

TELEVISION PORTRAYALS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE UNITED STATES: THE ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, MEDIA USE, AND GROUP IDENTITY AND VITALITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of television portrayals of ethnic minorities, particularly in the United States on group vitality and identity. The empirical evidence shows that certain television programs may influence minorities' perceptions of their group vitality and identities and media selection. This paper presents the effects of television depictions of minorities focusing on the individual differences perspective. Social identity theory, ethnolinguistic identity theory, uses and gratifications, and social identity gratifications help explain the role of individual differences on the use of media for social identity and group vitality.

INTRODUCTION

In the last several decades, there has been the evidence showing the change in television portrayals of ethnic minorities in the United States (Harwood, 1999; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Research shows the improvement of portrayals of ethnic minorities regarding the frequency of displaying minority characters and stereotypes of minorities on television (e.g., Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). Thus, the question is whether or not the improvement of these television depictions of minorities influences their group vitality and identities.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of the U.S. television portrayals of ethnic minorities on group vitality and identity. First, I provided theoretical frameworks explaining

group vitality and identity and media uses and gratifications. Second, I reviewed empirical research relating to television depictions of ethnic minorities. Third, I analyzed the effects of television programs on minorities' perception of their group identities and vitality. Finally, I provided a conclusion and recommendations for future research. In this paper, I focus on the four largest ethnic minorities in the United States: African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

In the United States, television portrayals of ethnic minorities have influenced audiences' perceptions and stereotypes of minorities (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Television shows and its programs provide audiences with constructed realities. Audiences may relate their viewing of constructed realities on television with their real life

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