 = .096, p = .885$), as predictors of relationship quality did not significantly impact the fit of the model.

Next, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine the impact of Stereotype Scale scores, total weekly television viewing, proportion of Black-oriented programming viewed, and proportion of mainstream programming viewed, on subscales of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, also controlling for age and length of the relationship. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is comprised of four subscales: dyadic affection, dyadic consensus,

dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion. Regression analyses indicated no significant predictors of dyadic affection, $F(1, 107) = 4.146, p = .044$ with $R^2 = .090$. Age was a significant predictor of dyadic consensus, $F(1, 109) = 5.724, p = .018$ with $R^2 = .050$, predicting a .128 increase in dyadic adjustment scores for each additional year in age, however length of relationship, Stereotype Scale scores, and television media variables did not significantly impact the model.

Results indicated no significant influence of age, $F(1, 109) = .981, p = .324$ with $R^2 = .009$, on dyadic satisfaction. The addition of length of relationship to the model was a significant predictor of dyadic satisfaction, ($R^2 = .064, p = .013$), as each additional year predicted a .176 decrease in dyadic satisfaction scores. However, the addition of Stereotype Scale scores, and television media variables did not significantly influence the model. In examining dyadic cohesion, results indicated no significant influence of age, $F(1, 109) = .330, p = .567$ with $R^2 = .003$, or length of relationship, ($R^2 = .012, p = .328$). The addition of Stereotype Scale scores to the model was a significant predictor of dyadic cohesion ($R^2 = .067, p = .013$), with a unit increase in Stereotype Scale scores predicting a .015 decrease dyadic cohesion scores. However, the addition of television media variables did not significantly influence the model.

Lastly, television media variables were examined as predictors of Stereotype Scale scores, not controlling for demographic factors, in order to explore the relationship between television media and internalized racism. Results indicated no significant predictors of Stereotype Scale scores, $F(1, 108) = .007, p = .932$ with $R^2 = .007$.

Discussion

The current study aimed to understand the role of internalized racism and television media in relationship quality for African Americans, addressing a critical gap in the literature. It was hypothesized that higher Stereotype Scale scores indicating a greater endorsement of negative stereotypes, would predict lower relationship quality. It was also hypothesized that television media viewing would significantly predict relationship quality, such that greater viewing would predict lower relationship quality. Consistent with hypotheses, Stereotype Scale scores did significantly lower predict relationship quality, however contrary to expectations television viewing did not significantly predict relationship quality, regardless of the racial composition of the programming's cast.

Findings that internalized racism predicted lower relationship quality in the current study are consistent with previous literature (Kelly & Floyd, 2001; Kelly & Floyd, 2006a; Kelly & Floyd, 2006b; Wesley et al., 2015), indicating the salience of this construct for African Americans in romantic relationships. Notably, the current study utilized a more psychometrically sound unidimensional model of the Stereotype Scale scores (Wesley et al., 2015), which corroborated findings from previous studies with a new sample. This provides greater confidence in the harmful role of internalized racism in romantic relationships for African American couples, and indicates that assessing for such beliefs may be clinically relevant for African American couples in treatment.

Given the inherent complexity in understanding and assessing the impact of television media on psychological constructs, a number of factors may have influenced overall findings in this area. For African Americans in romantic relationships, it may be that other factors related to television media consumption have a greater impact than time

spent viewing television. For example, consistent with social cognition theory, Osborn's (2012) research with 392 couples found that greater *belief* in the portrayals of relationships on television was a stronger predictor of relationship-related constructs than television viewing alone. Although Osborn's (2012) study focused overwhelmingly on White married couples, one's engagement and identification in the images shown on television is theorized to play an important role in how images are internalized (e.g. Bandura, 2001), and may be a particularly salient factor for African Americans. This theory is also consistent with conceptualizations of internalized racism (e.g. Cokley, 2002). For example, research indicates that viewers across racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans themselves, perceived television portrayals of African Americans in occupational roles and portrayals of negative personality characteristics as real or true to life (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). This finding held regardless of time spent watching television, indicating that another construct, such as belief in the images displayed, may influence the impact of television viewing on psychological and relationship-related constructs.

In addition, there may be additional cultural factors not assessed in the current study that buffered against the impact of television viewing on relationship quality for this sample. Research with African American adolescents indicated no significant difference between African American and White students in perceived realism of media (Ward et al., 2010), despite research indicating that African American adolescents engage in high levels of television viewing relative to their White counterparts (e.g. Sission & Broyles, 2012). This suggests that in general Black youth may be not as susceptible to perceiving images as realistic despite their heavy consumption of media. Consistent with

cultivation theory and given Black youth's heavy consumption of media, one would predict a greater perceived realism of media for this group as compared to other racial and ethnic groups. One possible explanation for this contradictory finding could be cultural factors such as racial socialization, which often includes messages of racial and cultural pride. For example, African American youth endorsing scores indicating greater affirming racial socialization messages was associated with scores indicating a greater ability to discern and identify negative and positive stereotypes of Blacks (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Although the aforementioned studies examined African American youth, it is possible that similar constructs operate for some African American adults in romantic relationships. Thus, it may be necessary to examine cultural factors that may mitigate television viewing and its effects to fully understand how such constructs operate in the lives of African Americans, and ultimately romantic relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

In addition to alternative possibilities for null findings related to television media in the current study, a number of study limitations likely impacted overall findings. Perhaps the largest challenge involved the overall sample size. Despite multiple methods used to solicit participation of both partners in the romantic relationship, participation was overwhelming dominated by women ($n = 77$ women, 35 men), resulting in only 22 couples where both partners participated (44 participants of the total 112 participants in the sample). In part, this was due to significant challenges in successfully recruiting participants over the course of a year, an experience consistent with literature highlighting significant recruitment and research participation barriers for African Americans (e.g. George, Duran, & Norris, 2014; Scharff et al., 2010; Whitt-Glover et al.,

2016) and African American couples (e.g. Rogge et al., 2006). Barriers in the current study included the length of the survey, requesting more sensitive demographic information such as address and income, and the request for both partners in the couple to participate. These barriers reflect cultural mistrust of researchers common within the African American community, in addition to challenges related to the time, resources, and information required to participate (e.g. Scharff et al., 2010). Given that the current study aimed to recruit *couples* where each partner identified as *African American*, the challenges related to recruitment in the current study for both of these special populations were compounded. The resulting sample size limited statistical power, only allowing for the possible detection of a medium effect sizes at an alpha level of .05 (Cohen, 1992). Thus, it is unclear if the non-significant findings were a product of inadequate power, particularly in detecting smaller effect sizes.

Another limitation involves the various ways to capture and measure television media consumption, with many conventions and methodologies used across studies in the literature. The current study assessed if participants watched particular primetime programming from major networks, which has several major limitations related to the presence of many non-primetime alternative television shows. First, it was not clear how recently shows were watched (e.g. last week versus over a month ago). In addition to frequency of viewing, it may matter how recently in time programming was viewed in terms of its relative impact on psychological constructs. This is complicated by the current availability and widespread use of online streaming that allows for the viewing of many programs that no longer air on television and thus are not a part of primetime television. In addition, online streaming allows for a vast array of programming including

original content that also falls outside of primetime programming (such as Netflix original shows), and some participants endorsed watching programming outside of the list of primetime shows from major networks. These programs were not included in analyses in the current study. To add to these challenges, primetime television also changes quickly, resulting in a number of shows that began or were cancelled during data collection. Lastly, the overall assessment of time spent watching television, as well as mainstream and Black programming, relied on participant self-report and estimates which many not accurately represent actual viewing time.

Given the multiple methods used in the literature to assess television media, another important limitation of the current study is the method chosen to capture television media. For example, some studies examined genre in addition to total viewing time, finding that genre had an important impact on findings (Bryant, 2008; Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014; Ward, 2003; Ward, 2004). The current study focused only primetime television, primarily dramas and sitcoms, and was limited to four major networks. Thus, other programming such as news, sports (NFL and NBA), and animated programs for adults (such as *Family Guy* and *Bob's Burgers*), were not included in analyses. While data indicates that viewing family dramas and sitcoms negatively impacts relationships, (e.g. Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014) it does provide an incomplete picture of television viewing, especially given increased access to programming from multiple sources. Furthermore, the current study did not assess for beliefs about content viewed or overall engagement with content viewed, consistent social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). Future research will need to employ multiple, comprehensive methods to further understand television's influence. Based on previous research, this should include self-

report of viewing hours, genres viewed, and beliefs about content viewed. This could include daily diary methods of watching television programming to adequately capture the range of programming viewed, as well as other methods that do not rely on self-report to corroborate past findings. Technology could be utilized to capture in-the-moment viewing habits, such as utilizing an app that provides notifications to have participants log viewing in real time, or tracking viewing through the viewing history logs of sites such as Hulu or Netflix.

In addition to the aforementioned limitations in measurement, many networks had relatively low counts of Black programming compared to mainstream programming. For example, in developing lists of programming for the current study, Black programming constituted approximately 7% of the 2015-2016 CBS programming (two shows out of total of 29). Both shows had a Black actor starring in a leading role, however there was little diversity in the rest of the cast, and one show was cancelled after one season. Other networks were similar in overall counts, particularly when noting which shows were cancelled. Black programming comprised approximately 12% of all total programming on NBC (four out of 30 shows total), with three of the four shows ultimately getting cancelled. Fox's Black programming included five shows out of 27 total, comprising approximately 19% of its lineup, with only one of those five shows resulting in a cancellation. ABC had the strongest lineup, with 21% of its programming highlighting Black lead actors or primarily Black casts (seven shows out of 33 shows total), and with two shows ultimately getting cancelled. Thus, the lower frequency of programming overall may have hindered and skewed an accurate measurement of the role of race in television viewing.

The lower frequency of Black programming on major networks during primetime has important implications to the current study, and directions for future research. In particular, a lack of representation of Black actors in television inherently results in African Americans viewing a greater proportion of mainstream programming. This suggests that perhaps race matters less simply because African Americans are underrepresented in television programming, both historically and currently. Thus, consistent with cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986), the lack of representation of Black programming may indicate less of an impact on the perceptions of Black people, as depictions simply are not as readily available. Within the current sample, an average of 62% ($SD = 27.73$) of programming watched was mainstream while 31% was Black-oriented ($SD = 23.44$). Thus, while it can be argued that participants did consume a high proportion of Black-oriented programming given the small percentage of shows available, it is unknown how more balanced viewing of both types of programming would impact results. As networks increasingly include more diversity in their primetime lineups, future research will be better able to fully explore the role of race in television programming.

In line with additional knowledge needed regarding the role of race in television programming, a greater understanding of the role of cultural factors is warranted as well. The current study did not assess for specific cultural factors beyond viewing Black-oriented or mainstream programming, although emerging research indicates such exploration may be important particularly for ethnic minority groups. For example, separate studies identified factors such as racial socialization (Adams-Bass et al., 2014), and acculturation (Schooler, 2008), as directly relevant constructs to the impact of

television viewing on ethnic minority youth. However, it is unknown what cultural constructs may matter for television viewing in African American adults, particularly related to its impact on relationship quality.

Although these limitations and overall null findings hinder conclusions that can be drawn from the current study in regards to television media, a number of promising avenues should be examined in future studies. First, the role the television media consumption plays in the lives of African American adults, and how media may impact romantic relationships are still unknown. A body of literature indicates television media consumption does play a role in the lives of African American youth (e.g. Ward, 2003), suggesting that these understudied constructs likely impact African American adults and their wellbeing in some way as well. With a larger sample size to better detect significant effects of all magnitudes, future studies should continue to explore this question, particularly in light of emerging research that television media consumptions matters for couples and relationship-related constructs (e.g. Osborn, 2012). In addition, greater attention to the role of beliefs about media content viewed, as well as cultural factors that impact constructs related to television viewing are promising and uncharted areas to explore for African American adults. In addition, the role of the neighborhood factors discussed from the literature needs to be assessed, particularly in relation to internalized racism.

Furthermore, while the current study continued to support research indicating that internalized racism is harmful to relationship quality, it is still unknown the mechanisms by which such beliefs internalized. Future research that focuses on understanding how these beliefs are internalized would provide necessary advances in this area. In addition,

such research would have important implications for the development of interventions to limit the internalization of harmful stereotypes, and in turn improve relationship quality for African American couples. Through continued exploration of sociocultural factors like internalized racism, television media, and neighborhood disadvantage, it is theorized that researchers will better understand the unique challenges faced by African American couples and in turn develop more culturally sensitive, effective approaches to addressing these challenges.

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Table 1

Means and standard deviations for demographic variables, sociocultural variables, and total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores (N = 112 participants, n = 77 women, 35 men)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Demographic Variables		
Age	41 years	15.64 years
Length of Relationship	14.42 years	14.19 years
Educational Level	15.75 years	4.05 years
Income	\$72,608.03	\$54,351.80
Sociocultural Variables		
Total Stereotype Scale Scores	70.46	18.28
Weekly Television Viewing	24.84 hours	15.51 hours
Mainstream Primetime Programming	62 percent	27.73 percent
Black-oriented Primetime Programming	31 percent	23.44 percent
Total Dyadic Adjustment Scale Scores	112.34	17.51

Table 2

Pearson's r correlations among sociocultural variables and total Dyadic Adjustment

Scale scores

Variables	1. SS	2. TV	3. PBP	4. PMP	5. DAS
1. SS	-	-.00	-.09	.04	-.20*
2. TV	-.00	-	.11	-.01	-.06
3. PBP	-.09	.11	-	-.50**	-.08
4. PMP	.04	-.01	-.50**	-	.04
5. DAS	-.20*	-.06	-.08	.04	-

Note. SS = total Stereotype Scale scores, TV = total weekly television viewing in hours, PBP = proportions of Black-oriented programming, PMP = Proportions of Mainstream programming, DAS = total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$