

EATING AWAY AT PERSONAL PREJUDICE: EXAMINING ASSIMILATION OF BLACKS  
AND ASIANS USING CHARACTERS FROM AMC'S THE WALKING DEAD

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Psychology

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Megan Britton

May, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Parasocial intergroup contact has been shown to influence beliefs about stigmatized groups, such as racial minorities. Previous work has demonstrated that affective factors, such as perspective taking, can account for the reductions in prejudice following parasocial interactions. The current study provides the first test of a cognitive factor (i.e., assimilation) that was expected to function in the same way. Specifically, it was expected that following the priming of a parasocial relationship with a Black or Asian character from the television show *The Walking Dead*, White participants would assimilate, or identify more closely with, the target characters racial group (i.e., Blacks or Asians). This assimilation was expected to lead to subsequent reduction in prejudice toward those racial groups, respectively. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that there would be individual differences that moderated this effect, such that it would only be observed for people low in avoidance of intimacy, as they are comfortable forming and maintaining close relationships. The final sample was comprised of 62 UH students and 148 MTurk workers. Significant findings were only observed for UH participants, and all observed effects were in the opposite direction of predictions. The discussion centers on explanations for the unexpected effects on assimilation, the null effects for prejudice, and general sample limitations. Implications and future directions are discussed.

*Keywords:* assimilation, prejudice, parasocial relationships, *The Walking Dead*

Eating Away at Personal Prejudice: Examining Assimilation of Blacks and Asians Using  
Characters from AMC's The Walking Dead

AMC's The Walking Dead features an apocalyptic world, ravaged by zombies, where the living face grueling challenges to their survival every day. As this show becomes one of the most watched shows on television, one noteworthy aspect of the show has received attention: the cast is, relatively speaking, ethnically diverse. Three racial groups (Whites, Blacks, and Asians) are represented in the opening credits alone for the show's most recent season, with more races appearing as smaller roles throughout the seasons. In recent years, television shows with diverse casts have attracted more viewers than those that lack ethnic diversity (Hunt & Ramón, 2015). Given its large following, The Walking Dead provides an excellent opportunity to study the impact that interactions between viewers and ethnically diverse media characters have on racial issues using a widely favored television show.

A growing body of research supports the notion that *parasocial* relationships may be a worthy avenue for reducing prejudice. Parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships that people develop with media characters (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Consumers of media often engage in these relationships as if they were reciprocal (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Such relationships may develop to the point that these pseudo-friends provide similar benefits to real friends (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009; Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008; Stern, Russell, & Russell, 2007). As in "real" social relationships (Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005) people may become similar to and even absorb the characteristics of (i.e., assimilate) the media character with whom they share a parasocial bond (Gabriel & Young, 2011). If parasocial relationships can indeed reduce prejudice, then assimilation may be the crucial mechanism by which this reduction occurs.

### **The Contact Hypothesis**

The contact hypothesis states that under appropriate conditions, intergroup contact can lead to prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954; 1958). Since the proposal of the contact hypothesis, researchers have delineated a number of mechanisms that drive prejudice reduction. Dovidio, Gaertner, and Kawakami (2003) classify these mechanisms into four main groups: 1) functional relations, 2) behavioral factors, 3) affective factors, and 4) cognitive factors.

*Functional relations* refer to the nature of the intergroup contact. When the interaction between two groups is cooperative in nature, prejudice reduction occurs. However, when the interaction is competitive in nature, prejudice may increase as a result (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). *Behavioral factors* refer to the interactions occurring between groups. Positive interactions may reduce prejudice by allowing people to generalize a positive interaction with one out-group member to all out-group members. Further, positive intergroup interactions may help in breaking down preconceived negative ideas people have toward the out-group (i.e., reducing cognitive dissonance; Miller & Brewer, 1986). *Affective factors* refer to the alleviation of intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985) or increases in empathy toward the group (e.g., Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones, Imhoff, & et al., 1997). Finally, *cognitive factors* refer to learning new information (Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000) or mentally reclassifying social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Functional relations are difficult to imagine in a parasocial context, as typical parasocial relations are not cooperative nor competitive in nature. Although behavioral factors could conceivably be applied to the parasocial context (e.g., an enjoyable parasocial interaction), affective and cognitive factors are more likely to be relevant to the parasocial context.

### **Affective Factors**

Intergroup anxiety (i.e., feelings of discomfort that arise during interactions with other groups) is typically present when two groups interact (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), resulting in negativity (Wilder, 1993), distrust (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002) and poor communication between groups (Hyers & Swim, 1998). Thus, to the extent that intergroup anxiety can be reduced, intergroup interactions should improve, and prejudice reduction should occur (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

Empathy works to reduce prejudice because it induces liking, which then generalizes to the entire group (Batson et al., 1997). A second way empathy may reduce prejudice is by encouraging supportive actions. When people feel empathy, they often care about the well-being of another person. Since prejudice is often experienced when there is no concern for a person's well-being, the extent to which empathy is increased, and supportive actions toward improving a person's well-being occur, prejudice reduction should occur (Batson, 1991). This discussion of affective factors demonstrates that people's feelings toward different racial groups can work to reduce prejudice. In the same manner, people's thoughts may also serve to reduce prejudice.

### **Cognitive Factors**

Learning new information about a group reduces prejudice because people have the opportunity to develop their own views on other groups that are not based on stereotypes associated with that group (Kawakami et al., 2000). To the extent that people are able to disengage from negative stereotypes and reinforce positive stereotypes about a certain group, prejudice reduction should occur.

Social categories are created when people hold a set of beliefs about what makes them similar to or different from others (Schiappa, 2003). When these differences are negative, as opposed to positive or neutral, prejudice ensues. However, to the extent that these categories can

be broken down and rearranged so that different social groups are seen as more similar, prejudice reduction should occur. In fact, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) have suggested that reconceptualization of these social categories may be the most crucial mechanism driving prejudice reduction during intergroup contact. This reconceptualization may occur in three different ways: 1) decategorization, 2) recategorization, and 3) mutual intergroup differentiation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In *decategorization*, people move away from thinking of themselves and others as members of different groups (Wilder, 1986). In *recategorization*, people shed their specific group identities and become immersed in a single, more inclusive group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Finally, in *mutual intergroup differentiation*, people think of their separate groups as working together toward common goals (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). In all three perspectives, the lines differentiating social groups blur, creating overlap between groups, which should result in prejudice reduction. Reconceptualization of social categories may be of particular relevance in a parasocial context, where people integrate new information about characters, likely leading first to decategorization and then to recategorization. Mutual intergroup differentiation is difficult to imagine in a parasocial context, as people engaging in typical parasocial relations do not work toward goals with the characters.

### **The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis**

Just as the contact hypothesis states that direct contact, or *social* intergroup contact, will reduce prejudice, the parasocial contact hypothesis states that *parasocial* intergroup contact will reduce prejudice (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006). Parasocial relationships provide a way to learn new information about an out-group, to develop emotional ties to characters, and to reappraise previously held beliefs (Pettigrew, 1998). When the ideas presented about groups are

negative rather than positive, however, people are likely to maintain or increase prejudice. For example, after presenting White people with negative stereotypes about Blacks and Latinos (e.g., laziness and criminality), participants experience an increase in prejudice and report less support for affirmative action (Ramasubramanian, 2010). Social intergroup contact is the most effective means by which to reduce prejudice, but parasocial intergroup contact has still proven effective (Detenber, Ho, Neo, Malik, & Cenite, 2013; Schiappa et al., 2006; but see Ramasubramanian, 2007).

### **Parasocial Contact and Affective Factors**

Just as social intergroup contact can reduce prejudice through empathy, parasocial intergroup contact should reduce prejudice through a similar medium, perspective taking (e.g., Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, & Trifiletti, 2015). When people are able to adopt the perspective of a character, they experience feelings of “empathy and affinity” for that character (Chung & Slater, 2013). Thus, if perspective taking results in empathy, one of the affective factors involved in prejudice reduction (Batson et al., 1997), then perspective taking should reduce prejudice.

There is currently some support for perspective taking as one potential route for prejudice reduction. First, people do not often engage in perspective taking for highly stigmatized groups (e.g., recovering drug addict in Sherrybaby; Chung & Slater, 2013). However, to the extent that people are able to take the perspective of a drug addict, prejudice is reduced (Chung & Slater, 2013). Similarly, the more that people are able to take the perspective of refugees when reading passages from the Harry Potter series, the more prejudice reduction they experience (Vezzali et al., 2015).

### **Parasocial Contact and Cognitive Factors**



Just as social intergroup contact can reduce prejudice through reconceptualization of social categories, parasocial intergroup contact may reduce prejudice through assimilation (i.e., the absorption of another's characteristics). When people assimilate characters of a different race, the lines between different racial groups should blur because of perceived similarity between the self and the character, leading first to decategorization (i.e., moving away from thinking of the character and the self as belonging to different groups) and then to recategorization (i.e., moving toward thinking of the character and the self as belonging to the same group). To the extent that assimilation results in reconceptualization of social categories, one of the cognitive factors involved in prejudice reduction (Schiappa et al., 2006), prejudice should be reduced.

People assimilate the characteristics of beloved characters in a narrative passage, even when those characteristics are unusual or extreme. For example, Gabriel and Young (2011) randomly assigned participants to read a passage about vampires (*Twilight*) or about wizards (*Harry Potter*). Participants who read the *Twilight* passage were more likely than participants who read the *Harry Potter* passage to associate themselves with vampire words such as blood, undead, fangs and bitten on an identity implicit association test (IAT). Conversely, participants who read the *Harry Potter* passage were more likely than those who read the *Twilight* passage to associate themselves with wizard words such as wand, broomstick, spells, and potions (Gabriel & Young, 2011). People often perceive many differences between themselves and people of other races, similar to how they might perceive differences between themselves and vampires or wizards. If people are able to assimilate the extreme characteristics of vampires and wizards, it seems plausible that people may also assimilate characteristics of a different race.

To the extent that people assimilate a media character of a different race, they should perceive more similarities between themselves and the character. This should result in a deconstruction of previously held beliefs about the self as separate from the out-group, and the reorganization of this media character into a broader, more inclusive group (Mussweiler, Rüter, & Epstude, 2004). According to the recategorization perspective, prejudice can be reduced when a reconstruction of categories leads people to mentally represent themselves and others as one all-inclusive group (Dovidio et al., 2003).

Assimilation is only one possible response to social or parasocial interaction. During social comparison, people may either assimilate (i.e., become more similar to) or contrast (i.e., become less similar to) a standard of comparison (i.e., a target). For example, if the target is an attractive friend, people who assimilate will feel more attractive themselves, whereas people who contrast will feel less attractive. Whether people assimilate versus contrast may vary based on characteristics of the target such as extremity, ambiguity, and group membership (see Mussweiler, 2003). Another determinant of whether people assimilate or contrast might be whether they tend to approach or avoid close relationships.

### **Avoidance of Intimacy**

Whether people engage in or shy away from close relationships determines whether people are likely to assimilate close others. According to adult attachment theory, the manner in which people relate to others can be described by two broad dimensions: anxiety about rejection and avoidance of intimacy (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Greater anxiety is characterized by greater worry about whether others truly care for the self; greater avoidance is characterized by greater distrust and discomfort with closeness. The extent to which people avoid, or are comfortable with, forming close relationships may be particularly important to assimilation.

People who are low in avoidance are more likely to assimilate friends, whereas people who are high in avoidance are more prone to contrast (Gabriel et al., 2005). This association should be the same in parasocial relationships, since people often think of their parasocial friends as similar to real friends (Stern et al., 2007). Thus, people who are low in avoidance should assimilate media characters and, given that assimilation is a primary mechanism for prejudice rejection, experience lower prejudice. Conversely, if avoidant people contrast, they should take on fewer characteristics of the out-group, and therefore, experience an increase in prejudice.

### **Overview and Hypotheses**

Both cognitive and affective factors mediate the association between social intergroup contact and prejudice reduction. Despite parallels between social and parasocial intergroup contact, the parasocial literature on prejudice reduction has focused primarily on perspective taking (Chung & Slater, 2013), an affective factor, as the key route to prejudice reduction. In this study, I have provided the first test of assimilation (i.e., the reorganization of categories) as a crucial mechanism by which prejudice reduction occurs.

In order to do so, I had White participants who watch AMC's *The Walking Dead* write about one of three characters from the show. These characters were main characters who represent three different racial backgrounds: Rick (White), Tyreese (Black), and Glenn (Asian). Writing about these popular characters was intended to activate participants' parasocial relationship with the character. Therefore, I expected that participants would assimilate the race of the character that they wrote about (e.g., a participant should respond to Black pictures as though they are self-relevant) after thinking about their parasocial relationship with Tyreese).

When participants assimilate the target character, they should feel more similar to the character. If participants feel similar to a member of a different racial group, they should move

away from thinking about themselves and people of this race as belonging to different groups (i.e., decategorization) and move toward thinking about themselves and people of this race as belonging to a single, more inclusive group (i.e., recategorization). This in turn, should reduce prejudice because people generally do not experience negative prejudice toward their in-group.

This prejudice reduction may only occur in participants who are comfortable with forming close relationships. Participants who are not comfortable doing so, like those high in avoidance of intimacy, may instead contrast the race of the character. If so, more avoidant participants would see themselves and the character as less cognitively close than participants who assimilate, would not experience reconceptualization, and would experience an increase in prejudice.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants were White adults (aged 18+) who watch the popular TV show, *The Walking Dead*. Although I originally intended to recruit 150 undergraduate students at the University of Houston (UH) to take part in the study in exchange for research credit in a psychology class, recruitment in this population was unexpectedly low. Therefore, I began offering \$10 Amazon Gift Cards to White viewers outside of the psychology department, as well as offering the study online. The measures taken to recruit a sample at UH did not significantly increase recruitment rates, so I also recruited participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk).

**Sample A.** Seventy-seven participants from the UH campus completed the study (73 in person, 4 online). However, 14 people did not complete the assessment of assimilation (i.e., the IAT) and one participant indicated that they were not White, leaving a final sample of 62 participants. One participant did not complete the questions assessing prejudice toward Asians.

Therefore, the analyses with prejudice toward Asians include one less participant ( $N = 61$ ) than all other analyses conducted. Participants were 23.10 ( $SD = 6.00$ ) years of age on average and 39 (63%) were female.

**Sample B.** One-hundred and fifty participants from Amazon's MTurk completed the study. However, one person did not complete the essay writing portion of the study, and one person did not complete crucial dependent measures, leaving a final sample of 148 participants. Participants were 34.61 ( $SD = 8.84$ ) years of age on average and 66 (45%) were female.

### **Procedure**

**Sample A.** For UH participants who took the study in person, the participant agreed to participate in the survey through SONA (UH's research management system). Only White students were able to see the study advertisement, which indicated that students must be viewers of *The Walking Dead* in order to sign-up for the study. On arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated in individual cubicles in front of computers. The experimenter described the study procedures for them and then left the computer cubicle. Each participant consented to the study by reading and agreeing to a cover letter presented first on the screen. All but two participants who took the survey in person received two research credits. The other two participants opted to receive a \$10 Amazon Gift Card instead.

For UH participants who took the study online, the procedures for online participants differed in three ways. First, there was no interaction with an experimenter. Second, the participant was directed to Qualtrics from SONA in order to complete the study. Third, the participant had to download Inquisit Web onto their computers during the experiment. All UH participants who took the survey online received one research credit.

**Sample B.** All Amazon MTurk participants (i.e., workers) completed the study online. The study advertisement indicated that workers must be viewers of *The Walking Dead* and willing to answer a series of screening questions (see Appendix G) without compensation prior to completing the study. Interested workers were then directed to Qualtrics to answer the screening questions. Any worker who indicated that they were non-White was screened out of the study. All workers who indicated that they were White were directed to the cover letter, where they could provide consent to participate in the survey.

**Sample A & Sample B.** Regardless of sample, the study was exactly the same for each participant. The experiment included four parts: completion of pre-test measures, administration of the experimental manipulation, completion of the behavioral assessment of assimilation, and administration of the self-report measures of prejudice.

First, participants completed a pre-test measure of prejudice. They provided favorability ratings of Blacks and Asians embedded in a list that included several other groups. Participants also completed two measures of attachment. They completed the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) because it has been used previously to assess attachment in research on assimilation and contrast (Gabriel et al., 2005). Second, they completed the Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures (ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011) assessment, a more contemporary assessment of attachment with better psychometric properties. Participants also completed a measure of demographics.

Next, participants began the experimental manipulation. They were randomly assigned to view a picture (see Appendix A) and write for three minutes about one of three main characters on *The Walking Dead*: Tyreese, a Black character (first experimental group), Glenn, an Asian

character (second experimental group), or Rick, a White character (control group). Participants saw the following instructions:

Please look at the photo of [Tyreese/Glenn/Rick] from The Walking Dead and take a minute to think about him. Using the next three minutes, please write an essay that describes [Tyreese/Glenn/Rick] in as much detail as possible. You might write about what [Tyreese/Glenn/Rick] is like and what makes his character important to the show. What are his interactions like with other characters on the show? Additionally, what type of impressions do you have about him? Write everything you can remember about [Tyreese/Glenn/Rick] from the times that you have watched him.

In the next part of the study, participants completed a single category Identity Implicit Association Test (Identity SC-IAT; Gabriel & Young, 2011; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006). The identity SC-IAT had both an identity dimension (self/not-self) and an object dimension (face). Six target words were used for each of the identity dimensions (self: *own, me, my, myself, I, and mine*; not-self: *they, theirs, his, hers, he, and her*). In line with previous research (Phills, Kawakami, Tabi, Nadolny, & Inzlicht, 2011; Kawakami et al., 2012), the object dimensions included six photographs of Black faces, six photographs of Asian faces, and six photographs of White faces. Three female and three male faces were used as stimuli for each race (see Appendix B for photographs; Bainbridge, Isola, & Oliva, 2013).

The Identity SC-IAT consisted of two stages, with two separate blocks in each. Each stage consisted of 18 practice trials (block 1 and block 3) immediately followed by 56 test trials (block 2 and block 4). In the first stage, (self + face), self words and photographs were categorized using one response key, and not-self words were categorized using another response

key. In the second stage, (not-self + face), not-self words and photographs were categorized using one response key, and self words were categorized using another response key. Order of presentation of the two stages (self + face and not-self + face) was counter-balanced to control for any ordering effects. In the practice blocks, 18 targets (words and photographs) were randomly selected without replacement. For the test blocks, all identity dimension words were presented randomly with replacement three times, whereas all object dimension words were presented randomly without replacement one time.

Prior to beginning each stage, participants received a set of instructions concerning the task dimensions and key responses. Reminders of the dimensions were placed on the appropriate sides at the top of the screen. All target words were presented in the middle of the screen, in lower case letters. Target words remained on the screen until the participants responded or for 1500 ms. If participants did not respond within 1500 ms, a reminder to “Please respond more quickly!” appeared for 500 ms in order to prompt quicker responses in the following trials. Following each response, participants received feedback regarding accuracy. If participants gave a correct response, a green O appeared in the center of the screen for 150 ms. If participants gave an incorrect response, a red X appeared in the center of the screen for 150 ms and the participant was expected to respond again.

Next, a post-test measure of prejudice was administered using an adapted version of the Attitudes Toward Races and Nationalities Scale (ATRN; Grice, 1934). This measure was used to assess participants’ explicit prejudice toward Blacks and Asians. Participants then answered questions about their television use as well as completed more specific questions about *The Walking Dead*. Finally, they answered questions serving as a suspicion check.

## **Measures**



**Self-Reported Prejudice (pre-test measure).** Participants completed a pre-test measure of prejudice using a feelings thermometer. This measure was used to assess participants' favorability toward two different racial groups (Blacks and Asians) using a scale of 0 to 100 (0 = extremely unfavorable, 100 = extremely favorable). The thermometer includes 13 distractor groups to conceal the purpose of the measure (e.g., Whites, Feminists). On average, participants held fairly positive views toward both Blacks ( $M = 63.90$ ,  $SD = 25.00$ ) and Asians ( $M = 69.48$ ,  $SD = 22.51$ ). This measure can be seen in Appendix C.

**Avoidance of Intimacy.** Avoidance of intimacy was assessed using two different measures. First, I assessed avoidance of intimacy using the RQ (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The RQ includes four statements about close relationships, each statement corresponding to one of four attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful). Participants were asked to identify the single style that best describes them. This question was used to create a categorical measure of avoidance of intimacy. In line with Gabriel et al. (2005), participants who identified themselves as dismissing and fearful were classified as avoidant ( $N = 103$ ), and participants who identified themselves as secure and preoccupied were classified as non-avoidant ( $N = 107$ ). Participants were also asked to rate on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = not at all like me, 7 = very much like me) the degree to which each attachment style is characteristic of how they engage in close relationships. To create a dimensional assessment of avoidance of intimacy, the ratings for secure and preoccupied attachment were added together and then subtracted from the ratings for fearful and dismissive attachment (Gabriel, Carvallo, Jaremka, & Tippin, 2008; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Computed scores ranged from -9 to 12 ( $M = 0.85$ ,  $SD = 4.37$ ). The RQ can be seen in Appendix D.

Second, I used the ECR-RS to assess avoidance of intimacy (Fraley et al., 2011). For the ECR-RS, participants rated their agreement with 6 items relating to attachment avoidance (e.g., “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to others”; “It helps to turn to people in times of need”, reverse coded;  $\alpha = .89$ ) and 3 items relating to attachment anxiety (e.g., “I often worry that other people do not really care for me”;  $\alpha = .93$ ) on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Although a score for both avoidance ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) and anxiety ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) was computed by averaging the respective items, the current study primarily focuses on avoidance of intimacy. The ECR-RS can be seen in Appendix E.

**Self-Reported Prejudice (post-test measure).** Participants completed a post-test measure of prejudice that included 14 items adapted from the ATRN (Grice, 1934) for each of the two racial groups of interest (Blacks and Asians) plus two distractor groups (Whites and Hispanics/Latinos). The order in which participants rated each group was randomized to control for any ordering effects. Participants were asked to rate 7 positive items (e.g., Blacks...have many desirable traits) and 7 negative items (e.g., Blacks...are the worst citizens) on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) for each group. Thus, participants responded to 56 items total. Reliability analyses indicated that there was a potential problem with item 12 for both Blacks and Asians (e.g., “Group X...are superior in every way to other groups”). Although this item was intended to be reverse-coded, the analyses demonstrated that it did not go together with the other reverse-coded items. Therefore, this item was dropped when computing prejudice scores. The six remaining positive items were reverse scored and averaged together with the negative items so that higher scores on the ATRN indicate higher levels of prejudice. The final scale for prejudice toward Blacks and toward Asians demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .95$  and  $\alpha = .90$ , respectively). Overall, participants reported relatively low levels

of prejudice toward both Blacks and Asians ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ;  $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ , respectively). The ATRN can be seen in Appendix F.

**Demographics.** Participants reported their age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Demographic questions can be seen in Appendix G.

**Television Use and The Walking Dead.** Participants answered questions about their general television use as well as completed more specific questions about The Walking Dead and its characters. These questions can be seen in appendix H.

**Suspicion Check.** Participants were asked a set of four questions regarding their ideas about the aims of the study. Answers to these questions were assessed and it was confirmed that no participant was fully aware of the true intentions of the study. Although some participants reported that they thought the study was about how television influences racial attitudes, no participant directly stated the hypotheses or mentioned avoidance of intimacy or assimilation specifically as contributing factors. These questions can be seen in Appendix I.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary data analysis included computing means and standard deviations for all variables in the current study. Bivariate correlations were assessed between age, gender, pre-test prejudice, avoidance of intimacy, SC-IAT scores, and post-test prejudice. Preliminary data can be found in Table 1.

**Violations of Assumptions.** There should be no violations for independence of groups because participants from each sample were randomly assigned to essay conditions, and the essay conditions were independent of one another. For all outcome variables (assimilation of Blacks, assimilation of Asians, prejudice toward Blacks, prejudice toward Asians), I tested for

violations of normality and homogeneity of variance (i.e., homoscedasticity in regression). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test revealed that the distributions for prejudice toward Blacks and prejudice toward Asians deviated significantly from normal, so I applied a log transformation to both outcomes. To test for homogeneity of variance in the ANOVA analyses, I ran a series of Brown-Forsyth tests. Homogeneity of variance was not violated in any test, so I did not make any adjustments for the ANCOVA analyses. In order to test for homoscedasticity in each regression analysis, I plotted the standardized predicted values of the dependent variable against the standardized residuals. The analyses where prejudice toward Blacks and toward Asians were used as dependent measures showed heteroscedasticity, so I used robust standard errors in all of the final regression analyses.

**Computing SC-IAT Scores.** In order to calculate SC-IAT scores, response times from the practice trials and the non-responses were dropped. SC-IAT scores were computed using a modified *D*-score algorithm (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006). The average response times of trials from the self + face stage were subtracted from the average responses times of trials from the not-self + face stage. This quantity was then divided by the standard deviation of all correct response times. Positive SC-IAT *D*-scores indicate assimilation (i.e., the not-self + face stage is slower [bigger] than the self + face stage), whereas negative SC-IAT *D*-scores indicate contrast.

The SC-IAT was developed to assess one object dimension. In the current study, however, the object dimension was divided into three categories: Black, Asian, and White. SC-IAT scores were calculated separately for each of the Black and Asian object categories. In other words, using only one test, I generated two SC-IAT scores to assess identification with Blacks and Asians. The two stages (self + face & not-self + face) were strongly positively correlated,  $r =$

.857,  $p < .001$  for Blacks, and  $r = .862$ ,  $p < .001$  for Asians. Using these scores from the SC-IAT, it is also possible to create a two-category (e.g., White/Black) SC-IAT score by subtracting the *D*-scores for one SC-IAT (e.g., Whites) from the *D*-scores for another SC-IAT (e.g., Blacks). The resulting score is comparable to the score obtained from a traditional two-category IAT. Given that two-category IAT scores have been criticized for being difference scores (e.g., Blanton & Jaccard, 2006; Blanton, Jaccard, Gonzales, & Christie, 2006; Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005), however, I have focused on the SC-IAT scores in my primary analyses.

### Primary Analyses

**Assimilation of Blacks.** Did participants who wrote about Tyreese assimilate Blacks more than participants who wrote about Glenn or Rick? To test this possibility, I ran an omnibus Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) examining the effect of condition (writing about Tyreese, Glenn, or Rick) on assimilation (i.e., Black SC-IAT scores), controlling for pre-test prejudice. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 2. The effect of experimental condition was not significant, alone or when considering source.

Next, I tested whether only less avoidant participants would show assimilation in response to the manipulation. To do so, I ran a 2 (avoidance of intimacy: non-avoidant vs. avoidant) x 3 (condition: Tyreese, Glenn, or Rick) ANCOVA examining Black SC-IAT scores, controlling for pre-test prejudice. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 3. The interaction between experimental condition and avoidance of intimacy was not significant, alone or when considering source.

I also conducted block sequential regression analyses examining avoidance of intimacy as a continuous predictor (using both the RQ and the ECR-RS, in separate analyses). In the first block, I entered centered pre-test prejudice to control for participants' preexisting prejudice

toward Blacks. In the second block, I entered the centered main effect of avoidance and two dummy-coded condition contrasts (the Tyreese condition served as the reference group). In the third block, I entered the two Avoidance X Condition contrast multiplicative interactions. A variable for source (dummy-coded 0 = UH, 1 = MTurk, but centered at the mean for analyses) was included in each block to explore the possibility that the results differed by sample. Results for the regression analyses predicting Black assimilation using RQ are presented in columns 2 and 3 of Table 4. Results for the regression analyses predicting Black assimilation using ECR-RS are presented in columns 4 and 5 of Table 4.

Although it was not significant in the ANCOVA analyses, I observed significant condition effects in the regression analyses when controlling for the continuous versions of avoidance (i.e., Step 2). Specifically, the two-way Rick X Source interaction emerged as significant in both sets of analyses (avoidance computed from the RQ [marginal] and from the ECR-RS). These interactions are presented in Figures 1 (RQ) and 2 (ECR-RS). In both analyses, the effect of condition (Tyreese vs. Rick) on assimilation was significant for UH participants,  $b = .18$ , 95%  $CI = [.001, .361]$ ,  $p = .049$  for the RQ, and  $b = .19$ , 95%  $CI = [.017, .367]$ ,  $p = .032$  for the ECR-RS, but not for MTurk participants,  $b = -.03$ , 95%  $CI = [-.165, .098]$ ,  $p = .613$  for the RQ, and  $b = -.04$ , 95%  $CI = [-.167, .096]$ ,  $p = .591$  for the ECR-RS. Unexpectedly, UH participants who wrote about Tyreese showed less assimilation (i.e., greater contrast) of Blacks than those who wrote about Rick,  $b = -0.18$ , 95%  $CI = [-.359, -.001]$ ,  $p = .049$  for the RQ, and  $b = -0.19$ , 95%  $CI = [-.365, -.017]$ ,  $p = .032$ , for the ECR-RS. Those who wrote about Tyreese did not show significantly greater contrast of Blacks than those who wrote about Glenn,  $b = -0.00$ , 95%  $CI = [-.180, .176]$ ,  $p = .981$  for the RQ, and  $b = -0.02$ , 95%  $CI = [-.193, .161]$ ,  $p = .859$ , for the ECR-RS. Unexpectedly, those who wrote about Glenn showed marginally greater contrast of

Blacks than those who wrote about Rick,  $b = -0.18$ , 95%  $CI = [-.380, .024]$ ,  $p = .084$  for the RQ, and  $b = -0.17$ , 95%  $CI = [-.371, .022]$ ,  $p = .081$  for ECR-RS. The hypothesis for effect of experimental condition was not supported in either the UH sample or the MTurk sample.

There was also a significant Glenn X Avoidance X Source interaction predicting assimilation using the RQ measure of avoidance. This interaction is presented in Figure 3. The two-way Glenn X Avoidance interaction was significant for UH participants,  $b = 0.04$ , 95%  $CI = [.004, .076]$ ,  $p = .030$ , but not for MTurk participants,  $b = 0.02$ , 95%  $CI = [-.124, .165]$ ,  $p = .777$ . Among UH participants, less avoidant participants ( $-1SD$ ) who wrote about Tyreese unexpectedly showed marginally greater contrast of Blacks than those who wrote about Rick,  $b = -.28$ , 95%  $CI = [-.566, .001]$ ,  $p = .051$ . They also showed a non-significant trend toward greater contrast of Blacks than those who wrote about Glenn,  $b = -.17$ , 95%  $CI = [-.395, .051]$ ,  $p = .131$ . However, those who wrote about Glenn and Rick did not differ in terms of their assimilation of Blacks,  $b = -.11$ , 95%  $CI = [-.438, .217]$ ,  $p = .506$ . More avoidant participants ( $+1SD$ ) who wrote about Tyreese did not differ from those who wrote about Rick in assimilation of Blacks,  $b = -.10$ , 95%  $CI = [-.299, .105]$ ,  $p = .344$ . However, more avoidant participants who wrote about Tyreese showed a nonsignificant trend toward greater assimilation of Blacks than those who wrote about Glenn,  $b = .18$ , 95%  $CI = [-.065, .418]$ ,  $p = .151$ . Those who wrote about Glenn demonstrated more contrast of Blacks than those who wrote about Rick,  $b = -.27$ , 95%  $CI = [-.523, -.018]$ ,  $p = .036$ .

**Reducing Prejudice toward Blacks.** In order to test whether or not participants who wrote about Tyreese experienced less prejudice toward Blacks than participants who wrote about Glenn or Rick, I ran another omnibus ANCOVA that examined the effect of condition on participants' post-test prejudice toward Blacks, controlling for pre-test prejudice. Results for the

ANCOVA are presented in Table 2. The effect of experimental condition, alone or considering source, was not significant.

I also tested whether only less avoidant participants would show reduced prejudice in response to the manipulation using both the categorical (ANCOVA) and the continuous (regression) approaches described above. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 3. Results for the regression analyses predicting prejudice toward Blacks using RQ are presented in columns 2 and 3 of Table 5. Results for the regression analyses predicting prejudice toward Blacks using ECR-RS are presented in columns 4 and 5 of Table 5. No effects involving experimental condition were significant.

**Assimilation of Blacks as a Mediator.** Next, I tested whether assimilation of Blacks (i.e., Black SC-IAT scores) mediated the association between the Rick X Source interaction and participants' post-test prejudice toward Blacks (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The total effect of the Rick X Source interaction on post-test prejudice was not significant, but Hayes (2009) argues that hypothesized indirect effects should still be tested, as an indirect effect can be significant in the absence of a significant total effect (Hayes, 2009). I used the user-written command, "sgmediation," in Stata (Ender, 2012) to perform a Sobel-Goodman mediation test. I used bootstrapping with case resampling to obtain the standard errors of the indirect effect. The indirect effect of Rick x Source interaction through assimilation to prejudice was not significant for the RQ or the ECR-RS.

Given that I observed a significant Glenn X Avoidance (RQ) X Source interaction predicting assimilation of Blacks, I also ran an exploratory analysis examining whether avoidance of intimacy moderated the proposed mediation model (i.e., moderated mediation).



Again, the indirect effect of Glenn X Avoidance (RQ) X Source through assimilation to prejudice was not significant.

**Assimilation of Asians.** In order to test whether participants who wrote about Glenn assimilated Asians more than participants who wrote about Tyreese or Rick, I ran another omnibus ANCOVA examining the effect of condition on Asian SC-IAT scores, controlling for pre-test prejudice. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 2. The effect of experimental condition was not significant.

I also tested whether only less avoidant participants would show assimilation in response to the manipulation using both the categorical (ANCOVA) and the continuous (regression) approaches detailed above, except Glenn was used as the comparison group for the condition contrasts. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 3. Results for the regression analyses predicting Asian assimilation using RQ are presented in columns 2 and 3 of Table 6. Results for the regression analyses predicting Asian assimilation using ECR-RS are presented in columns 2 and 3 of Table 6. No effects involving experimental condition were observed.

**Reducing Prejudice toward Asians.** In order to test whether or not participants who wrote about Glenn experienced less prejudice toward Asians than participants who wrote about Tyreese or Rick, I conducted analyses that parallel those described for examining reducing prejudice toward Blacks. The results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 2. The effect of experimental condition was not significant.

I also tested whether only less avoidant participants would show reduced prejudice in response to the manipulation using both the categorical (ANCOVA) and the continuous (regression) approaches described above. Results for the ANCOVA are presented in Table 3. Results for the regression analyses predicting prejudice toward Asians using RQ are presented in

columns 2 and 3 of Table 7. Results for the regression analyses predicting prejudice toward Asians using ECR-RS are presented in columns 4 and 5 of Table 7. No effects involving experimental condition were significant.

**Assimilation of Asians as a Mediator.** Next, I tested whether assimilation of Asians (i.e., Asian SC-IAT scores) mediated the association between the Rick X Source interaction and participants' post-test prejudice toward Asians (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). I performed another Sobel-Goodman mediation test. I used bootstrapping with case resampling to obtain the standard errors of the indirect effect. The indirect effect of the Rick X Source interaction through assimilation to prejudice was not significant for the RQ or the ECR-RS.

### **Discussion**

This study provides the first test of assimilation (i.e., a cognitive factor) as a mechanism by which parasocial intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Participants answered questions about their own attachment styles, wrote about a randomly assigned Black (Tyreese), Asian (Glenn), or White (Rick) character from *The Walking Dead*, completed a reaction time task (i.e., SC-IAT) that was designed to assess assimilation to Blacks and Asians, and completed the primary outcome of interest, prejudice toward these groups. I hypothesized that participants who wrote about Tyreese or Glenn would assimilate the respective race (Black or Asian) and would experience subsequent reductions in prejudice toward that race. However, I anticipated that this would only occur for participants who were low in avoidance of intimacy (i.e., comfortable forming and maintaining close relationships).

The findings from the primary analyses do not support the hypotheses of the study. In fact, the majority of the significant findings were in the opposite direction of the predictions. Generally speaking, UH participants who wrote about Tyreese and Glenn had less self-

identification with (i.e., contrast of) Blacks than participants who wrote about Rick. Furthermore, this was true of UH participants who reporting being comfortable with close relationships (i.e., low in avoidance), rather than for participants reporting high avoidance, who, given their adversity to forming close relationships, we would expect to contrast the characters.

It is difficult to draw definite conclusions from these findings, given that the sample at UH was very small. With approximately 20 participants in each experimental condition, the analyses were likely underpowered to detect true effects. I therefore conducted post-hoc power analyses with the program *G\*Power* (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992; Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) to find out whether the analyses in the current study were sufficiently powered to detect true effects. First, I examined power for the observed Rick X Source 2-way interaction. The power analyses for the RQ and ECR-RS are reported together, considering the size of the effect was the same in both models. The power to detect an effect of  $sr^2 = 0.02$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $N = 210$ ) was determined to be 0.53. Next, I examined whether there was enough power to assess the conditional main effect of Rick predicting Black assimilation among UH participants. The power to detect an effect of  $sr^2 = 0.02$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $N = 62$ ) was determined to be 0.19. Second, I assessed power for the observed Glenn X Avoidance RQ X Source 3-way interaction. The power to detect an effect of  $sr^2 = 0.001$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $N = 210$ ) was determined to be 0.07. Next, I examined whether there was enough power to assess the conditional two-way Glenn X Avoidance RQ interaction predicting assimilation among UH participants. The power to detect an effect of  $sr^2 = 0.02$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $N = 62$ ) was determined to be 0.19. Considering these analyses confirm that all of the analyses were underpowered, we cannot rule out that the detected effects are a result of chance, as opposed to true observed effects.

Furthermore, there were no observed effects for MTurk workers in the current study. MTurk workers reported significantly more prejudice toward Blacks,  $t(208) = -2.36, p = .019$ , and marginally more prejudice toward Asians,  $t(207) = -1.66, p = .098$ , than the UH sample, although neither group showed particularly high scores overall. This is consistent with UH being the second most diverse undergraduate campus in the country, as the White students likely have daily interactions with Black and Asian peers. It is possible that having more prejudice toward a race makes people less likely to form parasocial relationships with them. If this were true, then writing about Tyreese and Glenn would likely be a less effective manipulation for priming a parasocial relationship for MTurk workers than for UH students.

Additionally, there may have been no results for MTurk workers because the sample was collected using an online survey, whereas the study was originally intended to be completed as an in-laboratory experiment. There are concerns about the quality of online data, as it is more difficult to monitor participant attention, or ensure that they receive proper instructions and understand tasks required of them (Kraut et al., 2004). To combat against this, there were a series of data quality control questions programmed in to the study to ensure participant attentiveness. However, there may still be concerns about the engagement of participants with study tasks, particularly in this case, the reaction time task programmed into Inquisit. Online participants were required to download software, which assuredly increased the amount of time between the experimental manipulation (i.e., the essay writing task) and the assessment of assimilation. This may have shifted participants' focus away for too long to observe any resulting effects. This was not the case for the UH participants who completed the study in person, as Inquisit was programmed directly into Media Lab. Online participants may also have been more distracted

and therefore less careful when completing the reaction time task, whereas UH participants were monitored by research assistants in a quiet room with cell phones silenced.

There are at least two possible reasons why the assimilation results were opposite to predictions. First, participants reported liking Tyreese less than Glenn,  $t(189) = -7.77, p < .001$ , or Rick,  $t(196) = -2.23, p = .027$ , and felt less close to Tyreese than Glenn,  $t(196) = -7.24, p < .001$ , or Rick,  $t(200) = -5.71, p < .001$ , and so they may have contrasted Blacks because of this relative dislike for or lack of closeness to Tyreese. Additionally, participants reported that they felt as though they were less similar to Tyreese than to Glenn,  $t(200) = 4.94, p < .001$ , but not to Rick,  $t(204) = -1.41, p = .159$ . If participants are forced to write an essay about a character that they do not really like or do not see themselves to be similar to in the first place, it seems likely that they will contrast, rather than assimilate the character. This is in line with work suggesting that when the target person (in this case, Tyreese) is not close to the participant, contrast effects are more likely (Dijksterhaus et al., 1998), whereas when the participant has a close, intimate relationship with the target, assimilation is more likely (e.g., Pelham & Wachsmuth, 1995). Additionally, the participants' dislike for Tyreese (with respect to Glenn and Rick) may have generalized to Blacks in general, which could explain why the measure of assimilation showed participants contrasted Blacks following writing about Tyreese.

Second, although previous research suggests that less avoidant participants are more likely to assimilate close others (Gabriel et al., 2005), participants in the current study who reported being less avoidant were the ones who ended up showing contrast effects. Considering that people who are less avoidant feel more comfortable with forming and maintaining close relationships, it is possible that they are then more attentive to attributes in a character that make them an unlikely match for a relationship partner (e.g., likely to die). Similarly, if less avoidant

people are engaging in other close relationships, either with real people or other media characters, they are probably less likely to develop parasocial relationships with and assimilate characters that are seen as “unsafe” from shows like *The Walking Dead*. Contrasting these characters might be a way in which less avoidant people engage in relationship maintenance strategies. More avoidant people would not be expected to use the same strategies. If anything, it is possible that more avoidant people would assimilate characters that were more prone to leaving the show, as this would require less attachment to and investment in the characters. This could be examined in a show where most character lifespans are even shorter than in *The Walking Dead* (e.g., *Game of Thrones*).

However, neither of these explanations account for the fact that participants who wrote about Glenn did not show similar effects for assimilation to or contrast of Asians. One possibility is that writing about Glenn did not have the same impact on activating race-categories as writing about Tyreese. Although people found Glenn to be similarly typical of Asians ( $M = 3.81, SD = 1.62$ ) as Tyreese was to Blacks ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.62$ ),  $t(204) = 0.61, p = .541$ , and less typical of Asians as Rick was of Whites ( $M = 4.61, SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(207) = -6.31, p < .001$ , participants on average reported more favorability toward Asians ( $M = 68.48, SD = 22.51$ ) than toward Blacks ( $M = 63.90, SD = 25.00$ ),  $t(209) = 3.47, p = .001$ , and less favorability toward Asians than toward Whites ( $M = 76.05, SD = 19.76$ ),  $t(209) = -5.11, p = .001$ . Therefore, it is possible that writing about Glenn did not create as much reactivity in participants as writing about Tyreese. Again, one reason that participants in the current sample may not have contrasted Glenn was due to their liking for him over and above their liking for the either Tyreese or Rick. Therefore, if anything, we would expect to see assimilation results rather than contrast effects for Glenn.

There are also at least three possible reasons for the lack of significant results for prejudice. Participants might not have shown prejudice reduction because I manipulated cognitive, rather than affective factors in the current study. Previous research on the affective means by which prejudice reduction occurs suggest that parasocial interactions can reduce prejudice through perspective taking, even in unlikely scenarios (e.g., toward recovering drug addicts; Chung & Slater, 2013). Therefore, it should have been possible to reduce prejudice in the current sample, despite the fact that *The Walking Dead* has an unlikely setting (i.e., post-apocalyptic world). Past research on prejudice reduction through parasocial contact has examined parasocial relationships with characters from media sources such as *Will & Grace*, *Harry Potter*, or *Sherrybaby*. Similar to *Harry Potter*, characters from *The Walking Dead* should be relatable, despite the story taking place in an unrelatable world, as their interactions with one another (i.e., romantic relationships, friendships) and character development (i.e., leadership, roles within the group) mimic real-life scenarios that participants have likely experienced. Although there were between-character difference, all three characters in the present study were reported as above the mid-point in terms of being relatable (Tyreese:  $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ; Glenn:  $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ , Rick:  $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ). It is possible that cognitive-based factors such as assimilation may not be a fruitful avenue for exploring prejudice reduction in the parasocial domain. Instead, focusing on affective factors, such as perspective taking, that have been shown to be effective in reducing prejudice may be a better place to invest future resources.

Second, there may have been floor effects for our measure of prejudice. Explicit forms of racial prejudice (e.g., overtly verbalizing, or agreeing to, negative statements pertaining to one race) are by and large considered socially unacceptable, and therefore people may be less likely to endorse such attitudes, even in an anonymous survey. This possibility is supported in our data,

as participants tended to somewhat disagree on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale with items assessing explicitly negative racial attitudes toward Blacks ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ , range: 1 – 7) and Asians ( $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ , range: 1 – 7). Additionally, the data showed violations of heteroscedasticity and normality, with very few people reporting moderate to high levels of prejudice. Although these effects should have been minimized by the applied log transformation and the use of robust standard errors in the regression models, it is still possible that this floor effect was a contributing factor to not finding any movement on the scale following the experimental manipulation.

Finally, it is possible that the measure of prejudice was problematic in some way. I adapted the measure from Grice's (1934) Attitudes Toward Races and Nationalities Scale, which was comprised of items that felt too explicitly negative (e.g., Group X...are mentally defective) or outdated (e.g., "Group X...must undergo many years of civilization before they may be said to have reached our own level"). Although items were adapted to correct for this, it is possible that the scale still does not appropriately capture the type of racism that is likely to be endorsed by people living in today's society. Future studies might assess whether or not administering a measure of committed microaggressions (i.e., subtle, unintentional forms of racism) might be more appropriate and foster more response variability between participants.

### **Limitations**

There are at least three limitations of the current study. First, participants were assigned to write about a character that they may not have had a true parasocial relationship with. Even if a participant was a viewer of *The Walking Dead*, they may not "engage with", or feel as though they have a relationship with every character from the show. If a participant had been assigned to write about Tyreese, it may not be a strong manipulation if that participant does not have a



preexisting parasocial relationship with Tyreese. Instead, it might be beneficial to ask participants to write about their favorite character of a target race (i.e., when studying prejudice toward Blacks, ask participants to write about their favorite Black television character). However, these kinds of effects may be difficult to disentangle, because people who report forming parasocial relationships with characters of different races may be less likely to be prejudiced toward that race in the first place. Future studies may assess whether it is true that participants who are less prejudiced to begin with report forming parasocial relationships more readily than participants who are more prejudiced. If this were true, a manipulation designed to reduce prejudice in already prejudiced participants should aim to prime a parasocial relationship using a character that is knowingly popular and well-liked among viewers.

A second limitation was that the SC-IAT may not have been a good assessment of assimilation to Blacks and Asians. A stronger assessment might be possible by using a two-category IAT, or using separate SC-IAT's for each race. However, each of these options would have increased participant burden in the current study, as each participant would have been subjected to multiple reaction time tasks (i.e., Black vs. White IAT, Asian vs. White IAT, Black identity SC-IAT, Asian identity SC-IAT). Future studies might consider assessing only one race at a time.

Finally, the two characters of primary interest, Tyreese and Glenn, are no longer alive on the show. Prior to the beginning of recruitment (April 2016), Tyreese, the Black character for the experimental manipulation, was killed off of the show (February 2015; the end of season 5 of *The Walking Dead*). However, I continued with using Tyreese as the study's Black character because there were no other lead Black male characters that were as popular as Tyreese. There is one popular lead Black female character on the show, Michonne; however, I decided to use

same-gender characters for my manipulation, to reduce any possibility that gender of the character affected the likelihood of forming parasocial relationships or assimilation.

Additionally, in the time that it took to collect the data (March 2017; approximately one year), Glenn was also killed off of the show (October 2016; the beginning of season 7). Ideally, data collection for future studies would be quicker, and would not span across multiple seasons, to control for turnover in characters. Also, given the nature of *The Walking Dead* (i.e., post-apocalyptic survival), characters are typically killed off more often than other genres of shows. Future studies might explore this area with different genres of shows with less likelihood of character turnover.

Although it is possible that the characters' deaths would have strengthened the experimental manipulation, as viewers might have been eager to share good memories about the times that they were on the show (i.e., reminiscing), the Inclusion/Exclusion Model (Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Bless & Schwarz, 2010) might help to explain why we observed contrast effects. The Inclusion/Exclusion model states that whether certain pieces of information about the target are included or excluded in the cognitive representation of the target during evaluation (i.e., essay writing) is relevant to the resulting assimilation or contrast effect observed. For instance, if a piece of positive information is included during the evaluation of the target, the participant may assimilate the target, whereas if this piece of information is excluded, they may instead contrast. Here, it is possible that if participants excluded the death of the character from their evaluation (thus, missing out on the possibility for reminiscing), and instead included other negative aspects that might lead to contrast, the observed effects would make sense.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

This study adds to the body of literature on the parasocial contract hypothesis by extending previous research on mechanisms by which prejudice reduction occurs following parasocial contact. Past studies have largely examined affective factors, such as perspective taking, as the responsible mechanisms. However, this study was novel in that it tested assimilation, a cognitive mechanism. Although the findings did not come out as predicted, the results are informative to the existing literature in at least two ways. First, in assessing racial prejudice specifically, it might be important to conduct a pilot study to gain information regarding the characters of interest from a show. It is possible that in order to reduce prejudice, media characters that will serve as the target for an experimental manipulation of parasocial relationships should be very likable and relatable characters of a race for which people have preexisting unfavorable attitudes toward. Second, it may be that cognitive factors are simply not related to parasocial contact and prejudice reduction, and that affective factors are purely responsible. However, more studies assessing cognitive factors should be conducted in order to support this notion.

Future research should take into account the limitations of the current study and build upon them. For instance, a larger in-person sample that replicated these results would be necessary to draw definite conclusions about the findings presented in this paper. Therefore, future studies should be sure that an in-person sample of appropriate size and demographic is attainable prior to data collection. For instance, I could have easily recruited 150 any-race participants from UH's campus who watched *The Walking Dead* (as evidenced by the many interested sign-ups during in-class recruitment sessions), but the fact that participants had to be White was extremely limiting.

In addition, future studies may want to assess prejudice using more refined measures, and different methodologies, such as using a less loaded measure of prejudice and a daily diary approach. One possibility for this might be to analyze committed microaggressions, to assess how often White people commit more nuanced, unintentional acts of prejudice. It is possible that watching a show in which there are different-race interactions (e.g., between friends, peers, coworkers, etc.) may reduce the likelihood of committing a microaggression in real life, because the different-race interactions serve as a point of reference for how to act with people of different races. In this case, the show itself would need to be carefully selected, in order to allow for a show that avoided microaggressions during different-race interactions. By using a daily-diary approach, it would be possible to assess whether people commit fewer microaggressions on days when they watch the show depicting different-race interactions.

Finally, this research could be extended to other socially relevant groups. In today's political climate, it might be particularly interesting to assess the possibility of prejudice reduction toward heavily targeted groups, such as Muslims, or even toward anyone identifying as Middle Eastern or Arab. It is possible that the negative construal of these groups in the media is an opportunity to assess whether other popular media sources (e.g., television shows, movies) with Muslim, Middle Eastern, or Arab characters, could combat or override the negative views being portrayed.

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**Table 1.** Correlations Among and Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	-										
2. Gender	.02	-									
3. Black pre-test prejudice	-.04	.19*	-								
4. Asian pre-test prejudice	-.04	-.01	.68***	-							
5. Avoidance RQ (categorical)	-.11	.01	-.12 <sup>+</sup>	-.13 <sup>+</sup>	-						
6. Avoidance RQ (continuous)	-.11	.05	-.19*	-.28***	.71***	-					
7. Avoidance ECR-RS (continuous)	-.08	-.11	-.25***	-.27***	.59***	.70***	-				
8. Black assimilation	.05	.01	.03	.01	.02	-.00	-.02	-			
9. Asian assimilation	.05	.02	-.00	-.03	.01	.02	-.02	.95***	-		
10. Black post-test prejudice	.02	-.16	-.66***	-.40***	.08	.17*	.27***	-.02	-.03	-	
11. Asian post-test prejudice	.00	-.03	-.46***	-.55***	.04	.19**	.22**	-.01	-.01	.67***	-
Mean	31.21	0.50	63.90	68.48	0.49	4.57	3.52	-0.05	-0.06	2.46	2.16
<i>SD</i>	9.65	0.50	25.00	22.51	0.91	0.50	1.40	0.31	0.30	0.30	1.36

*Note.* RQ = Relationship Questionnaire; ECR-RS= experiences with close relationships – relationship structures

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.** Results for regression analyses predicting assimilation of and prejudice toward Blacks and Asians by condition

Independent Variable	Blacks				Asians			
	Assimilation		Prejudice		Assimilation		Prejudice	
	$F$	$\eta_p^2$	$F$	$\eta_p^2$	$F$	$\eta_p^2$	$F$	$\eta_p^2$
Pretest prejudice	0.14	.001	80.56***	.285	0.75	.004	49.66***	.198
Source	0.71	.003	0.18	.001	1.19	.006	0.22	.001
Pretest prejudice X source	2.38	.012	2.49	.012	1.26	.006	1.42	.007
Condition	1.10	.011	0.66	.006	0.57	.006	0.94	.009
Condition X source	1.85	.018	0.35	.003	1.19	.012	0.38	.004

*Note.*  $F(7, 202) = 1.15, p = .335$  for assimilation of Blacks  $F(7, 202) = 22.23, p < .001$  for prejudice toward Blacks;  $F(7, 202) = 0.77, p = .616$  for assimilation of Asians;  $F(7, 201) = 12.71, p < .001$  for prejudice toward Asians.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Results for regression analyses predicting assimilation of and prejudice toward Blacks and Asians by condition and avoidance

Independent Variable	Blacks				Asians			
	Assimilation		Prejudice		Assimilation		Prejudice	
	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Pretest prejudice	0.13	.001	82.70***	.297	0.72	.004	52.73***	.213
Source	0.53	.003	0.24	.001	0.08	.006	0.42	.002
Pretest prejudice X source	2.39	.012	1.64	.008	1.40	.007	0.44	.002
Condition	1.42	.014	0.20	.002	0.82	.008	0.90	.009
Condition X source	1.81	.018	0.42	.004	1.12	.011	0.05	.001
Avoidance	0.02	.000	2.87 <sup>+</sup>	.014	0.42	.000	2.83	.014 <sup>+</sup>
Avoidance X source	0.50	.003	5.28*	.026	0.49	.002	6.02*	.030
Condition X avoidance	0.46	.005	2.00	.020	1.23	.004	0.78	.007
Condition X avoidance X source	1.80	.018	0.07	.001	1.57	.016	0.02	.000

*Note.*  $F(13, 196) = 0.97, p = .480$  for assimilation of Blacks;  $F(13, 196) = 13.08, p < .001$  for prejudice toward Blacks;  $F(13, 196) = 0.73, p = .733$  for assimilation of Asians;  $F(13, 195) = 7.53, p < .001$  for prejudice toward Asians.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** Results for the regressions predicting assimilation of Blacks using the RQ and the ECR-RS avoidance scores

Independent Variable	Model 1: RQ Avoidance			Model 2: ECR-RS Avoidance		
	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Step 1: Control variables <sup>a</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	.00	[-.001, .002]	.001	.00	[-.001, .002]	.001
Source	.04	[-.051, .137]	.004	.04	[-.051, .137]	.004
Pretest prejudice X source	.00	[-.001, .007]	.010	.00	[-.001, .007]	.010
Step 2: Main effects <sup>b</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	.00	[-.002, .002]	.000	.00	[-.002, .002]	.000
Source	.12	[-.034, .266]	.009	.13 <sup>+</sup>	[-.020, .278]	.011
Pretest prejudice X source	.00 <sup>+</sup>	[-.001, .008]	.013	.00 <sup>+</sup>	[-.000, .008]	.015
Avoidance	-.00	[-.010, .010]	.000	-.01	[-.037, .026]	.001
Condition						
Tyreese	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn	-.01	[-.121, .097]	.000	-.01	[-.119, .101]	.000
Rick	.03	[-.077, .137]	.001	.03	[-.075, .137]	.002
Avoidance X source	.01	[-.013, .028]	.002	.05	[-.024, .126]	.009
Condition X source						
Tyreese X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X source	-.02	[-.245, .204]	.000	-.04	[-.260, .189]	.000
Rick X source	-.21 <sup>+</sup>	[-.438, .008]	.015	-.23 <sup>*</sup>	[-.447, -.009]	.017
Step 3: Interaction effects <sup>c</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	.00	[-.002, .002]	.000	.00	[-.001, .002]	.000
Source	.11	[-.038, .268]	.008	.12	[-.042, .272]	.008
Pretest prejudice X source	.00 <sup>+</sup>	[-.000, .008]	.015	.00 <sup>+</sup>	[-.000, .009]	.015
Avoidance	.00	[-.016, .023]	.001	-.01	[-.065, .044]	.001
Condition						
Tyreese	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn	-.02	[-.123, .098]	.000	.03	[-.048, .107]	.000
Rick	.04	[-.078, .149]	.002	-.02	[-.092, .060]	.002
Avoidance X source	-.01	[-.043, .020]	.002	.01	[-.108, .124]	.002
Condition X source						
Tyreese X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X source	-.02	[-.242, .205]	.000	-.03	[-.258, .201]	.000
Rick X source	-.22 <sup>+</sup>	[-.451, .014]	.015	-.21 <sup>+</sup>	[-.437, .013]	.015
Condition X avoidance						
Tyreese X avoidance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X avoidance	-.00	[-.029, .021]	.000	.03	[-.048, .107]	.000
Rick X avoidance	-.01	[-.037, .015]	.003	-.02	[-.092, .060]	.003
Condition X avoidance X source						
Tyreese X avoidance X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X avoidance X source	.05 <sup>*</sup>	[.002, .100]	.001	.10	[-.090, .283]	.001
Rick X avoidance X source	.01	[-.035, .065]	.015	.03	[-.150, .203]	.015



*Note.*  $N = 210$ ;  $b$  = unstandardized regression coefficient; 95%  $CI$  = 95% confidence interval; condition is dummy coded for which Tyreese serves as the reference group.

<sup>a</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 1.25$ ,  $p = .291$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 1.25$ ,  $p = .291$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>b</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.77$ ,  $p = .592$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .419$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>c</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .316$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.79$ ,  $p = .533$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 5.** Results for the regressions predicting prejudice toward Blacks using the RQ and the ECR-RS avoidance scores

Independent Variable	Model 1: RQ Avoidance			Model 2: ECR-RS Avoidance		
	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Step 1: Control variables <sup>a</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.015, -.011]	.378	-.01***	[-.015, -.011]	.378
Source	.03	[-.086, .134]	.001	.03	[-.086, .134]	.001
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.008, .000]	.006	-.00	[-.008, .000]	.006
Step 2: Main effects <sup>b</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.015, -.011]	.346	-.01***	[-.014, -.010]	.320
Source	.00	[-.243, .247]	.000	.01	[-.229, .258]	.000
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.008, .001]	.004	-.00	[-.008, .001]	.004
Avoidance	.00	[-.011, .012]	.001	.02	[-.016, .065]	.004
Condition						
Tyreese	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn	-.07	[-.217, .086]	.003	-.07	[-.217, .085]	.003
Rick	-.08	[-.224, .061]	.004	-.09	[-.231, .049]	.005
Avoidance X source	.02	[-.011, .050]	.005	.07	[-.022, .152]	.005
Condition X source						
Tyreese X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X source	.09	[-.213, .391]	.001	.08	[-.221, .375]	.001
Rick X source	-.03	[-.336, .268]	.000	-.04	[-.325, .255]	.000
Step 3: Interaction effects <sup>c</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.015, -.011]	.342	-.01***	[-.014, -.010]	.342
Source	-.01	[-.275, .245]	.000	.02	[-.237, .274]	.000
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.008, .001]	.004	-.00 <sup>+</sup>	[-.008, .000]	.004
Avoidance	-.00	[-.033, .026]	.000	-.01	[-.095, .075]	.000
Condition						
Tyreese	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn	-.05	[-.213, .111]	.002	-.05	[-.211, .108]	.002
Rick	-.07	[-.221, .081]	.003	-.09	[-.233, .059]	.003
Avoidance X source	.00	[-.059, .068]	.000	.08	[-.103, .272]	.000
Condition X source						
Tyreese X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X source	.11	[-.206, .423]	.002	.08	[-.230, .390]	.002
Rick X source	-.03	[-.335, .283]	.000	-.04	[-.339, .256]	.000
Condition X avoidance						
Tyreese X avoidance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X avoidance	.00	[-.037, .041]	.000	.02	[-.088, .134]	.000
Rick X avoidance	.01	[-.020, .045]	.002	.07	[-.024, .167]	.002
Condition X avoidance X source						
Tyreese X avoidance X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glenn X avoidance X source	.01	[-.065, .089]	.002	-.07	[-.312, .174]	.002
Rick X avoidance X source	.03	[-.042, .099]	.000	.01	[-.209, .220]	.000

*Note.*  $N = 210$ ;  $b$  = unstandardized regression coefficient; 95%  $CI$  = 95% confidence interval; condition is dummy coded for which Tyreese serves as the reference group.

<sup>a</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .43$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 51.70$ ,  $p < .001$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .43$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 51.70$ ,  $p < .001$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>b</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.67$ ,  $p = .672$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.98$ ,  $p = .443$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>c</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.35$ ,  $p = .843$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.74$ ,  $p = .454$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 6.** Results for the regressions predicting assimilation of Asians using the RQ and the ECR-RS avoidance scores

Independent Variable	Model 1: RQ Avoidance			Model 2: ECR-RS Avoidance		
	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
Step 1: Control variables <sup>a</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.00	[-.002, .002]	.001	-.00	[-.002, .002]	.001
Source	.05	[-.038, .138]	.006	.05	[-.038, .138]	.006
Pretest prejudice X source	.00	[-.002, .007]	.005	.00	[-.002, .007]	.005
Step 2: Main effects <sup>b</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.00	[-.003, .001]	.002	-.00	[-.003, .001]	.002
Source	.08	[-.072, .226]	.005	.07	[-.078, .225]	.004
Pretest prejudice X source	.00	[-.002, .007]	.008	.00	[-.001, .008]	.010
Avoidance	-.00	[-.011, .008]	.001	-.01	[-.040, .020]	.002
Condition						
Glenn	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese	.02	[-.089, .122]	.001	.01	[-.094, .119]	.000
Rick	.03	[-.064, .129]	.002	.03	[-.064, .126]	.002
Avoidance X source	.01	[-.013, .026]	.002	.04	[-.028, .118]	.007
Condition X source						
Glenn X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X source	.04	[-.167, .255]	.001	.06	[-.151, .277]	.001
Rick X source	-.14	[-.362, .089]	.007	-.13	[-.351, .089]	.007
Step 3: Interaction effects <sup>c</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.00	[-.003, .001]	.002	-.00	[-.003, .001]	.002
Source	.08	[-.068, .223]	.004	.07	[-.084, .223]	.004
Pretest prejudice X source	.00	[-.001, .008]	.009	.00	[-.001, .008]	.010
Avoidance	-.00	[-.017, .012]	.000	.00	[-.041, .051]	.000
Condition						
Glenn	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese	.02	[-.085, .131]	.001	.02	[-.092, .126]	.001
Rick	.04	[-.058, .136]	.003	.04	[-.057, .132]	.003
Avoidance X source	.03*	[.001, .067]	.014	.08	[-.049, .214]	.008
Condition X source						
Glenn X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X source	.05	[-.160, .260]	.001	.07	[-.151, .286]	.002
Rick X source	-.13	[-.364, .099]	.007	-.12	[-.344, .103]	.006
Condition X avoidance						
Glenn X avoidance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X avoidance	.01	[-.019, .030]	.001	-.01	[-.084, .063]	.000
Rick X avoidance	-.01	[-.028, .016]	.001	-.03	[-.104, .036]	.004
Condition X avoidance X source						
Glenn X avoidance X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X avoidance X source	-.03	[-.080, .010]	.010	-.04	[-.211, .137]	.003
Rick X avoidance X source	-.04	[-.089, .013]	.008	-.07	[-.257, .112]	.001

*Note.*  $N = 210$ ;  $b$  = unstandardized regression coefficient; 95%  $CI$  = 95% confidence interval; condition is dummy coded for which Glenn serves as the reference group.

<sup>a</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 0.90$ ,  $p = .442$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 0.90$ ,  $p = .442$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>b</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.52$ ,  $p = .790$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.71$ ,  $p = .639$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>c</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.89$ ,  $p = .473$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .739$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 7.** Results for the regressions predicting prejudice toward Asians using the RQ and the ECR-RS avoidance scores

Independent Variable	Model 1: RQ Avoidance			Model 2: ECR-RS Avoidance		
	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Step 1: Control variables <sup>a</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.278	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.278
Source	.03	[-.068, .132]	.001	.03	[-.068, .132]	.001
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.007, .002]	.003	-.00	[-.007, .002]	.003
Step 2: Main effects <sup>b</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.239	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.234
Source	.05	[-.097, .205]	.001	.05	[-.110, .207]	.001
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.007, .003]	.002	-.00	[-.006, .003]	.001
Avoidance	.00	[-.010, .016]	.001	.02	[-.026, .056]	.002
Condition						
Glenn	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese	.08	[-.048, .209]	.005	.08	[-.054, .210]	.005
Rick	.08	[-.039, .191]	.005	.07	[-.046, .185]	.005
Avoidance X source	.02	[-.005, .048]	.008	.09	[-.008, .180]	.012
Condition X source						
Glenn X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X source	-.08	[-.344, .187]	.001	-.06	[-.335, .207]	.001
Rick X source	-.01	[-.231, .207]	.000	-.00	[-.224, .223]	.000
Step 3: Interaction effects <sup>c</sup>						
Pretest prejudice	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.242	-.01***	[-.012, -.008]	.226
Source	.05	[-.096, .202]	.001	.06	[-.098, .216]	.001
Pretest prejudice X source	-.00	[-.005, .004]	.000	-.00	[-.007, .003]	.002
Avoidance	-.00	[-.021, .017]	.001	-.01	[-.067, .050]	.000
Condition						
Glenn	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese	.07	[-.069, .200]	.001	.05	[-.084, .187]	.002
Rick	.08	[-.036, .198]	.003	.05	[-.064, .163]	.002
Avoidance X source	.03	[-.006, .067]	.006	-.01	[-.143, .132]	.000
Condition X source						
Glenn X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X source	-.10	[-.368, .166]	.005	-.07	[-.352, .206]	.001
Rick X source	-.04	[-.264, .177]	.002	-.02	[-.244, .203]	.000
Condition X avoidance						
Glenn X avoidance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X avoidance	.00	[-.029, .034]	.000	-.04	[-.142, .055]	.003
Rick X avoidance	.01	[-.020, .033]	.001	.10	[.023, .171]	.017
Condition X avoidance X source						
Glenn X avoidance X source	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tyreese X avoidance X source	-.04	[-.102, .016]	.001	.13	[-.104, .360]	.006
Rick X avoidance X source	.02	[-.033, .066]	.006	.14	[-.030, .312]	.004

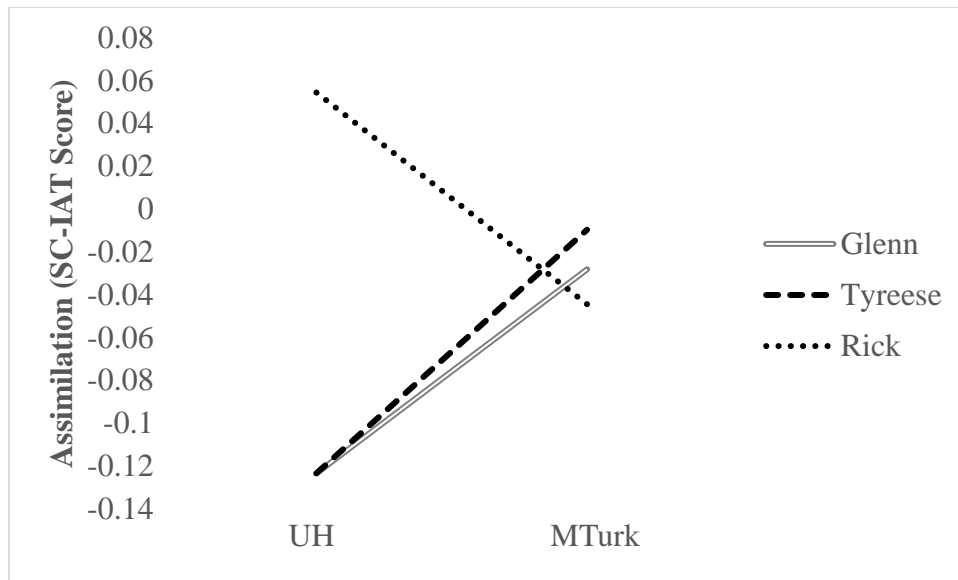
*Note.*  $N = 209$ ;  $b$  = unstandardized regression coefficient; 95%  $CI$  = 95% confidence interval; condition is dummy coded for which Glenn serves as the reference group.

<sup>a</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .30$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 29.05$ ,  $p < .001$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .30$ ,  $F(3, 206) = 29.05$ ,  $p < .001$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>b</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 200) = 0.86$   $p = .529$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(6, 199) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .300$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>c</sup> $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(4, 196) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .447$  for RQ;  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(4, 195) = 3.45$ ,  $p = .010$  for ECR-RS.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



*Figure 1.* Two-way Rick X Source interaction predicting Black assimilation for avoidance computed from the RQ.



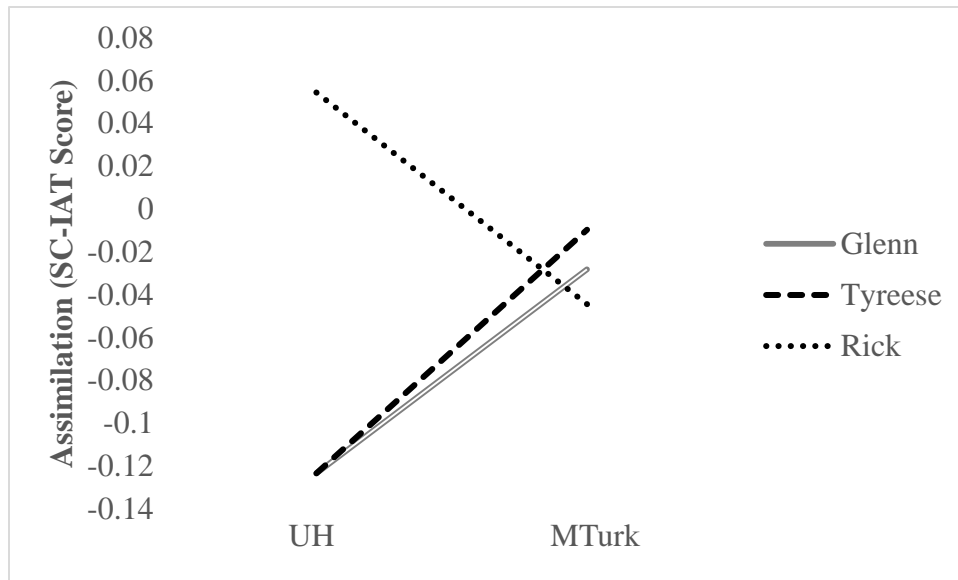


Figure 2. Two-way Rick X Source interaction predicting Black assimilation for avoidance computed from the ECR-RS.

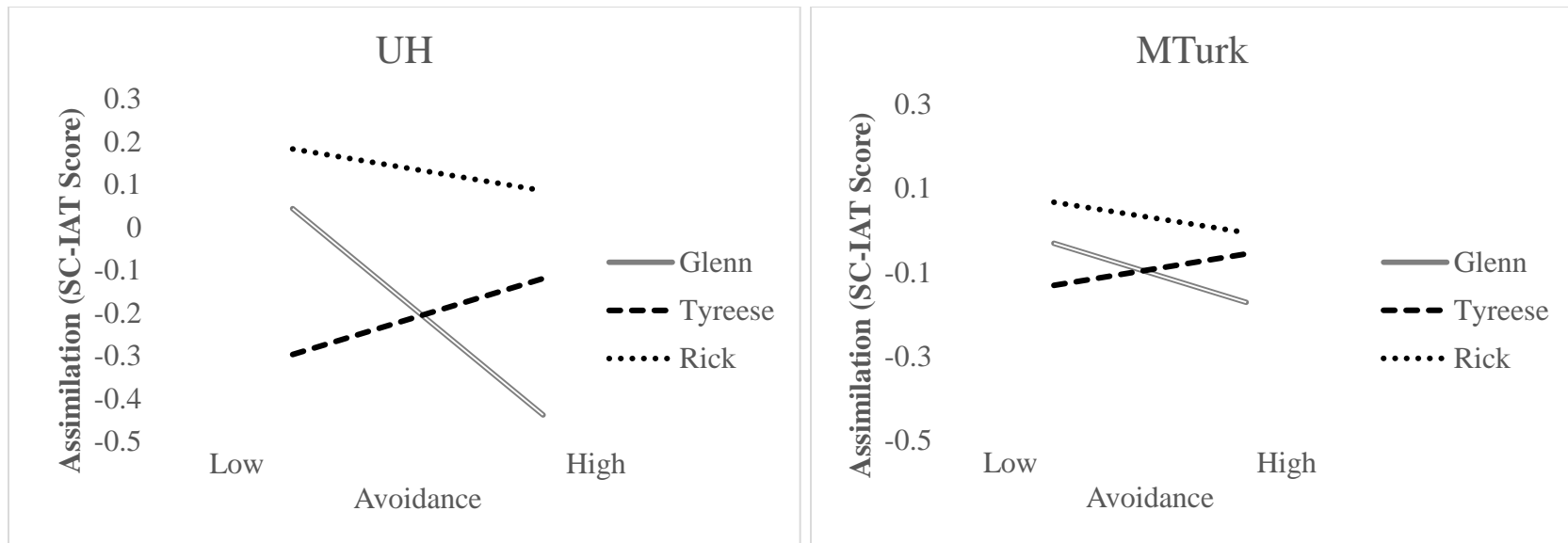


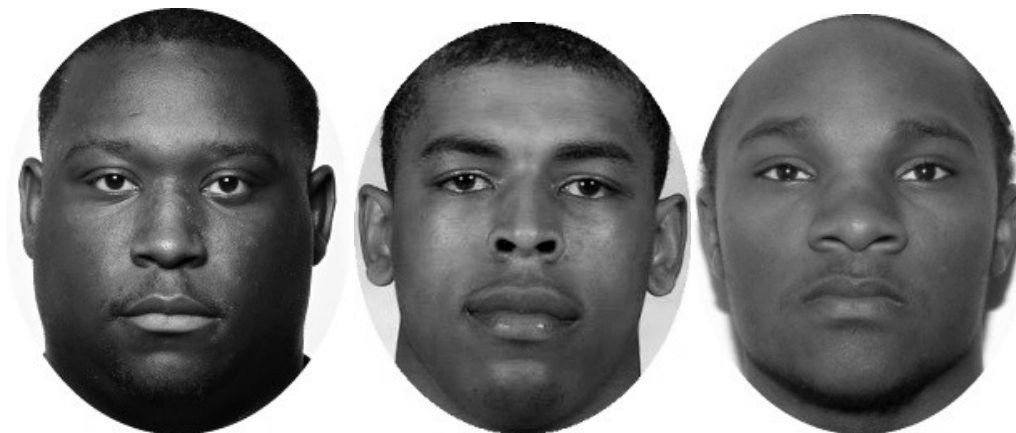
Figure 3 Glenn X Avoidance X Source interaction predicting Black assimilation for avoidance computed from the RQ.

**Appendix A: Faces for IAT**

Black Females



Black Males



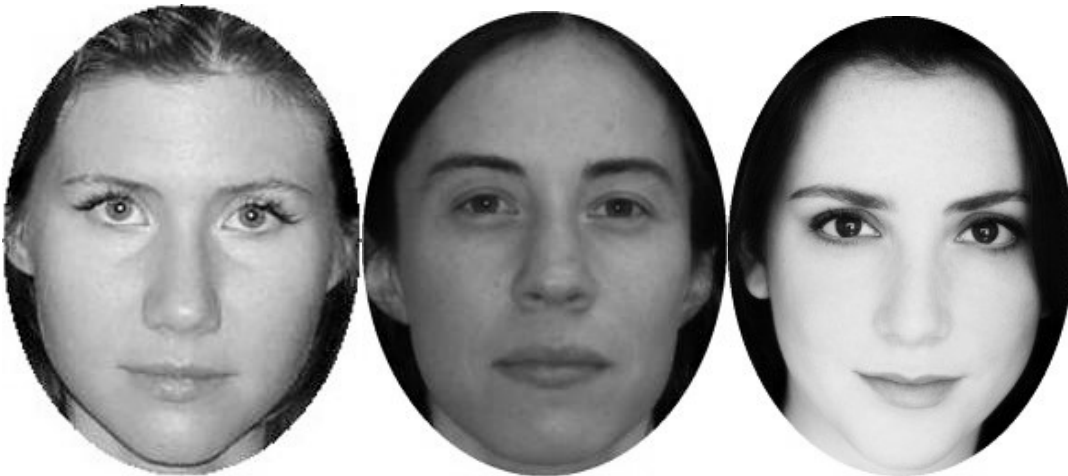
Asian Females



Asian Males



White Females



White Males



**Appendix B: Photographs of Characters**

Tyreese



Glenn



Rick



**Appendix C: Feelings Thermometer**

Instructions: Please indicate the amount of liking that you have for the following groups using the “thermometer” provided below.

0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°	
Extremely Unfavorable					Moderately Favorable					Extremely Favorable	
1. Athletes	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
2. Blacks	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
3. Republicans	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
4. Feminists	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
5. Asians	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
6. Politicians	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
7. Students	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
8. Hispanics/Latinos	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
9. Doctors	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
10. Arabs	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
11. Lawyers	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
12. Whites	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
13. Democrats	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
14. Priests	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°
15. Students	0°	10°	20°	30°	40°	50°	60°	70°	80°	90°	100°

### Appendix D: Relationship Questionnaire

Instructions: Below is a series of statements that correspond to your **general relationship style**. Using the scale provided, please rate how much each Relationship Style is characteristic of you.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all like me			Somewhat like me			Very much like me

1. It is easy for me to be emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Which of the relationship styles above best describes how you are in close relationships?

Style A

Style B

Style C

Style D

**Appendix E: Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures**

Instructions: Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you believe each statement best describes your feelings about **close relationships in general**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. It helps to turn to people in times of need.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with others.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. I talk things over with people.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. I find it easy to depend on others.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. I don't feel comfortable opening up to others.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. I prefer not to show others how I feel deep down.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7. I often worry that other people do not really care for me.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8. I'm afraid that other people may abandon me.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 9. I worry that others won't care about me as much as I care about them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |



**Appendix F: Attitudes Toward Races and Nationalities**

Instructions: Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree

**Black people...**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. make other groups better by interacting with them.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. make the world a better place.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. should not be allowed to associate with other groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. are the worst citizens.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. should be treated the same as any other group.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. have many desirable traits.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7. do not deserve my sympathy.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8. are not likeable.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 9. are impossible for anyone to like.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 10. are a privilege to associate with.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 11. deserve respect from any other group.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 12. are superior in every way to other groups.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 13. do not impress me.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 14. have no admirable traits.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Asian people...**

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. make other groups better by interacting with them.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 16. make the world a better place.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 17. should not be allowed to associate with other groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 18. are the worst citizens.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 19. should be treated the same as any other group.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

20. have many desirable traits.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. do not deserve my sympathy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. are not likeable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. are impossible for anyone to like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. are a privilege to associate with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. deserve respect from any other group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. are superior in every way to other groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. do not impress me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. have no admirable traits.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**White people...**

29. make other groups better by interacting with them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. make the world a better place.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. should not be allowed to associate with other groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. are the worst citizens.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. should be treated the same as any other group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. have many desirable traits.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. do not deserve my sympathy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. are not likeable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. are impossible for anyone to like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. are a privilege to associate with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. deserve respect from any other group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. are superior in every way to other groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. do not impress me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. have no admirable traits.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Hispanic/Latino people...**

43. make other groups better by interacting with them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 44. make the world a better place.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 45. should not be allowed to associate with other groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 46. are the worst citizens.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 47. should be treated the same as any other group.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 48. have many desirable traits.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 49. do not deserve my sympathy.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 50. are not likeable.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 51. are impossible for anyone to like.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 52. are a privilege to associate with.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 53. deserve respect from any other group.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 54. are superior in every way to other groups.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 55. do not impress me.                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 56. have no admirable traits.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Appendix G: Demographics**

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?  
  
Male  
Female  
Other (please specify)  
Prefer not to answer
3. What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify.  
  
African/African-American (Black)  
Asian, Pacific Islander, or Asian-American  
Caucasian/European-American (White)  
Latino/Latina/Latin American (Hispanic)  
Arab/Arab-American  
Native American (American Indian)  
South Asian  
Other  
Prefer not to respond

**Appendix H: Television Use and The Walking Dead**

1. How much do you *like* the character of Rick?
2. How much do you *like* the character of Glenn?
3. How much do you *like* the character of Tyreese?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

4. How *attached* do you feel to Rick?
5. How *attached* do you feel to Glenn?
6. How *attached* do you feel to Tyreese?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

7. How *attractive* do you think Rick is?
8. How *attractive* do you think Glenn is?
9. How *attractive* do you think Tyreese is?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

10. How *close* do you feel to Rick?
11. How *close* do you feel to Glenn?
12. How *close* do you feel to Tyreese?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

13. To what extent do you feel like you and Rick are *friends*?
14. To what extent do you feel like you and Glenn are *friends*?
15. To what extent do you feel like you and Tyreese are *friends*?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

16. To what extent do you feel like you and Rick are *similar*?
17. To what extent do you feel like you and Glenn are *similar*?
18. To what extent do you feel like you and Tyreese are *similar*?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not know who this character is.

19. To what extent do you feel like Rick is *relatable*?
20. To what extent do you feel like Glenn is *relatable*?

21. To what extent do you feel like Tyreese is *relatable*?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely

I do not know who this character is.

22. To what extent do you think Rick is a *typical White male*?

23. To what extent do you think Glenn is a *typical Asian male*?

24. To what extent do you feel like Tyreese is a *typical Black male*?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely

I do not know who this character is.

25. To what extent do you think Rick *is similar to* Glenn?

26. To what extent do you think Glenn *is similar to* Tyreese?

27. To what extent do you think Tyreese *is similar to* Rick?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely

I do not know who this character is.

28. Please list traits that you think describe Rick...

I do not know who this character is.

29. Please list traits that you think describe Glenn...

I do not know who this character is.

30. Please list traits that you think describe Tyreese...

I do not know who this character is.

31. Who is your favorite character from The Walking Dead? \_\_\_\_\_

I do not watch this show.

32. How often do you binge watch The Walking Dead?

Never  
Sometimes  
Often  
All the time

33. To what degree would you say The Walking Dead is one of your *favorite shows*?

1 = not at all, 7 = extremely  
I do not watch this show.

34. How often do you watch TV shows (including shows watched online or on DVD)?

Every day/night  
Several times per week  
Once a week  
A few times a month  
Rarely  
Never

35. When you watch TV shows, approximately how many hours do you typically watch (including shows watched online or on DVD)?

0 – 2  
2 – 4  
4 – 6  
6 – 8  
8 – 10  
10 +

36. On average, how engaged are you in watching a TV show?

Not at all a little engaged  
Somewhat engaged  
Usually engaged  
Engaged  
Very engaged

37. Which of the following is true of you?

I am a current viewer of The Walking Dead  
I used to watch The Walking Dead  
I do not watch The Walking Dead

38. How do you watch The Walking Dead? (select all that apply)

TV (every Sunday when it airs)  
TV (reruns)  
Online streaming (e.g., Hulu, Amazon, Netflix)  
Other (please specify)

39. How frequently do you watch The Walking Dead?

Never  
Less than once a month  
One every few weeks  
Once a week  
Multiple times per week  
Every day

40. Which seasons of The Walking Dead have you watched? (select all that apply)

Season 1  
Season 2  
Season 3  
Season 4  
Season 5  
Season 6  
I have not watched any seasons of this show.



**Appendix I: Suspicion Check**

1. Had you heard anything about this study prior to participating?
2. What do you think that this study is about?
3. Was there anything odd that you noticed during the study?
4. Have you ever completed an implicit associations test (IAT) or visited a website where you can take an IAT prior to participating in this study?

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May, 2017