

Professor Osei Appiah Describe...e to Form a More Perfect Union

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SPEAKERS

Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Eva Dale, David Staley, Osei Appiah

- E** Eva Dale 00:00

From the heart of the Ohio State University on the Oval, this is Voices of Excellence from the College of Arts and Sciences, with your host, David Staley. Voices focuses on the innovative work being done by faculty and staff in the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. From departments as wide ranging as art, astronomy, chemistry and biochemistry, physics, emergent materials, mathematics, and languages, among many others, the college always has something great happening. Join us to find out what's new now.
- D** David Staley 00:32

Osei Appiah is Professor and Associate Director of the School of Communication at The Ohio State University College of the Arts and Sciences. His research focuses on the impact of strategic communication messages in media on ethnic minorities and the role stereotypes play on intergroup interaction. His professional experience includes market research at Yankelovich Partners, product marketing and customer research at Apple Computer, and sports marketing at Nike. He has also worked as a Professor-in-Residence and a Multi-Cultural Media Consultant for Ogilvy & Mather Advertising Agency in New York. Welcome to Voices, Dr. Appiah.
- O** Osei Appiah 01:10

Thank you very much. I'm so happy to be here.
- D** David Staley 01:12

Your most recent article is titled "Cultural Voyeurism: A New Framework for Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Mediated Intergroup Interaction", which appeared in the Journal of Communication. And I note, I think you're working on a book on cultural voyeurism - you have

to tell us, what is cultural voyeurism?

O Osei Appiah 01:29

Thank you again for, for allowing me to be here, and I'm so excited about my work on cultural voyeurism. In essence, we all have a particular interest in other groups, and oftentimes, we become more engaged and more interested in out-groups. Cultural voyeurism is, in essence, our interest, fascination, and curiosity with an out-group we may not have readily access to, and one which we might have not just a peripheral interest in, but a genuine, serious interest in that particular out-group, for example. What's relatively hot right now is you see a number of young millennials who have a fascination with Black culture; in particular, hip-hop culture, and they engage in that culture, in essence, as a way of learning more about Black culture, Black people. So they'll listen to hip hop music, they may listen to jazz music, they may look at television shows, they may watch movies that feature black people. I always talk about my own personal experience with cultural voyeurism. As a young kid growing up in an indigent, poverty-stricken, gang-infested community of Long Beach, California, as a youth, I tried my best to find a way to escape from, basically, the mean streets of Long Beach. And part of the way in which I escaped was to look into or align myself with a counterculture, or a culture that was counter to my own, as a way of being something different, engaging in something different and learning about a different cultural group.

D David Staley 01:50

Is that what you mean by out-group, a culture that's different from my own?

O Osei Appiah 03:36

Yes, so we tend to think of, as an African American, an in-group would be other African Americans, an out-group would be, for example, Caucasians or Hispanics. So that is what is thought of as an out-group, so a culture or a group that is different from your own. So when I was young, I aligned myself with prep culture.

D David Staley 04:00

Prep culture being...?

O Osei Appiah 04:01

Being preppy.

D David Staley 04:02

Preppies.



Osei Appiah 04:03

So preppy culture. And I always was, I was so fascinated with prep culture, and part of the fascination -



David Staley 04:11

So, Izod shirts and...



Osei Appiah 04:13

Exactly.



David Staley 04:13

Sperry shoes, and Topsiders.



Osei Appiah 04:16

Exactly. So as a kid growing up in the inner city, I wanted so much to be engaged and be a part of prep culture, and part of that fascination was manifested by wearing Izod Lacoste, wearing Sperry Topsiders. I had dreams of going to a prep boarding school, maybe in Connecticut. I wanted to learn how to play tennis and golf because I thought that was part of the life of someone who is engaged with prep culture. Part of what I did also was I was a voyeur, in that I watched television shows, movies; I tried to gain as much information as I can through a mediated lens. So for example, similar to a voyeur who looks through the window of, let's say a house, and looks into that window and gets gratification by what they see on the other side of that window, the cultural voyeur does something similar. The cultural voyeur will look through a window, but not the window of an apartment or a house, but the window of a television screen, the window of the silver screen where you might watch a film, or the window of a computer screen and access another culture or cultural group or phenomenon. And that's what I did, I would watch television shows, I would look at movies that gave me more information about prep culture. And the more I watched, the more intrigued I became in... the more I tried to manifest that in my real life. The unfortunate thing was, growing up poor, trying to engage in prep culture was relatively short-lived. There were only so many Izod Lacoste and Sperry Topsiders I could afford. And one of the important things was I always felt like, at some point, that affluent white mainstream kids would always see me as an outsider and wouldn't necessarily embrace or welcome me. And I also felt like my own cultural group, being an African American in a Black inner city, I would be looked at as some deviant or weirdo who was trying to escape his or her own cultural group. So it didn't last as long as I would like, I'm still interested in prep culture. Now I have a job, I can actually afford to buy a Izod Lacoste or some Sperry Topsiders, but my signature outfit was a pink Izod Lacoste shirt, pink and lime green plaid shorts.

D David Staley 07:00
Oh dear.

O Osei Appiah 07:00
And some off-white Sperry Topsiders. That was my signature outfit going to high school.

D David Staley 07:06
So that, to me, sounds like you're doing more than just simply watching or observing or being a voyeur, you were actually enacting that culture.

O Osei Appiah 07:14
Right. And what cultural voyeurs do, from the way I've coined the concept, is that they immerse themselves in the culture, and they use a mediated lens as a way to learn more about the culture. So first, it's accessing the culture using media - it could be social media, could be television, it could be magazines, it could be movies, music - and learning about the culture from that standpoint, and as they learn more and more and get more engaged, that may lead to more direct contact with that culture or cultural group. So the idea behind cultural voyeurism kind of started with some of the research I found among Whites. And that research kept telling me that when you expose Whites to Black television shows, Black news programs, Black advertising content, and you compare it to the same media content between Whites, Whites were particularly intrigued and found that content featuring Blacks just as appealing if not more appealing than content featuring Whites. For example, I did some research where I showed a Cheerios print ad, and one Cheerios print ad featured Blacks, one Cheerios print ad featured Whites, and they were both equivalent, there was nothing different about them other than the race of the character. And when I randomly assigned one, participants to look at one or the other print ad and I asked them a series of questions - how much do you like this ad, how much is it intended for you, how much do you identify with the characters in this print ad - Whites overwhelmingly responded more favorably to the Black character Cheerios ad than they did to the White character Cheerios ad. Now, I must say that these were millennials, so I think that makes a difference, because Millennials seem to be more progressive, more open-minded, more willing to embrace difference, if you will. So, I believe it is probably more unique among the millennial generation than older generations, but I found this throughout my research. So if you look at news articles, the same news article about the same topic that featured Black characters compared to a news article that featured White characters, White audiences were just as fascinated, if not more fascinated, by the news article that talked about a Black person, vis a vis, a White person. So this gave me, in an effort to explain this, I started thinking more and more what does this mean? And cultural voyeurism kind of explains this immersion, if you will, into another culture. When you immerse yourself in another culture, you're likely to learn about that culture, develop a greater appreciation and understanding for that culture, and ultimately, it will lead, I believe, to less prejudice for that culture. In fact, the more you immerse yourself in a culture, the more likely you are to see that culture as being more like your own. You start to, not to sympathize, but empathize with that group. So my belief is that the more someone engages in cultural voyeurism, we'll have fewer negative stereotypes and negative prejudices against that other culture.

D David Staley 10:47

You've suggested that maybe millennials have a different attitude or have a fascination with Black culture in a way maybe that older generations do not. What is the impulse for cultural voyeurism, why engage in it, why do some engage in it versus others?

O Osei Appiah 11:03

Excellent question. Some engage in cultural voyeurism because they have a need for what's called self-expansion. Self-expansion, which is to develop oneself in a positive way. So, for example, you may work out on a regular basis in terms of developing your fitness as a way of bettering yourself. Some folks try to learn about others and other cultures as a way of self-development and self-enhancement. Others may engage in cultural voyeurism as a way of being cool and hip, in aligning themselves with a culture or cultural phenomenon that may align themselves with something that's trendy, something that's hip, something that's cool. Others may do it as a way of enhancing their social status or social approval among another group. Some may engage in it as a way of differentiating themselves from a particular group, I mentioned myself. Part of the reason I engage or immersed myself with prep culture was a way of distinguishing myself and making myself different from those African Americans who were in my community. Whites may engage in cultural voyeurism or become voyeuristic towards Black culture as a way of distinguishing themselves in a good way from White mainstream culture that may be perceived by that White person as more banal, more ordinary, boring. It isn't that they want to necessarily separate themselves from their own culture, they just want to more likely distinguish themselves, align themselves with maybe their own culture, but connect to another culture that might be seen in a favorable way as a way of distinguishing themselves from their own culture.

D David Staley 11:12

Self-expansion? So we were talking about not just simply being voyeuristic, but enacting one's voyeurism. Is there at all a concern that such enactment starts to look more like cultural appropriation?

O Osei Appiah 13:10

Excellent question. In the book that I'm working on, I call that cultural vultureism.

D David Staley 13:16

Oh, okay.

O Osei Appiah 13:16

So when you actually appropriate another culture as a means of maybe making money or

So when you actually appropriate another culture as a means or maybe making money or benefiting in some way, the other cultural group may see that in a very negative way. In cultural voyeurism, that isn't what the intent is behind one's fascination, interest, and immersion in the culture. It's genuine, it's, as I mentioned, a way of oftentimes expanding or developing oneself. But there are times where you may get an individual to want to benefit in certain ways, to appropriate that culture. And that's where the negativity comes into play for that person and for those who are the ones who are being emulated or imitated, if you will. So, there is a section in the book that I'm working on that gets into cultural appropriation, again, which I call cultural vultureism. But part of my reason to talk about the issue of cultural voyeurism is because, in the news, in today's culture, we hear so much in the media, in the news media in particular, about the intergroup tension, the racial divide, and the, you know, the religious and cultural divide that we have in our society. If you were to rely on the news media, and you know, I studied media, it would give you the impression that there's this huge racial divide between, for example, Blacks, and Whites. And although there may be some tension, if we look at things that happened in Charlottesville and in other places, there may be some tension, but by and large, I would argue that there isn't the racial divide and tension that we are likely to hear from the news media. I tend to believe that, by and large, Blacks and Whites not only get along very well, but there is a lot of shared interest about a mutual understanding, and a lot of, if you will, embracing of each other's culture. But, because of the negativity that we hear in the media, we sometimes get a misperception of what's going on and there isn't so much gloom and doom as we hear in today's news media, and cultural voyeurism is a way of explaining, hey, here's a, something positive that's going on and that leads to positive results, positive outcomes, like a reduction in prejudice, like better understanding and empathy that one may have with a different group.

J Janet Box-Steffensmeier 15:50

I'm Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Interim Executive Dean and Vice Provost for The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences. Did you know that 23 of our programs are nationally ranked as top 25 programs, with more than ten of them in the top ten? That's why we say the College of Arts and Sciences is the intellectual and academic core of The Ohio State University. Learn more about the college at artsandsciences.osu.edu.

D David Staley 16:15

So, and maybe this follows on what you just said, you also, last year, co-authored a paper, "Americans are More Exposed to Difference than We Think. Capturing Hidden Exposure to Political and Racial Difference." What were your findings in this article?

O Osei Appiah 16:28

Well, in that article, as well as a couple of papers that followed it, part of what we were trying to understand is do Whites and Blacks: one, interact, two, do they have conversations, three, if they do interact and have conversations, what are these conversations about? And there's been a lot of research out there from, let's say, the Pew Research Center, that, in essence, says Whites are significantly unlikely to have friends that are Black, and Blacks tend to have six or ten times as many friends that are White, as Whites have for friends that are Black. And we were looking at this and like, well, this seems to suggest that, you know, there's little

interaction. So what our findings state, we did a study that really asked people, Whites and Blacks, how often they interacted with someone of a different race, how often they talk to someone of a different race. In particular, we asked them, when talking about important matters, how many of those people you talk to about important matters is someone of a different race? And, believe it or not, we found that Whites actually talked to more Blacks about important matters than what we're led to believe by previous research. Sometimes they didn't probe more, so if I were to ask you, who were the three people you talk to about important matters, you may mention, I don't know your, your wife, your best friend, and maybe a co-worker. And then if I were to ask you, okay, when thinking about folks you talk to about important matters, is there anyone close to you who you talk about important matters that is Black, if you're White? Or if you're a Black person, are there any folks that you talk to about important matters that are White? And when you probe a little bit more than what we've seen in some of these Pew research studies, you find that Whites and Blacks actually talk to each other about important matters more than we originally thought. Moreover, some of my other research shows that when they talk about important matters, the topic of race or race specific topics come up quite often, whether it's issues about police brutality, or affirmative action, issues of immigration, and health - there are topics that are related to race that come up more often, at least when Whites talk to Blacks, they are more likely to talk about race issues than when they just talked to other Whites. So that was a very positive finding that, not only are Whites and Blacks having conversations about important matters or political issues, that many of those topics that they're talking about deal with race. So one of the articles that we're working on now is, in essence, "Having a National Conversation About Race", is one of the kind of titles of one of the papers, and in that paper, what we're arguing is: one, that Blacks and Whites are having conversations about issues of race, but interesting enough, it's Black liberals who are more willing and more engaged and have a stronger desire to have such conversations than Blacks in general. And Black liberals in particular, or to be more straightforward, Black Democrats, are less likely to want to talk about race with someone who's White than White Democrats are willing to talk about race. So White Democrats are significantly more likely to want to talk about issues of race with Blacks than Blacks are with Whites. And part of our research findings suggest that Blacks tend to believe that having such conversations, given there has been so many in the past are, in some ways, futile. And that they may lead to more negative outcomes, that Whites may not be receptive or may not listen, given past conversations historically. So it appears, unfortunately, that many Blacks, particularly Black Democrats, really don't want to engage in conversations with Whites, particularly when you're talking about issues of race. But that isn't the case for White Democrats.

D

David Staley 16:34

In 2014, you co-authored an article, "Racial Representation in Video Game Context: Identification with Gaming Characters". I'm very interested to learn your findings here.

O

Osei Appiah 21:15

In this study, what the title of the paper should be, is, "When I Get Angry, I Turn Into a Black Man". And why I mentioned that, and stated that way, what we were particularly interested in this study - there are so many video games that are available that deal with aggression and violence. And what we were interested in, and one, how much do video game players enjoy a video game based on the race of the characters in the game, and based on the race of the

character they're playing as in the game. So what we did was we had Whites and Blacks playing a first person shooter game - what that means is, you are the character. Many of video games, you watch the game, and you see characters running across the screen, and that's what you call a third person shooter game. First person shooter game is, you play the game through the lens of the character, so-

D

David Staley 22:24

Seeing the world as that character sees.

O

Osei Appiah 22:26

Absolutely. So, what we did was we showed participants a picture of the character that they were playing as, and it was either a Black male character or a White male character. And then, in this first person shooter game, part of the game was they had to go around and shoot military characters, because it's a first person shooter game dealing with military aspects, and you get points by navigating through the game and killing individuals in the game as a way of getting points because you're, like I said, it's a military game. But you get to see the race of the characters that you are pursuing. So, they either played as a Black character or White character against an opponent in the game that they were pursuing that was either Black or White. So as they navigated through the game, they would shoot characters, and what we found is Whites who played as a Black character not only enjoyed the game more, they engaged in more violent thoughts and violent activity in the game. So they thought more violently, and that was measured through asking them a series of word completion tasks, where they're asked to complete words in by finding out if they use more words that were violent or aggressive, that gave us an indication of their aggressive thoughts, and we also measured how many characters they killed, how many bullets they shot, how many punches they threw. And what we found is Whites, when they played as a Black character, were more likely to show aggressive tendencies through their thoughts and through their actions by shots fired, people they killed. It didn't matter if it was a White character or Black character that they were playing against, it only mattered when they played as a Black character. When they played as a White character, it didn't matter, there were no differences in their aggressive thoughts or aggressive behaviors in the game. When they played as a Black character, they showed more aggressive tendencies. For Blacks, it really didn't matter who they played as in terms of the race of their own character, it only mattered who they played against. So Blacks were more likely to have aggressive thoughts and show aggressive behavior when they played against an opponent that was White, so that when they were pursuing White soldiers, they were more likely to fire more bullets, more likely to shoot more characters, and enjoy the game more when they went against Whites. And the belief there was kind of that playing a video game, in many ways, gives them the opportunity to engage in probably historical remedies and resolutions that may have bothered them for years. And this is a safe way, perhaps, to remedy those issues and concerns that they may have, or may have held historically, and shoot and kill individuals who may remind them of some of those historical injustices. For Whites, it was a way of, I could argue, cultural voyeurism.

D

David Staley 22:28

Well, I was gonna ask, is this a kind of cultural voyeurism -

O Osei Appiah 25:49
Exactly.

D David Staley 25:50
That the video game players engaged in?

O Osei Appiah 25:51
Exactly. And really putting themselves in the minds and bodies of a Black person. And the stereotypes that may be associated with Blacks, particularly Black males, are actually manifested in the game, because of their aggressive tendencies and aggressive behaviors. If you look at the social psychology research, it tells us that when you present Whites with a adjective list of descriptions about Blacks, violent, aggressive, are two of the top three stereotypes that Whites have of Blacks, and we can see that manifested in their video gameplay. So they play the game as if they're Black as a result of those kinds of stereotypes that may be latent or unconscious, even conscious in their, in their minds, and like I said, we see that in the video game. So there are kind of two interesting results from that research. But it is, as you mentioned, a form of, kind of cultural voyeurism, where they're immersing themselves in the culture in such a way that they are the Black person or character.

D David Staley 26:59
I'm curious to know what a Professor-in-Residence does at an advertising agency.

O Osei Appiah 27:04
I really enjoyed working at Ogilvy & Mather. It was a few years ago, and what they did is, as a way of staying connected to academia, and as a way of academia staying connected to industry, there was a Ogilvy - among other ad agencies across the country, a small group of them - have these positions as a Professor-in-Residence, where you can come in and share your research with industry professionals. Talk to them about the theory, talk to them about how to apply that research in their own consumer audience research, in their own advertising campaigns, and their own strategic planning. But it's also a way for academics to learn more about what's happening in industry at that moment, and use that understanding to bring back to the classroom to teach your students and to do research that deals with relevant and important topics that industry professionals are struggling with. So, in general, that's what your typical Professor-in-Residence might do. In my case, it was that and more. I actually got to involve myself in a number of strategic planning meetings and campaigns dealing with Jaguar and Miller Lite. In particular, there was one that I worked on dealing with a healthful ad campaign, trying to get teens and tweens to stop using drugs, in particular marijuana and meth. So I worked on a campaign while I was at Ogilvy that was in conjunction with the Office of National Drug Control Policy, a health prevention campaign to get young people off of drugs,

particularly ethnic minorities. So that was my main job at Ogilvy, was to find ways to get ethnic minorities between the ages of seven and eighteen to prevent them from wanting to start these types of drugs like marijuana, and if they haven't started, to get them not to be interested in, and if they have started, to find ways for them to want to stop.

D David Staley 29:32
Osei Appiah, thank you.

O Osei Appiah 29:34
Thank you very much, I really enjoyed myself.

E Eva Dale 29:36
Voices from the Arts and Sciences is produced and recorded at The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences Technology Services Studio. Sound engineering by Paul Kotheimer, produced by Doug Dangler. I'm Eva Dale.