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Why the Media's Role in Issues of Race and Ethnicity Should be in the Spotlight

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In everything from the policies that regulate media industries to the practices of the organizations that produce the messages to the usage patterns of the consumers that choose them, mass media are implicated in real-world interracial/ethnic dynamics. Yet, despite the obvious associations between media and issues of race and ethnicity, a comprehensive effort aimed at documenting and addressing these links has not been undertaken. The current issue, Media Representations of Race and Ethnicity: Implications for Identity, Intergroup Relations, and Public Policy, endeavors to do just that. The merits of such an effort are articulated in this introduction to the volume alongside a review of the current state of the research in this domain.

Race and ethnic relations in society continue to be among the most challenging and controversial issues of the 21st century. From the ongoing ethnic conflicts on every continent of the globe to the " . . . be twice as good and half as black . . . " subtext of the Obama Presidency (Coates, 2012), humankind has yet to transcend race. This is not to diminish the bracing transformations we have witnessed in our history, but the undeniable reality is that we have yet to experience a world free from the complications of race and ethnicity (for simplicity, race/ethnicity is periodically substituted for race and ethnicity, to follow). Although a myriad of factors are known to contribute to racial/ethnic positions, for many, conceptualizations of race and ethnicity as well as interracial/interethnic dynamics are defined (at least in part) by the characterizations presented in the mass media—including both news and entertainment offerings. Indeed, media exposure has been determined to play a meaningful role in matters ranging from the construction and maintenance of racial/ethnic cognitions (and emotions) to expectations about intergroup relations

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to policy decision-making to perceptions of self and identity (see Mastro, 2009a, for review). As the links between media and race/ethnicity become increasingly apparent, it becomes imperative to focus attention on the array of processes and effects that may be implicated. This special issue*, Media Representations of Race and Ethnicity: Implications for Identity, Intergroup Relations, and Public Policy*, endeavors to do just that.

Calling upon leading and emerging scholars in the fields of communication, psychology, and linguistics, this volume: (a) documents trends in depictions of race and ethnicity in U.S. media fare; (b) demonstrates the influence of exposure to these representations on perceptions of self and identity, particularly for marginalized groups; (c) highlights the potential for media use to prompt both prosocial and antisocial outcomes and shape societal-level attitudes; (d) offers strategies to moderate the negative consequences of exposure to unfavorable portrayals; and finally (e) underscores the implications for political decision-making and policy discourse if harmful messages are not improved. In so doing, this volume serves as a key resource for media scholars, practitioners, and audiences interested in understanding the complex association between media and race/ethnicity in society and motivated to promote positive social change.

The Importance of Media Portrayals of Race and Ethnicity

Why do representations of race and ethnicity in the media matter? Although data from the 2010 U.S. Census reveal that non-Whites now comprise more than half of the births in the United States, the propensity to interact with (or befriend) different racial/ethnic groups in society (even on college campuses where such opportunities may be more readily available) remains low—particularly for Whites (e.g., Antonio, 1998; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004). Indeed, despite unprecedented and rapid changes in the composition of society, our schools, neighborhoods, and lifestyles continue to be profoundly segregated (see Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012). The average White American lives in a neighborhood and attends a school that is 75% White (Logan & Stults, 2011; Orfield et al., 2012; Reardon et al., 2012). Blacks and Latinos (particularly Mexican Americans) reside in neighborhoods clustered around their own racial/ethnic group, with disproportionately high levels of minority representation (70%) (Logan & Stults, 2011; Logan & Turner, 2013). Seventy-four percent of Black students and 80% of Latino students attend predominately non-White schools, often with fewer than 10% Whites (Orfield et al., 2012). Asian Americans experience the greatest degree of racial/ethnic diversity in their schools and neighborhoods, however, they are also disproportionately clustered in predominately Asian and/or ethnic neighborhoods. Among American Indians, 22% live on reservations or other trust lands (U.S. Census Briefs, 2012) and 46% attend schools in rural or isolated areas, with roughly one third in schools comprised of

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over 50% American Indians (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, III, 2010). Taken together, there is little doubt that there is great isolation with our own racial/ethnic groups in U.S. society.

Given this, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the bulk of our interactions with diverse groups are likely to come in the form of vicarious contact via media; in effect, substituting for the lack of direct experience (Gunter, 1987). In fact, this seems especially plausible when considering rates of media use in society. It is undeniable that we are immersed in media from birth. Nearly 70% of infants in the United States spend over 2 hours per day in front of a screen (Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartell, 2003). For U.S. adults, television time alone (not including computers or other screen time) averages 5 hours per day (Nielsen, 2012). Notably, this is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Consumers in countries such as Greece, Serbia, and Macedonia average over 5 hours per day watching television, and viewers in countries as varied as Puerto Rico, Turkey and Italy average at least 4 hours per day of TV time (Nielsen, 2012). With such media-saturated lifestyles, it may be difficult for audience members to even recognize the influence of exposure on perceptions of reality. Accordingly, the potential is great for media use to assume a profound role in shaping views on diverse groups. As such, the quality of media content takes on unprecedented importance.

Media Depictions of Racial/Ethnic Groups

Whether looking at primetime television, newspapers, TV news, advertising, film, sports, or videogames, the offerings provided in the media have historically been unfavorable when it comes to the quality of racial/ethnic representations (see Mastro, 2009b, for review). These characterizations vary based on the particular medium (e.g., television vs. videogames), the genre (e.g., dramas vs. sitcoms), and of course the race/ethnicity of the media figure. Moreover, certain groups are clustered within particular genres, day-parts, and/or mediums. Such tendencies are important to recognize for two primary reasons. First, because different media forms and genres are constrained by norms, conventions, and capabilities that inevitably guide the types of presentations prone to be offered, they are likely to prompt different effects (Armstrong, Neuendorf, & Brentar, 1992). Second, this tendency leaves open the possibility that, depending on media consumption preferences, audiences may be exposed to one-sided images of different racial/ethnic groups, or simply not see them at all. For example, although images of Blacks in primetime entertainment television have improved over the decades, this is not the case when it comes to their representation in print and television news where they are commonly depicted as violent and menacing criminals (see Mastro, 2009b, for review). Similarly, whereas some of the most egregious stereotypes that have traditionally been associated with Latinos in genres such as dramas have begun to disappear, they regularly remain in unflattering, objectified, and/or subservient

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roles compared with their on-air peers when in content such as sitcoms. Media depictions of Asian Americans and Native Americans are so uncommon that few generalizations can be offered regarding the attributes typically associated with these groups. However, what research does indicate is that these groups are commonly seen in roles tied to longstanding stereotypes. To illustrate, Asian Americans in advertising are typically linked with technology and their roles across the broader media landscape often epitomize the 'model minority' characterization. Native Americans are found in presentations tied to spirituality, historical contexts, and social ills. Just last year, the popular television sitcom, *Mike & Molly*, followed trend, characterizing Native Americans as "drunk Indians" as a punch-line of a joke (e.g., Fisher, 2013). Entman (1994) underscores the important consequences of such representations, noting that racial/ethnic depictions in the media have the potential to guide (mis)perceptions about both who racial/ethnic minorities are as well as why they should be viewed in a certain way.

Alongside discrepancies in terms of how different groups are portrayed, inequities also exist when it comes to how often different racial/ethnic groups are seen (see Mastro, 2009b). Although the quality of racial/ethnic representations is critical, the quantity of group representation is additionally meaningful as it contributes to perceptions of group vitality and standing in society (Harwood & Roy, 2005). Data from the U.S. Census indicate that Whites constitute approximately 69% of the U.S. population, Latinos 16%, African Americans 13%, Asian Americans 5%, and Native Americans 1% (U.S. Census Briefs, 2011). Yet, the racial/ethnic distribution in the media is far from representative of these figures. Instead, White characters outnumber both their mediated racial/ethnic counterparts as well as their proportion of the real-world population, at between 73% and 80% of the TV population (Mastro, 2009b). Although parity is found when looking at the current rate of representation of Blacks on television (between 14% and 17% of the characters on television), the same cannot be said for other racial/ethnic groups. Latinos are depicted at a level far below their percentage of the U.S. population, making-up a mere 2–6.5% of television characters. Asian American characters are also infrequently portrayed on TV, at only 1–3% of the figures on television. Native Americans fare the worst—often entirely absent in television programming.

Given that these patterns of representation convey messages to audiences regarding racial/ethnic dynamics and norms as well as the value attached to different groups in society (Harwood & Roy, 2005), the extent to which diverse groups are presented and/or thoughtfully integrated into the general media landscape should not be ignored. Simply put, it is socially significant to systematically document racial/ethnic representations in the media as these portrayals contribute meaningfully to both real-world intergroup dynamics as well as beliefs about oneself and one's own group in society.

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Accordingly, research in this volume from Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi (2015) contributes to this important area of study by quantitatively content analyzing the 40 most viewed television shows within each of 12 television seasons (spanning 1987–2009). The results are then used to predict (via multilevel modeling) national level racial/ethnic perceptions (between the years 1988–2008), using data from the American National Election Studies. In so doing, this work provides a far-reaching examination of media portrayals of race/ethnicity and the societal implications of exposure. However, whereas this work provides a macrolevel account of the relationship between media representations and public opinion, the media's contribution to intergroup relations and group identity can and should also be examined via more nuanced, micro-level perspectives.

Managing Self and Identity

When considering that media messages convey both concrete and abstract information about the features of different groups in society it is not surprising that exposure has been implicated in the construction of consensually shared perceptions of group members (e.g., Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Ortiz, 2007). Through both short and long term exposure to media's characterizations of racial and ethnic groups, cognitions about the features that define group members (including one's own groups) and the status and value of these groups in society, are established and reinforced (Mastro & Atwell Seate, 2012). This can influence the development of shared social identities which, in turn, affect self-concept. Because media use exposes audiences to a consistent set of information and perspectives on which to base definitions of different groups (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002), media images and texts become a part of the ongoing process of defining, validating, and creating shared group norms and stereotypes (Mastro & Atwell Seate, 2012).

As such, the results from content analytic examinations of racial/ethnic media portrayals suggest that an uneven playing field exists which privileges White audiences (White, straight, middle/upper income, male audiences in particular) and forces other groups to strategically negotiate media offerings "in ways that make their personal viewing profile considerably more supportive of their group identity than it would be otherwise" (Harwood & Roy, 2005, p. 195). In other words, the ability to select media content that reinforces self and identity needs is considerably easier for some groups than others (see Abrams, Eveland, & Giles, 2003).

Research indicates that the selection and avoidance of media (both conscious and unconscious) plays an important role in maintaining racial/ethnic group identity and perceptions of subjective vitality (Abrams & Giles, 2007; Abrams & Giles, 2009). Specifically, this work demonstrates that audiences actively and creatively engage in media use to satisfy racial/ethnic group vitality needs (distinct from

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personal/individual gratifications sought from media). Put differently, although many of the reasons people choose or avoid media content will be related specifically to personal needs, group-level factors provide an additional motivation in selection and avoidance processes. Unfortunately, this creates less than optimal conditions for identity-maintenance among racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States. If one's group faces persistently unfavorable characterizations (as is the case for many racial/ethnic groups), then selections must be more carefully considered—and media avoidance must also figure heavily into the process (Abrams & Giles, 2007). For Blacks, having a limited degree of quality portrayals (albeit varying dramatically by genre, day-part, etc.) alongside equity in numeric representations (at least on entertainment TV) means that media content may be sufficiently available to serve group identity and vitality needs. For most other racial/ethnic groups, few viable options exist in U.S. media fare. Accordingly, even if cautious, deliberate choices are made, exposure has the potential to harm perceptions of group vitality.

Thus, despite efforts to allay the potentially harmful impact of exposure to unfavorable portrayals of one's ingroup in mass media offerings, these attempts may not always be successful; resulting in damage to self-concept and esteem. Research by Rivadeneyra, Ward, and Gordon (2007) reveals that increased exposure to mainstream media offerings (such as television, movies, music, and magazines) has a harmful effect on Latinos' self-esteem along a number of dimensions. Not surprisingly, this association was more pronounced among those high in ethnic identification as well as those who actively engaged with the content. Similarly, Fryberg's (2003) research investigating the influence of exposure to Native American mascots (e.g., Chief Wahoo) on Native American audiences indicates that seeing such images has a negative effect on both self-esteem and beliefs about community efficacy.

On the other hand, if one's group enjoys advantageous representations in the media (as is the case for Whites), then the media environment can be utilized to effortlessly support identity needs. In the main, media exposure of any kind is likely to sustain, if not augment, group identity among Whites, both by reinforcing perceptions about group-based features as well as by providing opportunities for intergroup comparisons that enhance group esteem (e.g., Mastro, 2003; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008). For example, viewing stereotypical media representations of race/ethnicity appears to encourage race-based social comparisons among White viewers, which advantages their group and serves identity needs, particularly for those whose White identity is central to their self-definition. Thus, the range of unfavorable characterizations of minorities in the media provides Whites with abundant opportunities for stereotypical responses (i.e., comparisons that advantages their ingroup), which boosts these viewers' self-concept (particularly highly race-identified Whites).

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Of course the group-based usage patterns addressed here (and the subsequent implications for identity) have important consequences for intergroup contexts, globally. The work by Harwood and Vincze (2015) offers evidence in support of this assertion, in the context of ethnolinguistic identity among minority bilingual youth in Romania. This research, testing the implications of language-based group identification on group level gratifications sought from media, expands how we conceptualize media use and selection processes and highlights the association between group-based media motivations and societal intergroup dynamics. Importantly, this work underscores the nearly universal relevance of minority linguistic identity on media-related vitality perceptions and identity needs more generally.

Because the messages ultimately consumed in the media provide audiences with sets of features to be associated with different groups (ranging from values to traits to demographic compositions), these depictions serve to situate groups socially, geographically, and hierarchically. Accordingly, among the many relevant outcomes of exposure is the fact that viewing these portrayals moves audiences toward a media-formulated understanding of race/ethnicity-based issues, related judgments, and behaviors.

Media and Intergroup Relations

Although contemporary social norms frown upon overt expressions of racism, there is no shortage of examples of overt racial/ethnic hostility in Westernized society. Not only are hate groups on the rise in the United States (Potok, 2012) but nearly one-fourth of racial/ethnic minorities in the European Union report having been the victim of a hate crime in the past year (FRA, 2012). In the United States this surge appears, at least in part, to be a response to the Obama Presidency. The Southern Poverty Law center tracks both hate and 'patriot' groups in the United States and contends that, "Obama's election and the crashing economy have played a key role [in the rise of such groups] in the last three years" (Potok, 2012). Because media messages offer little in the way of comprehensive explanations for portrayals of race and ethnicity, and instead merely link groups with both desirable and undesirable characterizations (e.g., Entman, 1994), exposure can do more than simply define racial/ethnic groups but also exacerbate racial tensions in society. That said, it is also certainly the case that more favorable intergroup messages in the media (specifically) and more inspiring content (generally) can discourage such biases and promote more positive intergroup outcomes.

Implications for Majority Groups

Results from decades of experimental examinations of the effects of exposure to unfavorable portrayals of race/ethnicity in the media on majority groups attitudes and behaviors indicate that even a single, brief exposure to such depictions can

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provoke a range of antisocial, intergroup responses including stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, attribution errors, and generally punitive outcomes (e.g., Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996; Oliver, Jackson, Moses, & Dangerfield, 2004). Research additionally demonstrates that long-term exposure to stereotypic depictions of racial/ethnic groups in the media influences both stereotype development and subsequent stereotype-based responses, such as variations in language abstraction (Gorham, 2006) and adherence to stereotypes (e.g., Mastro et al., 2007). Dixon and Azocar (2007) argue that although recent exposure to a single message will be more accessible for use in processing and interpreting information, as exposures increase over time the cognitive associations between the attribute and the attitude object strengthen until this construct becomes chronically accessible in the minds of consumers—again underscoring the importance of more favorable and equitable characterizations of diverse groups in the mass media.

As cultivation theorists have long articulated (see Gerbner et al., 2002), television (and mainstream media more generally) provides audiences with a highly stable set of messages about racial/ethnic groups, which, over time and repeated exposure, influence audiences' real-world perceptions. Of course genre-specific variations exist (e.g., criminals in courtroom dramas, sexualized characters in comedies), but thematic representations are nonetheless constant—just with greater prevalence in certain subsets of media. Thus, the more that audiences consume media, the more their views reflect the media version of reality (consistent with their "media diet"), regardless of the veracity of the messages. Indeed, survey research examining this relationship has consistently revealed a significant association between exposure to media content and real-world racial/ethnic perceptions. For example, Armstrong et al. (1992) found that as exposure to TV news increased, so too did negative judgments regarding Blacks' socioeconomic status (consistent with content analytic results for the genre). On the other hand, increased exposure to entertainment programming resulted in more favorable estimates of Black socioeconomic status relative to Whites (again consistent with genre-specific depictions). Similar results were yielded by Busselle and Crandall (2002) who found that attitudes about and perceptions regarding Blacks varied based on exposure to TV news versus entertainment programming, in a manner consistent with dominant representations within these programming types. Comparable results have been found in examinations of the association between media use and stereotyping of Latinos (Mastro et al., 2007).

Despite the troubling nature of most of these findings, one promising implication is clear: if media characterizations of racial/ethnic groups were to improve (in specific ways) so too would intergroup outcomes associated with exposure. Results from Bodenhausen et al. (1995) as well as Power, Murphy, and Coover (1996) both reveal that exposure to positive, counter-stereotypes in the media prompts more favorable race-based judgments. Bodenhausen et al.'s (1995) research indicates that

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activating positive media exemplars generates more sympathetic responses toward discrimination as a social problem and more favorable attitudes about outgroup members as a whole. Power et al.'s (1996) data show (with relative consistency) that exposure to positive counter-stereotypes of Blacks in the media results in more favorable evaluations (compared with a control condition).

Furthering our understanding of the types of media messages that are most likely to promote constructive intergroup outcomes (and avoid undesirable responses such as discounting), research by Ramasubramanian (2007) as well as Mastro and Tukachinsky (2011) reveals that although favorable portrayals can promote prosocial outcomes, not all positive characterizations are equal. Instead, exposure to images/messages that: (a) support shared norms about valued features of outgroup members and (b) are not seen as extreme or outliers, offer the most desirable results. In other words, positive characterizations of outgroup races/ethnicities in the media appear to influence overall group perceptions (and intergroup outcomes, generally) more so when they exemplify constructive prototypes that are consistent with naturally existing positive models for the group.

To shed additional light on the potential for media to encourage prosocial interracial/ethnic outcomes, Ramasubramanian (2015) in this volume, provides an empirical test founded on three theoretical frameworks central to this domain of inquiry. This experimental work helps to fine-tune our conceptualization of the variables involved in such processes and compellingly demonstrates the need for more appropriately favorable representations of diverse groups in mass media. Further, these data indicate that exposure to admirable media portrayals of outgroups can both reduce stereotyping and increase support for diversity-related policies.

Innovative research by Oliver et al. (2015), presented in the current issue, helps further extend this consequential line of inquiry on prosocial outcomes, by testing the potential for affective responses to media to encourage interracial/interethnic connectedness and discourage prejudice. This novel approach focuses on the role that media enjoyment, in the form of the experience of elevation (an other-praising, morality-based emotion evoked from witnessing the admirable/virtuous acts of others), can play in promoting feelings of closeness with diverse groups in society, ultimately encouraging more favorable interracial/ethnic dynamics in society. What is particularly noteworthy about this study's evidence is its demonstration that inspiring media can promote feelings of connection with and more favorable orientations toward diverse groups by offering messages that arouse the best in humanity, even absent explicit mention of race/ethnicity. Although certain media content is known to offer "race-coded" messages to audiences, even when devoid of racial/ethnic reference (e.g., crime, welfare, etc.), and trigger unfavorable intergroup outcomes (e.g., Valentino, 1999), the potential for certain types of media messages to generate unifying intergroup outcomes had otherwise been ignored in the literature.

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Implications for Minority Groups

Regrettably, much less is known about the impact of exposure to unfavorable racial/ethnic media messages on racial/ethnic minority audiences themselves. Although theory would suggest that consuming negative images of one's ingroup would have a harmful effect on self-concept, esteem, and intergroup perceptions, few empirical studies have explored this relationship. In one notable exception, Fryberg's (2003) experimental examination of the effects of exposure to stereotypical depictions of Native Americans on Native American consumers indicated that viewing such representations has a negative effect on self-esteem and ingroup efficacy. Similarly, results from Rivadeneyra et al.'s (2007) survey of Latino high school students reveals that exposure to a variety of media genres negatively influences several dimensions of self-esteem (although not global self-esteem). A comparable relationship was documented by Tan and Tan (1979) who found that increased exposure to entertainment television was associated with lower self-esteem among Black audiences. On the other hand, Subervi-Velez and Necochea (1990) found no association between English- or Spanish-language television exposure and self-concept among Latino children.

The current volume provides critical insights into this important and underexamined issue with three innovative studies. First, Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, and Fryberg (2015) address the implications of invisibility in the media on the sense of belonging and group-conceptualization/s of American Indians (perhaps the most egregiously underrepresented group in mass media). This work provides a convincing framework for understanding how the quantity and quality of media representations of Native Americans homogenizes identity, constraining self-understanding and perceptions about appropriate social roles, among Native Americans. Next, Schmader, Block, and Lickel (2015) experimentally investigate the emotional consequences of exposure to unfavorable film depictions of Mexican Americans on Mexican American audiences. This research advances our understanding of how aspects of group identity (specifically, identity importance and group pride) can buffer or aggravate emotional responses (such as shame, guilt, and anger) to stereotypic media depictions of one's group. Further, this work demonstrates that the manner in which stereotypes are presented in the media can impact implicit attitudes toward the group, with objectifying, ridiculing content particularly harmful. Finally, Ortiz and Behm-Morawitz (2015) examine how media usage patterns among Mexican Americans influence perceptions of societal-level intergroup dynamics. Specifically, this research indicates that exposure to English language media in the United States (vs. Spanish language U.S. media) contributes to perceptions of prejudice and discrimination against Mexican Americans in U.S. society—each of which are known to have the potential to negatively influence civic engagement and psychological well-being.

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Taken together, the research on majority and minority group audiences provides insights into how exposure to media's messages about race/ethnicity can function to promote more favorable intergroup outcomes or aggravate harmful intergroup relationships, depending on the specific features of the messages and the characteristics of the audience members. The works presented in the current volume build on this literature by defining strategies for media messages to reduce prejudice and identifying mechanisms through which exposure can engender feelings of intergroup connectedness. Moreover, this work also highlights a range of harmful intergroup implications for minority group members if consumption patterns subject audiences to unfavorable group representations.

Opportunities and Obstacles for Public Policy

Research examining the effects of media exposure on policy reasoning and political decision-making offers additional insights into the far-reaching consequences of media depictions of race/ethnicity. Evidence from this growing body of literature indicates that race-related policy preferences are, indeed, affected by media consumption. Both a single exposure (Mendelberg, 1997; Richardson, 2005) and long-term media use (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Pan & Kosicki, 1996; Tan, Fujioka, & Tan, 2000) have been found to contribute meaningfully to political decisions ranging from party and candidate preferences to positions on a wide range of race-related policies such as affirmative action and immigration.

Work in this area has identified a number of factors involved in media-driven policy decision-making. Not surprisingly, the characteristics of the media messages are highly critical; with unfavorable messages encouraging unsympathetic policy outcomes and constructive messages producing supportive policy positions. However, the process is somewhat more complex. Although exposure to blatant stereotypes in the media can promote racially/ethnically biased political decisions, this relationship appears to be driven, more specifically, by conformity to or deviation from dominant norms and ideals (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006). Moreover, whereas favorable media messages about race/ethnicity can generate more constructive political positions, the influence of exposure appears to be indirect (Richardson, 2005). That is to say, its influence comes from weakening the link between racial attitudes and positions toward race-related policies and programs. Notably, existing research additionally reveals that individual difference factors play a significant role in these processes. Specifically, both seeking information-oriented media (Pan & Kosicki, 1996) and holding unfavorable racial/ethnic attitudes (Mendelberg, 1997) each enhance the influence of negative racial/ethnic media messages on subsequent policy decisions.

Despite the relative consistency of the findings in the domain of political decision-making and policy reasoning, numerous questions remain regarding the mechanisms underlying these processes, the contingencies to these effects, and

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the opportunities to disrupt the negative consequences of media exposure. In three studies presented in the current volume, these unresolved issues are thoughtfully addressed. First, Castañeda, Fuentes-Bautista, and Baruch (2015) examine the manner in which minority groups are framed in public policy debate and identify opportunities to challenge and even counteract traditional patterns of marginalization in media policy and practice—particularly in the context of the current National Broadband Plan. Next, Hurley, Jensen, Weaver, and Dixon (2015) experimentally test the complex relationship between exposure to inauspicious racial/ethnic media portrayals (specifically news coverage intersecting race and crime), group membership, and policy decision-making. Their data indicate that not only does this persistent (and disproportionate) theme in news content influence attributions of criminal culpability, but exposure also affects social policy preferences. Finally, Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) explore the potential for media literacy efforts to intervene in stereotype-related responses to media. Appling insights from existing quantitative studies on media literacy alongside original qualitative data from an ongoing study with early adolescents, their research reveals the promise for media literacy efforts to: (a) interfere with negative intergroup outcomes resulting from media exposure; and (b) promote more critical media consumers of race/ethnicity-related content, generally.

Summary and Conclusions

The research presented in this issue represents a diverse set of methodological approaches and incorporates a wide variety of literatures from fields ranging from communication to psychology to linguistics to political science. The complexity of the subject matter not only demands the rigorous application of a variety of approaches but also illustrates the need to incorporate broad schools of thought to fully grasp this multifaceted issue. Tukachinsky's (2015) concluding remarks in the current volume synthesize these ideas, summarize the current state of the field, highlight existing challenges and opportunities, and offer important new directions for future theoretical, applied, and policy research in this domain.

Clearly, what can be gleaned from this overarching body of research is that racial/ethnic group memberships play a more prominent role in media uses and outcomes than is often recognized (see Mastro & Atwell Seate, 2012). Given this, the current volume's effort at identifying a broader range of processes and effects relevant to this relationship is critical. This work provides meaningful advances into our understanding of this consequential topic and extends existing theory in this domain. Equally importantly, the studies presented here offer valuable practical implications for consumers and advocacy groups alike, who are concerned with what they are seeing across the media landscape and interested in finding ways to either mitigate the potentially damaging effects of exposure on one's self, group, and society or promote more prosocial outcomes.

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Of course this collection of work is not without limitations. Primary among these is the current volume's heavy emphasis on television and related effects of exposure to this medium, predominately in U.S. settings. Certainly this imbalance may constrain the generalizability of this body of research, however, not necessarily in the ways one might initially suspect. The themes and messages about race/ethnicity found on television (and addressed here) are not inconsistent with what is known to exist across other forms of media such as film, magazines, and even user-generated content (e.g., YouTube). Accordingly, issues parallel to those associated with television content and use are certain to be relevant across media types. What may differ, are the processing demands required of different media. The features of messages associated with distinct media forms (e.g., editing techniques, orienting elements, information density) place different constraints on the cognitive resources associated with information processing (Lang, 2000). In some cases (e.g., continuous, "real-time" media such as a radio broadcast or a live stream), medium-based features can reduce resources available for processing, whereas with others (e.g., user-controlled media such as reading a magazine, watching a recorded TV show) processing can be facilitated (given the motivation to do so). What remains to be tested, is the impact of these medium-related features on racial/ethnic outcomes.

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