



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

Master's Theses

Graduate College

6-2014

Of Tribes, Wars, and Jungles: A Study of U.S.College Students' Perceptions of Africa and Africans

Seseer P. Mou

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses



Part of the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons, Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons, and the International and Intercultural Communication Commons

Recommended Citation

Mou, Seseer P., "Of Tribes, Wars, and Jungles: A Study of U.S.College Students' Perceptions of Africa and Africans" (2014). *Master's Theses*. 505.

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/505

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



OF TRIBES, WARS, AND JUNGLES: A STUDY OF U.S.COLLEGE STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICA AND AFRICANS

by

Seseer P. Mou

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Communication
Western Michigan University
June 2014

Thesis Committee:

Kathleen Propp, Ph.D., Chair
Heather Addison, Ph.D.
Autumn Edwards, Ph.D.

OF TRIBES, WARS, AND JUNGLES: A STUDY OF U.S.COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICA AND AFRICANS

Seseer P. Mou, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2014

This study examined American college students' perceptions of Africans. Knowledge Gap and Systems Theory were applied to creating and discussing the research questions. Systems Theory addresses processes and levels of information transfer (Westley & Maclean, 1965). It requires an understanding of the sources, channels, messages, and the people who receive information in a communication encounter. Knowledge Gap Theory, on the other hand, states that when information circulates in a system, gaps in knowledge are formed and these gaps increase as more information enters the system (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970). The results showed that consumption of radio and newspaper news, engagement with international news, and contact with Africans in academic, social, and work environments influenced American college students' perceptions about Africans.

Keywords: perception, social distance, Africa, knowledge gap, communication systems theory.

Copyright by
Seseer P. Mou
2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my father and mentor, Dr. Dan Mou, for his love, encouragement, direction, and support throughout my life and unto this day. He is responsible for most of the good decisions I ever made. Also I thank my mother, Victoria Mou Chair, for her gentle wisdom, comforting words, and great belief in me. You both are the best parents for me.

I would also like to thank my persistent thesis committee members for sticking with me through my lengthy journey of figuring out, learning how to, and creating a very good thesis work. Specifically, I want to thank Dr. Heather Addison for her patience, guidance, advice, understanding, kindness, and immeasurable support. I want to thank Dr. Kathy Propp for her very thorough instructions, sacrifice of time, understanding, and incredible SPSS Jings that made analyzing my thesis results less agonizing. I want to thank Dr. Autumn Edwards for her prompt replies to all my thesis enquiries and all the helpful academic resources she provided.

I also want to thank my professor (retired) Dr. Steve Rhodes, who trustingly leant me his statistics textbooks for weeks, the first day I walked into his class. He is the reason I am not afraid of statistics. Finally, I want to thank my best friend in the world, Victor Kesselly for pushing me to go on when I felt like quitting and for being my biggest fan and cheerleader when I felt discouraged. He is my most valuable support system.

Seseer P. Mou

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	8
U.S. News in Digital Age, International Coverage and Africa.....	8
Media Habits of American College Students.....	15
Stereotyping, the Media, and Africa.....	18
Theoretical Framework.....	25
Theory of Communication Systems.....	25
Knowledge Gap Theory.....	28
III. METHODOLOGY.....	33
Participants.....	33
Procedures.....	34
Measures.....	36
Dependent Variables.....	36
Independent Variables.....	38
IV. RESULTS.....	42
Perceptions of Africa.....	42

Table of Contents- continued

CHAPTER

Desired Social Distance.....	49
V. DISCUSSION.....	54
Research Question One.....	54
Research Questions Two.....	56
Research Question Three.....	61
Implications of Study.....	62
Limitations and Future Directions.....	64
Conclusion.....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	68
APPENDICES.....	78
A. Recruitment Script.....	78
B. Consent Statement.....	80
C. Survey.....	83
D. HSIRB Approval.....	91

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well and was confused when I said Nigeria happens to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my tribal music and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.... She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me; her default position towards me as an African was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa, a single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.... After I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate’s response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria and if all I knew of Africa were [sic] from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS; unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved...” (Adichie, 2009).

Chimamanda Adichie is an African novelist who moved to the United States at the age of nineteen to study communication and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia and Eastern Connecticut State University. (She later completed graduate degrees at Johns Hopkins University and Yale University.) Adichie, like many African immigrants to the United States, has experienced some of the effects of the

misconceptions that many people in the U.S. have in regard to Africa. The excerpt above is from a presentation titled “The Danger of a Single Story,” which Adichie gave at the 2009 TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference. Her talk highlights the problem that is the central focus of this study: In our contemporary age, despite major advancements in information technology and distribution, Africa and its people are still represented by the same centuries-old stereotypes. In fact, Africans may be the most misperceived (as well as underrated; if you may) people on the planet, especially by those in the Western world, who often believe that Africa is a homogeneous continent and that Africans are primitive people.

With globalization and an increasing need for close international relations, it is more important than ever that all of us have knowledge about other countries that does not starkly contrast with the actual situation or misrepresent the populace under consideration. The need for reliable, accurate information on international affairs has been stressed by scholars of international education (UNESCO, 1997). Having a skewed or inaccurate understanding of Africa can affect important decision-making on global policy and issues (Osunde et al., 1997). A former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has highlighted the importance of developing a more nuanced understanding of Africa. In a 1998 speech that preceded a state visit to Africa by President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton, she said,

We as a nation still have much to learn about Africa. For many, our impressions are dominated by images of famine and strife, exotic wildlife, and vast deserts. The President’s trip can help paint a more complete

picture of modern cities, first-rate universities, fast-developing economies, and hardworking people with aspirations very similar to our own. (p. 1)

People who have never been to Africa may have inaccurate ideas about the continent and its people, ideas that encourage bias toward and prejudice against Africans. One particularly unfortunate misconception is that Africa has no notable history worth considering before the era of European contact began in the fifteenth century. Renowned Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper [1914-2003] shared this belief and excluded Africa from his world history courses (Bender & Leone, 2008). Negative stereotypes are promulgated by the mainstream media, including entertainment programs and news (Maeda, 2000). Maeda asserted that the most influential way perceptions of people who are different from us are formed is through our personal experience with them. However, those us who do not get this first-hand opportunity form perceptions from the media. When the message is distorted, the consumers of the message can acquire a misperception of reality. Media reports on Africa are usually limited to dramatic subjects such as poverty, war, famine, natural disasters and fetish rituals that maintain an impression of Africa as a primitive place in the minds of media consumers (Maeda, 2000).

According to Dubois (1996), this confounded narrative started centuries ago with the enslavement of millions of Africans. Eurocentric forces colonized not just the African continent but also Africans' culture, cosmology and history (Asante, 2007). With the power of their languages, religion, and military, European nations were able to convince the rest of the world that their derogatory opinions about Africa and its people were true, setting in motion a profound negativity about Africa. In 1829, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich

Hegel, a German philosopher and important intellectual figure in Europe, argued that Africa should never be mentioned in discourses about history because Africans had played no significant role in them. Thus, stories about Isocrates, a Greek Philosopher who studied both medicine and philosophy with the Kemetic (or ancient Egyptian) philosophers of Africa were suppressed and forgotten (Achebe, 1978). In the same era, a map of the world portrayed Africa as only slightly larger than Europe, yet today we know that Europe can fit into Africa more than three times over (Caplan, 2008).

In the United States, Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) reported that the media are not the only enablers of faulty perceptions, as the elementary education system has arguably produced some of the errors in knowledge about Africa. Instructional materials in U.S schools have focused mainly on exotic African themes, such as the safari, the Kalahari Desert, and the Massai tribes of Kenya. These materials also suggest that Africa is primitive, underdeveloped and covered with jungles. For centuries, this paradigm has been the primary impression of Africa available to the average person in Western society, impeding rather than contributing to a sophisticated, realistic understanding of the continent. Osunde et al. (1997) argued that these perceptions have managed to prevail despite the significant social and economic development that has occurred in the sub-Saharan regions of Africa since the 1960s. In their study of pre-service social studies teachers, they found that these teachers had the same perceptions of Africa that their grandparents had. In a survey, the student teachers selected the following concepts as being relevant descriptions for Africa: “wild animals, malnutrition, disease, huts, tribe, elephants, jungles, poor, desert, villages, tigers, natives, and superstition” (p. 120). Some

of those surveyed referred to Africa as a country, even though it is a continent with dozens of countries.

Most of these stereotypes reflect faulty assumptions. For example, although it is true that a lot of rural Africans live in huts made of thatched materials, plaster or mud-bricks, wooden stakes and bamboo strips, many of them do so because they choose to live in these sorts of houses. For some, it is convenient and affordable; for others, dwelling in huts upholds and promotes their cultural values. In rural African settings, such structures are the most appropriate for the prevailing climate as well as the physical and cultural environment, just as the modern, concrete constructions present in the urban settings of Africa are more suited for city life. This kind of geographical and cultural diversity is not a strange phenomenon on any other continent. Such variations exist in North America, for instance: the United States has metropolitan cities like New York and Chicago, as well as remote rural locations in which daily life is much different. Also, many of the problems associated with Africa, such as famine, malnutrition, and drought, are caused not only by humans but to a large degree by natural factors. Changes in climate, perhaps as a result of global warming, have been linked to many natural disasters the world over. These disasters have taken on different forms in different parts of the world: floods, hurricanes, tornados, desertification, famine etc. Why then should the identity of Africa be indissolubly linked with such disasters, if they occur across the globe?

This study aimed to expose some of the myths about the African continent and Africans that circulate in the West. It examined U.S. college students' perceptions of Africa and Africans and attempted to identify patterns of misinformation or gaps in

understanding. According to Gibbons and Ashwood (2006), college students provide a representative sample for the study of behavior and attitudes. Colleges reflect changes in societal patterns and U.S. college students come from several strata of the population (Morphew, 2009). Therefore, understanding college students' knowledge of Africa is an important endeavor, especially in the era of globalization. The perceptions held about a group ultimately affect attitudes towards that group. The consequence of a distorted understanding of Africa and Africans in the United States is that Africans – and Americans of African descent – are at risk of undeserved judgment, prejudice, and discrimination. It is therefore important to examine perceptions of Africa. As Kanya (1997) argues, misconceptions about Africa make African immigrants in the U.S. an especially vulnerable population. Although all immigrants have to go through a process of acculturation that involves learning to cope cognitively, socially, and behaviorally with their new home, Africans are likely to experience greater identity-related stress, like poor self-esteem and conflicts about role perception.

Several studies about Americans' perceptions of Africa and Africans have been published within the last two decades (Bone, 2010; Ette, 2012; Hawkins, 2012; Kanya, 1997). Whereas these reports tend to give a rather gloomy account of U.S. perceptions of Africa, they point to other factors that may have improved these perceptions and produced significant improvements in knowledge about Africa, such as thriving U.S. and African trade policies, advancements in information technology, and a continuous influx of Africans into the United States, especially on college campuses. This study focused on college students, who represent the next generation of attitudes toward Africa.

Employing surveys, I investigated what perceptions today's college students have about

Africans and attempted to identify differences in their perceptions that may be a product of their news consumption habits, demographic variables, contact with Africans, and so on. The goal of the study was to establish whether, and to what extent, attitudes toward Africa may have shifted, signaling the emergence of a new era of understanding between the United States and Africa.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Americans may get their impressions of Africa from many media sources, such as movies, television shows, novels, textbooks, and so on. I am particularly interested in presentations of Africa in mass media that provide information (as compared to entertainment and/or fictional narratives). Arguably, when most Americans seek up-to-date, reliable information on Africa or other subjects, they turn to news media; therefore, my literature review focuses on the current state of United States' news media, particularly its coverage of international affairs (and of Africa), and the media habits of American college students, such as which news media they pay attention to as well as the reasons why. I then consider the complex issue of stereotypes, especially as it relates to discussions of Africa and African history in Western media. Finally, I cover systems theory and knowledge gap theory, which serve as a foundation for predicting how and why there may be “gaps” or differences in students' understanding of Africa.

U.S. News in the Digital age, International Coverage, and Africa

As news technology has evolved, established media have been overshadowed by the emergence of newer innovations. The newspaper, for instance, was threatened by the invention of the television, which was the new media in the 1950s (Cyr, Carpenter, & Lacy, 2010). By 1963, the television industry had plunged into the news business in a serious way, doubling the production of their nightly newscasts and expanding into the production of daytime news. This change dealt a blow to the newspaper industry by

taking a significant chunk of its revenue sources, leading to a slow and continuous decline in the circulation of hard copies of issues (Patterson, 2007). Today, the news environment is faced with a sophisticated medium in the Internet. The Internet has become a popular vehicle for facilitating communication and information sharing worldwide (Dimmick, 2004).

According to Bird (2009), news no longer runs one way, in which a few firms compete to “speak loudly while the rest of the population listens in isolation from one another” (p. 294); the lines between news producers and news audiences are getting blurred by citizen journalists, bloggers, and online news groups. Because many television and newspaper organizations now have online outlets that require fewer staff members and face fierce competition for funds from advertisers, the size of some media houses has shrunk and there have been layoffs of journalists (Bird, 2009; Himelboim, 2010; Weaver, 2009). Ironically, whereas the Internet poses a threat to traditional newsrooms, it has also created an extension of these physical structures and provided an avenue for media organizations and individuals not only to reach larger audiences, but also to bring matters in the larger world home to their audience. For instance, we would not need to pick up a copy of a newspaper or turn on the TV at primetime in order to find out about a recent attack at an oil plant in Mali or an American who has been sentenced to thirty-five years in prison for aiding an attack in Mumbai, India (<http://edition.cnn.com/>). We simply need to log in to our favorite news blog or glance over the homepage of a website from which we connect to our emails, or even spot the story in our social media feeds.

People rely on the news to make judgments about the world, especially in regard to those places that they cannot experience directly. International news reportage can

influence people's liking for other countries and the perceptions they hold about other nations' success (Besova & Cooley, 2009). This highlights an important role of the media in connecting the globe through providing information and helping people form opinions about other countries. In 1922, Walter Lippmann identified the media's agenda-setting role. He claimed that the media have the power to dictate the issues that are important to people. Twenty-first century researchers have also found strong correlations between media reports and public opinion (Besova & Cooley; Chinedu, 2008). A few scholars even suggest that international news coverage can have a greater effect on public opinion than domestic coverage because international news contains unobtrusive issues (things that individuals do not experience or verify for themselves) as compared with obtrusive issues (things that people may deal with daily) (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Lippmann, 1922).

In recent decades, the content, structure, and reporting of international news has generated a lot of interest in mass communication research (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Himelboim, 2010; Horvit, 2003). Many scholars report that international news coverage across various U.S. mainstream media is declining (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Horvit, 2003). A lot of this decline is the result of a shortage of advertising revenue. It has become more difficult to sponsor foreign bureaus and correspondents. Horvit (2003) raised another valid explanation for the absence of international stories in news. She is of the opinion that many editors think that U.S. readers are not interested in international news or do not have a need for it. Chinedu (2008) cites Martha Malan, the international editor of *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, who has said that producers of smaller papers do not

have any particular connection to foreign stories and that the vogue out there is to keep things local, or at least domestic.

According to Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger (1987), there are several determinants of newsworthiness of international news in the U.S. media: oddity and uniqueness of the event, relevance to the U.S., potential for social change, geographical proximity, language affinity, level of press freedom, and similarity in economic systems. Editors who cannot easily identify such factors in an international news story may not be convinced that it is important to report on it. With globalization, all international news can arguably be judged relevant in one or more of Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger's categories. For instance, many aspects of local life are affected by decisions made internationally. Rainfall and temperature are affected by global climate changes influenced partly by factory emissions in China and India; myriad countries represented on a youth soccer field in the U.S. may be determined by the lack of economic growth in Central America; and the condition of local schools is affected by tax revenues for education which links back to the mortgage markets and the willingness of international investors to continue to support the borrowing habits of the U.S. (Hamilton, 2010) . As Hawkins (2012) put it,

Globalization has made more of the world more relevant to more of us. Seemingly unrelated events and issues in places on the other side of the globe have the potential to affect our access to goods and services, our economic status, our security (or sense of security) and even our climate (p. 13).

In addition, scholars stress the need for average citizens to have some knowledge about foreign countries (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Hamilton, 2010; Riegert, 2011; UNESCO, 1997).

Yet despite the relevance of global news, research indicates that international stories are declining in the mainstream media (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Horvit, 2003). International news coverage in the U.S. media generally decreased after the Cold War ended in the late 1980s. Such coverage was reinvigorated by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, although it centered primarily on activities in the Middle East and Africa that were seen as threatening to Western interests. According to Ette (2012), “the debris from the collapse of the Twin Towers is still falling around the world at many levels,” so the United States’ media are quick to respond to even the perception of a threat from “real and imagined enemies” (p. 46). This was evident in the reaction towards the incident of the Nigerian suicide bomber on Christmas Day in 2009. A Nigerian Islamist under the instruction of Al-Qaeda attempted to detonate explosives hidden in his underwear while on board Northwest Airlines Flight 253, en route from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan. Nigeria was suddenly newsworthy, but only because of a perceived threat. Within days of the incident, the *Washington Post* reported that Nigeria had been classified as a country of interest in the context of terrorism alongside countries like Algeria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Pakistan (Ette, 2012).

Critiques of U.S. mainstream media coverage focus on the waning presence of foreign news, but also address biases in the coverage that does exist. Some critics claim that certain countries, such as Russia, Germany, France and China, are featured more than others as a result of trade relations (Horvit, 2003). There are also critics who argue

that whenever international news is reported in the mainstream media, it is often from a negative perspective, focusing on issues of violence, exploitation, or deprivation. For instance, Besova and Cooley found in their study of the *New York Times* that about seventy percent of all coverage on North Korea is connected to nuclear issues (Besova & Cooley, 2009).

Despite the reports that international news coverage is declining in the mainstream media, Hamilton (2010) identified alternative media outlets that have supported the generation and distribution of international news in the twenty-first century. The availability of various news perspectives projected by a heterogeneous body of transmitters (from professional journalists to eyewitness reporters, and even people who simply want to share their point of view on a matter) across many media platforms provides a wide spectrum of information from which audiences get a more comprehensive view of foreign issues. One of these is User Generated Content (UGC) through channels like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. UGC facilitated detailed reporting on the unfolding of a terrorist attack in Mumbai, India in 2008 and provided crucial information on the election unrest in Iran in 2009. Foreign bloggers also offer highly insightful positions and reports about events in their countries. The downside to UGC is that consumers in the U.S. may not have the background needed to correctly interpret images and text coming from abroad. Nuanced uses of language and/or other aspects of context may be misconstrued. Some non-profit web organizations have decided to pull together and translate information on particular regions, countries and topics. Such websites include GlobalVoices (www.GlobalVoicesOnline.Org) and TehranBureau.com. Others include CNN's for-profit venture, iReport

(www.ireport.cnn.com), that culls UGC (Hamilton, 2010). Non-profits have often provided international affairs stories which are then transformed into news reports by both print and broadcast reporters.

In the for-profit media world, certain subscribers are willing to pay for international news. For example, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, and *Bloomberg* can charge their customers for international news because those customers use the information for business decisions. Such individuals allow media outlets to maintain reporters and bureaus abroad. Then there is the educated consumer. A relatively small but educated and affluent group of readers in the U.S. is willing to pay for subscriptions to read detailed, intelligent coverage of international events. Examples of these people are subscribers to the *Economist*, and a subset of subscribers to the *New York Times*. There are also advertiser-supported ethnic media outlets targeted at immigrants to the U.S. These outlets, which started off as niche operations serving small communities, have increased circulation and revenue in recent years because of the continuous influx of immigrants. Examples of ethnic media outlets include *Sing Tao Daily*, a Chinese daily published in San Francisco, *El Diario/La Prensa*, a Spanish daily in New York, and the *Namibia Economist* circulating in Stanford, California. They are utilized by advertisers looking to attract immigrants who are harder to reach through English-language outlets. Another form of advertiser-supported international news source includes the international topics featured in soft news (talk shows and entertainment programs). Finally, there are networked journalists and syndicated stories: reporters work through a networked system to fill the void created by once full-time journalists employed by metro dailies to cover international news. The GlobalPost.com is an example of an online U.S.-based news

outlet that focuses on international news, made possible by editors tying together the output of reporters from both sister and rival news organizations (Hamilton, 2010).

Thus the landscape of international news in the United States has shifted dramatically over the past two decades, affected by waxing and waning interest in global affairs and the easy availability of information on the Internet. This shifting pattern of news production and consumption begs the question: What are the media habits of contemporary college students, and how might those habits affect their knowledge of Africa?

Media Habits of American College Students

Many studies have reported a bleak future for young people and mainstream news (Broddason, 2006). Meijer (2007) pointed out that the declining appetite for traditional news among college-aged people is related to fundamental technological changes in our culture. With the wide variety of news content now available across several media, conventional news is not as appealing to young citizens. The Internet is one of the major news sources consulted by college students, along with campus newspapers and comedy television programming (Diddi & Larose, 2006; Janis, 2009). The Internet offers audiences a high degree of selection, delivery, and presentation of information – a phenomenon called News Personalization (Thurman, 2011). According to the Pew Research Center (2012), people are taking advantage of having easy access to news throughout the day – in their pocket, on their desks and in their laps. College students use laptops, tablets, and smart phones to get news from the Internet, which is connected to multiple media sources (Bird, 2009; Gil, 2012), including television channels which can

now be streamed via websites. However, one reason that television sources have ranked (and still rank) high as a preferred news source for college students (Diddi & Larose, 2006) is the growing popularity of *fake news* (Borden & Tew, 2007) - a fusion of entertainment and news and “opinionated news” in which the anchor expresses a clear point of view (Feldman, 2011). Television also offers round-the-clock exposure to a variety of news materials, which may provide quick information about many topics but not in-depth, substantive coverage (Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010).

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, audiences select a news source based on its ability to gratify their needs, which can include organizing their lives and experiences (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1942). Young people today seek news not as an end in itself but for inspiration, a sense of belonging, and a basis for conversation (Meijer, 2007). In the twentieth century, young adults closely related newspaper reading to maturity (it was believed that adults were more prone to understand the complicated reports in the papers) and considered newspapers a prime source of information about the world (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991). Jeffers (1996) found that reading newspapers as a leisure time activity correlated significantly with a focus on external public affairs; however, Atkins (1994) found that although young readers acknowledged newspapers as factual sources of news, they considered the content boring because newspapers covered issues that they felt were unrelated to their lives. Contrasting television’s focus on entertainment with newspaper’s focus on providing information prompted students to classify newspaper reading as “work” (Atkins, 1994). This implies that the tendency for younger news readers to gravitate towards more entertainment-based media outlets is not just a twenty-first century phenomenon.

College-aged Americans have shunned traditional media outlets much more than their predecessors. Harrington (2008) argued that young people are not necessarily apathetic towards news; rather, they are simply switching to sources that are more interesting and relevant to them. They are not necessarily turning off the news or trying to stay uninformed. In an attempt to attract younger readers and viewers, newspapers have changed their layout and design, and television has added more music, more appealing studio venues and live broadcasting, but young adults are still more likely to go online for information and are interested in entertainment news more than any other type of news (Kaufhold, 2010). Nine out of ten journalists agree that young adult news consumers prefer to go online for their news and that it is important to present news in ways that appeal to younger audiences so as not to alienate them from the mainstream media (Kaufhold, 2010).

While younger news consumers are more likely to gravitate towards non-traditional news reporting, it is noteworthy that the newer, alternative modes of news reporting have attracted their fair share of critics who do not agree that such modes are authentic and credible journalistic outlets (see Borden & Tew, 2007; Feldman, 2011; Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010). Ksiazek et al. pointed out that the polarization in news (a result of the different styles of news reporting) has caused a disparity in the general knowledge of news consumers, especially in terms of their knowledge of political issues and international affairs. One of the arguments of the early proponents of new communication technologies was that the move of news online would be a chief mechanism for its democratization as a result of the wide availability of information, and a decreased audience reliance on centralized news content producers. However,

researchers have begun to worry in recent years that the decline of the traditional press has meant a decline in real (substantive) journalism (Bird, 2009). In 2000, Andrew Kohut, the Director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, asserted that reading newspapers (as hardcopies) regularly makes a difference in people's knowledge of public affairs and their propensity to vote; more people are turning to the Internet for news but this does not necessarily mean that more people are getting important news. According to Kohut, people seeking news on the Internet only get more information on subjects that concern or interest them, as compared to getting general enlightenment (2000). And when international subjects *do* concern or interest them, they may consume news that perpetuates unfortunate stereotypes, especially in regard to Africa.

Stereotyping, the Media, and Africa

The most influential way perceptions of people who are different from us are formed is through our personal experience with them. However, individuals who do not get the opportunity to meet others in person form perceptions of them from the media (Maeda, 2000). Where the message is distorted, the consumers of the message acquire a misperception of reality, a set of flawed stereotypes.

Stereotypes are perceptions about groups (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). According to McGarty et al., they are an important psychological process for understanding the social world and save cognitive effort and time. However, while stereotypes play a strong role in our understanding of the world, they may be inaccurate, providing a false foundation for our strongly held notions. Thus, some scholars have

argued that stereotypes are not necessarily aids to comprehension, but causes of misunderstandings (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). Hilton and Hippel (1996) explain that stereotypes are not all negative and can sometimes be accurate and even helpful; however, stereotyping about others who are different usually has negative connotations. Stereotypes about race, religion, and gender in particular have been found to have huge potential for perpetuating erroneous information (Hilton & Hippel, 1996).

Inaccurate information about Africa has been circulating for centuries, and in the last few decades scholars have identified and attempted to debunk problematic stereotypes. The critical look at cultural issues such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sex that began in the 1960s paved the way for analysis of the depictions of Africa and Africans in the media (Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007). In 1972, for example, historian Lester Brooks complained that the media presented Africa in an exotic and primitive fashion:

[It is a] a “dark continent,” a wall-to-wall jungle full of barking savages, many of them cannibals; “the white man’s graveyard”; Tarzan’s playground; a perfect place to hunt exotic beasts, except for the torrid climate, murderous insects and snakes; a mecca for slow immolation of saintly missionaries; a land of witch-doctors, Mau-maus, diamonds, throbbing drums and witless, naked, paint-daubed Blacks always on the verge of battle... (p. 5)

Mahadeo and McKinney argue that the media is one of the most powerful vehicles through which meanings are formed. The misrepresentation or denigration of aspects of a

people's culture reinforces the idea in the minds of the receivers that the culture is problematic or even inferior. Despite the information-rich environment in which we live as a result of advances in communication technology and scholars' attempts to discredit misleading portrayals of Africa, many people still cling to outmoded stereotypes of the continent and its inhabitants. According to Taylor (2008), the reason for the fixed association between Africans and underdevelopment, primitivism, poverty, war, etc., is a result of the content in the news regarding Africa. The twentieth century did not witness any concerted attempt by the media to seek and present an accurate, contemporary picture of Africa (Caplan, 2008). When Africa is mentioned in U.S. news or used in casual conversation today, the common image presented is that of impoverished black people (Taylor, 2008). In recent decades, reports about Africa have centered on sensational issues like "civil wars, famines, droughts, extreme deprivation, and the AIDS crisis" (Taylor, 2008, p. 16). Moreover, sentiments that Africa's development has gone backwards since colonization have been echoed by various writers (Jeffrey, 2006; Kumuyi, 2006; McLaughlin, 2004), implying that Africans are incapable of successful self-management without colonial rule. But the process of colonization took vast wealth and natural resources out of Africa, leaving the continent in a difficult situation created by the West. The colonial era never brought better economic opportunities nor an improved standard of living for Africans, things which contact with the Western world could have catalyzed. Instead, Africans were forced into one form of slavery or another (Taylor, 2008) and their resources were summarily appropriated.

Thus, the misrepresentation of Africa has historical origins (Caplan, 2008).

Western explorers and the colonialists considered Africa a remote, primitive, and

stagnant place that they had a right to dominate. One example of this is the first colonists, who took it upon themselves to rename various geographical elements they came across in Africa, including the waterfalls, forests, and towns, which had been in possession of the locals for centuries and had native names. According to Caplan (2008), the original African names were disregarded by the Westerners as if nothing was in existence until it was discovered by a European. Many Europeans believed that black Africans were unsophisticated and ignorant. Such notions provided a convenient rationale to justify the inhumane commerce of slave trading. Caplan argues that because the misconceptions of that early period were not corrected, they have been strongly reinforced over time, especially in the minds of those who have never visited Africa. He gives an example of the *Tarzan* movies (1932, 1981, 1989) in which the folk hero lives in an Africa that is little more than a rainforest and has a lower propensity for speech: “Me Tarzan, you Jane” (p. 13).

There is a long-standing need for accurate information about the history of Africa, including the achievements of its people. For example, many Americans do not know that during the mid-eleventh century, while Duke William was preparing to sail for England, French troops were at war with the Moors in Spain, and Seljuk Turks were taking over Baghdad and laying siege to Damascus in the Middle East, in Africa, Mansa Musa, a powerful black king with immense wealth and a fierce army, was building Mali into one of the greatest empires in the world. Mansa extended his rule as far as the Atlantic coast to the west of Mali and north towards the Sahara, even crossing the desert. Mansa’s empire was incomparably richer in territory and gold than even the more recognized wealth of ancient Egypt (Brooks, 1972). Some people may be aware that William the

Conqueror had twenty-thousand troops during his invasion of England in 1066, but very few know that in the same era, a Ghanaian king commanded an array of over two-hundred thousand troops and ruled a vast empire. Ancient Ghana, which was established circa 200 A.D., had a well-developed system of administration and taxation. It was prosperous, peaceful, and had extensive trade relations. Ultimately, its empire was invaded and destroyed in 1075, after persisting for more than 800 years.

Brooks (1972) argued that Africa is “a land of extremes, of paradoxes, of grandeur, of staggering accomplishments, and abysmal exploitation” (p. 5). As evidence of Africa’s early achievements, he cites the chronicles of a Dutchman who visited the continent before European colonization had begun:

[Benin town in West Africa] seemed very large as one came into it via the main street which was seven or eight times as broad as Warmoes Street in Amsterdam. Though it was not paved, the street was straight and ran for about four miles through the city, continuing on into the suburbs. Entering the city gate through thick earthen walls, one could see street after street and on them, shoulder-to-shoulder were the houses of the citizens. They stood in good order...like the ones in Holland, and consisted of kitchen, dining, and other rooms covered by a roof open in the middle to let the breeze and light in. (p. 257)

By 1000 B.C., tribes in Africa had expanded and began to start small nations. These nations had ethics, religions, and philosophies about man and his environment. Various crafts had already developed by this time, including metal mining (Brooks, 1972).

Ethiopia has been documented by historians as the oldest civilized nation. Their ancestral foundations enabled the building of subsequent civilizations, such as Egypt. In 333, Ethiopia became a Christian nation, scarcely a decade after Christianity was officially made the state religion of the Roman Empire, making Ethiopia the second oldest Christian nation on earth (Brooks, 1972).

Despite Africa's well-deserved place in world history, Westerners have systematically ignored or denied African achievements. At the turn of the twentieth century, a German adventurer and ethnologist named Leo Frobenius who explored the Ife area of West Africa was gifted many terra cotta (baked clay) pieces of art. In reports on his journey, he argued that Africans could not possibly have fashioned the artworks he received, which symbolized royalty, dignity, and strength. Their ubiquity could not convince Frobenius that they were produced by the indigenous culture; instead, he concluded that the artists must have been from Atlantis, the legendary lost continent. Even the Europeans who doubted the Atlantis theory did not credit the ingenuity of the art works to Africans but to the Portuguese and their tutelage. Yet, subsequent analysis revealed that the Ife art works dated back to 1200 A.D, about three hundred years before the Portuguese had any dealings with Africa (Brooks, 1972).

In 1931, the first highly stylized sculptures of the Japa people of Nok were found in what is present day Nigeria. The art works were mostly of human forms and pottery and were made out of clay through the terra cotta process. This technique preserved the art forms for many years as some of the figurines were traced through scientific techniques to 900 B.C. Historians and archeologists argue that the Nok people had a sophisticated agriculture and were skilled ironworkers as a result of the iron tools found

close to the various sites where the Nok sculptures were retrieved. There were many more artistic sculptures with several variations found in different parts of Africa. One of these is the elaborate centuries old bronze-brass castings of the Benin culture which has inspired admiration around the world and adorns several international museums.

Today, there are about one billion people belonging to fifty-five independent countries on the African continent with a variety of backgrounds, cultures, religions, and appearances. Two-thirds of the people of Africa live in rural areas and engage in one form of traditional farming or another (Caplan, 2008). In fact, Africa is not just a continent but a universe or more appropriately, it is many mini-universes (Caplan, 2008, p. 7). It is not that there are no parts of Africa facing the challenges of underdevelopment, poverty, famine, and disease because that conclusion is false. However, many African cultures accomplished tremendous things before colonial rule, and the continent has seen significant advancement and achievements since its countries began to gain independence from Europe (which for most countries has been within the last fifty to sixty years). For instance, Rwanda's parliament has more women than any other parliamentary system in the world (Caplan, 2008). According to *The Economist Online* (http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/01/daily_chart) and *The Insider* (<http://www.businessinsider.com/worlds-fastest-economies-2012-10?op=1>), several of the fastest growing economies in the world are from sub-Saharan Africa and include Rwanda, Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Zambia, and Mozambique.

Of course, focusing only on the achievements of Africans produces a one-sided story of the continent. Genocides, famine, wars, and natural disasters are part of the reality of present-day Africa, and coverage of such subjects has led to some remarkable

relief attempts worldwide. For instance, reports aired on CNN about a famine in Somalia and the broadcast of disturbing pictures by the BBC of drought in Ethiopia caught the world's attention and brought massive aid to Somalia and Ethiopia respectively (Chinedu, 2008). Yet, care must be taken in the way that any coverage is presented. Discourses of Africa that tell only a negative story of the continent and its people are misleading, with potentially dire consequences for Africans at home and abroad, such as a devaluation of their persons and their heritage. Working from the assumption that the media, especially the news media, produce and/or reinforce much of the West's knowledge of Africa, this study considers American college students' impressions of Africa and Africans, particularly in relation to gaps or misconceptions that may be present. To do so, it employs systems theory and knowledge gap theory as a framework for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Communication Systems

Systems theory explains the processes of information transfer. It serves as an important place to begin the theoretical framework for this study because understanding how information enters a system from various sources (in this case, Africa) can offer a rationale for understanding and drawing conclusions about what U.S. college students know about Africans and the variance in their opinions about Africans based on the processes through which they have received information.

Westley and MacLean (1965) established a model for understanding mass communication which can be credited with bringing the theory of systems from the field of engineering to mass communication research. The conceptual model is ideal for

research on knowledge because it explains information transfer from simple two-way communication situations to more complex communication involving many parties, content and media.

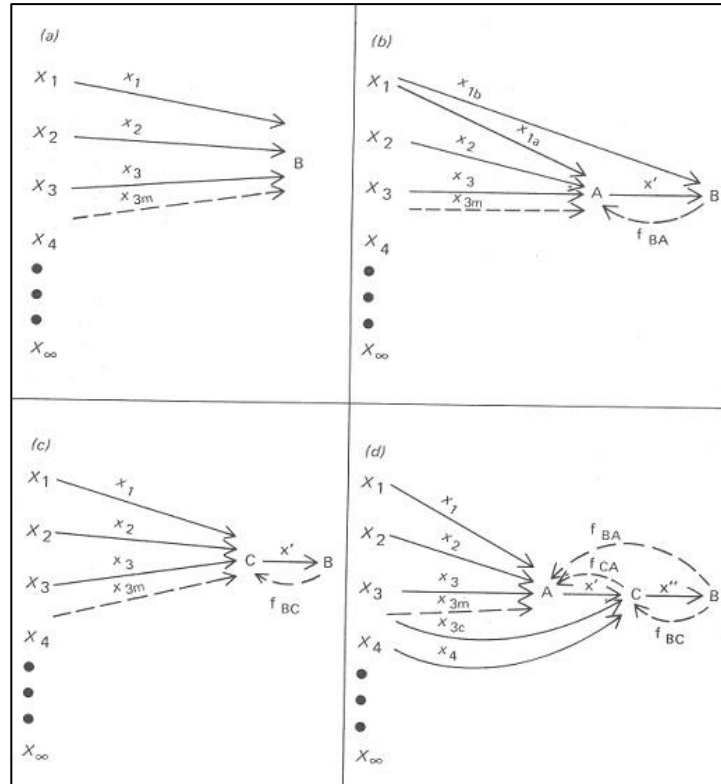


Figure 1 : Westley and MacLean's four explanations of the communication process.

The model has four versions, all of which are relevant to this study. (See Figure 1.) The first situation is between the receiver 'B' getting information 'X' directly with no interference between X and B. An example is the interpersonal interaction some American college students may have had with people from Africa. In the last 40 years, approximately one million Africans have immigrated to the United States, and Africans constitute a significant number of the international students in U.S colleges (Essandoh, 1995; Liao, "Vital Signs" 1997; Finn, & Lu, 2005); about 25,000 students from black

African nations come to America each year. There has also been a tremendous growth in the United States' population of African descent (Bone, 2010).

The second version of the model is a movement of information 'X' to the receiver 'B' directly and also through a transmitter 'A' who gathers and processes the information and then sends it to the receiver. Through interactions with Africans, an American college student may decide to seek more information from a relative who has lived in Africa. The third version of the model includes a channel 'C' which is the receiver's only way to learn about the information 'X'. As discussed earlier in the literature review, the vehicle through which one learns about what cannot be experienced directly is the media. Thus many Americans turn to the media as a source of information about Africa. The fourth version of Westley and MacLean's model includes the first, second, and third versions working together so that the receiver has a comprehensive selection of information, sources, and channels and can draw viable conclusions. However, although Systems Theory allows for the conception of interdependence among various sources and receivers of information, it does not consider the potential dominance of any of these components (Child, 1968) or the impact of different patterns of communication use. American college students may have been exposed to information about Africa from personal encounters with Africa or Africans, from discussions of Africa with those who have direct knowledge of it, or from more impersonal channels such as the media, but for many students, getting information from the media is probably the standard mode of acquiring knowledge. Theoretically, students' knowledge of Africa and their understanding of Africans will vary, depending on the means through which they obtain information.

Knowledge Gap Theory

Knowledge acquisition is a component of social change, so the study and understanding of knowledge gaps is important (Tichenor, Donohue, & Ollien, 1970). Beaudion (2004) defined knowledge as any idea or information that can be recalled. To say that this is a study about American college students' knowledge of Africans is to assert that it will identify and analyze what comes to the minds of college students when they are asked about Africans. The literature review argues that Africa is frequently misrepresented in the Western world. By investigating college students' impressions of Africans, I will be better placed to draw conclusions about the current state of knowledge about Africa in the United States, the sources of this knowledge, and how erroneous or factual it is.

I hope to draw conclusions about factors that predict which students will be better informed about Africa. Knowledge gap theory posits that people with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire information at a faster rate than people of a lower status (Tichenor, Donohue, & Ollein, 1970). Higher levels of education are associated with higher socioeconomic status; most communication studies on knowledge gaps have focused on educational differences of participants as the determinant of socioeconomic status (Beaudion, 2004; Kwak, 1999). Thus, level of education is a primary variable used for evaluating knowledge gaps as a result of its influence on stronger information processing skills and heavier media use (Jeffries, 2012). This study is unusual in the sense that it will apply knowledge gap theory to the study of individuals who are at approximately the same educational level. The aim is to expose other factors apart from educational level that may produce gaps or disjunctions in what people think about

Africa, including gender, economic class, connections to Africa, patterns of media consumption, and so on.

Another assumption of the theory is that as information (in this case international news) continuously penetrates the system, the knowledge gaps between different segments of a society will increase (Tichenor et al., 1970) as some individuals absorb more information than others. According to Jenssen (2012), although the development of electronic media has made international news widely accessible to college students, there still are gaps in their knowledge about Africa. Tichenor et al. suggested some factors that affect the growth of knowledge gaps: communication skills, amount of stored/prior information, relevant social contact, selective exposure, acceptance, retention, and finally the nature of the channel (p. 162). They argued that the stratification of the audience, combined with the exposure received, will strongly affect how knowledgeable the audience gets. In general, people with higher socioeconomic status usually get higher rates of exposure (Tichenor et al., 1970). Beaudion (2004) found that paying attention to the news, engaging in discussions about foreign affairs, and education are predictors of international affairs knowledge.

It is likely that selective exposure to news content and people's associations with individuals from other countries are factors that affect their international affairs knowledge or at least their interest in international news. The motivation to learn about a certain aspect of international news – which could be provided by a sense of personal connection to the subject or an interest in sensational stories – can propel a student to go the extra mile to acquire more knowledge. Negatively compelling news reports are more arousing and arousing media messages boost the motivation for consumption and the

length of time that information is retained, which, according to Grabe (2008), increases knowledge. The ironic point in the example of Africans is that students who absorb *more* information about the subject may be more prone to accept unfortunate stereotypes of the continent and its people. Thus students of higher socioeconomic status whose media habits include regular consumption of international news or students who gravitate toward dramatic or exotic representations of Africa circulating in the news media may acquire stereotyped information about Africa that is biased and inaccurate, whereas students who have *less* exposure to the news media may not be as likely to view Africa in terms of harmful stereotypes.

Yet, if we *are* in a new age of information availability with multiple sources of news production, those who seek information about Africa may have an advantage in understanding its complexities. Within population segments, some people are open to behavioral and value changes, while others may not be (Donohue et al., 1975). The flexible parts of the segment are more likely to adopt new information and at a faster rate. Some factors that reinforce this adaptation include the mass media systems which are employed, the level of communication skills, and relevant interpersonal contact (Donohue et al., 1975). According to knowledge gap theory, information can provide problem resolution in the sense that the more saturated with positive information a population becomes, the more the general knowledge of that information will increase within specific population segments (Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien, 1975). If this is the case, then with the wide availability of news about Africa on the Internet, more people have the opportunity to learn about it and present-day college students may be better informed about Africa than previous generations – assuming that circulating information

is not contaminated with traditional Western stereotypes. This also suggests that presenting balanced (problems *and* achievements) reports about Africa can help to correct any misconceptions that may currently exist.

My study aims to assess college students' current impressions of Africans, to "take the temperature" of their perceptions, and to account for any differences or gaps in their knowledge that may emerge. I am concerned that old stereotypes of Africa are still dominant in Western media. College students may have differential knowledge of Africa, but, ironically, those who absorb more information about Africa from the media may be more prone to have a stereotyped understanding of it. On the other hand, we may also be at the dawn of a new era in which the democratization of the media means that more and better information about Africa is circulating – and may have been at least partially absorbed by American college students. The research questions that will inform my study can be summarized as follows:

RQ 1: What perceptions do American college students have about Africa?

RQ 2: What factors influence American college students' perceptions about Africans?

- (a) Does news consumption affect perceptions of Africans?
- (b) Does news engagement affect perceptions of Africans?
- (c) Does contact with Africans affect perceptions of Africans?
- (d) Does social distance affect perceptions of Africans?
- (e) Do certain demographic factors affect perceptions of Africans?

RQ 3: What factors influence American students' desired social distance from Africans?

- (a) Does news consumption affect desired social distance?
- (b) Does news engagement affect desired social distance?

- (c) Does contact with Africans affect desired social distance?
- (d) Do certain demographic factors affect desired social distance?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research questions and better understand student's perceptions of Africans, I utilized empirical, quantitative measures. More specifically, this study used survey research design (see Borden & Abboth, 2002). In this chapter, I discuss the research participants, the procedures carried out in recruiting and collecting data from the participants, and the measures of analysis. To apply Systems Theory, I incorporated measures that test the source and transfer of information, while for the application of the Knowledge Gap, I incorporated measures that could indicate knowledge gaps among the different segments among the participants.

Participants

Participants consisted of 341 students at a large public university in the Midwest of the United States. College students are a valuable source of participants because they are representative of various strata of a nation's population (Morphew, 2009). They were of particular interest to this study because of their news consumption habits and engagement with the Internet. College students were also a convenient group to assess given the resource and time constraints of the study. The study used a volunteer sampling process (Jupp, 2006) with the selection of participants primarily based on the willingness of some professors to offer their students extra credit for participating in the study.

Initially a total of 353 responses were collected. Out of this total, 2 responses were discarded because the participants did not complete the survey. An additional 8 responses were taken out because the participants indicated that they were non-

Americans. Two other responses were excluded because the participants selected 'other' for school year making it difficult to ascertain if they were college students or not. The total number of responses that were discarded was 12 leaving a sample of 341 respondents. Females comprised 67.5% (n = 235) of the sample, males comprised 30.2% (n = 105), and "other" comprised 0.3% (n = 1). The sample consisted of 17.0% (n = 59) freshmen, 21.6% (n = 75) sophomores, 30.5% (n = 106) juniors, 25.9% (n = 90) seniors, and 2.6% (n = 9) graduate students. The ethnicity of the sample was primarily Caucasian American (71.3%, n=243) but also included Native Americans (1.5%, n = 5), Asian Americans (0.6%, n = 2), African Americans (17.0%, n = 58), Hispanic/Latino Americans (3.5%, n = 12), and students of mixed ethnicity (5.9%, n = 20). The total number of people who indicated their ethnicity was (99.75%, n = 340). Only one participant did not indicate their ethnicity.

Procedures

After obtaining permission to carry out the study from the necessary institutional review board of the participants' university, the survey was uploaded online using secure survey development tools. The secure tools enabled the distribution of the survey through an online link. To recruit participants for the study, I began by meeting with instructors from different departments of the university and asked for their permission to recruit participants during one of their class sessions. I also asked the professors to offer extra credit to their students as an incentive for participating in the study. Additionally, some of the instructors had classes in which the students were required to participate in research studies. In the end, some professors agreed to offer extra credit incentives to their students while others only agreed to have participants recruited from their classrooms.

For classes I was given permission to recruit participants from, I attended a normally scheduled session of the course. In most cases, participants were given a recruitment sheet (see Appendix A) that instructed them to send an email to the researcher to indicate their interest in participating in the study and that told them that they would then receive a link to the online survey. In a few classes, I was only allowed to introduce the study and the instructor shared the email address with the students. All of the students who indicated an interest in participating in the study via email were sent an online link to the survey. When participants clicked the survey link, they were first presented with a consent document (see Appendix B) that explained what the study was about, ensured their confidentiality, explained that they could withdraw from the study without penalty, and provided information on how to contact the researcher.

There were two systems of ensuring that participants whose professors were offering extra credit received the incentive without compromising their identities. For the classes where the students were required to participate in research as a course requirement, the online survey design tool was set up in such a way that the professors were immediately notified when any of their students completed the survey. The professors however, had no access to the survey responses, rather only to the students' names, and I had access to the responses but not the students' names. In the case of professors who chose to help the researcher by offering extra credit, the survey design tool was set up in a way that made it possible to see the email addresses of the students who completed the survey via the email link, but this did not link directly to their responses. The researcher obtained a class list from professors whose students were in this category and checked off those who had participated. Other professors did not give a

class list but asked their students to let them know as soon as they had completed the survey.

Most of the participants came from the classes where their professors agreed to offer extra credit. Some participants came from classes where the instructors allowed the researcher to present the study in the classrooms but did not offer extra credit, and other participants were recruited by college friends of the researcher. They recruited other participants by sharing the survey link.

Measures

In chapter 2, three research questions were asked - RQ1: What perceptions do American college students currently hold about Africa/Africans? RQ2: What factors affect American college students' perceptions of Africa/Africans? And RQ3: What factors affect American college students' desired social distance with Africans? The variables of this study that were treated as outcomes or dependent variables in statistical testing were 'perception of Africa' and 'social distance with Africans.'

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable, students' perceptions of Africa, was operationalized with an attitude scale comprised of 16 descriptive traits and their opposing adjectives on a seven-point semantic differential scale (see the third and fourth pages of Appendix C). The scale was adapted from a scale of 84 traits (Katz & Braly, 1932). Katz and Braly prepared the list of 84 descriptive adjectives to help them identify college students' perceptions of different racial groups (African Americans, Germans, Jews, Italians, English, Irish, Americans, Japanese, Chinese, and Turks). The Katz and Braly study has

been credited as the most famous study of racial stereotyping (Cardwell, 1996). Only 8 items from the original scale were used in this study (intelligent, sophisticated, imaginative, naïve, lazy, honest, cowardly, and ambitious). This was because many of the 84 traits seemed repetitive and given the large number of items being measured, brevity of the measure was desired. In addition to the adjectives taken from the original scale, eight more traits were added. These traits were derived from terms and themes used in previous studies about opinions of Africa and were discussed in the literature review (see Asante, 2007, Caplan, 2008, & Osunde, Tlou, & Brown, 1996) . The traits added included violent, savage, rural, inarticulate, educated, attractive, modern, unhealthy, insignificant, and diverse and their opposing adjectives. The 16 final traits used were presented on a semantic differential scale and some of the items were reverse-coded to avoid a response set. The final summative scale achieved an acceptable internal consistency coefficient (16 items, $\alpha = 0.79$).

In order to examine desired social distance, Bogardus' (1933) Social Distance Scale (SDS) was used. According to Bogardus, an individual's opinion about a particular group will affect the individuals' desire to interact with members of that group. SDS was relevant to this study as a measure for opinions and perceptions about Africans. To determine how much social distance is preferred by the respondent, the original scale contained seven social situations: 'would marry', 'would have as regular friends', 'would work beside in an office', 'would have several families in my neighborhood', 'would have merely as speaking acquaintances', 'would have live outside my neighborhood', and 'would have live outside my country' and asked respondents if these situations were acceptable or not. For this study, the seven situations were modified to meet the needs of

this study. The adapted scale had statements like ‘I would exclude Africans from my country’, ‘I would not mind having Africans as visitors to my country’, ‘I would not mind having an African as a citizen of my country’, ‘I would not mind having an African working alongside me at work’, ‘I would not mind having an African in my club as a personal friend’, and ‘I would not mind having an Africans as a relative by marriage’.

The original scale was presented to participants alongside a list of forty races, thirty occupations, and 30 religions. Bogardus’ (1933) participants were asked to check their first reactions to each of the groups based on the seven situations presented, using the nominal options of yes/no. For this study, the scale was adapted to elicit interval data by utilizing a seven-point Likert-type format with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This was done so that more sophisticated statistical analyses could be run. The new scale treated as a whole achieved an acceptable internal consistency coefficient (7 items, $\alpha = 0.88$).

Independent Variables

The variables treated as explanatory or independent variables in this study consisted of students’ news consumption (total amount of time spent consuming various news media), news engagement (attitude toward news), amount of contact with Africans (environment of contact, relationship, and travel to Africa), and several demographic variables (gender, school year, ethnicity, grade point average, and income). For this study, news consumption and news engagement were operationalized based on adaptations of two sub-scales in Livingstone and Markham’s (2008) scale of media factors that affect civic participation (see Appendix C). Livingstone and Markham

constructed their scale with individual items from previous research through an exploratory factor analysis.

Livingstone and Markham's original News Consumption sub-scale asked participants if they consumed any of the news media (newspaper, television, radio, and internet) at least three times a week with binary yes/no responses. For this study, the news consumption questions were presented as open-ended questions that asked participants to indicate how much time they spent getting news from the various media in a day. This adaptation enabled the collection of ratio data that allowed for more powerful statistical analyses. Additionally, as it was important to understand participants overall news habits, this study asked questions of the form, "on average, how much time do you spend getting news from each of these sources (internet, television, radio, newspaper) every day"?

Livingstone and Markhams' News Engagement sub-scale consisted of five items: 'It is a regular part of my day to catch up with the news', 'You follow the news to understand what is going on in the world', 'You follow the news to know what other people are talking about', 'It is my duty to keep up with what is going on in the world', and 'You have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country'. These items measured the participants' attitudes toward news in general. For this study, the sub-scale was repeated twice with the first five questions measuring participants' attitudes about domestic news and the last five measuring their attitude about international or world news. This was done so that the effect of different types of news on the dependent variables could be examined. The domestic news engagement sub-scale achieved an

internal consistency coefficient of .79 while the international news sub-scale achieved an internal consistency coefficient of .78.

The third independent variable was contact with Africans, and as there was no appropriate published scale, one was specifically constructed for this study. The scale contained six items, four of which were categorical and required Yes/No answers such as ‘Have you had contact/connections with Africans in your place of work?’ and ‘Have you ever travelled to Africa?’ The other two items required a single estimated quantitative answer, they included, ‘How many Africans do you know personally?’ ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 15.60$) and, ‘How many Africans do you have (have you had) a close relationship with?’ ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 4.62$). These factors were measured in order to examine the effect relationships and associations with Africans have on the dependent variables. The categorical data were analyzed with a T-test and the questions that required a relative value were correlated with the dependent variables.

The last independent variables were the demographic items which helped in testing and identifying disparities in college student’s knowledge about Africa/Africans. Since the demographic questions required some sensitive information like Grade Point Average (GPA) scores and income level, the entire section was placed last on the survey in order to not discourage participation. The rest of the demographic items were gender, ethnicity, and school year. They were analyzed with an F-test. I wanted to find out if gender, ethnicity, or years spent in college had any effect on the dependent variables. I also wanted to see if income or a higher or lower GPA had anything to do with the participant’s perceptions of Africa and desired social distance with Africans. I analyzed

the income and GPA responses with Pearson Correlations. The next section will address the data analyses and results.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine American college students' perceptions of Africans. In chapter three, there was a discussion of the participants of this study, the procedures carried out for collecting data, the measures of analysis, as well as the dependent and independent variables. This chapter reports the analyses that were carried out to address the research questions of this study and the results of those analyses are presented in the order that they were executed.

Perception of Africa

The first series of statistical analyses were chosen to describe and assess American students' perceptions of Africa. RQ 1 was "*What perceptions do American college students' have about Africa?*" To answer this question, measures of central tendency were computed and the results of participants' answers to the items on the Perception scale are reported (see Table 1). The perception scale contained 16 items with their opposing adjectives (sophisticated and naïve, essential and insignificant, imaginative and unimaginative, honest and dishonest, diverse and homogenous, articulate and inarticulate, civilized and savage, brave and cowardly, attractive and unattractive, peaceful and violent, educated and uneducated, healthy and unhealthy, modern and primitive, urban and rural, and lastly ambitious and lazy) on a seven-point Likert scale with higher numbers representing more positive perceptions of Africans. In order to clearly report the results, the data obtained from the sample were presented with only the more favorable term used as the labels on a bar graph (see Table 1). To create Table 1, the means and standard deviations obtained for each item on the perception scale was

constructed into a bar-chart with the Y axis numbering from 0-6 to diagrammatically indicate the different scores. The means and standard deviations for all 16 items are reported below

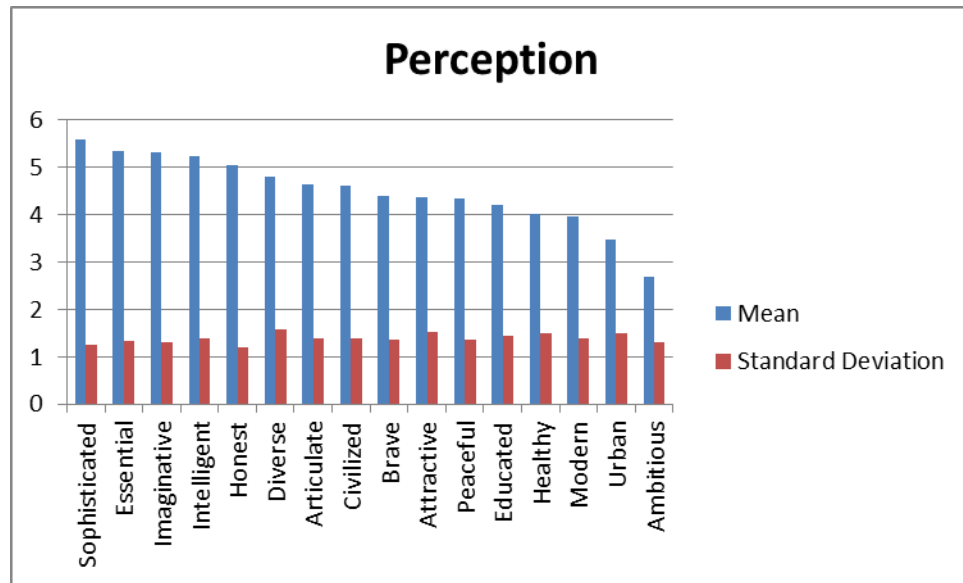


Table 1

The means and standard deviations for each item on the scale were: sophisticated ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 1.25$), essential ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.34$), imaginative ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.29$), intelligent ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.37$), honest ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.19$), diverse ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.58$), articulate ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.37$), civilized ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.38$), brave ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.35$), attractive ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.51$), peaceful ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.34$), educated ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.44$), healthy ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.48$), modern ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.38$), urban ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.49$), and ambitious ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.31$). Of all 16 items that measured perceptions about Africans, the item sophisticated had the highest mean, indicating that the participants rated Africans with higher scores for that item on the

perception scale. The item ambitious had the lowest mean which meant that the participants selected lower scores for Africans for that item. The frequency of the participants' answers on the perception scale were represented on a histogram chart (see Table 2 below).

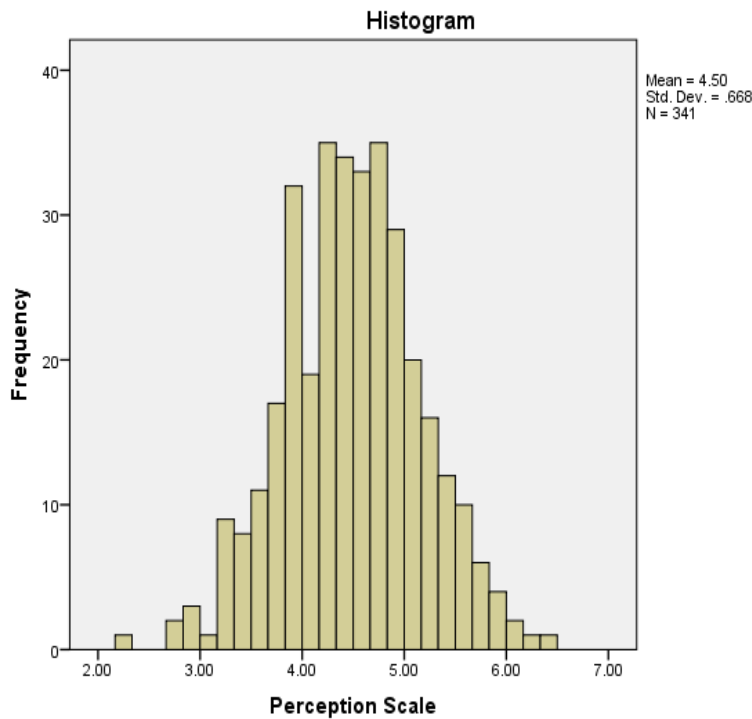


Table 2

From Table 2, one can observe that on the seven-point Likert type perception scale, most of the ratings fell between 3 and 6 which represents moderate perceptions of Africans on the scale.

RQ 2 was “*What factors influence American college students’ perceptions about Africans?*” Several analyses were carried out to determine what factors led to the results obtained from RQ 1. The first factor looked at the impact of news consumption (how much time was spent on a given medium) of four different media on perceptions of Africans. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to assess these

relationships. There was not a significant correlation between Internet news consumption ($M = 149.1, SD = 160.9$) and perception of Africans ($M = 4.50, SD = .66$). The variables were not significantly related ($r(333) = .05, p = .35$). Similar to internet news consumption, the relationship between TV news consumption ($M = 62.5, SD = 80.9$) and perceptions of Africans was not significant ($r(328) = .02, p = .77$). However, when a correlation coefficient analysis was computed for radio news consumption ($M = 25.9, SD = 49.5$) and perceptions of Africans, there was a significant relationship ($r(327) = .16, p = .004$). Similarly, the correlation coefficient analysis between newspaper news consumption ($M = 7.28, SD = 19.06$) and perceptions of Africans also revealed a significant correlation between the two variables ($r(327) = .13, p = .02$).

The second factor analyzed under RQ 2 was the participants' news engagement; that is their attitude about the importance of news. News engagement was sub-divided into two categories: domestic news engagement which examined the participants' attitude to American news stories and international news engagement that examined their attitude towards news stories from other parts of the world. Reliability analyses were carried out on each sub-scale. After confirming the reliability of both sub-scales, the data collected on both of them were summarized for analysis. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between domestic news engagement ($M = 3.98, SD = 1.23$) and perception of Africans. There was no significant correlation between the two variables ($r(339) = .04, p = .51$). However, when correlation coefficients were computed for international news engagement ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.19$) and perception of Africans, there was a positive significant correlation $r(339) = .13, p = .02$. That means the more

engaged they were in international news, the more positive their perceptions of Africans were.

The third factor thought to influence American students' perceptions of Africans was contact with Africans. As mentioned in chapter three, a scale was created to measure the effect of varying degrees and types of contact with Africans. The next set of analyses measured perception and contact with Africans. The Contact with Africans scale was comprised of six items: (1) contact with Africans in an academic environment, (2) contact in a social environment, (3) contact in a place of work, (4) how many Africans the participants knew, (5) how many Africans the participants had previously had a close relationship with, and (6) whether the participants had travelled to Africa or not.

Independent samples *t* tests were conducted on the first three items to determine if the amount of contact individuals had with Africans in the three different environments had an impact on their perceptions of Africans. There was a significant difference between the means of participants who had contact with Africans in an academic environment ($M = 4.57, SD = .66$) and those who did not ($M = 4.31, SD = .64$), ($t(339) = 3.24, p = .001$). There was also a significant difference in the scores for participants who had contact with Africans in a social environment ($M = 4.59, SD = .63$) and those who did not ($M = 4.50, SD = .72$), ($t(338) = 3.72, p < .001$). Similarly, there was a significant difference in the scores for participants who had contact with Africans in a place of work ($M = 4.70, SD = .65$) and those who did not ($M = 4.45, SD = .66$), ($t(339) = 3.53, p < .001$). In all three contexts, participants who had previous contact with Africans had significantly better perceptions of Africans, but the differences were relatively small.

Still analyzing the impact that contact with Africans had on perceptions of Africans, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between how many Africans the participants knew ($M = 4.97, SD = 15.6$) and perception of Africans. There was a significant, positive correlation between the two variables ($r(326) = .16, p < .005$). There also was a positive significant correlation ($r(332) = .21, p < .001$) between how many Africans the participants had a close relationship with ($M = 1.64, SD = 4.62$) and perceptions of Africans. Finally, an independent samples t test was conducted to assess if there were differences in the perceptions of Africans based on whether the participants had travelled to Africa ($M = 4.60, SD = .61$) or not ($M = 4.49, SD = .67$). There was not a significant difference between the scores of those who had travelled to Africa and those who had not ($t(339) = .69, p = .49$).

The fourth factor thought to potentially be related to American students' perceptions of Africans was social distance. After collecting data from the social distance scale, a reliability analysis on the scale revealed an internal consistency coefficient of .878. As a result of the strong reliability of the items as a whole, the data derived was summarized for analyses. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between social distance ($M = 1.54, SD = .86$) and perception of Africans. There was a significant negative correlation between the two variables ($r(339) = -.343, p = .00$). In other words, people who desired less social distance reported having more favorable perceptions of Africans on the perception scale.

Finally, several demographic factors were tested to determine if they had an impact on the dependent variable of perceptions of Africans. The first demographic

variable that was examined was participants' gender. The original data collected for gender included 105 'male', 235 'female', and 1 'other.' The variable 'other' was discarded in this analysis because there were not enough respondents in this category to reliably test it. An independent samples *t* test was conducted to assess if there was a difference in perceptions of Africans between males ($M = 4.50, SD = .71$) and females ($M = 4.49, SD = .64$), and the difference was not found to be significant ($t(338) = .14, p = .53$).

The second demographic variable examined was respondents' current year in school. The means and standard deviations of the perception of Africans for the various school years of the participants were: freshman ($M = 4.33, SD = .68$), sophomore ($M = 4.44, SD = .70$), junior ($M = 4.51, SD = .68$), senior ($M = 4.66, SD = .62$), and graduate level ($M = 4.67, SD = .38$). A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if the differences in means were significant and the results indicated a significant difference ($F(4, 334) = 2.59, p = .04$). It is interesting to note that the higher the participants' school year, the better their perceptions of Africans were.

The third demographic factor examined was ethnicity. The mean perceptions of Africans based on ethnicity were: Caucasian American ($M = 4.41, SD = .63, N = 243$), Black/African American ($M = 4.68, SD = .65, N = 58$), Hispanic/Latino American ($M = 4.51, SD = .62, N = 12$), and mixed race/ethnicity ($M = 4.89, SD = .92, N = 20$). There were also 5 Asian Americans and 2 American Indian/Native Americans in the original sample, but they were not used for this analysis because the number in each category was too small to reliably test. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean perceptions of Africans based on ethnicity. The results of the ANOVA were significant

($F(3,329) = 5.24, p = .002$). According to the results, Mixed race/Other had better perceptions about Africans, followed by Black/African Americans, and then Hispanic/Latino Americans, and lastly Caucasian Americans.

The fourth demographic factor examined to determine if it had an effect on perceptions of Africans was the respondents' self-reported Grade Point Average (GPA). A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between GPA ($M = 3.19, SD = .49$) and perceptions of Africans. There was a significant negative correlation between the two variables ($r(313) = -.098, p = .08$). This means the higher the GPA score that the participants reported, the less positive their perceptions of Africans were.

The fifth and final demographic factor examined was income. A Pearson correlation coefficient was carried out to assess the relationship between participants' income ($M = 4.38, SD = 1.16$) and their perceptions of Africans. The data indicated a very small negative correlation between the two variables but it was not significant ($r(339) = -.05, p = .33$).

Desired Social Distance

RQ 3 focused on the second dependent variable and posed the question, "*What factors affect American students' desired social distance from Africans?*" The same factors thought to influence perceptions of Africans were also analyzed to determine if they affected the participants' desired social distance from Africans. Therefore, the first factor for this section of the analysis was news consumption. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between news consumption and social distance. When a correlation coefficient was computed for internet news

consumption ($M = 149.1$, $SD = 160.9$) and desired social distance, the results were not significant ($r(333) = -.07$, $p = .21$). There also was not a significant relationship ($r(328) = -.03$, $p = .59$) between television news consumption ($M = 62.5$, $SD = 80.9$) and desired social distance. A correlation coefficient was also computed to assess the relationship between radio news consumption ($M = 25.9$, $SD = 49.5$) and desired social distance. Unlike with the perceptions of Africans, the result of this correlation was not significant ($r(327) = -.08$, $p = .17$). The last relationship tested was between newspaper news consumption ($M = 7.28$, $SD = 19.1$) and desired social distance, and this was not significant ($r(327) = -.03$, $p = .55$).

The second factor thought to potentially influence desired social distance from Africans was news engagement. As discussed earlier, this factor was sub-divided into domestic news engagement and international news engagement. A correlation coefficient was conducted to analyze the relationship between domestic news engagement ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.23$) and social distance, and the result of the analysis indicated that there was not a significant relationship between the two variables ($r(339) = -.04$, $p = .46$). A correlation coefficient was also conducted to assess the relationship between international news engagement and desired social distance. The results indicated a significant negative relationship ($r(339) = -.11$, $p = .04$). This implied that the better the participants' attitude towards international news stories was, the less social distance they desired from Africans.

The third factor thought to influence desired social distance was contact with Africans. The six items (contact in an academic environment; contact in a social environment; contact in a work environment; how many Africans participants know

personally; how many Africans participants have had a close relationship with; whether or not they have travelled to Africa) on the contact with African scale were analyzed with several statistical methods. A series of independent samples *t* tests were conducted to examine the first three items. The first item was contact with Africans in an academic environment. The results of the independent samples *t* test between participants who had contact with Africans in an academic environment ($M = 1.46, SD = .72$) and those who had not ($M = 1.78, SD = 1.11$) and their desired social distance was significant ($t(339) = -3.13, p = .002$). The results indicate that participants who had previous contact with Africans in an academic environment desired less social distance from Africans.

An independent samples *t* test was also conducted to assess if the desired social distance from Africans was different for those participants who had contact with Africans in a social environment ($M = 1.46, SD = .75$) and those who did not ($M = 1.72, SD = 1.03$). The result of this analysis was also significant ($t(338) = -2.61, p = .00$). This indicates that prior contact with Africans in a social setting affects respondents' desired social distance in the same way that contact in an academic environment did. However, when an independent samples *t* test was conducted to analyze desired social distance of those who had contact with Africans in a place of work ($M = 1.51, SD = .82$) and those who did not ($M = 1.56, SD = .87$), the result was not significant ($t(339) = -.49, p = .38$).

Continuing the analyses performed to determine if various forms of contact with Africans had an impact on desired social distance, a Pearson correlation coefficients was used to test the relationship between how many Africans the participants knew personally ($M = 4.97, SD = 15.6$) and desired social distance. The result of this analysis was not significant ($r(326) = .05, p = .37$). A correlation coefficients was also computed to test

the relationship between how many Africans the participants had a close relationship with ($M = 1.64, SD = 4.62$) and desired social distance, and the result of this analysis was not significant ($r(332) = .02, p = .69$).

To complete the analyses examining different types of contact with Africans and desired social distance, an independent sample t test was conducted. The difference between those who had travelled to Africa ($M = 1.68, SD = .69$) and those who had not ($M = 1.54, SD = .86$) was not significant ($t(339) = .74, p = .65$).

Several demographic variables were explored in order to determine their impact on desired social distance. The first factor was gender. An independent samples t test was conducted, and the difference between the means of males ($M = 1.61, SD = .92$) and females ($M = 1.51, SD = .83$) desired social distance was not significant ($t(338) = .90, p = .44$).

The second demographic factor that was explored was the participants' year in school. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of participants' desired social distance based on their current year in school. The means and standard deviations for year in school was, freshman ($M = 1.49, SD = .83$), sophomore ($M = 1.60, SD = .99$), junior ($M = 1.59, SD = .93$), senior ($M = 1.49, SD = .69$), and graduate level ($M = 1.41, SD = .34$). The difference in desired social distance between participants various school years was not significant ($F(4,334) = .33, p = .86$).

The third demographic factor examined was participants' ethnicity. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted for this category, to compare the means of participants' desired social distance based on their ethnicity. The various means and standard deviations were, Caucasian American ($M = 1.57, SD = .88$), Black/ African American (M

= 1.53, $SD = .78$), Hispanic/Latino American ($M = 1.27$, $SD = .41$), and Mixed race/other ($M = 1.55$, $SD = .86$). The results of the ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference ($F(3,329) = .49$, $p = .69$)

The fourth demographic factor examined was respondents' self-reported GPA. A Pearson correlation coefficient was carried out to test the relationship between participants' GPA ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .49$) and their desired social distance. The result of this analysis was not significant ($r(315) = -.102$, $p = .07$). The last demographic variable examined was income. A correlation coefficient was carried out to test the relationship between income ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.16$) and desired social distance. The result of this analysis was not significant ($r(341) = .02$, $p = .71$).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

To investigate American college students' knowledge about Africa, I collected and analyzed survey data from 341 American college students from different departments, and various class levels at a large Midwestern University. They responded to questions about their engagement with and consumption of news, their perceptions about and contact with Africans, their desired social distance with Africans, and demographic information about themselves. Perception of Africans and desired social distance were used as the major indicators of knowledge about Africans in this study and were treated as the dependent variables. The data indicated that certain news media, engagement with news, contact with Africans, and demographic factors appear to influence the American students' perceptions of Africans and desired social distance with Africans. For instance, those who had increased engagement with international news stories had more positive perceptions of Africans and less desired social distance. Another interesting finding that emerged was that prior contact with Africans in academic and social environments led to more positive perceptions of Africans and less desired social distance. Even more fascinating was the effect that GPA had on perceptions of Africans. In this chapter, I attempt to interpret these findings in light of the wider body of literature on the subject and in the context of Knowledge Gap and Communication Systems Theory.

Research Question One

Several scholars have argued that knowledge about Africa in the Western world is to a large extent, flawed (Achebe, 1978; Kanya, 1997; Maeda, 2000; Asante, 2007).

Their premise is that the prevailing notions are filled with one-sided, negative, and derogatory narratives about Africa (Adichie, 2009). The misperceptions about Africa are said to be centuries-old, dating back to the enslavement of millions of Africans (Brooks, 1972). In past decades, the mainstream news media has been accused of being a culprit in the propagation of unbalanced information about Africans (Maeda, 2000). The first research question that this study set out to answer was what perceptions do American college students' have about Africa and Africans? From the findings, it is obvious that perceptions of Africans were not arched toward any of the extremes of good or bad, but they were rather moderate. Table 1 in the previous chapter displayed a graphic representation of the differences in means on the perception scale. Most of the means were within close ranges in scores with the exception of the items 'sophisticated' that had the highest mean score of ($M = 5.58, SD = 1.25$) and 'ambitious' that had the lowest mean score of ($M = 2.68, SD = 1.31$) and were at opposing scores of the perception scale analysis. With the exception of the means for the items 'sophisticated' which was highest and 'ambitious' which was the lowest mean. In light of previous research, these findings are promising because they do not align wholly with the trend of negative reports about Americans' perceptions about Africans and Africa. For instance scholars such as Caplan (2008), Dubois (1996), and Taylor (2008) found through their exploration of perceptions about Africa that the opinions that many Americans have about Africa are flawed and filled with one-sided dramatic stories about war, illnesses, and lack of progression. As pointed out in the literature review, some of the adjectives and phrases used to describe Africa over the decades have included: primitive, poverty, impoverishment, and underdevelopment (Taylor, 2008). The seeming shift in perceptions about Africans found

in this study may be the result and evidence of increasing social awareness about Africa. Mahadeo & McKinney in 2007 stated that the rising awareness of sensitive cultural issues such as race and gender has also encouraged a critical look at the depiction of Africans in Western society. Multiple aspects of globalization probably also play a role in the changing perceptions about Africa such as international migration and information technology. Increasing knowledge about aspects of Africa that are not typically showcased in the news media, the shared concerns about global warming, and other environmental hazards, and the achievements of a few Africans in the international spotlight may all be factors that are causing an increased interest in Africa.

Research Question Two

The second research question explored in this study was, what factors influence American college students' perceptions about Africans? In order to answer this broad question, Westley and MacLean's (1965) theory of communication systems and Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien's (1970) knowledge gap premise were applied to create more focused sub-questions. Westley and MacLeans model explains different processes of information transfer within a system. One of those processes involved the transfer of information from the source through a channel to a receiver, where the channel is the receiver's only way of getting the information. In the context of this study, the news media was the channel of information transfer. Therefore the first sub-question under research question two asked if news consumption affected perceptions of Africans. By news consumption, I was referring to the amount of time that the participants spent consuming news from various news media. The findings revealed that consuming more traditional radio news and newspaper news affected perceptions about Africans- the

students, who reported consuming more news through the radio and newspapers, also reported more favorable perceptions about Africans. This finding agrees with the Systems Theory that basically argues that information channel matters, although it does not tell us how various channels of information affect the dissemination of information.

The second sub-question asked if news engagement affected perceptions of Africans. By news engagement, I was referring to the participants' attitude about news. Beaudion (2004) reported that paying attention to the news and engaging in discussions about foreign affairs are predictors of international affairs knowledge. For this sub-question, participants were asked questions such as whether it was a regular part of their day to pay attention to the top news stories in the United States and international news stories, their reasons for following the news, and whether they felt that it was their duty to keep up with the news. The data revealed that international news engagement had an effect on perceptions about Africans and it was a positive effect. Participants who followed international news stories and felt that it was their responsibility to keep up with the main issues in other parts of the world had more favorable perceptions about Africans. These findings are however, contrary to previous studies about media effect particularly those regarding perception of Africans. Maeda (2000) and Chinedu (2008) reported that the U.S. news media presents bias portrayals of Africa and consumption of those news reports lead to negative perceptions of Africans. In light of this, the more people consume the 'negative' media messages, the more unfavorable their opinions of Africans would be. It is worthy of note that this study did not investigate the news content that the participants consume or the media houses that they turn to for their news. Perhaps more American college students who are interested in foreign news get their

news from non-U.S. news agencies or U.S. news reportages are not as partial as they may have been in their previous reports about Africa.

Many American universities and colleges have a diverse immigrant population (Morphew, 2009) and Africans in particular constitute a significant part of U.S. higher institutions (Kamya, 1997). Therefore the third factor considered in answering research question two was contact with Africans. Participants were asked whether they had encountered Africans in academic, social, and/or work environments. They were also asked whether they had travelled to Africa, how many Africans they knew personally, and how many Africans they had a close relationship with. According to the results, having contact with Africans in an academic, social, and/or work environment had a positive significant effect on more favorable perceptions of Africans. How many Africans the participants knew personally and how many they had a close relationship with also had a positive significant relationship with perception. In other words, the more Africans participants knew personally or had a close relationship with, the more favorably they perceived Africans to be. The positive relationship between contact with Africans and perception of Africans was predicted by the Knowledge Gap Theory- additional contact with Africans led to more knowledge about Africans and similarly better perceptions of Africans. This is because participants who interacted with Africans in academic, social, and work environments and/or built close relationships with Africans may have perceived Africans as similar to them in terms of interests and goals.

Other studies offer details about the contact-perception relationship. Formation of perceptions about others in a person's memory is the result of constant reinforcement of those trait constructs, a process called priming (Ford, 1997). American college students

who have had contact with Africans form trait constructs based on their experiences. Study has shown that a trait can be associated with an individual or group simply through its semantic association with similar traits (Ford, 1997). According to Ford, perceptions of the trait 'beautiful' can be expected to affect descriptive judgment of the traits 'attractive' and 'pretty' but not affect semantically dissimilar traits like 'intelligent' or 'ambitious' (Ford, 1997).

The fourth sub-question of research question two asked if social distance is related to American students' perceptions of Africans. The results showed that the less social distance the participants desired, the more favorable their perceptions of Africans were. It is not surprising that this finding shows that an individual who is willing to have a member of a different group within their social space would most likely have favorable perceptions about the person.

Finally, certain demographic information was solicited from the participants to answer research question two. They included the participant's gender, school year, ethnicity, reported GPA, and income. The findings show that some demographic factors affect American college students' perceptions of Africans. These factors include school year and ethnicity that affected perceptions of Africans positively and GPA that had a negative effect on perception. The means for perceptions of Africans were slightly higher, the higher their year in school was. This finding supports an assumption of the Knowledge Gap Theory which states that higher versus lower education levels would cause disparities in people's knowledge (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1970). According to the results, Mixed race/Other had better perceptions about Africans, followed by Black/African Americans, and then Hispanic/Latino Americans, and lastly

Caucasian Americans. The results also revealed that the higher the participants reported GPA, the less favorable their perceptions of Africans were. The analyses of the demographic data presented very interesting findings. Analyses supported that the higher the participants' year in school, the more favorable their perceptions of Africans were. It is possible the longer the participants have been in school, the more contact with Africans they are likely to have had. Earlier on, I reported the significant effect contact with Africans had on positive perceptions of Africans, so this may explain the results derived from the analysis between perception and school year.

The analyses of the demographic information also resulted in the finding that participants of mixed races had more favorable perceptions of Africans (with African Americans following as a close second.) There is barely any research literature available to support the connection found between people of mixed races and more favorable perceptions of Africans but a speculation can be drawn that this unique category of people may be more interested, sensitive to, and open-minded about peoples of diverse backgrounds and ethnicity because they share a heritage with not just one ethnicity but two or more ethnicities. Similarly, African Americans had more favorable perceptions of Africans in this study than other races and this may be because they may feel a sense of connection with Africans based on common ancestry. As a result of their close physical resemblance with Africans, African Americans may perceive that Africans are more similar to themselves and this may lead to interest in Africa and more knowledge about Africans.

Probably the most surprising finding was that students with higher GPAs had less favorable perceptions of Africans than students with lower GPAs. This finding is

indirectly contrary to the assumption of the Knowledge Gap Theory which states that people with higher education will be more informed. I use the term *indirectly contrary* because higher GPA does not equal higher education level however if one looks at GPA from the perspective of *academic competence* (ACES, 2001), people with higher GPAs are believed to have high academic competence and possess or use skills, attitudes, and behavior different from others that makes them succeed academically. Therefore, they should be more informed than students with lower academic competence.

Research Question Three

The third research question was, what factors affect American students' desired social distance from Africans? The results of the analysis carried out to answer research question three showed that better attitudes toward international news stories had a significant negative effect on desired social distance. In other words, higher scores for news engagement led to less desired social distance with Africans. The results also revealed that participants who had prior contact with Africans in an academic and social environment also desired less social distance from Africans. As reported earlier, these factors (international news engagement, contact with Africans in an academic environment, and contact with Africans in a social environment) affected perceptions about Africans in a similar way. Based on the assumptions of the Knowledge Gap Theory, I speculate that selective exposure to news about Africa and associations with Africans are determinants and indicators of interest in Africa. In addition, seeking information about Africans may lead to a sense of personal connection and a willingness to acquire more knowledge about Africa, both of which may lead to more favorable associations.

Implications of Study

There are some implications that emerged through this study that can possibly bring about some positive social change. One implication is that organizations, researchers, and well-meaning individuals interested in the propagation of lucid and pragmatic information regarding Africa, particularly among American college students, should include traditional radio and newspaper news media as outlets. While the analysis showed that the mean scores of students who consumed radio and newspaper news were lower than that of the majority of college students who consume news from the Internet and television, perceptions of Africans were only significantly related to consumption of radio and newspaper news. These findings lead to another implication which is that information streaming on the radio via radio active waves or published on wood pulp or a bunch of recycled items in the form of a newspaper still hold relevance even though many newspaper and radio agencies have moved online. According to Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010), issues that garner traction in online media differ significantly from those in the mainstream media. The significant relationship between traditional news media and more favorable perceptions of Africans shows us one way in which they differ. People who pay attention to traditional news media may be getting more informed about foreign affairs issues than people who do not.

Another implication is that this study offers a 'new' perspective on the discourse about perceptions of Africans. As mentioned throughout this study, some scholars and writers in the last two decades and earlier times reported the gloomy state of perceptions about Africans in the Western world. Using the poll of favorable versus less-favorable perceptions (as done in the earlier parts of the discussion section) for the sake of

explanation, the study did support that certain factors that were analyzed led to less-favorable perceptions of Africans like grade point average and more desired social distance. However, there were also factors that caused some of the participants to have more favorable opinions about Africans such as contact with Africans in various environments (academic, social, work), international news engagement, less desired social distance, and of course radio and newspaper news consumption. So, it would be a misstatement to say that overall, this study supports previous studies that give a dismal report about the image of Africans. While the goal of this research was not to compare findings from previous studies directly, it was clear that perceptions of Africans in the sample analyzed for this study were not completely discouraging.

A theoretical implication of this study is that it revealed Knowledge Gap as a useful theory for exploring perceptions of Africans. As far as I am aware, no other study has applied this theory in this manner. Perhaps the application of the theory is one reason for the disparities between the results in this study and that of other studies. By applying Knowledge Gap Theory, I was able to focus on the perceptions and desired social distance of sub-segments within the sample compared to analyzing the sample as a whole. For instance, if I were comparing American students' knowledge about Africa, Europe, and Asia in one study (similar to the procedure carried out by Katz and Braly in 1932), then my results would report how similar or dissimilar knowledge about the three continental groups are, while regarding the student sample as a single entity. However, this study did not focus on college students as a singular entity, but rather tested the various sub-sections and factors that make up the whole.

In seeking to answer the research questions of this study, the above implications arose. In summary, the main implications of this study highlighted the importance of traditional news media, extended and added to the body of research regarding American students' perceptions of Africa, and extended the use of Knowledge Gap Theory to research about perceptions of Africa and Africans. The next section discusses the limitations of this study and the suggestions for future research.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were some aspects of this study that would need to be improved if it is to be replicated or extended. They include both methodological and approach-based issues. The first limitation to the study was that there were not enough measurements in the methodology that specifically assessed perceptions about Africa, compared to perceptions of Africans. While there were a few items on the Perception Scale that enabled the evaluation of participants' opinions regarding the diversity and development of Africa, a more holistic report of what the participants really know or really think about Africa would have been achieved if there were a separate measure of their perceptions of Africa. For the purpose of extending this study, research questions should include an examination of participants' perspectives regarding certain news stories about Africa, as well as Africa's geography, countries, and cultures. Moreover, the lines between knowledge of Africa and perceptions of Africans were blurred out in this study—one is a continent and the other is the people of the continent. Carrying out this study has left me with the question; do perceptions of Africans reflect knowledge about Africa and vice versa?

Apart from the shortcoming with the instrument of measurement, the method of collecting data from the sample was a challenge of the study. The majority of participants answered the survey because they were given extra credit. There is the possibility that one or more participants may have selected answers on the survey just for the sake of receiving extra credit and not out of a personal willingness to participate which would have resulted in deeper reflections before answering. Moreover, the sample was restricted (with the participants being mainly from classes where the instructors were offering extra credit) causing the analysis to not cut across all colleges of the university as was intended.

In order to analyze how associations with Africans affected the participants' perceptions, a Contact with Africans Scale was created. This scale asked participants which environments they had encountered Africans, the number of Africans they knew personally or had a close relationship with, and if they had travelled to Africa. The scale did not achieve an internal consistency coefficient. This was because all the items on the scale stood individually; in other words, each item measured different things. For the scale to be effectively utilized in the future, it will need to be modified and remodeled. While the results of this study are reflective of the sample studied, they cannot be generalized for all American college students because the sample was collected from only one university which is in midwestern United States. The same study conducted in other parts of the U.S. (Eastern, Western, Southern etc. settings) may have yielded different results. The data reported ethnicity was a factor in determining perceptions about Africa but this study did not go as far as investigating how ethnicity affected perception and the reasons why.

Another recommendation for future research in this area is to explore more demographic factors for example, state of origin. As a result of the very diverse nature of the United States' various geographical zones, the results of this study cannot be generalized to be reflective of American college students in universities outside the Mid-Western United States. Additionally, a comparative analysis of the samples from colleges across the U.S. would produce an important, comprehensive report of American college students' knowledge about Africa.

Finally, in order to fully understand the reasons why several factors had a positive effect on perceptions of Africans and desired social distance, while others had a negative effect, and yet other factors had no effect at all, one will need to conduct an experimental research where the participants are subjected to different test variables, based on the explanatory or independent variables of this study that had a significant effect

Conclusion

This study sought to determine U.S. college students' perceptions about Africa and the factors that affected these perceptions. After carrying out the study, I was able to answer all the research questions this thesis was intended to answer which included:, 1) What perceptions do American college students' have about Africa? 2) What factors influence American college students' perceptions about Africans? and 3) What factors affect American students' desired social distance from Africans? The results showed that consumption of radio and newspaper news, engagement with international news, and contact with Africans in academic, social, and work environments influenced American college students' perceptions about Africans.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achebe, C. (1978). An image of Africa. *Research in African Literature*, 9, 1-15.
- Albright, M. (March, 1998). *Clinton visit to spotlight 'other Africa'*. Secretary of state's 3/19 address at George Mason University. Retrieved from <http://www.usembassyisrael.org.il/publish/press/state/archive/1998/march/sd1320.htm>
- Asante, M. K. (2007). Communicating Africa: Enabling centrality for intercultural engagement. *China Media Research*, 3, 70-75.
- Atkins, D. J. (1994). Newspaper readership among college students in the information age: The influence of telecommunication technology. *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*, 2, 95-103.
- Barnhurst, K. G. & Wartella, E. (1991). Newspapers and citizenship: Youngadults' subjective experience with newspapers. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8, 195-209.
- Beaudoin, C.E. (2004). The Independent and Interactive Antecedents of International Knowledge'. *Gazette*, 66, 459-73.
- Bender, D. L., & Leone, B. (2008). *Why consider opposing viewpoint. Africa: Opposing Viewpoints*. Michigan: Greenhaven Press.
- Besova, A. A., & Cooley, S. C. (2009). Foreign news and public opinion: Attribute Agenda-Setting Theory revised. *African Journalism Studies*, 30, 219-242.

- Bethell, T. (2005). AIDS in Africa: A political epidemic. *American Spectator*, 38, 38-40.
- Bird, S. E. (2009). The future of journalism in the digital environment. *Journalism*, 10, 293-295.
- Bone, M. (2010). Narrations of African immigrations to the U.S. south: David Egger's what is the what and Cynthia Shearer's the celestial jukebox. *The New Centennial Review*, 10, 65-76.
- Borden, S. L., & Tew, C. (2007). The role of journalist and the performance of journalism: Ethical lessons from "fake" news (seriously). *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22, 300-314.
- Broddason, T. (2006). Youth and the new media in the new millennium. *Nordicom Review*, 27, 105-118.
- Brooks, L. (1971). *Great civilizations of ancient Africa*. New York: Four Winds Press.
- Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8, 47-60.
- Caplan, G. L. (2008). *The betrayal of Africa*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.
- Chang, T. K., Shoemaker, P. J., & Brendlinger, N. (1987). Determinants of international coverage in the U.S. media. *Communication Research*, 14, 396-414.
- Child, J. (1968). Sociology and Modern Systems Theory. *British Sociological Association*, 2, 245.

- Chima Amanda. The Danger of a single story. TEDGlobal (2009).
- Chinedu, E. (2008). Darfur: Coverage of a genocide by three major U.S. TV networks on their evening news. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 4, 277-292.
- Cho, D., & McLeod, D. M. (2007). Structural antecedents to knowledge and participation: Extending the knowledge gap concept to participation. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 205-228.
- Cyr, C. S., Carpenter, S., & Lacy, S. (2010). Internet competition and US newspaper city government coverage: Testing the Lowrey and Mackay model of occupational competition. *Journalism Practice*, 4, 507- 522.
- Diddi, A., Larose, R. (2006). Getting hooked on the news: Uses and gratifications and the formation of news habits among college students in an internet environment. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 50, 193-210.
- Dimmick, J., Chen, Y., & Li, Z. (2004). Competition between the internet and traditional news media: the gratification opportunities niche dimension. *The Journal of Media Economics*, 17, 19-33.
- Donohue, G. A., Tichenor, P. J., & Olien, C. N. (1975). Mass media and the knowledge gap: A hypothesis reconsidered. *Communication Research*, 2, 3-23.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1996). *The souls of Black folk*. New York: Penguin Classics

- Ette, M. (2012). Nigeria as a country of interest in terrorism': Newspaper framing of Farouk Abdulmutallab, the underwear bomber. *Journal of African Media Studies, 4*, 45-59.
- Essandoh, P. K. (1995). Counseling issues with African college students in U.S. colleges and universities. *The Counseling Psychologist, 23*, 348–360.
- Feldman, L. (2011). The effects of journalism opinionation on learning from the news. *Journal of Communication, 61*, 1183-1201.
- Finn, M., & Lu, J. (2005). Information-seeking behavior of international graduate students vs. American graduate students: A user study at Virginia Tech 2005. *College and Research Libraries, 68*, 5- 25.
- Gaziano, C. (1988). Community knowledge gaps. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 5*, 351-357.
- Gibbons, J. L., & Ashdown, B. K. (2006, August 30). Emerging adulthood: The dawning of a new age [Review of the book *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* by Arnett, J., & Tanner, J. L.] American Psychological Association, 341.
- Gil, A. (2012). “Digital first’ training begins on campus” (2012). *The Quill, 100*, 40.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Grabe, M. E., Yegliyan, N.,& Kamhawi, R. (2008). Experimental evidence of the knowledge gap: Message arousal, motivation, and time delay. *Human Communication Research, 34*, 550-571.

- Hamilton, J. T. (2010). The (many) markets for international news. How news from abroad sells at home. *Journalism Studies*, 11, 650-666.
- Harrington, S. (2008). Future proofing journalism: Youthful taste and the challenge for the academy. *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 22, 395-409.
- Hawkins, V. (2012). Terrorism and news of Africa post 9/11 coverage in The New York Times. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 4, 13-25.
- Hilton, J. L., & von Hippel, W. (1996). Stereotypes. *Annual Reviews of Psychology*, 47, 237-271.
- Himmelboim, I. (2010). The international network structure of news media: An analysis of hyperlinks usage in news web sites. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 54, 373-390.
- Horvit, B. (2003). Combat, political violence Top international categories. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 24, 22-35.
- Jeffrey, S. (2006). How aid can work. *New York Review of Books*, 53, 97.
Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2006/dec/21/how-aid-can-work/?pagination=false>
- Jeffers, L. W. and Atkin, D. J. (1996). Dimensions of student interest in reading newspapers. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 51, 15-23.
- Jeffres, L. W., Neuendorf, K., and Atkin, D. J. (2012). Acquiring knowledge from the media in the internet age. *Communication Quarterly*, 60, 59-79.

- Jenssen, A. T. (2012). Widening or closing the knowledge gap? The role of TV and Newspapers in changing the distribution of political knowledge. *Nordicom Review*, 33, 19-36.
- Jupp, V. (Ed.) (2006). *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods*. London, England: SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Kamya, H. A. (1997). African immigrants in the United States: The challenge for research and practice. *Social Work*, 42, 154-165.
- Kaufhold, K. (2010). Journalists show unified optimism about young adults' news consumption. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 31, 63- 68.
- Kohut, A. (2000). Internet users are on the rise; but public affairs interest isn't. *The Pews Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism*. 68-69.
- Ksiazek, T. B., Malthouse, E. C., & Webster, J. G. (2010). News-seekers and avoiders: Exploring patterns of the total news consumption across media and the relationship to civic participation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54, 551-568.
- Kumar, N., & Sahu, M. (2011). Coverage of India by major U.S. television newscasts: An analysis of the last thirty years. *Global Media Journal- Indian Edition/Summer Edition*, 1-15.
- Kumuyi, W. F. (2006). Wanted: Leaders! *New Africa*. 20-21. Retrieved from <http://www.africasia.com/services/opinions/opinions.php?ID=1090&title=kumuyi>

- Kwak, N. (1999). Revisiting the knowledge gap hypothesis: Education, motivation, and media use. *Communication Research*, 26, 385-413
- Liao, Y., Finn, M., & Lu, J. (2005). Information-seeking behavior of international graduate students vs. American graduate students: A user study at Virginia Tech 2005. *College & Research Libraries*, 68, 5-25.
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Frank N. Stanton (eds.) (1942). *Radio Research 1941*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.
- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Maeda, M. (2000). The effect of a video produced by young African people on perceptions of Japanese people about Africa. *Journal of Educational Media*, 25, 87-106.
- Mahadeo, M., & McKinny, J. (2007). Media representations of Africa: still the same old story? *Policy and Practice a Development Education Review*, 4, 14-20.
- Martin, B. M. E. (1964). *Ethnic group and belief as determinants of social distance*. (Order No. EC45718, The University of Western Ontario (Canada)). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, , 80-80 p. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/302167022?accountid=15099>. (302167022).
- McGarty, C., Yzerbyt, V. Y., & Spears, R. (2002). *Stereotypes as explanations: The formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Mcgill, D., Iggers, J., and Cline, A. R. (2007). Death in Gambella: What many heard, what one blogger saw, and why the professional news media ignored it. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22, 280-299.
- McLaughlin, A. (2004). AIDS is a serious problem in Africa. *Christian Science Monitor*, 23-27.
- Melamed, C. (2005). The economics of failure: The real cost of 'Free' trade for poor countries; a Christian Aid Briefing Paper.
- Meijer, I. C. (2007). The paradox of popularity. How young people experience the news. *Journalism studies*, 8, 96-116.
- Migiro, A. (2007). Press Release: Remarks of Deputy Secretary-General at New York City Bar Association Committee on African Affairs in New York, June 6.
- Morphew, C. C. (2009). "Conceptualizing Change in the Institutional Diversity of U.S. Colleges and Universities." *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80, 243-269.
- Mwenda, A. (2006). Foreign aid and the weakening of democratic accountability in Uganda. *CATO Institute Foreign Policy Briefing*, 88, 2-4.
- Osunde, E. O., Tlou, J., & Brown, L. E. (1996). Persisting and common stereotypes in U.S. student's knowledge of Africa: A study of preservice social studies teachers. *The Social Studies*, 87, 119-124.
- Patterson, T. E. (2007). The decline of newspapers: The local story. *Nieman Reports*, 33-34.

Powell, B. (2005). Africa needs investments, not insanity. *Investor's Business Daily*, 2000-2008.

Riegert, K. (2011). Pondering the future for foreign news on national TV. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 1567-1585.

Spehr, K., & Curnow, R., "Are your objectives really about behavior change? or are they really about knowledge and attitudes?" *Community Change*, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.communitychange.com.au/insights-and-tools/improving-your-program/are-your-objectives-really-about-behaviour-change.html>

Stohl, R. (2004). The legacy of illicit small arms: Devastation in West Africa. Center for Defense Information. May 20.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basis of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Taylor, I. (2008). Introduction: Opposing Viewpoints. Michigan Greenhaven

PressWidner, J. (2005). Africa's democratization: A work in progress. *Current History*, 104, 216-221.

Tichenor, P. J., Donohue, G. A., and Olien, C. N. (1970). Mass media flow and differential growth in knowledge. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34, 159-170.

The State of The New Media. An Annual Report on American Journalism (2010). Pews Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Thurman, N. (2011). Making ‘the daily me’: Technology, economics, and habit in the mainstream assimilation of personalized news. *Journalism*, 12, 395-415.

UNESCO (1997) Sexennial report on progress made in implementing the recommendation concerning education for international understanding co-operation and peace and education relating to human right and fundamental freedoms (1974) (UNESCO, Paris).

“Vital Signs” (1997). Vital signs: Students from Black African nations in U.S. colleges and universities. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 77, 1.

Weaver, D. H. (2009). US journalism in the 21st century- what future? *Journalism*, 10, 396-397.

Westley, B. H. and Maclean, M. S. (1965). A conceptual model for communication research. *Audiovisual Communication Review*, 3, 3-12.

Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction*, 9th Ed. Wadsworth, Boston: Cengage Learning

Appendix A
Recruitment Script

Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Principal Investigator: Kathleen Propp, Ph.D.
Co-Principal Investigators: Heather Addison,
Ph.D., Autumn Edwards, Ph.D
Student Investigator: Seseer Mou

I am a graduate student in the School of Communication and I am conducting research for my thesis. My study is exploring the views college students in the United States have about Africa. You are invited to participate in this survey research that focuses on your media habits and personal contact with Africans. There are no foreseeable known risks for participating in this research project. The survey will take you approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you are not a college student or **you are younger than 18 years old**, please do not participate. If you wish to participate in the following study, please go to the following link (Survey Monkey Link). If you have any questions at a later date, please feel free to contact me at seseerprudence.mou@wmich.edu or (269) 447-5883. Thank you.

Debriefing Statement (will appear on the last page of the survey)

Thank you for participating in the study. We are working to understand the views students in the United States have about Africa. If you would like more information about the results of the study, please contact me at seseerprudence.mou@wmich.edu or (269) 447-5883. Again, thank you for participating.

Appendix B
Consent Statement

Appendix B

Consent Statement

Western Michigan University

School of Communication

Principal Investigator: Kathleen Propp

Co-Principal Investigators: Heather Addison & Autumn Edwards

Student Investigator: Seseer Mou

Title of Study: American Students' Knowledge of Africa

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Students' Knowledge of Africa." This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully.

What we are trying to find?

We want to understand the views college students in America have about Africa.

Who can participate?

All college students **who are at least 18 years old** may participate.

Where will this study take place?

Should you wish to participate, you may continue on with this online survey.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate?

You will read a message and be asked to answer a series of questions that focus on your opinions about Africa, contact with Africans, media habits, and demographics.

What information is being measured during the study?

Your views about Africa are being measured. You may choose to not answer any question and simply skip it. You may also choose to stop taking the survey at any point. Submitting a completed survey indicates your consent for the researchers to use the answers you supply.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

There are no known risks for participating.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

By taking the survey, you are contributing to the body of knowledge about the views of Africa in the United States.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are no monetary costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study, but your instructor may be offering extra credit.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

Only the researchers will have access to the information collected during this study.

What if I want to stop participating in this study?

To stop participating, all you have to do is close your browser. You may choose to stop participating in this study at any point with no judgment or penalties. Your responses will not in any way be tied to your identity. You are assured of anonymity.

This consent has been approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on “date.” Do not participate after “date decided after consent is approved.” If you have any questions, you may contact Seseer Mou (269) 447-5883, Kathleen Propp (269) 387-3138, Heather Addison (269) 387- 2901, the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269) 387-8293 or the Office of the Vice President for Research (269) 387-8298.

DATE WILL REFLECT APPROVAL

Appendix C

Survey

Appendix C

Survey

News Consumption

On average, how much time do you spend getting news from each of these sources every day?

- 1 Internet _____ hours _____ minutes
- 2 Television _____ hours _____ minutes
- 3 Radio _____ hours _____ minutes
- 4 Newspaper _____ hours _____ minutes

News Engagement

Please respond to the following items, all of which relate to your engagement with the news. There is a seven-point scale, with 7 indicating “strongly agree” and 1 indicating “strongly disagree.”

Domestic news

Q.1 It’s a regular part of my day to catch up with the top news stories in the United States.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.2 I follow the news to understand what’s going on in my country.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.3 I follow the top news stories in the United States to know what other people are talking about.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.4 It's my duty to keep up with what's going on in my country.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.5 I have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

International news

Q.6 It's a regular part of my day to catch up with the top international news stories.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.7 I follow the news to understand what's going on in the world.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.8 I follow the top international news stories to know what other people are talking about.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.9 It's my duty to keep up with what's going on in the world.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Q.10 I have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing other countries.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Knowledge Patterns

The following is a series of attitude scales. Please indicate your impression of Africans (people born in Africa – *not* African-Americans) in relation to the adjectives that are provided. Use an ‘X’ to indicate the degree to which you agree with each term. (An ‘X’ in the center means that you are ‘neutral.’)

Please note that **there is no right or wrong answer** and that **your responses will remain anonymous**.

In my opinion, Africans are:

Intelligent ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Unintelligent
Imaginative ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Unimaginative
Naïve ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Sophisticated
Cowardly ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Brave
Violent ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Peaceful
Savage ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Civilized
Honest ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Dishonest
Rural ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Urban
Ambitious ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Lazy
Inarticulate ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Articulate
Educated ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Uneducated
Attractive ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Unattractive
Modern ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Primitive

Unhealthy ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Healthy

Insignificant ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Essential

Diverse ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ Homogenous

Contact with Africans

Q.1 Have you had contact/connections with African(s) [people born in Africa] in an academic environment?

1 Yes

2 No

Q.2 Have you had contact/connections with African(s) [people born in Africa] in a social environment?

1 Yes

2 No

Q.3 Have you had contact/connections with African(s) [people born in Africa] in your place of work?

1 Yes

2 No

Q.4 How many Africans do you know personally? ___

Q.5 How many Africans do you have (or have you had) a close relationship with? ___

Q.6 Have you ever traveled to Africa?

1 Yes

2 No

Q.7 Please respond to the following items, all of which refer to people born in Africa. There is a seven-point scale, with 7 indicating “strongly agree” and 1 indicating “strongly disagree.”

1 I would exclude Africans from my country.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2 I would not mind having Africans as visitors to my country.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

3 I would not mind having an African as a citizen of my country.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

4 I would not mind having an African working alongside me at work.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

5 I would not mind having an African on my street as a neighbor.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

6 I would not mind having an African in my club as a personal friend.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

7 I would not mind having an African as a relative by marriage.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

Demographics

Q.1 Gender

- 1 Male
- 2 Female
- 3 Other

Q.2 Education

- 1 Freshman
- 2 Sophomore
- 3 Junior
- 4 Senior
- 5 Graduate Level
- 6 Other

Q.3 How would you describe yourself?

- 1 American Indian/Native American
- 2 Asian American
- 3 Black/African American
- 4 Hispanic/Latino American
- 5 Caucasian American
- 6 Mixed race or ethnicity/Other
- 7 Non-American

Q.4 What is your current GPA? ____

Q.5 Please use an 'X' to indicate the degree to which each term applies to your family.

Poor __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ Wealthy

Low-income __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ High-income

Poverty __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ : __ Affluence

Appendix D
HSIRB Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: September 5, 2013

To: Kathleen Propp, Principal Investigator
Heather Addison, Co-Principal Investigator
Seseer Mou, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-08-15

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "American Students' Knowledge of Africa" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 5, 2014