

Analyzing PSAs for African-American women

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(Medical Xpress)—African-American women die from breast cancer at a higher percentage rate than other populations. Numerous factors contribute to that fact, but it can be at least partially attributed to the lack of communication emphasizing the importance of screenings and preventative care suited to the demographic. A University of Kansas professor has authored a study analyzing a series of public service announcements targeted to African-American women finding that, when culturally appropriate, they can be effective.

Crystal Lumpkins, courtesy assistant professor of strategic communications and assistant professor of [family medicine](#), analyzed the California Department of Health's 2006 "Every Woman Counts" campaign. The initiative aired a series of televised public service announcements, known as PSAs, that encouraged women 200 percent below the [federal poverty level](#) to get screened for breast and [cervical cancer](#). [African-American women](#) were among those targeted. The PSAs that specifically targeted this sub-population featured well-known African-American women such as Phylicia Rashad, Eartha Kitt and Maya Angelou as well as family based messages and others representing the deadly reality of the disease.

"When I saw these PSAs they were, at first view, very gripping visually and the story was so powerful," Lumpkins said. "I wanted to find out if they were effective, because African-Americans are still dying disproportionately from [breast cancer](#)."

Lumpkins analyzed the PSAs through the lens of Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm theory. The theory states, in essence, that humans communicate through a narrative structure and that messages are better received when they are interpreted as probable and reliable. The ads featuring the aforementioned celebrities rated high in terms of message probability and fidelity or reliability.

Fisher's theory also states that meanings and value of a story must also be compared to other similar stories a viewer or receiver of the message may be familiar with. The comparison can lend an idea of how the message resides in a cultural context outside of its own text, Lumpkins wrote. The narratives of the PSAs were deemed probable and would likely resonate with the intended audience given their emphasis on family values and healthy lifestyles delivered by someone the audience can identify with.

The PSAs and larger program they were part of were indeed effective. The California Department of Health reported that more than 190,000 women received breast or cervical cancer screenings through the program and more than 7,000 received treatment. The problem, however, lies within the reach of the message. The California campaign was successful, but not all states have similar efforts.

"The fact remains, if these are something African-Americans can be impacted by and are appealing, they should at least be considered as part of programming that will reach African-American audiences more widely," Lumpkins said. "Compared with the rest of the U.S. population, we need to do better in reaching African-American and low-income women."

Lumpkins hopes to further analyze the Every Woman Matters campaign as well as others to find what methods are most effective in communicating health messages to minority and underrepresented

populations. The success of the campaign can serve as a model for health communicators trying to serve these communities.

"Through culturally grounded communication, there is a higher probability that health communication personnel will achieve the goal of reaching diverse populations and impacting cancer screening behavior," Lumpkins wrote. "Culturally grounded messages disseminated through appropriate channels such as direct marketing materials (tailoring) or mobile advertising (targeting), for instance, have the potential to break through prevalent barriers among African-Americans."

Provided by University of Kansas

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