

# Television shows can affect racial judgments

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A new study published in the journal *Human Communication Research* reveals that viewers can be influenced by exposure to racial bias in the media, even without realizing it.

Led by Dana Mastro of the University of Arizona, the study exposed participants to television clips where Latinos were portrayed in both flattering and unflattering ways.

First, using a simulated television script, Latinos were presented in a variety of roles which differed in terms of the degree of intelligence and educational attainment associated with the main character. Next, additional participants were exposed to actual television programming, providing a more valid television viewing experience. Although the simulated scripts offered greater control, viewing actual programming more closely reproduced an authentic television encounter.

Exposure to stereotypes produced unfavorable effects on the viewers. When the target character was white, no association was made between racial identification and evaluations of the character. However, with relative consistency, when the target character was Latino, as viewer racial identification increased, perceptions of the character's education and qualifications decreased.

The research indicates that stereotype-based processing may occur based on media exposure, even when at a conscious level people try to dismiss what they are seeing as harmless. Indeed, TV images not only affected what the viewers thought about minorities, but also led to an us-versus-

them mentality.

The study also suggests that when white's own racial group membership is an important part of how they define themselves, then these unfavorable television characteristics may be used to boost their own esteem and elevate the status of their group.

“Just as people can develop their views about others through dialogue and interaction with others in society, the same types of outcomes can emerge based simply on watching television,” Mastro notes. “The quality of the images presented on television carries a consequence. Ultimately, even fictional TV content can perpetuate stereotypes which may promote real-world discrimination.”

Source: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

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