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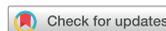
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Race and Media: A Critical Essay Acknowledging the Current State of Race-Related Media Effects Research and Directions for Future Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The following article illuminates how race-related media effects research creates a space for race to be represented within quantitative literature. However, it presents barriers towards inclusion regarding the examination of diverse audiences and distinct media content, while also normalizing existing patterns of hierarchy by concentrating on the implications of White viewers. To address this, the following text presents a synthesis of previous race-related media effects research and discusses applicable theoretical frameworks. More importantly, this piece offers suggestions for future direction where diverse audiences and media content are centered, various inclusive social contexts are contemplated, and the expansiveness of mass media platforms, as well as the adoption of theories, inside and outside of the discipline, are brought into the dialogue. These recommendations are offered to champion creating a more equitable landscape regarding the future of race-related media effects research.

Mass media is broadly defined as media intended to reach large audiences; because of this, it may be a primary source of information for viewers regarding unfamiliar people, cultures, and norms (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). Mass media has historically referenced "legacy" forms of media, which include broadcast television and radio. However, these forms of media, although valid, only account for a portion of the types of mass media that exist today. Mass media platforms, including the internet and various media channels such as streaming services (e.g., Netflix), digital outlets (e.g., Apple TV), and smartphone applications have emerged over the last few decades and arguably contribute to a dynamic, ever-changing, and diverse media landscape (Ito et al., 2009). This reality brings to light that mass media may bridge the knowledge gap among viewers as it depicts various racial groups and introduces diverse norms and practices.

The opportunity to examine race relations, group tension, and social judgments among viewers within race and media scholarship may seem promising. However, empirical research demonstrates that mass media has historically demeaned, criminalized, and marginalized many racial groups, providing overwhelming examples of

unsympathetically influencing audiences' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Considering that race-related media research impacts individual and group stereotyping (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2012), social judgments of public policies (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2010; Saleem et al., 2017), and perceived health disparities among racial groups (Niederdeppe, Bigman, Gonzales, & Gollust, 2013), considerable attention toward expanding this literature and the type of examinations that are constructed are warranted.

Without question, race-related media effects research is far-reaching within the discipline of communication. Still, our understanding of race-related media effects research is constrained due to its concentration on White audiences' point-of-view, a concerted focus on marginalized groups as the primary object under scrutiny, a sensationalized focus on adverse consequences related to those marginalized groups, and the lack of theoretical application geared toward affirmative outcomes. These arguments do not necessarily negate current race-related media effects scholarship. Instead, this article suggests areas within race-related media effects research that may benefit from the application of unconventional theories and the use of an intersectional frame regarding audience and media subject—especially considering an emerging and divergent media landscape that is increasingly accessible to marginalized audiences (Ito et al., 2009).

An analysis of race-related media effects research and offerings of distinctive paths for future examination are timely; likewise, a review of this type serves several functions. First, race-related media effects research overwhelmingly positions Whites as the primary audience, potentially normalizing that the influence of media exposure on audiences is only worthwhile to *specific* viewers. The challenge of extending attention toward diverse audiences, including considering intersecting identities (i.e., race, class, and gender), and types of subject matter under examination (e.g., positive media depictions of Muslim women) addresses the practice of diversifying the representation of racial identities within communication research (Chakravartty et al., 2018).

Second, a substantial portion of media effects research acknowledges the outcomes of media exposure on Whites' judgments. Yet, little attention is focused on the implications of these images on communities of color and other underrepresented groups (e.g., sexual minorities). Moreover, there is an absence in the literature addressing how these groups demonstrate discernment regarding their media exposure and benefit in increased esteem, vitality, and individual and group perception via their deliberate mass media selection (see Abrams & Giles, 2007; Ramasubramanian, 2016). Also, previous research overwhelmingly concentrates on implications from exposure to "legacy" mass media, particularly news and broadcast television. The examination of digital forms of mass media (e.g., streaming services) creates a robust opportunity for understanding how audiences, specifically people of color, seek out mass media for more diverse characterizations and affirmative narratives (see Sun et al., 2015).

Lastly, Lipsitz (2006) encouraged scholars to identify, analyze, and contest practices, including within scholarly research, that hinder equality among various groups, specifically underrepresented individuals. Although this reasoning, in it of itself, may not drive inquiry, analyzing the foundation of a robust body of literature and forging more inclusive paths for investigation may provide beneficial outcomes. These outcomes include, but are not limited to, adequately representing the spectrum of racial identities and

advancing our understanding of the effects of mass media exposure on marginalized populations (Tukachinsky, 2015).

To this end, the following article briefly discusses previous literature within race-related media effects scholarship, providing an overview of prevailing theories. This is followed by suggestions for future directions, including recommendations of additional pertinent theories and an acknowledgment of the researcher's consideration of, and engagement with, a more modernized mass media landscape. Lastly, suggestions for addressing in*tra*group dynamics, intersectional identities, and utilizing various situational contexts to drive inquiry are offered.

Theoretical applications of race-related media effects research

Current research within the domain of race-related media effects employs various theoretical applications that collectively advance the understanding of media exposure on viewers. These perspectives, including social identity theory, social cognitive theory, cultivation theory, self-categorization theory, and media priming, address a range of aspects concerning audiences' reaction to, and social judgments of, racial groups via audiences' media exposure and responses to various media stimuli.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals experience collective identity based on their membership to a specific group, including racial groups. These identities may lead people to create ingroups and outgroups based on identifying characteristics, potentially causing social comparison and competition (Hornsey, 2008). According to SIT, maintaining a positive social identity not only encourages intergroup comparisons but also creates favoritism toward group members and sustains discriminatory behaviors and adverse judgment toward nongroup members (Hornsey, 2008).

Race-related research applying SIT argues that audiences rely on positive media depictions to support their group and associate unfavorable media depictions with negative judgments of nongroup members. For example, research documents that media representations of communities of color that assimilate to White norms and values tend to be evaluated favorably among White audiences (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). On the other hand, negative media depictions of minorities tend to increase adverse social judgment among White audiences including negative stereotyping (Figueroa-Caballero, Mastro, & Stamps, 2019; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2012), decrease support for racialized public policies (i.e., affirmative action; Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2010; Saleem et al., 2017), and a belief in intergroup threat (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016).

Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) proposes that audiences cognitively process information and internalize responses to situations based on observations, including media observations. Certain behaviors are learned when they are perceived to be real, repeated, and audiences feel adequately equipped to perform those actions. SCT also suggests that if viewers identify with a media character and subsequently accept their perspective or worldview, this may guide future judgments, potentially attenuating

prejudice or bias (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Several media studies demonstrate these effects on audiences.

For example, Dalisay and Tan (2009) found that media exposure of Asian Americans shapes White participants' attitudes about various racial groups. Specifically, exposure to positive attributes of the group increases positive perceptions of Asian Americans. However, results also reveal that the same media exposure influence negative stereotyping of Blacks despite the absence of exposure to media depictions of Blacks. The discrepancy in judgments is attributed to the shifting standards model (Biernat, 1995), in which Whites rely on racial hierarchy in their evaluation of minority groups. Within this study, media depictions of Asians embodying the "model minority" stereotype influence sympathetic judgments; however, Blacks, even when absent from media portrayals, were negatively evaluated as they are perceived as deviating from the "model minority" stereotype. The authors contend that Whites' cognitive assessment places racial groups within a hierarchy, positioning Asians above Blacks, and thus, groups are judged accordingly. Research within this domain demonstrates that not all minorities are judged equally, and the cognitive mechanisms, such as learned behaviors from media exposure, among audiences are much more intricate regarding social judgments and group perceptions.

Research examining Whites' perceptions of minorities via exposure to positive media portrayals further supports this assertion. Particularly, audiences, when exposed to high quantities of favorable media depictions of communities of color, experience a decrease in perceived threat and social distance (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Researchers suggest that media exposure exhibiting positive behaviors of minority groups might create familiarity and decrease prejudice and negative social stigmas. However, it must be acknowledged that a majority of these studies focus on White's social judgments and the attenuation or exacerbation of negative stereotypes, which arguably are not created nor reinforced by communities of color.

Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) refers to the formation of perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the world due to consistent and substantial media exposure. Initially, cultivation focused on exposure to television, insinuating that heavy (versus light) viewing of consistent and persistent media messages shape audience perceptions about society (Potter, 2014). Considering that mass media continues to portray minorities negatively (Mastro & Stamps, 2018), adopting cultivation to race-related media effects research seems logical. If media consistently portrays minorities in negative depictions, heavy media consumers who lack direct contact may embrace this worldview, regardless of reality. Mastro, Behm-Morowitz, and Ortiz (2007) tested the influence of cultivation among White audiences concerning media portrayals of Latinx individuals. They found that across various negative stereotypical depictions of Latinx populations, Whites who were heavy media viewers assume those stereotypes to be accurate. Moreover, White viewers who had minimal direct contact with Latinx individuals relied on media to potentially judge the group.

Self-categorization theory

Building from the initial processes aligned with social identity theory, self-categorization theory (Turner, 1978) proposes that self-definition is established and maintained through the placement of self and others into group-based categories. When an individual characterizes themselves as a group member due to shared values, beliefs, and attitudes, a collective group identity emerges, and those traits distinguish the group from nongroup members (Hornsey, 2008).

Observable group traits (e.g., gender or race) are likely to prompt initial category-based comparisons due to their convenience, supporting the application of self-categorization (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). Mastro and Kopacz (2006) examine media depictions of Black and Latinx individuals and the extent to which imagery deviates or converges from White audiences' perceived social norms. Findings support the adoption of social categorization theory; specifically, the more similar and acceptable race-based media depictions are to perceived white norms, there was an increase in positive evaluations as these behaviors were viewed as acceptable among White audiences. Likewise, the more race-based media depictions deviate from perceived white norms, favorability decreased among Whites, including adverse opinions of racialized social issues (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2010).

Media priming

Media priming "evokes certain thoughts and feelings, which in turn play a role in coloring impressions formed about issues, objects, or people" (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014, p. 388). Within priming, media stimuli evoke specific opinions among audiences, which may affect social judgments or behavioral tendencies. Typically, within race-related media effects research, media depictions of racialized characters serve as the prime and viewers subsequently evaluate an indistinct situation, individual, or group related to the primed racialized context. Collectively, priming allows researchers to utilize media content to gauge audiences' cognitive capacity regarding existing ideas about groups and the influence on subsequent judgments related to issues and people.

Priming is used mainly in race-related media effects scholarship concerning media depictions of Blacks in the news, an association with criminality, and an increase in perceptions of Black individuals as threatening (Abraham & Appiah, 2006; Dixon, 2006a; 2006b; Hurley, Jensen, Weaver, & Dixon, 2015). For example, Dixon (2006a) found that when primed with news media images of Blacks (versus non-Blacks), individuals relied on negative racial stereotypes and were more likely to support the death penalty. Abraham and Appiah's (2006) research similarly demonstrates an association among audiences primed with negative media images of Blacks (versus non-racialized content); and a negative association of Blacks with societal issues (e.g., poverty) and public policies (e.g., welfare).

A limited body of research adopts priming in the exploration of race and gender. For example, Brown Givens and Monahan (2005) examine mass media depictions of Black women and subsequent judgments of the group in face-to-face social situations. Their research disentangles the association between stereotypes of Black women in media as aggressive or overtly sexual and audiences' perception of Black women in nonmediated social settings. Findings reveal that viewers, when primed with unfavorable media

images, associate these depictions with Black women in general, and this judgment spills over into perceptions of Black women in real-world engagements such as evaluations of prospective job candidates.

Collectively, these theories offer insight in extending our understanding of mass media's role in constructing viewers' self-concept and social perception of others. These theories also address the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms that audiences may be unaware of but have far-reaching implications (Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Considering that audiences' cognitive complexity varies, meaning viewers may interpret and retrieve information and display judgments and evaluations differently, examinations using mass media establishes awareness of group differences and varied identities. Many individuals may be unaware of their bias and mass media's role in exacerbating social judgments. Likewise, mass media may impact audiences' attitudes regarding public policies, influence voting behavior, and strengthen perceptions about groups, especially when individuals lack direct face-to-face contact (Mastro & Stamps, 2018).

The majority of the research acknowledged above, and this list is nonexhaustive, supports these assertions. However, this body of literature falls short due to a lack of inclusivity, including the spectrum of racial groups under investigation, the acknowledgment of audiences and media characters' intersecting identities, and consideration of mass media post the digital age (e.g., streaming services). Past literature argues that race-related media effects research primarily examines intergroup dynamics, notably Whites' responses to Black media portrayals (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). However, minorities constitute 23.4% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2018), and arguably possess greater diversity regarding language, cultural and ethnic identities, and sociocultural practices (e.g., quinceaneras). The lack of research concentrating on non-White racial groups is perplexing, considering that Latinxs are a larger ethnic group in comparison to Blacks, and Asians are the fastest-growing racial group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2018). One could ascertain that race-related media effects research has only scratched the surface regarding fully representing the spectrum of race.

It may be challenging to examine various racial groups in race-related media effects research, considering many groups are "white-washed" or nearly absent from the media landscape (Chidester, 2008). However, this does not excuse the reality that current race-related media effects research has limitations, and the lack of inclusivity regarding racial identity is one example. To address this gap, several suggestions are presented to identify the spectrum of racial identities and to shift away from the attentiveness directed at Whites as primary media consumers.

New directions in race-related media effects research

Considering an expanding media environment (e.g., streaming services, on-demand content, and social/digital media), predicted demographic changes, and the acknowledgment of willful agency among communities of color, additional considerations examining race and media effects is reasonable. A shift in racial representation within the United States is assumed, with expectations that by 2045 Whites will no longer be a majority (Frey, 2018). Also, people of color are, and historically have, denounced practices of exclusion from mass media (e.g., #OscarsSoWhite), calling for more inclusive

practices including the creation and distribution of media content by people of color, and increased representation of non-White writers, directors, and producers. Likewise, each of these groups is using various media platforms (e.g., YouTube) to distribute content that is representative of their lived experiences (Sun et al., 2015).

Taking into account the shift in racial demographics and the increase in various media platforms, is the continued exploration of race-related media effects concerning the social judgments of Whites necessary? This research consistently and continuously demonstrates a history of unfavorable and disproportionate media representation of communities of color and continued racism and prejudice among many Whites. Also, race scholarship has shown that racism and discrimination still exist but arguably take on various forms among White audiences (e.g., modern racism, symbolic racism, aversive racism; see Henry & Sears, 2002). Likewise, scholars demonstrate that racism and prejudice are not targeted toward any specific minority group, but all of them (Mastro, 2016; Mastro & Stamps, 2018). Considering this, broadening race-related media effects scholarship, including shifting the focus away from White audiences, seems reasonable. To address this, recommendations including a focus on intragroup dynamics among communities of color, a concerted interest in intersectionality, examining diverse content across various mass media platforms, and a shift in consideration of distinctive theories and research queries from qualitative and critical cultural work is presented.

Shifting toward inclusivity within race-related media effects

Intragroup dynamics

An area of race-related media effects scholarship that deserves further attention is the examination of intragroup dynamics. It may be arduous to tease out White audiences' attitudes and beliefs regarding culture-specific groups, for example, Whites attempting to distinguish between Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. However, research addressing intragroup variability among minorities steers away from the focus of Whiteness. This action concentrates on media depictions of communities of color and the influence of those portrayals on people of color.

To demonstrate, Schmader, Block, and Lickel (2015) experimentally test the effects of exposure to comedic and dramatic film depictions of Mexican Americans on Mexican American viewers. Findings reveal that audiences who highly identified with their racial and ethnic group found disparaging media imagery damaging to their performance and social esteem and weakened positive implicit attitudes toward the group. In comparison, McKinley, Mastro, and Warber (2014) found that Latinx audiences, when exposed to positive media depictions of their group, reported higher levels of social esteem and were more likely to express favoritism of group members. Taken together, these studies, and others, illustrate the promising direction of race-related media effects scholarship concentrated on intragroup dynamics (see also Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019).

To build on the momentum of intragroup investigations, future research may want to consider Blacks and their exposure to news and its influence on individual and group perceptions. This is especially salient as content analytic research demonstrates that Blacks are overwhelmingly depicted in the news as offenders and abusers of social programs, and these images may influence group perceptions (see Dixon 2006a; 2006b). Also, extending

intragroup examination of Asian American audiences is appropriate. Asian Americans are currently the fastest-growing minority group in the United States. Moreover, Asian Americans have increased representation in television (e.g., ABC's *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-) as well as film (e.g., *Crazy Rich Asians* [2018] and *Always Be My Maybe* [Kahane & Khan, 2019]). Extending this research creates a greater understanding of group dynamics, including often neglected research addressing protective factors that maintain positive racial esteem and group perceptions when audiences are exposed to various media.

Intersectionality

As previously stated, race-related media effects research typically addresses *inter*group relations and to a lesser degree, intragroup dynamics. Also, this work tends to address racial identity, paying far less attention to intersecting identities such as gender or sexual orientation and their relationship to race (Behm-Morawitz, Pennell, & Gerding Speno, 2016). Examining the intersection of race and various identities (e.g., sexuality, gender, and class), often referred to as intersectionality, would be an essential step in expanding race-related media effects scholarship.

Intersectionality acknowledges interconnected identities, including race, gender, class, social location, and sexual orientation, among individuals and the potential implications for audiences to endure various forms of oppression from these overlapping identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Also, intersectionality recognizes the adverse outcomes that are associated with those identities, including racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia (Anthias, 2013). Intersectionality is characteristically adopted within critical race and feminist scholarship (see Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). However, the application of intersectionality in race-related media effects creates a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of media exposure among a diverse racial audience who are exposed to distinct media programing.

Research connecting intersectionality and race-related media effects is limited. However, Mora (2018) explores the role of intersectionality, examining ABC's *Modern Family's* (2009-) character Gloria Pritchett (Sofia Vergara), her various intersecting identities (e.g., gender, race, and class), and audiences' likeability toward the character. Using open and closed-ended survey data, Mora explores the racialized, classed, and gendered characterization of Gloria and participants' social attraction. Results demonstrate that the character's cultural appeal relates to participants' intersectional traits, specifically class and gender identity, showing that the more Gloria's femininity and class were pronounced, the more participants demonstrate social attraction. This research emphasizes media characters' intersecting identities and how each provides a distinct context regarding attraction among audiences (see also Figueroa-Caballero et al., 2019).

Similarly, the intersection of race with identities, including sexuality, class, religion, and gender among audiences, may also influence the effects of media exposure. For example, sexualized media depictions of minority women perpetuate problematic stereotypes specifically at the intersection of race *and* gender (Stamps, 2019). These media depictions may include the sexually seductive "dragon lady" stereotype (Sun et al., 2015) and the "Jezebel" stereotype (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005). How would these media depictions specifically impact women of color? Surprisingly, there is a lack of research demonstrating the impact of race-related media effects on arguably some of the most

at-risk and alienated underrepresented audiences. Currently, scholars may be unaware of the influence of media representations of Black Trans women on LGBTQ audiences in general, and Black Trans women, specifically. Examinations of this type exemplify the type of work bridging intersectionality and race-related media effects. Adopting this framework creates exciting new avenues for exploration and a more nuanced understanding of a heavily saturated media environment.

Researchers should also consider how audiences whose intersecting identities are salient, are driven toward specific media selection and the outcomes from that exposure. For instance, Black women account for more leading roles in scripted television than any other non-White group (Lauzen, 2016). Taking this into consideration, how might media portrayals of Black women as lead characters in programing potentially undermine existing negative stereotypical beliefs of Black women? Also, a gender-fluid non-White viewer disputably has access to expansive representations of their intersecting (i.e., race, gender, sexuality) identities within mass media. Such programing includes *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-), *Queer Eye* (2018-), and *Pose* (2018-), each of which portrays non-White, nongender conforming main characters (Collins, 2018; Murphy, 2018; Murray, 2009). Mass media has begun to include diverse representation and the assumption that audiences are limited in media depictions that resonate with their identities at this particular point and time, is questionable. What are potential outcomes of race-related media effects research concentrating on media that present non-White, nongender conforming personalities to those same audiences? Right now, evidence lacks within this domain.

Diverse media platforms

It is argued that mass media caters to predominately White audiences, representing the ideologies of Whites who are majority decision-makers within the industry (Tukachinsky, 2015). This action potentially ignores marginalized viewers and perpetuates problematic stigmas of some groups (e.g., Blacks) or the erasure of others (e.g., Native Americans). However, the expansive media environment that currently exists offers new terrain for exploration. These include streaming services (e.g., Netflix and Hulu) and video sharing websites (e.g., YouTube and Facebook), which offer diverse media representation of various racial groups.

Moreover, many outlets permit audience interaction via commenting on content, direct sharing of content, as well as the opportunity to generate original content. These actions seemingly bypass gatekeepers of legacy mass media (i.e., broadcast television), where typically, media organizations disseminate material to appease advertisers and stakeholders. This shift suggests that digital and streaming platforms potentially offer agency to communities of color within the sphere of media engagement, exposure, and content creation due to their distinctive financial model (Ito et al., 2009).

Literature implies that shifts in the representation of underrepresented groups are due to the increasing demand of organizations (e.g., NAACP and GLAAD) acknowledging the exclusionary practices of mass media organizations, as well as media companies concentration on the spending power of marginalized groups (Kubey et al., 1995; Tukachinsky, 2015). Whatever the motivation, mass media presenting alternatives for distributing various viewpoints and diverse representations of marginalized groups, which are accessible to mass audiences of all racial backgrounds, is a step in the right direction.

It is also argued that mass media outlets such as YouTube and Facebook may appear to follow similar patterns of reinforcing problematic racial stereotypes via user-generated content and online comments (Kopacz & Lawton, 2013; Weaver, Zelenkaukaite, & Samson, 2012). Nevertheless, the opportunity to examine non-White audiences focused explicitly on media depictions created by and featuring communities of color, and their intragroup engagement is encouraging (Ramasubramanian, 2016). For example, Sun and colleagues (2015) found that Asian American youth preferred digital and social networking sites as each provides positive narratives and diverse images of Asian Americans. Ramasubramanian's (2016) work highlights community-driven, self-reflective media generated by Latinx and Black media content creators. This content is distributed through streaming services and mobile applications and is driven by participatory involvement from Latinx and Black audiences. Ramasubramanian suggests that these programs may strengthen esteem and offer agency to Latinx and Black viewers due to their innate nature of bringing community members together. Although this work is not empirically testing media effects, it acknowledges the potential for empirical work that explores intragroup dynamics among minority audiences, specifically with content that is created and distributed through social and digital mass media outlets.

Expanding theoretical applications

The following are established and emerging theories that are appropriate for examining race-related media effects among communities of color and within racialized media context, yet each has received limited attention. These theories derive from previous and forthcoming work, examining cognitive and behavior dynamics among audiences or present questions that may steer continued examination of the influence of mass media. Each of the following frameworks has the potential to achieve an inclusive representation of various racial groups within race-related media scholarship.

Group vitality

Vitality recognizes a group's assessment of their status, support, and influence within society, and perceptions of vitality may be influential regarding how marginalized communities view themselves and their racial group (Abrams & Giles, 2007). More importantly, vitality influences how minorities navigate life choices, such as taking collective action (e.g., protests) in social spaces where their identities are challenged or unwelcomed. According to this literature, groups that have community support and unbiased representation may have a considerable advantage regarding positive racial, performance, and individual esteem. These assumptions are in line with previous work, suggesting that the more vitality a group has, the more likely that group will thrive as a collective whole (Abrams, Eveland & Giles, 2003). For instance, researchers examine the role of media exposure and vitality among Blacks, and results show that positive media exposure increases vitality and prompts prosocial behaviors (e.g., aspirations toward attending college; Abrams & Giles, 2007; Brooms & Davis, 2017; author, in-press).

Mass media can promote narratives about an array of people, places, and ideas, thus shaping a worldview that many audiences may be unable to experience otherwise, and this may be especially true for people of color (Mastro, 2016). For example, *Black*

Panther (Feige & Coogler, 2018) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (Jacobson & Chu, 2018) are examples of mass media content that has the potential to influence an audience's perception of their racial group. Empirical research within this domain has just begun to scratch the surface. Questions, including how minorities benefit from media exposure of their group in multi-dimensional, affirmative, high-status positions, and how this impacts self-perceptions and group status, is a worthwhile and vital query.

Social identity gratifications

Minority group's media engagement and exposure may influence individual well-being in ways that Whites would not necessarily encounter (Mastro, 2016). Research suggests that media selection (as well as avoidance) may affect perceptions of group identity, racial esteem, vitality, and create a sense of belonging among minority audiences (Abrams & Giles, 2007; 2009). Harwood's (1999) social identity gratifications (SIG), an extension of uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), highlights how audiences increase or sustain positive perceptions of their identity via their deliberate media viewing. SIG acknowledges that viewers actively select mass media that supports their identities, and those same audiences avoid mass media messages that threaten or demean their racial group.

Abrams and Giles apply SIG to address the relationship among Black (2007), Latinx (2009), and Asian (2010) audiences' media selection and avoidance and perceived group vitality and esteem. Results demonstrate that among each, racial identity (particularly among individuals with high racial identification) is an essential factor regarding media selection and avoidance. However, motivations for media selection and avoidance differed, and perceptions of each respective racial groups varied. For example, among Asian American audiences, media selection influenced positive attitudes of other racial groups as Asian representation were rarely seen in mass media; however, this outcome differed for Latinx and Black audiences (Abrams, 2010). In consideration of these complex findings, the underlining results within this body of research deserve considerable attention. What more could scholars learn from understanding the mechanisms that motivate minority audiences' media selection, considering varied content from all forms of mass media platforms, as well as the role of protective factors (e.g., media literacy) that exist?

Qualitative and critical cultural frameworks

As race continues to be recognized as a social construct and malleable identity (Lipsitz, 2006), the examination of race and its effects on audiences also needs to build toward more widespread application in terms of theory. With this in mind, the consideration of qualitative and critical cultural work aids in furthering this goal. Qualitative and critical cultural scholars, for decades, examine racial identity within various forms of mass media, including, but not limited to scripted television (Chidester, 2008; Enck & Morrissey, 2015), film (Griffin, 2015; Madison, 1999), and reality programing (Bell-Jordan, 2008). This work considers the role of race, racial representation, and mass media's potential influence on audiences. A great deal of this work uses in-depth interviews, focus groups, and various forms of critical and qualitative analyses to meaningfully acknowledge the impact of mass media on underrepresented minority groups.

Although the implementation of these inquiries is not empirically tested using quantifiable data, formidable roadmaps for race-related media effects scholars are offered.

For example, Chidester (2008) asks scholars to consider the role of whiteness as an unrecognized and unacknowledged presence in mass media, and question the implications that may arise because of the absence of other racial identities? Likewise, Enck and Morrissey (2015) and Griffin (2015) present the question, what does post-racial mean in a world where mass media promotes racial hierarchy and profits from vilifying people of color? To build on these questions, Stamps (2019) uses thematic analyses to interrogate Asians and Latinx television characters presented in minority-focused television programs. Their findings suggest that problematic depictions continue to be prominent even within minority-focused entertainment and acknowledge that Whites continue to be overrepresented within these minority-centered shows. Lastly, Madison (1999) posited that within mass media, is the antiracist White savior created so Whites can relish in a false narrative that caters to their feelings, and more importantly, how might these depictions influence communities of color? These methods of inquiry and reflective questions are just a sample of the types of interrogations that race-related media effects scholars can begin to interrogate using quantitative tools among underrepresented audiences.

Race-related media effects scholars are embracing the opportunity to bridge this gap, realizing that qualitative and critical cultural scholars have much to offer in advancing race-related media effects. Ramasubramanian and Banjo (2019) have begun an exciting advancement, creating the framework, critical media effects. Critical media effects examine four influential components, including intersectionality, agency, context, and power, and the potential influence of each regarding exposure to mass media on minority groups. Also, author (in-press) utilizes critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to explore the prosocial outcomes of minority audiences from exposure to minority-focused media. This work extends race-related media effects research concentrating on minority representation in mass media, positive narratives on screen, and findings that demonstrate positive impact (e.g., increased aspiration and esteem).

Concluding thoughts

Access to mass media is increasing, and as minorities navigate their media exposure, seeking content that portrays their group positively, examinations of these relationships are imperative (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015). Society, at times, is sluggish at embracing racial differences and endorsing racial equality (Chidester, 2008). However, examining how various forms of mass media influence minorities' well-being, and doing so outside of the consideration of White audiences, promotes a unique shift in race-related media effects research.

The current body of race-related media effects research should not be ignored but realized as a steppingstone for continued growth. In addition to the suggestions listed above, others include examining the systemic issues that exist regarding search engine optimization, which disproportionately vilifies many minority groups (Noble, 2018). Also, there should be a continued interrogation into large-scale media stakeholder's motivation for creating diverse media content targeting minority audiences. Overall, race-related media effects scholarship will only become reflective of various identities

when scholars are encouraged to embrace those multifaceted, inclusive identities, and this article aims to champion that call-to-action.

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