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18 Race/Ethnicity and Media

Abstract: The current chapter systematically documents the implications of exposure to racial and ethnic depictions in the media, on audiences. To this end, the quantity and quality of portrayals of racial and ethnic groups across U.S. media are detailed, including representations of Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Middle Eastern Americans. Next, the empirical evidence demonstrating the effects of exposure to these characterizations, on both members of these groups and non-members, is presented. Whenever possible, attention is devoted to identifying the types of message features and audience characteristics that are likely to produce: (a) damaging intergroup outcomes ranging from cognitions to emotions to behaviors, (b) constructive intergroup outcomes, including prejudice reduction, and (c) harmful or beneficial effects on psychological well-being. An agenda for future research is also discussed, including a call for consideration of multiple and intersecting identities in media effects research.

Keywords: media effects, race/ethnicity, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, intergroup communication, content analysis

Ratings-wise, it works. People like to see it. I don't understand why people don't understand that the world of TV should look like the world outside of TV.

– Shonda Rhimes, *Salon* interview, February 10, 2013

As producer and screenwriter Shonda Rhimes pointedly remarks (above), there is a disconcerting discrepancy between the content preferences of media audiences and the offerings that are produced for them. Indeed, despite the fact that both TV programming and films with inclusive and wide-ranging casts attract larger audiences than media fare with less diverse casts (Hunt et al. 2017), content analytic research has consistently revealed a pattern of underrepresentation and misrepresentation, across platforms and genres (Mastro 2009). Although portrayals of Blacks on primetime entertainment television provide one exception to this tendency, the degree of evenhandedness currently found for this group within this context does not generalize across different media forms or even across TV genres. Unsurprisingly then, concerns have repeatedly been raised regarding the implications of exposure to this content on both underrepresented and dominant group members. The current chapter details the existing empirical research in this area. Specifically, this chapter: (a) reviews the quantitative content analytic research documenting portrayals of race/ethnicity in English-language U.S. media; (b) summarizes the small body of research examining the implications of exposure to these characterizations (both positive and negative) on racial/ethnic group members; and (c) synthesizes the broader array of research investigating the effects of exposure to

both constructive and unfavorable/stereotypic racial/ethnic portrayals on dominant/White audiences. Implications of this work and recommendations for ongoing research are also offered. It should be noted that although the bulk of the quantitative research exploring these issues focuses on television, research examining film, advertising, video games, and other interactive media is addressed when possible.

1 Portrayals and effects

Media messages convey both concrete and abstract information about the characteristics, behaviors, norms, beliefs, status, etc., of different groups in society. Given this, it is not surprising that media use has been implicated in a wide variety of real-world intergroup and identity-based outcomes (Mastro 2009). Indeed, alongside messages from family, friends, and other cultural institutions, media exposure contributes in a modest but consistent and meaningful way to individual's belief-systems regarding one's own and other racial/ethnic groups and can even play a role in dictating behaviors in society. Accordingly, how and how often diverse groups are depicted in the media is consequential as the effects of exposure depend, largely, on the nature and frequency of the media characterization.

2 Black Americans

When it comes to media representations of Blacks, in several domains positive changes in both the number and quality of depictions have emerged over the decades – although this is not the case for all genres or platforms (Mastro 2009). Research suggests that sheer numeric representation in the media communicates a message to audiences about the value and standing of different groups in society (Harwood & Roy 2005). In light of this, it is important to address not only the quality but also the quantity of media representations of diverse groups.

2.1 Quantity of portrayals

Content analytic evidence indicates that the rate at which Blacks are seen on prime-time television, in advertising, and (at times) in film has improved to the point of parity with population parameters: 13.3% in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2015). Although this is cause for cautious optimism, representation varies dramatically based on film and TV genres (Mastro 2009; Smith, Choueiti & Pieper 2012).

Historically, very few images of Blacks could be found on primetime television prior to the 1970s (Wilson, Gutierrez & Chao 2013). During that time, Blacks comprised

approximately 12% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Briefs 2010), yet they made up only 6% of characters on TV (Greenberg & Brand 1994). The proportion rose to 8% in the 1980s and 11% by the early 1990s (Mastro & Greenberg 2000), with the mid-1990s marking the start of numeric equity with the U.S. population (approximately 13% on TV & 12% of the U.S.). This more equitable rate of representation has been sustained since that time (Mastro & Tukachinsky 2011; Monk-Turner et al. 2010). Although these overarching percentages are a meaningful indicator, a more careful inspection reveals a less evenhanded picture, with representations varying, sometimes dramatically, across genres (e.g., Signorielli 2009a, 2009b). To illustrate, in her work documenting depictions of diverse groups across the TV landscape, Signorielli (2009a, 2009b) found that although Blacks had achieved equivalence with real-world figures in term of their overall rate of depiction, Black characters were largely isolated to limited genres and networks or shows with “mostly minority characters” (Signorielli 2009a). Consequently, she argues that looking only at overall representation figures masks the ongoing segregation across the broader television landscape. Earlier research by Harwood and Anderson (2002) yielded similar results indicating that although the number of Black characters on television had increased, half were found in only 7 of 61 shows.

When it comes to analyses of depictions of Blacks in film, much the same pattern emerges. Although the rate of appearance of Black characters meets or (in some cases) exceeds their proportion of the population, they are not found in a wide array of film genres and are instead largely presented in films with predominately Black casts (e.g., Eschholtz, Bufkin & Long 2002). This tendency to constrain Blacks to certain genres or types of programs is not without consequence. Given the norms and limitations inherent to the content, style, and structure of different genres, such compartmentalization in representation increases the potential for audiences to be exposed to one-sided representations or not to see any Black characters at all (e.g., Mastro 2009). Accordingly, a consideration of the way Blacks are portrayed in the media is critical.

2.2 Quality of portrayals

In terms of the quality of television portrayals of Blacks, the earliest characterizations (when present) relied predominately on unfavorable archetypes popularized in radio and film (Greenberg, Mastro & Brand 2002; Wilson, Gutierrez & Chao 2013). These included depictions of Blacks as servants and laughable objects of humor. The 1960s, during and following the Civil Rights movement, were marked by changes in programming which intended, in part, to provide more sympathetic and favorable representations of Blacks and of interracial relations in the United States. Although a positive departure from the past, these depictions were sometimes seen as overly idealistic given the realities of the era. By the 1970s Black characters on television were primarily found in sitcoms featuring predominately Black casts. To some extent, these situation comedies were identified as important for their focus on Black families across

varying socioeconomic backgrounds. At the same time, many disparaging and otherwise unflattering stereotypes were also common in this content, including depictions of Blacks as servants, objects of humor, lazy, poor, and unemployed (Ford 1997; Greenberg, Mastro & Brand 2002; Ward 2004). The 1980s offered a notable shift in the quality of television portrayals of Blacks. During this timeframe, Blacks were presented as professional and successful experts, a trend that continues today (e.g., Harwood & Anderson 2002; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005). Yet content analytic evidence also indicates that compared with other racial/ethnic groups on TV, Blacks continue to be portrayed as less respected, less professional, and more unkempt in their appearance (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005; Monk-Turner et al. 2010; Signorielli 2009a, 2009b). Altogether then, the current landscape offers an array of admirable characterizations but with questions remaining regarding Black character's isolation within programming/genres and the persistence of certain stereotypic media narratives.

When it comes to depictions of Blacks in the news, a distinctly different and entirely unfavorable set of messages is offered, revolving primarily around criminality. Although Blacks are presented only infrequently in the news, when represented they are disproportionately seen in crime news stories (Dixon & Linz 2000a; Entman 1994; Romer, Jamieson & DeCoteau 1998), with few exceptions (i.e., Dixon & Williams 2015). In such news coverage, Blacks not only are portrayed as criminal suspects or perpetrators (Dixon & Linz 2000a) but also are presented as threatening and disheveled (Entman 1994). Further, Dixon and Linz's (2002) data indicate that prejudicial information (such as prior arrests) is reported more frequently in the news when the defendant is Black (vs. White). This disproportionate coverage of Blacks as criminals is inconsistent with Whites' rate of depiction as criminals and is also discrepant from real-world statistics such as arrest reports (e.g., Dixon & Linz 2000a, 2000b). This finding holds for both Black adults seen in the news as well as Black youth in the news (Dixon & Azocar 2007). In fact, Dixon and Azocar (2007) find that 39% of juvenile perpetrators seen in the news are Black (18% in Department of Justice statistics) whereas 24% are White (22% in Department of Justice statistics). Finally, in addition to their overrepresentation as criminals in the news, Blacks are substantially underrepresented as police officers on television news (3%), compared with U.S. police population figures demonstrating that Black police officers represent roughly 16% of law enforcement (Dixon, Azocar & Casas 2003; Governing Data 2013).

2.3 Effects of exposure: Black audiences

The implications of exposure to messages about racial and ethnic groups in the media are bound to the quality of the representations. For Black viewers, exposure to the unfavorable depictions that have been prevalent for decades in mass media offerings has been linked with undesirable psychological and social effects including deflated self-esteem among adults and adolescents (Tan & Tan 1979; Ward 2004) and reduced career aspirations (Gordon 2015). For example, Martins and Harrison's (2012)

longitudinal panel survey of elementary school children revealed TV viewing to be negatively associated with the self-esteem of Black, but not White, children. The authors suggest that this deleterious outcome for Blacks stems from viewing the unfavorable characterizations of their group that are commonly presented on television. More detailed examinations of this relationship support this assertion. Such research has found that specific TV viewing patterns are associated with particular esteem-based outcomes, such that the type of content (and the features of those depictions) affect the consequences for different dimensions of self-concept and esteem (e.g., Ward 2004).

Similarly, Gordon's (2015) survey-based research found that exposure to and identification with Black figures on TV and in music was associated with reduced academic performance and career aspirations among Black high school students. Additionally, perceptions of ability in science were negatively associated with the proportion of stereotypical depictions of Blacks in student's TV diet.

Importantly, research in this domain also indicates that exposure to constructive messages can prompt more auspicious evaluations of one's self-concept and views about one's group. For example, McDermott and Greenberg's (1984) research with Black 4th and 5th graders found a positive association between viewing Black family television programming and general self-esteem (though not racial esteem) among children with positive attitudes toward the Black characters depicted in the content. Lending some support to this finding, Stroman (1986) found a positive relationship between the self-concept of Black elementary school girls and TV exposure, with these girls overwhelmingly reporting holding favorable attitudes toward the Black characters they saw on television. However, esteem was not affected by either exposure to Black-oriented media or identification with Black characters.

2.4 Effects of exposure: Outgroup (non-Black) audiences

The influence of exposure to media representations of underrepresented groups on the beliefs and behaviors of outgroup members (typically, Whites) is well-documented (e.g., Mastro 2009; Punyanunt-Carter 2008). Depending on audience member's real-world intergroup contact (and their existing belief-systems), exposure to depictions of race and ethnicity has the potential to shape how diverse groups are viewed and the norms of treatment toward them. Again, the manner in which different groups are depicted is central to this relationship. For example, both long-term exposure and one-time exposure to negative portrayals of Blacks in the media have been found to be associated with unfavorable perceptions of Blacks in terms of criminality, educational attainment, intelligence, work ethic, economic standing, and even values (Dixon 2007; Ford 1997; Fujioka 1999; Mastro & Kopacz 2006; Peffley, Shields & Williams 1996; Tan, Fujioka & Tan 2000). Exposure to unfavorable representations is also linked with unsympathetic political positions and antagonistic views on

diversity-related policies (e.g. Busselle & Crandall 2002; Tan, Fujioka & Tan 2000). At the same time, exposure to more favorable characterizations, including both positive and counterstereotypical depictions, has been found to discourage stereotyping, prompt more favorable perceptions of Blacks, and encourage more sympathetic positions on diversity related policies (e.g., Fujioka 1999; Mastro & Kopacz 2006).

3 Latino Americans

What content analytic evidence (and everyday experience with mass media) continuously reveals is that advances or improvements in the quality and nature of portrayals for one group do not translate into positive changes for other groups (and vice versa). Accordingly, it is essential to understand the unique trajectory of media representations of distinct, diverse groups to get a sense of inclusion and/or isolation, mistreatment and/or improvements over time and across genres.

3.1 Quantity of portrayals

At 17.6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census 2015) Latinos comprise the largest ethnic minority group in the United States. Yet, Latinos are presented only infrequently across the media landscape. When it comes to television, Latinos have been severely underrepresented for nearly six decades (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi 2015; Mastro & Sink 2017). In fact, the only period during which Latinos were presented on TV at a rate proportionate to their population in the U.S. was in the 1950s: 3% of the characters on primetime TV and approximately 2.4% of the population in the U.S. Since then, although the Latino population has continued to grow, the number of Latinos on TV has stagnated and even dropped during some decades. Indeed, in the 1980s, Latinos comprised 8% of the U.S. population but represented only 1% of characters seen on television (Gerbner & Signorielli 1979; Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez 1980; *New York Times* 1988). This discrepancy worsened in the 1990s, as Latinos rose to 11% of the U.S. population but idled at approximately 1.5% of the TV population (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005). The 2000s saw a modest rise in the number of Latinos on TV to a range of between 3.86.5% (Children Now 2004; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005). However, this rate of representation remained well below Latino's 13% proportion of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Briefs 2010). Today, Latinos constitute a mere 3% of the TV population (Mastro & Sink 2017). Research additionally indicates that Latino men have all but vanished in recurrent roles on television, with Latinas more likely to be found in recurring parts on primetime (Negrón-Muntaner 2014).

Only a handful of quantitative content analyses have explored the numeric representation of Latinos in other forms of media. This research indicates that the

persistent underrepresentation facing Latinos on TV also exists in other platforms, including film and video games. For example, in their analysis of top grossing films across 11 countries, Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper (2013) found that Latinos made up only 1.6% of characters. Further, Knowlee and colleagues' (2001) work revealed that Latinos totaled only 2% of the characters in the top-selling video games (across seven major consoles) and that all these characters appeared in sports games. This finding is consistent with results from Williams, Martins, Consalvo and Ivory (2009) who found that only 2.7% of the characters in the 150 top-selling video games were Latino, none of whom were primary characters in the games.

3.2 Quality of portrayals

When portrayed on primetime television, Latinos have historically appeared in a limited range of stereotypic roles, including objects of ridicule, criminals or law enforcers, and objects of sexual appeal (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005). In roles related to ridicule, Latino characters are the focus of demeaning humor and are typically portrayed as lazy, subordinate, unintelligent, and unable to effectively speak English (Mastro & Greenberg 2000). Roles tied to criminality exist on both sides of the law, with Latino criminals characterized as dishonest, disheveled, young, and aggressive (Berg 1990). On the other hand, law enforcers are honest, intelligent, and respected (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005). When depicted as sex objects, Latino characters are defined by their hot-temperaments as well as their sexual attractiveness and sexual aggressiveness (Berg 1990). Finally, Latinos are rarely seen in high status roles in the media and are more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be portrayed in service roles (Children Now 2000). Although evidence does indicate that some of these stereotypic characterizations are fading from the television landscape, (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz 2005), research also reveals that Latinos continue to be depicted as inarticulate and with accents (Mastro & Sink 2017).

Given that many of the most common archetypes on TV were derived from early film depictions, it is unsurprising that representations in film are not altogether different from those on television (Wilson, Gutiérrez & Chao 2013). For example, images linking Latinos with comedic simplemindedness or with criminality trace back to films of the early 1900s, wherein Mexican men were persistently presented as untrustworthy bandits or dimwitted buffoons (Berg 1990; Trevino 1985). Outrage over these characterizations, largely from Mexican and South American audiences for U.S. films, led to a movement away from these destructive depictions. The dominant characterization that emerged in their place was of Latinos as attractive but hot-tempered objects of romantic and sexual desire. This Latin lover representation (for both men and women) was wildly popular and quickly became a staple in films of the mid-1900s (Trevino 1985). The early film era also propagated images of Mexican men as

lazy peasants or peons, particularly in the genre of western films (Trevino 1985). Currently, research indicates that despite the success of a handful of Latino/a super-stars, portrayals of Latinos in film continue to be constrained to these limited and largely unfavorable stereotypes (Negrón-Muntaner 2014).

When it comes to video games, although concerns regarding this medium's tendency to promote racial stereotypes (Leonard 2006) may be somewhat overstated, they are not entirely unwarranted. Certain genres (e.g., urban/street) do appear to capitalize on the exploitation of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes (e.g., Everett & Watkins 2008). However, there is insufficient research (and a deficiency in Latino characters) to determine if this pattern generalizes beyond this sub-genre. Content analyses have also revealed that only 2% of heroes in video games are Latino (Knowlee et al. 2001). Further, despite the fact that sports-related games contain the largest number of Latino characters, little is known about the manner in which Latinos are characterized within this popular medium.

Last, research has examined depictions of Latinos in the news. Although limited, this work indicates that Latinos are rarely represented and when they are covered, it is nearly exclusively in immigration-related stories (Dixon & Williams 2015). Within this coverage, the emphasis is disproportionately centered on illegal (vs. legal) immigration and on undocumented immigrants (Chavez, Whiteford & Hoewe 2010). Further, not only does the rate of coverage exceed real-world estimates, but undocumented immigrants are also profoundly overrepresented as criminals (outside the context of immigration) compared with Department of Justice crime statistics (Dixon & Williams 2015). Immigration news focuses predominately on Mexicans and frames this group as a threat to the economic, moral, and physical safety of U.S. citizens (see Atwell Seate & Mastro 2015).

3.3 Effects of exposure: Latino audiences

Considering the unfavorable portrayals of Latinos found across U.S., English-language media, it should come as no surprise that exposure to these depictions have been found to have a harmful effect on Latino audience members. For example, Schmader, Block, and Lickel (2015) experimentally tested the effects of exposure to stereotypic film depictions of Mexican Americans (both comedic and dramatic) on Mexican American audiences. For participants who highly identified with their ethnic group, even when the content was considered entertaining, viewers found these depictions to be demeaning and damaging to their performance and social self-esteem. In addition, exposure to these depictions weakened positive implicit attitudes towards Latinos, in general. Rivadeneyra, Ward, and Gordon (2007) found comparable results with their survey-based research on exposure to negative portrayals of Latinos. Their findings demonstrated that Latinos who highly identified with their ethnic group were negatively affected by exposure, including harm to

their appearance and social esteem. Findings from Atwell Seate and Mastro (2015) yielded comparable results. More specifically, in their experimental examination of the effect of negative TV news coverage of Latinos on Mexican American audiences, they found that exposure harmed Mexican American viewers' perceptions of their ingroup's entitativity (i.e., perceptions that one's group is coherent and effective). Notably, McKinley, Mastro, and Warber (2014) found that Latinos exposed to *positive* depictions of themselves in the media reported higher levels of appearance and social esteem and were more likely to favor their ingroup. Taken together, these results underscore the importance of favorable messages about one's group in the media.

Alongside English-language media, there are also several Spanish language networks in the U.S. which provide a distinct set of characterizations and narratives for Latino audiences (e.g. Telemundo, Univision, UniMás). Although not without criticism, Spanish language media in the U.S. offers more diverse and respectable portrayals of Latinos for Spanish-speaking audiences. As such, Latinos are likely to find content which offers positive cultural representations (Ortiz & Behm-Morawitz 2015). Currently, only limited research exists which examines the effects of exposure to this content on Latino audiences. Subervi-Velez and Necochea's (1990) pilot study of 117 Latino children explored the implications of exposure to English-language and Spanish-language TV on perceptions of self. They found no effect of either English or Spanish language television use on Latino adolescents' self-concept.

More recently, Ortiz and Behm-Morawitz (2015) surveyed 209 Latino adults and found that, whereas English-language television viewing was associated with elevated beliefs in prejudice and discrimination against Latinos in the U.S., this was not the case for exposure to Spanish-language programming. Given the proliferation of Spanish language media offerings in the U.S., much more comprehensive research is needed to illuminate this relationship.

3.4 Effects of exposure: Outgroup (non-Latino) audiences

Consistent with the research on exposure to unfavorable depictions of Blacks, consuming negative and stereotypic messages about Latinos has a harmful influence on the beliefs and behaviors of Whites (and other non-Latinos) including: (a) prompting unconstructive emotions about and judgments regarding Latinos, (b) encouraging dispositional attributions, (c) decreasing support for policies sympathetic to Latinos, and (d) generating active and passive harming behaviors (Mastro 2003; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz 2007; Mastro & Kopacz 2006; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi 2015). Research indicates that these effects can emerge as a result of both long-term media use as well as a single media exposure. In addition, higher levels of media consumption as well as limited real-world contact with Latinos both exacerbate these relationships (e.g., Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz 2007).

Again, however, the media's influence is not limited to harmful outcomes. Research indicates that exposure to favorable media portrayals of Latinos can reduce negative stereotyping and have a positive effect on intergroup attitudes. Indeed, even a one-time exposure to favorable Latino characterizations has been found to improve White's perceptions about Latinos (Mastro & Tukachinsky 2011).

4 Native Americans

Native Americans and Alaska Natives (not multi-racial) comprise 1.2% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census 2015). When it comes to media depictions, they are nearly non-existent. An analysis of 12 primetime TV seasons spanning from 1987 to 2009 identified only 2 unique, recurring Native American characters out of a sample of 2,336 regular characters (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi 2015). When they are depicted in the media, cultural and linguistic diversity are ignored (Tan, Fujioka & Lucht 1997); this, despite the fact that there are more than 500 federally recognized Native American tribes in the U.S. The few studies that have documented the manner in which Native Americans are depicted across media indicate that they are typically characterized in historical contexts, as spiritual, as people with health or social problems, as mascots, in association with casinos, and in "traditional" garments and headdresses (Fryberg 2003; Fryberg et al. 2008; Tan, Fujioka & Lucht 1997).

4.1 Effects of exposure: Native American audiences

For Native Americans, consuming the limited and highly unfavorable characterizations of Native Americans that are offered by mass media has been linked with a number of undesirable psychological outcomes. To illustrate, Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, and Stone (2008) found that exposure to stereotypical media depictions of American Indians depressed the appearance, performance, and social self-esteem of American Indian audiences and harmed perceptions of community worth. Further, their work revealed that viewing negative representations of Native Americans in the media constrained achievement-related possible selves (i.e., what one hopes to become).

4.2 Effects of exposure: Outgroup (non-Native American) audiences

Empirical studies exploring the impact of overall media exposure on non-Native audiences' perceptions about and behaviors toward Native Americans have found no relationship (see Tan, Fujioka & Lucht 1997). As Tan and colleagues

(1997) argue, however, the number of portrayals may simply be too few to pose an influence.

5 Asian Americans

Only scant quantitative content analyses have been conducted which examine depictions of Asian Americans in the media or the effects of exposure on audiences. As such, it is difficult to offer much detail when it comes to medium-specific findings or the implications of exposure for Asian or non-Asian consumers.

Currently, Asian American and Pacific Islanders make up 5.8% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census 2015) and 3.8% of the characters appearing on primetime television (Mastro & Sink 2017). It is common to find Asian media characters linked with technology, math, science, strong family values, a strong work ethic, and in roles that exemplify the “model minority” stereotype (Mastro & Stern 2003; Taylor & Stern 1997; Yuen et al. 2005). This stereotype, meant to highlight a racial/ethnic group’s achievements (in this case, certain Asian Americans), can: (a) create extraordinary pressure to meet the stereotypic norm; (b) encourage exclusion across groups; and even (c) lead to political marginalization as the diversity of this population and its varying needs go unrecognized (e.g., Taylor & Stern 1997; Zhang 2010).

In addition, Hamamoto’s (1994) comprehensive assessment of television programming spanning five decades found that, whereas Asian American characters exist, the preponderance of images perpetuate racial stereotypes. More recent research reveals much the same, indicating that Asian women are commonly portrayed as either overly humble, obedient, and exotic – or – as ruthless, sexually seductive “dragon ladies” (Lee & Joo 2005; Yuen et al. 2005). Asian men are often characterized as effeminate, asexual, and nerdy – or – as one-dimensional cunning villains and martial artists (Yuen et al. 2005). Finally, when not represented in these limited ways, Asians are routinely depicted as foreign or simply “other” in terms of norms, culture, and the like (Lee & Joo 2005; Park, Gabbadon & Chernin 2006).

5.1 Effects of exposure: Asian American audiences

The research addressing media effects among Asian American audiences has focused more on how this group uses media than on how the content affects them. For example, Abrams (2010) applied insights from research and theorizing in the domain of social identity gratifications to identify and understand Asian Americans’ media usage tendencies. The study revealed that television selection for Asian Americans, especially those that highly identified with their ethnic group, was focused on identity gratification, or seeing oneself portrayed in media narratives.

Asian Americans with lower levels of identification with their ethnic group viewed television for escapism and were not strict consumers of programming that showcased Asian American characters. Consistent with these results, Sun, Liberman, Butler, Lee, and Webb (2015) found that for many Asian Americans (Asian American youth, in particular), digital and social networking sites that provide more positive images and narratives regarding Asian American are a source of alternative media.

5.2 Effects of exposure: Outgroup (non-Asian) audiences

Few studies have examined the influence of media use on non-Asians' stereotypes about and behavioral intentions regarding Asian Americans. Generally, this work indicates that media exposure is associated with stereotypic views about Asian Americans, including perceptions of Asians as nerdy, intelligent and academically successful, and socially alienated (Zhang 2010). Further, television exposure has been associated with decreased intent to interact with Asians.

6 Arab and/or Middle Eastern Americans

Very few empirical studies have examined Arab and/or Middle Eastern depictions in the media. The most recent assessment of television is from the 2003–2004 season (Children Now 2004). In that study, Arab and/or Middle Eastern characters were found to constitute only 0.5% of the total primetime population and 0.3% of the characters appearing in the shows' opening credits. In nearly 46% of these roles, the characters were identified to be criminals. When it comes to film and news, Arab and/or Middle Eastern depictions revolve predominantly around themes of terrorism, with Arab and/or Middle Eastern characters in film lacking a particular nationality, accent, or dialect (e.g., Nashef 2011). An additional point of clarification is warranted here: Although the Islamic faith is widely followed in the Middle East, the majority of Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region, with Indonesia being the largest Muslim-majority nation (Pew Research Center 2015) – a reality overlooked in the media, which commonly depicts Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims as homogenous and interchangeable.

6.1 Effects of exposure: Ingroup (Arab/Middle Eastern) audiences

Very little is known about the media preferences or viewing patterns of Arab and/or Middle Eastern Americans, or, relatedly, the implications of exposure to media messages about ingroup members. In one study, conducted outside of the U.S., Das and colleagues (2009) found that Muslims exposed to terrorist depictions of their group reported increased prejudice toward Europeans.

6.2 Effects of exposure: Outgroup (non-Arab/Middle Eastern) audiences

Media research addressing the implications of exposure to depictions of Arabs and/or Middle Easterners on outgroups is also sorely lacking. Given the nearly exclusive focus on terrorism in portrayals of this group, the bulk of the empirical studies in this domain have focused on this characterization – and more specifically on portrayals of Muslims as terrorists. This research consistently demonstrates that viewing this predominant narrative increases perceptions that Muslims are aggressive, and intensifies support for policies that harm the Muslim community, including both military action in Muslim countries as well as support for harsh public policies that target Muslims in the U.S. and internationally (Saleem et al. 2015; Saleem, Yang & Ramasubramanian 2016). Research in the context of video games finds comparable results, revealing that playing “Arab terrorist” games increases both anti-Arab attitudes as well as perceptions that Arabs are aggressive, generally (Saleem & Anderson 2013).

7 Multiple ethnicities/intersecting identities

What may be apparent based on the research that has been addressed to this point is that the empirical studies examining issues of media and race/ethnicity tend to address only one group membership at a time (although this is not exclusively the case). Portrayals of Latinos may be examined (for example), but identities such as Black Latinos/as, LGBT Latinos, etc., receive little attention. Although there are legitimate and appropriate reasons for this practice (including homogenization in media portrayals and constraints in empirical research), the exploration of multiple identities and/or intersectionality is certainly the next important step within this area of scholarship. Intersectionality emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations including race, gender, and class (Crenshaw 1989), and also recognizes the social divisions and social relationships that account for a marginalized group’s unique lived experiences (Anthias 2013). Accordingly, taking an intersectional approach to the study of media and race/ethnicity opens the door to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities within our social and mediated environment. Equally importantly, it lends voice to often overlooked communities.

8 Concluding thoughts

Despite limitations, important conclusions can be drawn from the overarching body of research examining issues of media and race/ethnicity. Foremost among these is that both the quantity and the quality of media representations are critical to

outcomes associated with media use, with effects varying in line with the nature of the characterization. That is to say, just as unfavorable messages can produce harmful intergroup outcomes, auspicious representations can improve intergroup dynamics in society. In addition, it is critical to recognize that media use has implications for both dominant and underserved groups. For marginalized groups, mainstream media use can lead to increased apprehension about experiencing bias and intolerance in society. For dominant group members, media use appears to be one factor contributing to outcomes associated with stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (in terms of both exacerbating and lessening these responses). Finally, for all consumers, exposure has the potential to influence the self-confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations of the viewers.

As acclaimed filmmaker Ava DuVernay poignantly notes, “There’s a belonging problem in Hollywood. Who dictates who belongs? The very body who dictates that, looks all one way” (Buckley 2016). Despite this reality, perhaps transformations in the nature of our media environment signal the potential for positive changes. The profound increase in traditional channels of media messages (e.g., cable TV offerings) alongside new and digital media offerings (and the associated ability for diverse communities to produce their own content) means that there are increased opportunities (although not yet realized) for media programming tailored to and featuring underserved groups in front and behind the camera (e.g., Kubey et al. 1995). In light of this, it is imperative for the next phase of research in this area to more rigorously explore the experiences of diverse audiences, and to transition from the heavy focus on dominant group members.

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