

Research Article

Performing What He Resists: Monk Ellison's Social Categorization and Prototype Performance in American Fiction through the Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach

F.X. Sugiyana ¹, Suprapti ², and Gianto, M. ^{2,*}

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Pastoral Kateketik Santo Fransiskus Asisi Semarang

² Universitas sains dan teknologi computer

³ Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Arastamar (SETIA) Ngabang

* Corresponding Author: e-mail : xxx@xxx.com

Abstract American Fiction (2023) presents Thelonious "Monk" Ellison's conflict as a Black writer confronting institutional expectations regarding what constitutes recognizable and authentic Black authorship. Although previous research has addressed stereotypes, parody, resistance, commodification, and issues of racial authenticity in both American Fiction and Erasure, the socio-categorical mechanisms that enable stereotypical representations to gain institutional credibility remain relatively underexplored. This study aims to analyze Monk's social categorization, his response to the prototype of Black authorship, and the consequences of Stagg R. Leigh's performance on his negotiation of social identity and individualized self-definition through the Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design with theory-informed character analysis. From the entire film screening, 18 candidate scenes were identified and reduced to 14 primary analytical scenes. Data were analyzed through two-level coding, separating descriptive coding from theory-informed coding. The results of the study reveal five main patterns: Monk's categorization prior to Stagg's emergence, prototype resistance through satirical construction, strategic prototype performance, intragroup categorical evaluation through interactions with Sintara, and institutional validation and recirculation of Stagg's persona. The main finding indicates that the perceived fit between Stagg's performance and the prototype of Black authorship increases categorical recognizability, which can then be interpreted as authenticity. This study proposes prototype-based social recognition as an analytical synthesis to explain the relationship between perceived prototypicality and perceived authenticity, while also emphasizing that deliberate prototype performance is not identical to self-stereotyping or psychological internalization. The findings also indicate that resistance to externally imposed categorization does not automatically exempt Monk from categorical judgments about other members of the same broad social category.

Keywords: American Fiction; social identity approach; social categorization; prototype group; prototypicality; strategic prototype performance; racial authenticity

Received: 15th February 2026

Revised : 20th Marech 2026

Accepted: 21th April 2026

Published: 30th June 2026

Curr. Ver.: 30th June 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Submitted for possible open

access publication under the

terms and conditions of the

Creative Commons Attribution

(CC BY SA) license

([https://creativecommons.org/li](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

[censes/by-sa/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/))

1. Introduction

Literary authorship is often understood as a form of individual artistic expression, but a writer is never fully read as just an individual. The social identity inherent in a writer can shape the expectations of readers, publishers, and cultural institutions regarding the types of experiences and representations they deem worthy of presenting. This issue becomes more complex when racial identity functions not only as a social marker but also becomes a normative demand for what an author should write. The issue of racial authenticity itself has a long history in African American literary scholarship. (Favor, 1999) shows that Blackness does not function as a static identity category but is continually negotiated through competing cultural definitions of authenticity. (Eversley, 2004) further demonstrates that discourse on racial authenticity can shift the issue from mere category membership to questions about the

characteristics deemed necessary for a person or work to be recognized as genuinely Black. In a more contemporary publishing context, (Nishikawa, 2021) shows that corporate publishing can even turn African American literature into a sales category, allowing racial authorship to function simultaneously as a literary and commercial classification.

American Fiction presents this tension through Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, a Black novelist and academic whose works are repeatedly judged by narrow expectations about what constitutes a recognizable literary form as a representation of the Black experience. When a work deemed to align with his intellectual and aesthetic preferences struggles to find acceptance in the marketplace, Monk responds by writing a parody that deliberately exaggerates stereotypes about Black life through the persona of Stagg R. Leigh. Ironically, the representation created to mock these expectations ultimately gains far greater commercial and institutional recognition. (Bowles, 2023) points out that the film critiques the reproduction of stereotypes and caricatures, as well as the commodification and flattening of Blackness in the cultural industry. Thus, the film's conflict relates not only to the existence of stereotypes, but also to the question of how a representation becomes recognizable and, subsequently, deemed authentic.

Since its release, American Fiction has garnered academic attention from various perspectives. (Bowles, 2023) places the performance of Blackness, caricature, and cultural economy as the film's central issues. (Beck, 2024) examines the film within the development of representations of racial relations in contemporary American cinema. (Harris, 2024), through the Africana Media Representations Quadrants Model, expands attention to the representation of Black women in film. Meanwhile, (Silveira, 2024) examines American Fiction through the sociology of racial subjugation and shows how Monk does not conform to the stereotypes of Blackness expected by the publishing industry. These lines of research demonstrate that American Fiction is not an untouched object of academic study. The film has become a crucial text in discussions of race, representation, identity, stereotypes, and the relationship between cultural production and institutional power.

The issue of Monk also has a longer critical tradition, as American Fiction is an adaptation of (Everett, 2001). (Russett, 2005) points out the problematic categorization of the "African-American novel" and the tendency to connect race to writing as if there were a single, consensually representable Black experience. (Vörös, 2019) then shows that Monk's social world is filled with normative expectations that limit his self-identity and authorship, so that race operates prescriptively rather than simply descriptively. (Caputa, 2020) situates this conflict within the relationship between resistance, the publishing industry, the media, the literary canon, and preconceived beliefs about authentic Black experience. (Depci & Tanritanir, 2014) more specifically show that Monk's parody novel was accepted by the market because it conformed to racial clichés that had previously been read as authentic representations.

This problem also lies within the broader tradition of African American literary scholarship. (Favor, 1999), (Eversley, 2004), and (Chinitz, 2013) demonstrate that Black authorship can confront competing expectations regarding representation, belonging, public identity, and authenticity. These dimensions become more complex when publishing institutions influence the conditions for the production and circulation of works. (Nishikawa, 2021) demonstrates how African American literature can be shaped as a market category, while (Bowles, 2023) demonstrates that changes in the publishing business have consequences for the conditions of production of African American writing. Thus, racial classification in literature is not only representational but also related to institutional and commercial structures.

While previous scholarship has addressed stereotypes, racial expectations, parody, resistance, commodification, and the failure of Monk's satire to be read as satire, a comparatively underexplored question remains: why a persona deliberately created as a caricature so readily gains institutional credibility as an authentic representation. (Jay, 2024) approaches this issue through a discussion of persona, authenticity, and the prior expectations audiences bring to a person as a particular "type." The remaining question is how these expectations operate socially-categorically: how certain attributes make Stagg more easily recognized as representative than Monk as he defines himself.

The Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach, which connects Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, provides a framework for explaining these mechanisms. This approach positions social categorization as a crucial process in organizing the social world

and explains how category membership can have consequences for self- and other-perception (Hornsey, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). The concept of group prototype is highly relevant because it represents context-dependent attributes that are considered distinctive or representative of a group (Hogg & Reid, 2006). In this study, this concept is used not to assume the existence of an objective prototype of Black writers, but to analyze the prototype of Black authorship as constructed by literary and cultural institutions within the narrative world of film.

Based on this gap, this study uses the Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach to analyze how the prototype of Black authorship organizes social recognition for Monk and Stagg. The research's novelty lies in explaining the mechanisms of prototype-based social recognition, particularly the relationship between perceived prototypicality and perceived authenticity, the distinction between deliberate performance and self-stereotyping, and the contradiction of Monk's categorical resistance in his interaction with Sintara. In this study, personal identity is understood as Monk's individualized self-definition and not as a construct derived from other identity theories.

This research is guided by three research questions:

RQ1. How is Monk Ellison socially categorized within the literary and cultural contexts represented in American Fiction?

RQ2. How does Monk respond to the prototype of Black authorship and the normative expectations attached to Black authorship throughout the film?

RQ3. How does Monk's performance as Stagg R. Leigh influence the negotiation between his social identity and individualized self-definition throughout the narrative?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Racial Authorship, Stereotype, and Authenticity in American Fiction and Erasure

The central issue in American Fiction cannot be separated from the history of criticism of Erasure because Monk's conflict is built from the beginning through the tension between the individual freedom of an author and the tendency of the culture industry to read works through the author's racial identity. (Russett, 2005) shows that Erasure questions the category of the "African-American novel" and the problems that arise when the relationship between race and writing is treated as something automatic. Labeling works based on the author's identity has the potential to reduce the diversity of African American experiences to as if there is one experience or representation that can be considered applicable to the entire group.

(Vörös, 2019) develops this problem through the relationship between misrepresentation, identity, and authorship. According to her reading, Monk's world is filled with normative expectations that determine not only how he is perceived as an individual but also how he is expected to function as an author. Race is thus not only descriptive but also prescriptive. Monk's identification as a Black writer is accompanied by demands regarding what experiences he should represent.

The problem of normative authenticity has broader roots in African American literary scholarship. (Favor, 1999) demonstrates that definitions of authentic Blackness always involve contestation over who and what can be considered representative of Black identity. (Eversley, 2004) shows how authenticity discourse can transform category membership into a question of criteria of belonging. Meanwhile, (Chinitz, 2013), through his study of Langston Hughes, shows how a Black author can confront competing expectations regarding public and literary identity. All three studies demonstrate that Monk's conflict lies within a broader tradition of authorship, representation, and racial authenticity.

(Caputa, 2020) positions Monk's response in Erasure as resistance to racial misconceptions that operate through the publishing industry, media, and literary canon. Monk's parody novel developed in response to demands for authentic Black experience. However, this resistance cannot be separated from the institutions that determine the circulation and reception of the work.

(Depci & Tanritanir, 2014) identified a paradox that aligns closely with the focus of this research. Monk's parody novel became a bestseller because readers and the market saw it as a work that conformed to racial clichés considered authentic Black experience. Intended satire and audience interpretation therefore operate in opposite directions. What Monk considered criticism was read as confirmation.

This institutional dimension also aligns with research on African American publishing. (Nishikawa, 2021) shows how corporate publishing can transform African American literature into a market category, while (Brier, 2022) shows how transformations in the publishing business influence the production of African American writing. This perspective demonstrates that literary categories are not solely aesthetic or representational, but are also shaped by institutional and commercial structures.

The film adaptation of *American Fiction* maintains this conflict while transferring it to an audiovisual medium that allows for greater space for persona, bodily performance, voice, gesture, costume, and direct institutional interaction. (Bowles, 2023) examines the film through the performance of Blackness and the economies of caricature, demonstrating how commodified Blackness generates cultural and commercial legibility. (Beck, 2024), (Silveira, 2024), and (Harris, 2024) demonstrate that the film also engages with representational constraints, racial positioning, and heterogeneity in Black representation.

These studies have established that racial expectations, stereotypes, parody, resistance, commodification, and authenticity are significant issues in *Erasure* and *American Fiction*. Therefore, this research does not claim these concepts to be novel. The focus is directed at the mechanisms that make certain representations more socially recognizable as authentic than others.

2.2 Social Identity Theory: Categorization, Identity, and Social Comparison

Social Identity Theory developed from Tajfel and Turner's efforts to explain how group membership can become part of self-definition and influence relationships between individuals and groups. One of its fundamental concepts is social categorization, the process by which the social world is organized through meaningful categories. When someone is perceived as a member of a category, their self-evaluation can be influenced by the social meaning attached to that category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

(Turner & Oakes, 1986) emphasized that social identity is a mechanism that connects psychological and social processes, so that group behavior cannot be reduced to individual characteristics. (Hogg & Abrams, 1988) then expanded on this discussion by showing how social identification relates to perception, stereotyping, influence, and intergroup relations.

The concept of social identity becomes relevant when group membership has consequences for how a person understands themselves and is understood by others. However, membership does not mean that all members must accept an identical normative meaning. A person can recognize themselves as a member of a group while simultaneously rejecting demands about how that group's members should act.

This distinction is crucial to reading *Monk*. The conflict cannot be simplified as a rejection of Black identity. What is rejected is when category membership becomes the basis for category prescription, namely the demand that Black writers should produce a certain type of representation. In this study, category prescription is used as a descriptive analytical label to indicate the transformation of category membership into normative demands regarding how members of that category are expected to represent themselves; this term is not a formal construct in Social Identity Theory.

Social comparison is also relevant because category meaning develops through comparison with relevant others. (Turner et al., 1979) demonstrated the importance of social comparison in group evaluation. In *American Fiction*, comparison cannot be mapped simply as Black ingroup versus White outgroup. Race, profession, literary orientation, creator/gatekeeper position, and representational stance can be salient in different contexts.

Sintara is important in this context. He and Monk may fall within the same broad category of Black writers, but hold different positions on representation, market, and responsibility. Therefore, Sintara is positioned as an intragroup comparison figure, demonstrating that shared social categories do not produce normative homogeneity.

2.3 Self-Categorization Theory: Category Salience, Group Prototype, and Prototypicality

Self-Categorization Theory was developed by (Turner et al., 1987) as an elaboration of the categorization process in the Social Identity tradition. SIT and SCT are then commonly discussed together as the Social Identity Approach (Hornsey, 2008).

One of the key concepts of SCT is category salience. Not all categories have the same consequences in every situation. In one context, Monk might be perceived as a professor, novelist, brother, or son. However, in interactions with publishing institutions, the category Black author becomes highly salient and can dominate how both the work and the person are evaluated.

The concept of group prototype explains that group norms can be represented as context-dependent configurations of attributes considered distinctive to a category (Hogg & Reid, 2006). A prototype is not a list of objective characteristics shared by all group members, but rather a representation used to assess how representative a person or position is of a particular category.

(Hogg et al., 1995) showed that group-based evaluations can be influenced by prototypical similarity, not just overall interpersonal similarity. This finding strengthens the position of prototypicality as the perceived degree of fit between a person or representation and the salient group prototype.

In this study, we do not assume a universal group prototype for Black writers. What is analyzed is the institutionally constructed prototype of Black authorship as represented in film. Poverty, criminality, violence, street language, racial trauma, or urban hardship can emerge as stereotypical attributes. However, when a combination of these attributes is used to judge a work or persona as more representative of Black authorship, these attributes begin to function as part of the group prototype in a given context.

Thus, stereotype and prototype are not treated as synonyms. Stereotype refers to simplified cultural attributes or representations, while group prototype refers to a context-dependent configuration used as a standard of representativeness.

Self-categorization remains a theoretical concept, but it doesn't automatically apply to Stagg. The film demonstrates the deliberate construction and critical distance between Monk and the persona. Therefore, performing a group prototype doesn't automatically mean internalizing that prototype as self-definition.

This distinction also applies to depersonalization. In SCT, depersonalization is not a psychological pathology, but rather a shift in perception from individualized to category-based representation. However, because the corpus more strongly indicates category-based perception of Stagg by institutions than internalization by Monk, depersonalization was not a central finding.

2.4 Analytical Position of Strategic Prototype Performance

One of the conceptual issues when the Social Identity Approach is used to read American Fiction is the status of Monk's performance as Stagg R. Leigh. If Stagg is immediately categorized as self-stereotyping, the analysis risks ignoring that the persona was consciously created by Monk as satire.

This study uses the term strategic prototype performance to explain the deliberate enactment of attributes that Monk understands as socially recognizable elements of a group prototype, which are carried out for satirical or instrumental purposes without necessarily showing that these attributes have been internalized as part of individualized self-definition.

Strategic prototype performance is a study-specific analytical construct, not a formal concept from Tajfel, Turner, Hogg, or SCT. This construct serves as an interpretive bridge between group prototype/prototypicality and character performance.

Thus, the main distinction of this research is that prototype performance is not the same as self-stereotyping because enactment does not in itself prove internalization.

The research also uses the term prototype resistance to refer to Monk's efforts to reject the normative demands attached to the prototype of Black authorship, as well as institutional validation to show the acceptance and legitimacy of this representation by publishing, media, awards, or Hollywood institutions.

The term prototype-based social recognition is used as an analytical synthesis to describe the process by which a persona's conformity to a salient group prototype makes it more easily recognized as representative and subsequently judged authentic by external observers. This term is also not a formal Tajfel-Turner concept, but rather an interpretive formulation built from the relationship between social categorization, group prototype, prototypicality, and institutional judgments of authenticity.

In summary, the research analytical framework moves through:

CATEGORIZATION -> RESISTANCE -> PERFORMANCE -> VALIDATION -> RECIRCULATION

Meanwhile, the theoretical mechanisms that were tested in more detail were:

Social Categorization -> Prototype Imposition -> Prototype Resistance -> Strategic Prototype Performance -> Perceived Prototypicality -> Perceived Authenticity -> Institutional Validation -> Recirculation

Prototype imposition in this framework is used as a descriptive process label, not as a formal concept in the Social Identity Approach.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with theory-informed character analysis to examine social categorization and prototype performance in Thelonious "Monk" Ellison's character in *American Fiction*. The qualitative approach was used because the study did not aim to measure category frequencies or test statistical relationships, but rather to interpret how Monk's identity positioning is formed and negotiated through dialogue, action, interaction, performance, and institutional context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach is used as an interpretive framework, primarily through the concepts of social categorization, social identity, social comparison, category salience, group prototype, and prototypicality. The theory is not used as a diagnostic framework for character. Monk is analyzed as a fictional character, not as a clinical representation or generalization of Black writers or real-life groups.

3.2 Data Sources and Units of Analysis

The primary corpus of this research is the film *American Fiction*. English subtitles were used as a transcription aid to assist with dialogue identification, timestamp recording, and consistency checking. Subtitles were not treated as a substitute for the film because evidence also came from voice, speech register, gesture, posture, facial expression, interaction, and audiovisual performance.

The novel *Erasure* (Everett, 2001) was not included in the second corpus and was not systematically coded. It was used only as a scholarly context to understand the history of criticism of Monk, racial authorship, stereotypes, parody, and the publishing industry. Therefore, this research is a film character analysis and not a comparative adaptation study.

The unit of analysis is a meaningful scene or sequence that shows categorization, category expectations, identity positioning, comparison, persona performance, institutional response, or consequence related to Monk.

3.3 Data Collection and Scene Selection

Data were collected by screening the entire film with English subtitles. Scenes were included as candidate data when they displayed at least one of the following conditions: Monk is categorized by race or authorship; there is a normative expectation regarding Black literature; Monk rejects or questions that expectation; Monk engages in category-relevant comparison; Monk shapes or plays Stagg R. Leigh; institutions respond to Stagg; or the persona has consequences for Monk.

Scenes that only function as narrative transitions, are not directly related to research questions, or repeat patterns that have been represented more strongly in other scenes are not retained as primary data.

The initial screening yielded 18 candidate scenes. Each scene was coded S01-S18 based on the order in which it appears in the film. After reviewing them for relevance, analytical density, evidence strength, and redundancy, 14 scenes were retained as the primary analytical corpus and four scenes were used as supporting evidence.

The Monk's interaction with Sintara is specifically preserved as contrasting evidence. This scene serves to test the possibility that the Monk is not only an object of categorization but can also produce categorical judgments about other members of the same broad social category.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using a two-level coding procedure. This principle adapts the distinction between First Cycle and Second Cycle Coding in qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2021). This procedure also aligns with (Schreier, 2012) qualitative content analysis, which places segmentation, development of coding frames, trial coding, and the systematic application of coding categories as essential parts of the analytical process.

At Level 1, scenes are assigned descriptive codes based on observable evidence without directly incorporating Tajfel-Turner terminology. Examples of codes include institutionally imposed racial classification, imposed authorship expectation, stereotype construction, deliberate persona performance, institutional authenticity judgment, category-relevant comparison, and persona-related consequence.

At Level 2, descriptive codes were analyzed using theoretical concepts such as social categorization, category salience, group prototype, prototypicality, social identity, and social comparison. Additionally, the study used analytical labels such as prototype resistance, strategic prototype performance, and institutional validation. These labels were not treated as formal Tajfel-Turner concepts.

Stagg's performance is not automatically coded as self-stereotyping. Self-categorization or self-stereotyping is only used when evidence supports internalization of the prototype as a self-definition. The corpus does not provide sufficient evidence to make self-stereotyping a central finding.

To maintain analytical rigor, each scene was recorded based on its ID, timestamp, context, dialogue/action, descriptive code, theoretical code, and analytical memo. Scenes with interpretive ambiguity were re-examined through the film and subtitles. Contrastive evidence, particularly the Monk-Sintara interaction, was used to reduce confirmation bias.

4. Results

Analysis of 14 primary analytical scenes yielded five main patterns.

Finding	Focus	Main scene
4.1	Social categorization before Stagg	S02, S04, S08
4.2	Prototype resistance and satirical construction	S05, S06
4.3	Strategic prototype performance	S07, S09, S10
4.4	Intragroup categorization	S12, S14, S15
4.5	Institutional validation, identity consequences, recirculation	S11, S16, S18

4.1 Categorized Before Performing: Monks and Expectations of Black Authorship

The first pattern suggests that Monk's conflict with racialized authorship predates the creation of Stagg. Early in the film, the publisher expresses a desire for a "Black book," despite Monk's assertion that he is Black and that the book is his work. He then interprets this expectation as a demand for a specific narrative related to violence and disadvantaged Black lives (00:05:19-00:05:31).

This scene demonstrates the distinction between category membership and normative expectations. Monk doesn't reject Black identity. What's questioned is the assumption that racial membership must produce a certain type of representation to be culturally recognizable.

This pattern reappeared when Monk's book was placed in the African American Studies section based on the author's racial identity, rather than its content (00:16:20-00:17:10). Racial authorship became the basis for classification that preceded individualized evaluation of the work.

Institutional categorization also emerged when Monk was offered a position on an awards committee in the context of diversity requirements. Although the circumstances were different, racial identity once again became a salient basis for his positioning within a literary institution (00:58:11–00:59:19).

Overall, Monk had been the object of category-based evaluation before Stagg was created. The conflict, therefore, was not a rejection of Black membership, but a resistance to the prescriptive prototype of Black authorship.

4.2 Rewriting Stereotypes: Resistance through the Satirical Construction of Prototypes

The second pattern emerges when Monk no longer simply critiques these expectations but instead uses stereotypes as satirical material. In writing his manuscript, Monk deliberately combined attributes he believed the market considered recognizable Black content, including dysfunctional families, crime, drugs, and police violence. He satirically questioned what could be more "Black" than this combination (00:40:40-00:41:04).

This scene demonstrates Monk's ability to identify a configuration of attributes deemed representative by the market. He then deliberately enlarges that configuration.

While the manuscript received substantial offers, Monk maintained a distance between the work and his individualized self-definition. He rejected the notion that the manuscript represented him and asserted that it was created as a joke (00:46:21-00:48:28).

Thus, prototype reproduction at this stage does not demonstrate prototype identification. Monk uses recognized attributes satirically precisely because he rejects them as a definition of Black writing.

4.3 When Parody Is Considered Authentic: Stagg R. Leigh as Strategic Prototype Performance

The third pattern emerges when satire moves from manuscript to persona. In the publisher's first interaction with Stagg, Monk's work is described as "raw and real" and is immediately linked to the possibility that the narrative draws from Stagg's lived experience (00:49:32-00:49:40).

This institutional reaction is important because the caricature is not read as artificial. Instead, the exaggerated representation reinforces assumptions about authenticity.

Ahead of a Hollywood meeting, Monk was asked to "play that up" when Stagg's fictional biography as a fugitive was deemed interesting by the producers (01:01:28-01:01:31). Monk remained aware that the persona differed from his own.

Stagg's performance is therefore more accurately read as strategic prototype performance rather than self-stereotyping. Monk deliberately uses linguistic, behavioral, and biographical cues that are understood as recognizable by a specific audience.

Institutions not only embraced the performance but also expanded upon it. Marketing discussions link the book to Juneteenth and racialized consumer segmentation, demonstrating that institutional actors helped expand the category cues Monk initially created as satire (01:09:04-01:12:44).

These findings suggest that Stagg gained credibility along with the high perceived fit between his persona and the prototype of Black authorship that institutions already had.

4.4 Who Has the Right to Define Black Writing? Monk, Sintara, and Intragroup Categorization

The fourth pattern complicates Monk's position. He is not only the target of external categorization, but also generates normative evaluations of other Black representations.

Monk explains his objection to stereotypical writing by stating that such work "flattens our lives" (01:22:40-01:22:42). His criticism is directed at the reduction of heterogeneous Black experiences to narrow representations.

However, the confrontation with Sintara demonstrates that Monk himself has standards for legitimate Black authorship. Sintara even calls Fuck "pretty pandering," demonstrating that he cannot be reduced to a character who simply accepts stereotypes (01:34:59-01:35:04).

Their differences become more pronounced when Monk worries that White readers might read Sintara's work and "confine us to it," that is, turn one representation into a generalization about the entire Black group (1:39:10-1:39:15). Sintara, on the other hand, rejects the notion that the author is responsible for all generalizations made by the audience.

This interaction demonstrates the heterogeneity within the broad category of Black writers. Shared membership does not yield a single normative position regarding audience, market, representation, or authenticity.

The monk is thus both an object of categorization and an agent of categorical evaluation. Resistance to externally imposed prototypes does not automatically exempt him from category-based judgments.

4.5 When Personas Get Out of Satire's Control: Institutional Validation and Recirculation

The final pattern shows that after Stagg gained validation, the social meaning of the persona became increasingly separate from Monk's intentions. Publishing, media, awards, and Hollywood each added new layers to the persona.

Consequences become increasingly clear when Monk begins to view commercial success as a constraint and even shows a desire to return to the conditions before his book sold (01:21:15-01:21:19).

The literary award further reinforced this irony when Stagg's work was positioned as a crucial representation of the need to hear "Black voices" (01:41:40-01:41:43). Stagg, created as a fabricated persona, gained institutional status as a representative Black voice.

Stagg's development also directly impacted Monk's identity negotiations. The greater the social recognition Stagg received, the wider the gap between Monk's individualized self-definition and the persona legitimized by external institutions. Stagg's success, then, was not only a professional consequence but also an identity consequence.

In the film's metafictional ending, Stagg's narrative is reworked through Hollywood. Monk's confession that his persona is artificial isn't a literal confession at an awards ceremony, but rather one of the movie's imagined endings. When the narrative was later made more violent and racialized, the producers responded to this version as "perfect" (01:49:14-01:49:19).

Thus, the representation that was initially created as satire moves through validation -> amplification -> recirculation and becomes increasingly difficult for the creator to control.

5. Discussion

5.1 From Black Membership to Prototypical Black Authorship

The first finding suggests that Monk's problem is not a rejection of Black identity, but rather a shift from category membership to category prescription. Publishing and literary institutions not only recognized Monk as a Black author but also used that membership to develop normative expectations about what content is considered representative.

This interpretation corroborates (Vörös, 2019), who suggests that Erasure is shaped by expectations that make race function prescriptively. (Silveira, 2024) and (Bowles, 2023) also show how racial meaning in American Fiction relates to hegemonic representation, caricature, and commodification.

This study expands on this reading through the mechanism of prototype-based categorization. In SCT, group prototypes function as context-dependent representations used to assess representativeness (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Therefore, what works for Monk is not simply the label Black author, but the prototype of Black authorship that makes certain representations more recognizable.

Distinction membership-prescription is also in line with (Eversley, 2004), who shows that the discourse of racial authenticity can shift the question from whether someone is a member of a category to whether he or she exhibits attributes that are considered to be in accordance with the criteria of belonging.

Thus, Black membership is not the main source of conflict; It is the demand for prototype conformity that is the problem.

5.2 Resistance by Reproducing Rejected Categories

The second finding reveals the paradox that Monk counters the prototype by precisely reproducing the attributes that constitute the prototype.

This finding is consistent with (Caputa, 2020), who reads Monk's parody as resistance, and (Depci & Tanritanir, 2014), who show that satire of racial clichés is actually accepted by the market as legitimate representation.

The contribution of this research is not to find parody as resistance, but to differentiate prototype reproduction from prototype identification.

Monk can recognize and enact stereotypes without internalizing them as individualized self-definitions. This is where strategic prototype performance acquires an analytical function.

Thus, categorical performance does not always indicate categorical identification. This distinction is important to prevent automatic self-stereotyping when behavioral conformity is actually deliberate enactment.

5.3 Prototypicality as Institutional Authenticity

The third finding is a central contribution of the research. When Monk played Stagg, institutional actors did not interpret exaggeration as artificiality. The more the persona matched their expectations, the more credible and authentic the persona was perceived.

Existing scholarship has recognized the irony. (Depci & Tanritanir, 2014) show that Monk's parody was accepted because it fit into preconceived racial clichés. (Bowles, 2023) shows how commodified caricature achieved market success. (Jay, 2024) also emphasizes the importance of prior expectations in issues of authenticity and persona.

This study extends that research by explaining why parody can gain credibility.

(Hogg & Reid, 2006) showed that group prototypes provide a standard for assessing category representativeness. (Hogg et al., 1995) also showed that group-based perception can rely on prototypical similarity.

Applied to American fiction, this logic suggests that Stagg doesn't need to be verified as "real" to be credible. The persona simply needs to have a sufficiently high perceived fit with a prototype already deemed plausible.

prototype fit -> categorical recognizability -> perceived authenticity

Authenticity in Stagg's case is therefore a social judgment, not an objective property.

Stagg is considered authentic not because he is stereotypical, but in part because those stereotypical attributes make him highly prototypical in the institutional imagination.

5.4 The Limits of Categorical Resistance: Monk as Target and Agent of Categorization

Monk's interaction with Sintara prevents the analysis from devolving into a simple binary opposition between individualized Black subjects and stereotypical White institutions.

Monk rejected the externally imposed prototype, but he also developed a normative judgment on Sintara's representation. Shared membership does not produce a uniform perspective on Black authorship.

(Hornsey, 2008) points out that the Social Identity Approach does not have to be associated with total group homogeneity. Social identity processes must also be able to account for variation, dissent, and complexity within groups.

Sintara can therefore be read as an intragroup comparison figure. He shows that category membership and normative position are two different things.

Monk need not be labeled simply hypocritical. A more accurate position is that his resistance demonstrates the instability of categorical resistance. He resists others assigning Black authorship to him, but he himself is not entirely free from normative category evaluation.

(Jay, 2024) also shows that racial conventions can operate not only through White perceptions, but also among Black subjects themselves. This study expands on this insight through a specific Monk-Sintara comparison.

Thus, Monk is both a target of categorization and a potential producer of categorical judgment.

5.5 From Institutional Validation to Recirculation

Recent findings suggest that institutional validation is not Stagg's final endpoint. Validation allows these representations to move, be reinforced, and be repackaged across different institutional contexts.

(Caputa, 2020) has demonstrated the relationship between publishing, media, canon, and Black representation in Erasure. (Depci & Tanritanir, 2014) also show how authoritative intention loses control when satire is read literally.

Films extend this process through publishing, marketing, media, awards, and Hollywood. Stagg experiences recognition -> validation -> amplification -> recirculation.

(Jay, 2024) helps explain the significance of film endings because multiple endings openly demonstrate the constructedness of narrative authenticity. The most overtly racialized ending actually received the most approval from commercial filmmakers.

Thus, the prototype that Monk originally produced as a critique came back to him in an increasingly commercially recognizable form.

Overall, the five findings indicate the following mechanisms:

Social Categorization -> Prototype Imposition -> Prototype Resistance -> Strategic Prototype Performance -> Perceived Prototypicality -> Perceived Authenticity -> Institutional Validation -> Recirculation

The research's first contribution is to show that perceived prototypicality can serve as a basis for perceived authenticity. Observers do not always verify the correspondence between representation and lived identity; they can use prototype fit as a basis for credibility.

The second contribution is the distinction between performance and internalization. Monk can deliberately enact category-defining attributes while maintaining distance from them.

The third contribution is to show that categorical resistance is relational and unstable. Monk rejects the prototype applied to him but still produces a categorical evaluation of Sintara.

Thus, American Fiction doesn't just satirize the profitable sale of stereotypes of Blackness. The film exposes a more fundamental problem: institutions have established templates for representation that allow constructed personas to appear more believable than individualized identities.

The ultimate irony is that the version of Monk that is furthest from individualized self-definition is precisely the version most easily recognized by institutions.

This explains the central logic of the title *Performing What He Resists*: Monk performs a prototype that had previously been used to limit him. When the performance is recognizable enough, institutions read it as confirmation that the prototype is indeed authentic.

6. Conclusion

This research shows that Monk Ellison's conflict in *American Fiction* cannot be understood simply as a rejection of racial stereotypes or as a simple conflict between authentic and inauthentic Black representation. Using the Tajfel-Turner Social Identity Approach, the research finds that Monk's main problem lies in the process by which category membership as a Black writer turns into category prescription. Literary and cultural institutions use Monk's social identity as the basis for a prototype of Black authorship that determines the type of representation considered recognizable and legitimate.

Monk's response to the prototype evolves from prototype resistance to deliberate reconstruction and finally strategic prototype performance through Stagg R. Leigh. Stagg does not automatically suggest that Monk is engaging in self-stereotyping. Instead, the corpus demonstrates the distance between the performed persona and Monk's individualized self-definition. However, the greater the social recognition Stagg receives, the wider the distance between that self-definition and the persona legitimized by institutions. Stagg's success thus becomes part of the negotiation between Monk's social identity and individualized self-definition.

Research also shows that perceived prototypicality can serve as a basis for perceived authenticity. Stagg was deemed credible not because his lived identity was verified, but because his performance matched a prototype that had become recognizable to institutions. This relationship can be formulated as prototype fit -> categorical recognizability -> perceived authenticity.

The findings regarding Sintara complicate Monk's position. Resistance to externally imposed categorization does not automatically place him outside of categorical evaluation. Monk can be both the object of categorization and the agent of categorical judgment. Thus, resistance to social prototypes is relational and not entirely stable.

Theoretically, the research's primary contribution lies in the formulation of prototype-based social recognition. The study expands on previous scholarship on stereotype, parody, resistance, commodification, and authenticity by explaining the social-categorical mechanisms that connect these phenomena. This process involves social categorization, prototype imposition, prototype resistance, strategic prototype performance, perceived prototypicality, perceived authenticity, institutional validation, and recirculation. The study also emphasizes that performance cannot automatically be treated as evidence of psychological internalization.

This research is limited to Monk Ellison as the primary character in one film. Findings are not intended to be generalized to Black writers or Black communities at large. Sintara and other characters are only analyzed as far as they are relevant to Monk's positioning. The study also does not conduct a systematic adaptation comparison with Erasure and does not use multiple coders. Future research could compare prototype-based recognition in American Fiction and Erasure, analyze Sintara as the primary character, or apply the Social Identity Approach to other cultural texts that display the conflict between individualized self-definition and socially prescribed representation.

Ultimately, American Fiction demonstrates the irony that the more Monk attempts to demonstrate the artificiality of stereotypes by performing their most recognizable forms, the more easily institutions perceive those performances as authentic. Performing What He Resists therefore illustrates not only Monk's strategy but also the film's paradox: representations created to dismantle category expectations actually gain social power because they align with the expectations they are intended to dismantle.

References

- Beck, B. (2024). Thinking about race in American Fiction and Origin. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 26(1), 59-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2024.2355802>
- Bowles, T. (2023). Beneath the mask: The performance of Blackness and economies of caricature in American Fiction. *Markets, Globalization & Development Review*, 8(4), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.23860/MGDR-2023-08-04-03>
- Brier, E. (2022). Unliterary history: Toni Morrison, *The Black Book*, and "real Black publishing." *American Literature*, 94(4), 651-676. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-10341720>
- Caputa, S. (2020). Resistance and protest in Percival Everett's *Erasure*. *Review of International American Studies*, 13(1), 145-157. <https://doi.org/10.31261/rias.7567>
- Chinitz, D. E. (2013). Which sin to bear? Authenticity and compromise in Langston Hughes. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199919697.001.0001>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Depci, A., & Tanritanir, B.C. (2014). Parody of racial cliché in Percival Everett's *Erasure*. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 7(29), 281-294.
- Everett, P. (2001). *Erasure*. University Press of New England.
- Eversley, S. (2004). The real Negro: The question of authenticity in twentieth-century African American literature. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203498392>
- Favor, J. M. (1999). *Authentic Blackness: The folk in the New Negro Renaissance*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822379515>
- Harris, H.E. (2024). The strong Black women of the film *American Fiction*: An exploration using the Africana Media Representations Quadrants Model. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 41(3), 282-287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2024.2391811>
- Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. (1988). *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. Routledge.
- Hogg, M. A., Hardie, E. A., & Reynolds, K. J. (1995). Prototypical similarity, self-categorization, and depersonalized attraction: A perspective on group cohesiveness. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(2), 159-177. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420250204>
- Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), 7-30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x>
- Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: A historical review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(1), 204-222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x>
- Jay, M. (2024). Afropessimism and the figural Negro: Ruminations on American Fiction. *Salmagundi*, 224-225.
- Nishikawa, K. (2021). Driven by the market: African American literature after urban fiction. *American Literary History*, 33(2), 320-349. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajab008>
- Russett, M. (2005). Race under "Erasure": For Percival Everett, "a piece of fiction." *Callaloo*, 28(2), 358-368. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2005.0059>
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications.
- Silveira, JB da. (2024, September 5-6). Exclusão e obliteração: As manifestações da sócio-lógica da subjogação racial em American Fiction (2023) [Conference paper]. 47º Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação, Univali, Brazil.

- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favoritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 9(2), 187-204. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207>
- Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D., & Wetherell, M.S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Basil Blackwell.
- Turner, J. C., & Oakes, P. J. (1986). The significance of the social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism, interactionism and social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(3), 237-252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1986.tb00732.x>
- Vörös, G. (2019). Misrepresentation, identity, and authorship in Percival Everett's *Erasure*. *Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(2), 78-90.