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Television Viewing and Ethnic Stereotypes: Do College Students Form Stereotypical Perceptions of Ethnic Groups as a Result of Heavy Television Consumption?

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This study investigated television viewing patterns of college students and their subsequent perceptions of ethnic minority groups in the United States. A brief version of the Big-Five Personality Traits instrument was used to obtain respondents' opinions of five different ethnic groups. Significant differences in stereotypes held were identified based on the amount of television viewing and amount of exposure to specific television genres. The results suggest that many heavy television viewers hold ethnic stereotypes; they also suggest a need for increased media critique and consumer education.

KEYTERMS *college students, cultivation theory, ethnicity, personality traits, social cognitive theory, stereotypes, television viewing*

Positive and negative stereotypes exist in our society. Although stereotypes are often assumed to be negative, the reverse is also true even though positive stereotypes are rarely identified as a problem. Ashmore and Del Boca

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(1981) identified the term *stereotype* as descriptive rather than derogatory, which may be positively or negatively valenced. Some argue that stereotypes are a by-product of human natural cognitive tendency to categorize the internal and external world for simplification (Hamilton, 1981; Hamilton & Trier, 1986). Ashmore and Del Boca defined a stereotype as one group's generalized and widely accepted beliefs about the personal attributes of another group; in essence, the perception of a group as generic rather than being made up of individuals. Kanahara (2006) defined a stereotype as a belief about a group of individuals. Gorham (1999) used the term *racial myths* to describe stereotypical perceptions. Gorham noted the important role played by the media in contributing to the maintenance of these myths by repetitively exposing consumers to language and contextual associations aligning with mythical viewpoints.

Others have argued that stereotypes tend to form when humans have limited experience with an unknown world and in turn rely on vicarious experiences through other outlets such as television or movies (Berry & Mitchell-Kernan, 1982; Fujioka, 1999; Gandy, 2001; Gilens, 1996; Graves, 1999; Hawkins & Pingree, 1982; Leifer, Gordon, & Graves, 1974; Taylor & Stern, 1997). *Cultivation theory* (Gerbner, 1998) asserts that such information gleaned from television can lead one to hold a generalized view of the world as a mean and dangerous place. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1994; Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997) also addresses the potential for individuals to hold erroneous perceptions of reality based on media observation. For this reason, media scholars continually criticize the media's portrayal of minority groups as a contributing factor for existing negative stereotypes.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the shaping of individual perceptions of ethnic groups and the media's role in this process. The analysis focused on college students, their television viewing, and the potential impact of such viewing on racial stereotyping. For this research, stereotypes were measured in terms of the Big-Five personality traits (e.g., Goldberg, 1992). The five traits under scrutiny included measures of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Particularly, the focus was to assess whether heavy exposure to television had an impact on respondent perceptions of the personality traits of Caucasians, African Americans, Asians, Latino/Hispanics, and Native Americans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic Stereotypes

Several studies identify current stereotypes with respect to various ethnic groups (Dates & Barlow, 1990a, 1990b; Fisher, 1994; McAneny, 1993; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994; Smith,

1991; Tan et al., 1997; Taylor & Stern, 1997). Caucasians are most commonly stereotyped as being intelligent, egotistical, and pleasant/friendly (Niemann et al., 1994). In addition to these traits, Caucasian males are also considered upper class and racist whereas Caucasian females are considered attractive. From a list of Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, Smith found that Caucasians received the highest scores in all traits measured (work ethic, wealth, dependency, violence, intelligence, and patriotism). Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, and Howard (1997) found similar results when exposing participants to digitally produced faces of Caucasian and African American men and women. Their findings revealed that participants quickly associated positive traits (e.g., trustworthy) with the Caucasian images and negative traits (e.g., cruel) with the African American images.

Research has identified stereotypes held of African Americans and they include, but are not limited to, inferior, lazy, dumb, dishonest, comical, unethical, and crooked (United States Commission for the Study of Civil Rights, 1977). Dates and Barlow (1990a) added insolent, bestial, brutish, power hungry, money hungry, and ignorant to the above list. In addition, Niemann et al. (1994) found common stereotypes of African Americans to be athletic, dark-skinned, and antagonistic. Stereotypes also vary by gender. African American males were reported to have muscular appearance and participate in criminal activities, whereas African American females were stereotyped as loud speakers, pleasant/friendly, and unmannerly (Niemann et al., 1994). Violence and antagonism appear to dominate as stereotypical elements used to describe African Americans. An opinion poll by McAneny (1993) reported that more than one-third (37%) of African American and Caucasian adults viewed African Americans as “more likely” than any other ethnic group to commit crimes.

Fisher (1994) found the stereotypes held of Asian Americans include such traits as affluent, highly educated, holding managerial/professional occupations, and rapidly growing in number. Niemann et al. (1994) found the top stereotypical elements attributed to Asian Americans were intelligent, soft speakers, and short in stature. Asian American males were reported to be achievement oriented, and hard workers, whereas Asian American females were viewed as pleasant/friendly (Niemann et al., 1994).

The dominant stereotypical elements held by respondents for Latino/Hispanic Americans were dark skinned and lower class. Hispanic males are perceived as hard workers, antagonistic, and non-college educated; whereas Hispanic females are stereotyped as dark haired, attractive, pleasant/friendly, and overweight (Niemann et al., 1994). Mendez-Morse (2000) described females (Latinas) frequently stereotyped as being dominated by males and many labeled their primary responsibility as a wife and a mother, having limited access to education and employment (Mendez-Morse, 2000).

Tan et al. (1997) found that some popular stereotypes of Native Americans included alcoholics, lazy, out of work and on welfare, uneducated, and that they live on reservations because they are unable to “make it” in mainstream America. They also found that Native Americans are commonly perceived as having “super citizen status” in that they receive checks from the government just because they are Native Americans.

Stereotypes and Media Theory

Several mass communication theories attempt to explain a link between existing stereotypes and media portrayals. For example, the cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) asserts that viewers cumulatively internalize messages as a result of massive exposure to television’s uniform messages and subsequently hold a more generalized conception or worldview. Gerbner argued that viewers are more likely to accept portrayals as valid and real when television is watched frequently. In addition, the cultivation theory asserts that there is a connection between television content and the viewer’s perception of the world as a mean and dangerous place (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation occurs when one is heavily exposed to television’s stereotypical messages.

Although cultivation theory focuses primarily on television consumption and less on individual cognition, the social cognitive theory addresses cognitive development resulting from observation. The theory explains how behaviors, attitudes, and values can be learned vicariously through the observation of others (Tan et al., 1997). This learning can occur through direct observation as well as mediated observations. Individual cognitive factors may determine what events are observed and retained and how that information will be used or imitated in the future (Bandura, 1994). Through heavy exposure to the often inaccurate world of television, televised images may eventually appear to be authentic in the eyes of the viewer (Bandura, 1994). Hawkins and Pingree (1982) argued that heavy television viewing shapes viewers’ beliefs and conceptions of reality. Tan et al. hypothesized that television acted as a socializing agent by allowing novices to learn about socialization via television, internalize, and ultimately project the information observed into their own individual reality. Their research findings indicated that adolescents were especially receptive to the values observed in television.

For some people with limited direct contact with other ethnic groups in social settings, television becomes a tool with which to observe minority groups and form subsequent opinions (Tan et al., 1997). In this way, television may contribute to the shaping of ethnic stereotypes. Individual reality is in part constructed by the surrounding social world, with the media being one part of that social reality. A dependence on the media for information about the world aids in this process. Few have access to the world in such a way that allows direct experience for knowledge, thus pictures are created

in their heads as a result of media use (Lippmann, 1922). Lippmann used the word *stereotype* to describe a “partial and inadequate way of viewing the world” (p. 72). There is some concern then that the media may provide images that are inadequate and therefore perpetuate stereotyping for highly dependent individuals (Boulding, 1956).

Berry and Mitchell-Kernan (1982) postulated that television provides information regarding where each ethnic group fits into the social structure and presents the prevailing attitudes toward ethnic minority members. For example, Gilens (1996) found that “network television news and weekly newsmagazines portray the poor as substantially more black than is really the case” (p. 515). African Americans made up 62% of the people in pictures accompanying stories about poverty and welfare. Gilens argued that the racial composition of the poor has remained constant since the 1960s, but the media have increasingly shown Blacks as making up the majority of the poor. Gilens further argued that changes in media portrayals over time alter public perception.

Furthermore, some have argued that the omission of certain content could also create distorted views of reality (Graves, 1999; Taylor & Stern, 1997). When television content includes diverse groups, specific examples of physical, psychological, social, cultural, and economic characteristics of each group are offered. In contrast, when diverse groups are not included in television content, there is a message that the missing groups are unimportant and powerless (Graves, 1999).

Fujioka (1999) found that television plays a greater role in influencing stereotypes when direct contact is lacking. This research investigated the effects of television portrayals of African Americans by surveying two groups. One group was Caucasian college students who have had direct contact with African Americans. The other group was Japanese international students who have had little to no direct contact with African Americans. Fujioka found that stereotypes were affected by the respondent’s evaluations of television portrayals (positive or negative) rather than the number of television programs viewed. Exposure to television programs alone did not directly influence the respondent’s perceptions across samples. The study also provided some evidence that television messages had a more significant impact on viewers’ perceptions when first-hand information was lacking.

Brown-Givens and Monahan (2005) addressed the issue of mediated stereotypes by examining media portrayals of African American and Caucasian females and subsequent viewer perceptions. Their findings showed that participants were quick to associate African American females with negative terms (e.g., aggressive, dishonest, lazy), and quick to associate the Caucasian females with positive terms (e.g., sincere, intelligent, friendly). Ford (1997) analyzed the effect of comedic representations on television and found that respondents associated negative stereotypes with African Americans as opposed to Caucasians after exposure to negative stereotypical media content.

Both cultivation theory and social cognitive theory provide a rich foundation for the analysis of television use and stereotypes. The issue of heavy television consumption and its effects will be addressed in the current research. This will then be linked to individual stereotypes of ethnic groups in an effort to reveal television's impact on stereotype formation and perpetuation.

Stereotypes and Personality Traits

Numerous studies, using a variety of methodologies, have been conducted to determine common stereotypical traits associated with different ethnic groups. For example, Niemann et al. (1994) used free response and cluster analysis to determine the stereotypes of eight groups, whereas Tan et al. (1997) used a 7-point scale to determine stereotypes of Native Americans. Other methodologies include opinion polls (McAneny, 1993) and content analysis (Taylor & Stern, 1997). In this study, the Big-Five personality traits were used as a tool for measuring college students' perceptions of personality traits (stereotypes) for different ethnic groups.

The Big-Five, or five-factor model of personality, has been well developed in scholarly research (Buss, 1996; Digman, 1996; Goldberg, 1992; Goldberg & Kilkowski, 1985; Kenny, 2002; Saucier, 1994; Shafer, 1999). Although the literature addresses individual personality traits, little has been done to determine the stereotypical personality traits attributed to specific ethnic groups and how these stereotypes are formed by media consumption. Costa and McCrae (1996) identified the Big-Five personality factors as extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. These are the concepts that will be used to measure stereotypes for the current study.

According to Goldberg's 1992 scale, the personality traits are as follows: *extroversion*, as the first factor, is a measure of traits such as energetic, boldness, activity, spontaneity, assertiveness, adventurousness, and sociableness. The second factor, *agreeableness*, measures warmth, kindness, cooperation, politeness, trustfulness, generosity, flexibility, and fairness. Factor three, *conscientiousness*, measures organization, responsibility, dependability, practicality, carelessness, thrift, caution, and seriousness. Goldberg found the fourth factor, *neuroticism*, to measure anger, nervousness, stability, contentedness, security, emotion, guilt, and moodiness. Factor five, *openness*, measures intelligence, perceptiveness, analysis, reflectiveness, curiosity, imagination, creativity, culture, refinement, and sophistication (Goldberg, 1992, p. 31).

To assess the effects of media use on college students' stereotypes, the current study measured participants' television viewing patterns and their perceptions of different ethnic groups. This study examined whether heavy television viewing and program genre has an effect on college students' ethnic stereotypes in terms of the Big-Five personality traits. Based on the given literature, the following research questions were derived for this study.

- RQ1: Do heavy viewers of television hold primarily positive or negative perceptions (stereotypes) of Caucasians?
- RQ2: Do heavy viewers of television hold primarily positive or negative perceptions (stereotypes) of Asians?
- RQ3: Do heavy viewers of television hold primarily positive or negative perceptions (stereotypes) of African Americans?
- RQ4: Do heavy viewers of television hold primarily positive or negative perceptions (stereotypes) of Latino/Hispanics?
- RQ5: Do heavy viewers of television hold primarily positive or negative perceptions (stereotypes) of Native Americans?

METHOD

A self-administered survey was distributed to undergraduate students at a university in the northwest region and a university in the southwest region of the United States. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Surveys were distributed in class and participation was voluntary. A total of 271 completed surveys were obtained from the university in the Northwest. At the university in the Southwest, 179 surveys were completed. Thus, a total of 450 completed surveys were used for the analysis.

Of the 450 participants, 39% ($n = 177$), were male and 58% ($n = 259$) were female. Fourteen respondents did not report their gender. The majority of participants identified themselves as Caucasian (79%), whereas the remaining participants identified themselves as African American (4%), Asian (5%), Latino (4%), Native American (1%), Middle Eastern (.4%), or other/left blank (6.6%). The sample clearly lacked diversity, but this is justifiable since the study focused primarily on the perceptions of different ethnicities and not the ethnicity of the participant per se.

Survey Design

The survey instrument was designed to assess college student television consumption (independent variable) and its impact on ethnic stereotyping (dependent variable). The participants were asked to report their media use and the types of programs they watched regularly on television. Respondents recorded how many hours per week (on average) they watched each type of program listed. Using a Likert scale, the participants then recorded how often they accessed television, national and local newspaper, the Internet, magazines, and radio.

Participants were also asked to rate their personal perceptions of five different ethnic groups (African Americans, Asians, Caucasians, Latinos/Hispanics, and Native Americans) using a scale adapted from the Big-Five Personality Traits (Shafer, 1999). A seven-point semantic differential

TABLE 1 Scale of Bi-Polar Adjectives Used to Measure Big-Five Personality Traits.

Bi-polar adjectives	
Shy	Outgoing
Lazy	Hard working
At ease	Nervous
Vengeful	Forgiving
Unresponsible	Responsible
Headstrong	Gentle
Uncreative	Creative
Quiet	Talkative
Unagitated	Tense
Unartistic	Artistic

Note. The question used was as follows: "Please indicate how you would rate the various ethnic groups using the following terms based on a scale of 1 to 7 (e.g., For the first term, 1 = shy and 7 = outgoing)."

scale was used allowing participants to rate members of each ethnic group as closer to one or the other of two bi-polar adjectives (Table 1). The measure included 10 brief markers (Shafer, 1999). The final section asked basic demographic information about the participant, such as gender, ethnic background, religion, and political ideology.

Developing Indices for Media Viewing Patterns

Eighteen different types of television genres were included in the survey. Participants were asked to estimate how many hours per week they watched each genre. By using a factor analysis (Principal Component Matrix with Varimax rotation), seven overall categories emerged (56.77% explained): entertainment, drama, informational, educational, reality, soap opera, and sports. The entertainment category included comedies, music television, movies on television, and late night talk shows, eigenvalue = 1.92, 48.11% explained. Drama included drama, emergency drama, and crime drama (*ER*, *Law & Order*, etc.), eigenvalue = 1.83, 60.98% explained. The information category was made up of local and national news, eigenvalue = 1.55, 77.47% explained. The educational category included educational programming (PBS), nature programs, and game shows (*Jeopardy*, *Wheel of Fortune*, etc.), eigenvalue = 1.54, 51.57 explained. The reality category was made up of reality shows (*Survivor*, *Fear Factor*, etc.) and news magazines (*60 Minutes*, *20/20*, etc.), eigenvalue = 1.22, 61.12% explained. The soap opera category contained various daytime programs (*All My Children*, *Days of Our Lives*, etc.) and the sports category included sports coverage.

Once the categories were established, frequency tables were used to determine light viewers and heavy viewers. Summed scores of each category

TABLE 2 Distribution of Light vs. Heavy Television Viewers for Each Genre of Programming.

Genre	Light TV viewers (%)	Heavy TV viewers (%)
Overall TV	72.5 (<14 hours per week)	27.5 (15+ hours per week)
Entertainment	68.4 (<9 hours per week)	31.6 (9+ hours per week)
Drama	77.3 (<3 hours per week)	22.7 (3+ hours per week)
Informational	68 (<4 hours per week)	32 (4+ hours per week)
Educational	78.9 (<2 hours per week)	21.1 (2+ hours per week)
Reality	69.6 (<2 hours per week)	30.4 (2+ hours per week)
Soap opera	72.9 (<1 hour per week)	27.1 (1+ hours per week)
Sports	76.2 (<5 hours per week)	23.8 (5+ hours per week)

were used to create indices for media consumption. The divisions between light and heavy viewers were done somewhat artificially based on the frequency distribution for each category. The split was made based on the distribution of each genre where a natural break point was noted (based on the judgment of two researchers). For example, overall TV viewing was split between “light viewers” who watched TV for 14 or less hours per week (72.5%) and those considered “heavy viewers” at 15+ hours of viewing per week (27.5%). For all genres, approximately 65–75% of the total sample was categorized as “light viewers” whereas only about 25–35% of the total sample was categorized as “heavy viewers” (Table 2).

RESULTS

Simple independent *t* tests were used to answer the research questions in this study. The analyses examine participant television viewing intensity and their perceptions of different ethnic groups. Results are then broken down by specific program genres viewed most often by participants in order to provide a more detailed assessment of the impact of television content in shaping their stereotypes (Table 3).

RQ1: The first research question addresses whether participants who are heavy viewers of television will rate Caucasians as having more positive or negative stereotypical personality traits. The participant's perceptions of Caucasians were predominantly positive. This aligns with past research that suggests that Caucasians are often portrayed by the media in a more positive light and therefore perceived to have

TABLE 3 Significant Differences in Respondent's Perceptions of Ethnic Groups (Based on Television Consumption Intensity).

Ethnicity stereotyped	TV genre viewed by respondent	Big 5 personality trait	Heavy TV viewers	Light TV viewers
Caucasians	Overall TV	Neurotic	7.5	8.0
	Information	Conscientious*	10.1	9.2
	Entertainment	Neurotic	7.5	8.1
	Sports	Neurotic*	7.2	8.1
	Education	Conscientious	8.8	9.7
Asians	Entertainment	Conscientious	10.6	11.1
	Information	Extroverted*	4.9	5.6
	Soap Operas	Extroverted*	4.9	5.5
	Educational	Neurotic*	8.8	8.1
	Sports	Conscientious*	10.4	11.1
African Americans	Sports	Agreeable	8.7	9.4
	Entertainment	Agreeable*	6.1	6.8
	Entertainment	Extroverted	10.9	11.4
	Drama	Open	10.0	9.3
	Information	Open*	9.9	9.2
Latino/Hispanics	Reality	Neurotic*	7.1	7.9
	Sports	Agreeable	7.6	7.0
	Sports	Extroverted*	8.6	9.4
Native Americans	Overall TV	Open*	9.0	9.9
	Overall TV	Conscientious	8.0	8.7
	Overall TV	Extroverted	5.6	6.2
	Entertainment	Open*	9.1	9.9
	Information	Extroverted*	5.5	6.3
	Reality	Extroverted	5.7	6.2

Note. Cell entries are mean scores (0–14 scale). The traits featured in the table represent significant differences at the $p < .05$ level. An asterisk * denotes significance at the $p < .01$ level. The remaining traits are not included because they were not significantly different.

more positive characteristics (Brown-Givens & Monahan, 2005; Dovidio et al., 1997; Niemann et al., 1994). Significant differences were noted with respect to heavy versus low television viewers. Overall, participants with heavier television viewership rated Caucasians as less neurotic ($p < .05$).

Upon further analysis, some interesting findings emerged based on the type of programs watched frequently by respondents. Specifically, participants that were heavy viewers of informational television rated Caucasian conscientiousness higher ($p < .01$) when compared with lighter viewers. Caucasians also received lower neuroticism scores from heavy viewers of entertainment ($p < .05$) and sports programs ($p < .01$). Many heavy television viewers appear to view Caucasians as more dependable, stable, and less angry.

The only significant negative stereotype noted by participants regarding Caucasians was by heavy viewers of educational television programming.

These viewers rated Caucasians as low in conscientiousness ($p < .05$). This may be due to the fact that educational programming provides cues that are less likely to favor positive stereotyping with respect to Caucasians. Overall, more positive stereotypes of Caucasians were asserted by participants that were heavy television viewers; therefore, the answer to research question one indicates that heavy viewers of television hold predominantly positive stereotypes of Caucasians (Table 3).

RQ2: The second research questions focuses on participants' ratings of Asians as having more positive or negative stereotypical personality traits. The results overwhelmingly indicate that heavy television viewers hold more negative stereotypes of Asians when compared with lighter viewers. Several significant findings emerged for a variety of programming genres.

Specifically, heavy viewers of entertainment television rated Asians as less conscientious ($p < .05$). Heavy viewers of information programming ($p < .01$) and soap operas ($p < .01$) rated Asians as less extroverted. Heavy viewers of educational programs rated Asians as more neurotic ($p < .01$). Heavy viewers of sports television rated Asians as less conscientious ($p < .01$) and less agreeable ($p < .05$). It may be possible that the personality of Asians is misunderstood. Respondents in the current study perceived Asians to be less responsible, less warm, and more nervous. Past analyses have detected stereotypes indicating a perception of Asians as shy or soft spoken (Niemann et al., 1994). Perhaps their quiet demeanor is misunderstood to convey a lack of warmth and cooperation. These findings indicate that in response to research question two, heavy viewers of television hold predominantly negative stereotypes of Asians (Table 3).

RQ3: Research question focuses on heavy viewers of television ratings' of the stereotypical personality traits of African Americans. Results were mixed for stereotypes of African Americans among heavy television viewers. Participants who were heavy viewers of entertainment television programming rated African Americans as less agreeable ($p < .01$) and less extroverted ($p < .05$). This aligns with past research in that African Americans are often portrayed by the media and perceived to be uncooperative and antagonistic (Brown-Givens & Monahan, 2005; Niemann et al., 1994). The entertainment genre may then be the front-runner in displaying these types of negative stereotypes.

On the other hand, heavy viewers of television drama ($p < .05$) and information programming ($p < .01$) rated African Americans as more open. Heavy viewers of reality television also rated African Americans as less

neurotic ($p < .01$). This may suggest that television programming featuring more realistic or dramatic information may strive to portray African Americans more positively. These findings indicate a mixed response to research question three. Respondents attributed both positive and negative traits to African Americans (Table 3).

RQ4: Research question four is concerned with the participants' ratings of Latino/Hispanics stereotypical personality traits. Few significant differences were noted between heavy and light television viewers; those that did emerge were inconsistent. Specifically, participants that were heavy viewers of sports television rated Latino/Hispanics as more agreeable ($p < .05$), but less extroverted ($p < .01$). This finding indicates that stereotypes presented in sports programming displays Latino/Hispanics as both cooperative and fair, but not assertive. These were the only differences noted with significance; therefore, research question four yielded mixed results (Table 3). The lack of findings indicate a need for further inquiry.

RQ5: Research question five is concerned with participants' ratings of the stereotypical personality traits of Native Americans. Significant differences were noted overall between participants who were heavy versus light television viewers. The stereotypes noted were all negative. Respondents who were heavy television viewers rated Native Americans as less open ($p < .01$), less conscientious ($p < .05$), and less extroverted ($p < .05$).

Specifically, participants that were heavy viewers of entertainment television rated Native Americans as less open ($p < .01$). Heavy viewers of information programming ($p < .01$) and reality television ($p < .05$) also rated Native Americans as less extroverted. Tan et al. (1997) found that Native Americans were typically stereotyped as lazy, uneducated, and unassertive. The current findings align with past research and indicate similar perceptions of Native Americans as less sophisticated, unintelligent, and unadventurous. These results suggest that heavy viewers of television hold predominantly negative stereotypes of Native Americans (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

In this study, an attempt was made to investigate participants' exposure to television programming as well as their stereotypical perceptions. In particular, participants were asked to rate the perceived personality characteristics of different ethnic groups based on the Big-Five personality traits. Participants also identified how frequently they watched television and the specific program genres they watched most often. Cultivation and social cognitive

theory were used as the context for assessing the impact of heavy television observations on forming stereotypes.

Overall, respondents who were heavy viewers of television exhibited more negative stereotypes. Heavy viewers of television only attributed positive stereotypes to Caucasians, African Americans, and Latino/Hispanics. Asians and Native Americans were only associated with negative stereotypes. The findings indicate that participants credited Caucasians with the most positive traits (and least negative) when compared to the other ethnic groups. Respondents rated Caucasians as being more thoughtful and emotionally stable.

When investigating the specific personality stereotypes, several trends emerged. Overall, more instances of negative personality stereotypes were noted from participants than positive. The most frequent positive stereotype was "less neurotic." The most frequent negative traits were "less conscientious" and "less extroverted." Participants most often attributed these traits to the Asian and Native American ethnic groups.

More instances of negative stereotyping were revealed than positive, even when looking at specific program genres viewed. Specifically, heavy viewers of entertainment, educational, and sports programs appeared to have more negative ethnic perceptions overall. Heavy viewers of information programming seemed to have the more positively skewed perceptions. On the other hand, heavy viewing of the soap opera genre was the only programming type not statistically associated with holding a positive stereotype.

In sum, students with heavy television viewing habits also held many stereotypes. Theorists may suggest that this is no coincidence, however, because this study simply exhibited statistical differences detected based on self-administered surveys, it should not be considered that the data support a causal link between simple media exposure of different programs and individuals' stereotypes.

There are several limitations in this study. First of all, due to the sensitive nature of researching stereotypes of ethnic groups, several issues about the validity of the data were considered. It is difficult to ensure that we obtained individuals' true feelings about other races based on self-report measures alone. In addition, the participants in the study were college students; therefore the findings cannot be extrapolated to the general public. Also, the percentage of heavy viewers was small in comparison to light viewers. Finally, the participants were predominantly Caucasian and this may have affected their perceptions. Future analysis should strive for obtaining a more diverse sample of participants in order to detect differences.

The survey instrument also contained a large quantity of questions relating to stereotypes, different ethnic groups, demographics, and so on (some related to the analysis and some not) in an effort to disguise the true nature of the study. This was done to avoid defensive reactions or response bias, but may have led to some confusion among respondents. Future study is also

needed to validate the category designations made for the television genres to see if participants are in agreement with the program choices.

This research began by recognizing different theories about how the media influences people's perceptions (stereotypes). The cultivation theory postulated that the general accumulation of television exposure itself influences how individuals in a society shape their views of ethnic groups. However, the assumption that mere exposure to the media has a strong influence was criticized heavily by other scholars who recognize complicated human learning processes and the influence of other factors such as direct interactions with members of different ethnic groups. In that aspect, social cognitive theory gives a direction to how and when individuals internalize what they see or watch to shape their stereotypes. The co-existence of heavy television viewing and stereotypical perceptions that were revealed in this study may very well indicate that media exposure has an influence. Future study should explore the link between the two with additional emphasis on the impact of different program genres in order to further validate this theory.

The implications for this research are numerous. If the media are responsible for perpetuating stereotypical myths, then consumers must be educated in an effort to combat such erroneous information. If racial stereotypes have an impact on viewer interpretations of reality, then we must be vigilant in our efforts to educate and encourage critical thinking and analysis. Scholars can bring issues to light that encourage media critique as well as promote efforts to reduce stereotypical portrayals. It is necessary to analyze the effects of varying program genres so that we can further understand their impact and offer tools for encouraging consumers to be more active and critical in their media consumption.

The current study contributes to the development of communication research and theory by offering another assessment of how the media communicate and their potential influence on audience members. Specifically, cultivation theory and social cognitive theory are used as a framework for understanding the present findings. As cultivation would suggest, heavy television consumption would appear to have an impact on the generalized (or stereotypical) perceptions held by subjects. This adds yet another inquiry to this very familiar theoretical tool and may even suggest that cultivation occurs not only as a result of heavy viewing, but heavy viewing of specific program genres. Social cognitive theory refers to the learning that occurs through observation. This research would suggest that the negativity observed on television has an influence on audience members. The findings indicate support for both theoretical perspectives while also identifying additional variables in need of further analysis.

Understanding the shaping of individual perceptions of various ethnic groups is a multifaceted process that merits additional inquiry. Future analyses should continue to assess the different factors interacting to shape individuals' perceptions of other ethnic groups and the media's role in the process.

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