

# Television Exposure, Model Minority Portrayals, and Asian-American Stereotypes: An Exploratory Study

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## Abstract

This exploratory study examines how television exposure influences White-American viewers' attitudes toward Asian-Americans. Prior research reveals that the dominant image of Asian-Americans in contemporary television is that of the "model minority." Drawing on social identity, intergroup communication, and attributional theories, this study explores the negative outcomes of the seemingly positive Asian-American model minority stereotype. Path analyses conducted with preliminary empirical data from a survey of White-American college students (N = 323) revealed that viewers who internalized television stereotypes reported more stereotypical perceptions of Asian-Americans, greater internal attributions for Asian failures, and more symbolic racist beliefs about Asian-Americans. Directions for future research and implications for media scholars, practitioners, and policymakers are discussed.

**Keywords:** Asian-Americans, intergroup communication, television, model minorities

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Despite their growing presence in the United States, Asian-Americans are under-represented, marginalized, and misrepresented in mainstream media. For instance, Asian/Pacific Islanders form only 3% of all prime-time characters and are rarely cast in central roles. Historically, Asian-Americans were portrayed using such derisive stereotypes as "the yellow peril" (dangerous criminals), "the perpetual foreigner" (unassimilated immigrants), and "the exotic geisha" (subservient sexual objects). More recently, the nerdy and polite "model minority" stereotype has become more prevalent.

Stereotypes are widely-accepted, culturally shared beliefs describing personal traits and characteristics of groups of individuals. Media discourses help to define, share, and maintain racial stereotypes across societies over time, especially when inter-racial contact is limited. Stereotypes are descriptive in nature and can be either positively or negatively valenced. While negative stereotypes of racial/ethnic out-groups are used to justify White superiority, positive stereotypes can also be detrimental. Apart from the obvious drawbacks of defining a group uni-dimensionally, seemingly positive racial stereotypes can reinforce racial hierarchies while undermining support for race-targeted policies such as affirmative action.

Much of the prior research on racial media stereotypes has focused on negative stereotypes such as criminality and violence without much attention to positive stereotypes. While a few scholars have examined Asian-American stereotypes in various media contexts, research on the socio-cognitive effects of these portrayals on audiences is practically non-existent. Considering that often contradictory and somewhat uneven portrayals of Asian-Americans in the media, it is important to understand how such depictions shape real-world attitudes towards this group.

Using insights from social identity theory, causal attribution perspective, and aversive racism framework, this exploratory study examines whether television exposure is correlated with White viewers' perceptions toward Asian-Americans. Specifically, it presents preliminary empirical evidence based on survey data conducted with a convenience student sample in the United States. It explores how television viewing reinforces model minority stereotypes about Asian-Americans, increases internal causal attributions for Asian-American failures, and strengthens negative attitudes toward Asian-Americans.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### *Asian-American Portrayals on Television*

Anti-Asian sentiments can be traced as far back as the early 19th century with the entry of Chinese workers into the United States. Orientalist stereotypes of Asians are rooted in European colonialism that constructed the West as civilized in contrast to the East as barbaric. Chinese migrants were seen as an economic threat to Whites, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that lasted till about 1960. World War II propaganda against Japan, especially after the Pearl Harbor attacks, saw a peak in anti-Japanese feelings. Anti-miscegenation laws such as the 1917 Immigration Act banned Asians from marrying non-Asians. Model minority stereotypes evolved in the 1960s as an attempt to provide Asian-American assimilation as a model for other racial minorities to follow.

Asians are often invisible in narratives, playing trivial roles without much depth or substance. Even when Asian roles are included in television scripts, they are often played by White-American actors masquerading in "yellowface" by taping their eyes, putting on heavy make-up, and talking in a nonsensical "ching chong" language. They are typically marginalized as background characters. Even when they are cast in prominent roles, these tend to revolve around stereotypical occupations such as geishas, laundry workers, and martial artist experts. It is only more recently that shows have started featuring Asian-Americans as recurring characters in high-profile occupations such as lawyers and doctors.

One of the most dominant and pervasive portrayals of Asians in contemporary television is that of the highly accomplished yet passive "model minority". Early traces of the model minority stereotype can be seen in Charlie Chan movies of the 1930s and 1940s where he was depicted as an intelligent yet effeminate, unassertive character. However, it is in the post Civil rights era of the 1960's that the myth of the model minority stereotype blossomed with full gusto.

Content analyses of contemporary Asian-American portrayals reveal that the model minority stereotype is widespread across several media formats such as television commercials, magazine advertising, and entertainment programs. For example, television commercials predominantly depict Asian-Americans as diligent workers in business settings rather than focus on their family or social life. Similarly, prime-time dramas often portray Asian-Americans in high-profile occupations as doctors and lawyers in such shows as *ER*, *Heroes*, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Ally McBeal*.

The model minority stereotype is not as positive as it appears to be. Some scholars suggest that it is rather closely related to a long-standing negative stereotype of Asian-Americans as "the yellow peril". The yellow peril stereotype describes Asians as conniving, untrustworthy, and mysterious. Television crime dramas allude to this stereotype when they depict Chinatown or Little Tokyo areas of inner U.S. cities as dangerous, dark, seedy, and criminal. According to this perspective, yellow peril stereotypes are embedded within discourses of model minorities such that Asian competence is presented as a threat to White resources and power.

Additionally, the model minority representations of Asians as smart and nerdy are often dovetailed with traits such as unsociability and awkwardness. This aspect of the model minority stereotype is characterized by William Hung, a reject from *American Idol* in 2004, who was perceived as technologically-savvy yet socially inept nerd with no musical talent.

### *TV Portrayals and Perceptions of Asian-Americans*

While stereotypical images of Asian-Americans in the media by themselves are disturbing, the ways in which these depictions influence viewers' real-world attitudes toward Asian-Americans are far more significant. Media messages influence racial attitudes from a very young age, especially when direct inter-racial contact is minimal. Considering that most White viewers have little direct interpersonal contact with Asian-Americans, the impact of television is likely to be quite profound.

Cultivation theory posits that continued exposure to television messages can have long-lasting cumulative effects on audiences. Cultivation theory was primarily studied in the context of media violence to understand how heavy television exposure influenced perceptions of violence in the real world. Recent extensions suggest that viewers' exposure to specific television content is a better predictor

of the long-term cultivation effects than overall television exposure . Viewers who consider media portrayals as valid and realistic are more likely to internalize stereotypical messages .

Over a period of time, media representations that are internalized become chronically accessible from memory while making judgments . Chronically accessible media stereotypes can influence both stereotype *activation* and stereotype *endorsement*. While media stereotypes might be accessible to many viewers at the sub-conscious level, not all of them consciously endorse these stereotypes at the explicit level . Through repeated associations, these stereotypes become an integral part of the audiences' schemata or mental models about the racial/ethnic out-group such that even subtle cues are sufficient to trigger an entire network of related thoughts and feelings from long-term memory .

### *Social Identity Theory and Racial Hierarchy*

Social Identity Theory informs us that the need for positive esteem motivates people to show in-group favoritism while engaging in inter-group comparisons . From this perspective, out-group members who are seen as most similar to and least threatening to the dominant culture will be acknowledged but others will be condoned. For instance, prior research on news stories shows that viewers will be more lenient toward African-American criminals with lighter skin tones and less Afro-centric features . Along similar lines, Asian-Americans are likely to be seen as more acceptable when they are more assimilated into the White norm. That is, Asian-Americans have to often "act White" by changing their eating, language, clothing etc. in order to fit in with Whites. In the context of media portrayals, Asian characters that act and look "Asian" are more likely to be portrayed in negative ways as compared to those who are more "White," where the underlying message is one of White superiority. For example, a White actor, David Carradine, played the lead role in *Kung Fu* while the famous Asian martial artist, Bruce Lee, was ironically denied the part for being "too Asian" .

Media stereotypes underscore group differences in ways that typically increase the salience of group identity while still maintaining power differences. They do so by portraying Whiteness as normative, some racial/ethnic out-groups as "good minorities," and others as "bad minorities." The "good minority" discourse typically presents Asian-Americans as non-threatening passive subordinates who have assimilated into White culture. In contrast, the "bad minority" discourse represents more vocal racial minorities such as African-Americans as unjustifiably challenging White power. This racial hierarchy or triangulation has been traced to the post Civil Rights era as a way of curbing non-White power by pitching Asian-Americans against African-Americans . Such "divide and conquer" politics leads to unnecessary and counter-productive competition between racial minorities. Moreover, Whites are able to maintain their self-image as fair by providing conditional support for those minorities who are unquestioning of White dominance and are willing to assimilate into White culture.

### *Internal Attributions for Group Differences*

Apart from highlighting intergroup differences in ways that maintain in-group superiority, media messages also subtly explain *why* power differences exist in society. According to causal attribution theory , people have an inherent need to explain and attribute causes for behaviors. Most people have a set of causal generalizations about situations. That is, causal schemas are activated automatically in trying to quickly generate plausible causes for a given behavior.

There are two main types of attributions: internal (person/individual attribution) and external (situational/societal) . When the perceiver makes internal attributions, the behavior is attributed to the personal's individual disposition such as intelligence, work ethic, language proficiency, and social skills. In contrast, when the perceiver makes external attributions, the behavior is attributed to situational factors such as government support, discriminatory policies, and peer pressure.

Analyses of news stories demonstrate that they can attribute responsibility for social problems to either internal or external causes . Specifically, readers exposed to episodic frames tended place greater blame on individuals for their problems but those exposed to thematic frames tended to attribute these failures to external causes. When racial/ethnic out-groups are portrayed in stereotypical ways as the "racialized other," they are likely to be blamed for their lower status in society . Even subtle cues in news stories such as framing them as "lives gained" rather than "lives lost" or modifying active to passive tense can bring about significant changes in causal attributions. Research also shows that internal attributions of

White readers for African-American criminality and poverty decreases support for the race-targeted policies such as affirmative action and welfare programs .

With regard to Asian-Americans, although they are perceived to be hardworking, intelligent "model minorities," they are also simultaneously regarded as lacking in warmth and friendliness . In other words, although the model minority stereotype appears to be a positive one, it is inherently tied to the yellow peril stereotype that suggests that Asians are competitive threats to White power . Therefore, it is likely that the stereotypical perception of Asian-Americans as model minorities increases internal attributions (such as lack of social and language skills) rather than external attributions (such as discrimination and government support) for disparities in quality of life.

### *Racial Attitudes towards Asian-Americans*

Whereas old-fashioned bigotry focused on perceived biological inferiority of racial minorities and racial segregation, contemporary forms of racism are more subtle and indirect . Aversive racism is rooted in symbolic abstract values such as individualism rather than any concrete threat from racial minorities . Aversive racists are torn between egalitarian principles that they cherish and the unacknowledged anti-minority sentiments that they harbor. Aversive racism is characterized by beliefs that (a) racial discrimination is no longer a problem in present-day America, (b) that racial minorities are pushing too hard and too fast for their rights, and (c) and that policies supporting racial minorities are unfair .

Although not often acknowledged in modern-day America, anti-Asian racism is a real phenomenon. Research shows that Asian-Americans are less likely than White-Americans to be represented in top administration, suggesting a possible "glass ceiling effect" (Suzuki, 1997). After controlling for age and education, they earn less than their White counterparts (Young & Takeuchi, 1998). They are also likely to be excluded from social networks within organizations because they are perceived as foreign and unsociable (Friedman & Krackhard, 1997; Paek & Shah, 2003).

Even seemingly positive stereotypes can indirectly disadvantage racial minorities . The model minority perceptions leads to the misconception that Asians have achieved the "American Dream." By treating all Asians as a single homogenous entity, it ignores the enormous variation in educational and income levels within Asian-American communities. There is tremendous pressure on Asian-Americans to give up their sub-cultures, adopt White dominant values, and live up to their model minority status . Such divisive discourses justify racism lack of support for race-targeted policies such as affirmative action by suggesting that Asian-American successes are proof that other racial minorities such as African-Americans and Latino-Americans are not trying hard enough. From this perspective, disparities in privileges for racial minorities are attributed to internal factors such as language skills and social skills rather than external factors such as discrimination and government support.

### **The Present Study**

Based on theoretical perspectives such as the social identity theory, causal attribution perspective, and aversive racism framework elaborated above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis: Greater the exposure to model minority portrayals of Asian-Americans on TV, stronger perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities, more internal attributions for Asian-American failures, and more negative racial attitudes towards Asian-Americans.

According to social identity theory, White-American viewers will show in-group favoritism such that even seemingly positive model minority stereotypes about Asian-Americans need not necessarily translate into respect and support for Asian-Americans. Media effects perspectives suggests that heavy television viewers differ significantly from light television viewers in their level of recall and extent of internalization about television messages into their perceptions and belief systems. Causal attribution theory proposes that television messages might implicitly suggest that internal factors such as poor language skills or social skills rather than external factors such as lack of governmental support or discrimination are reasons why Asian-Americans might not succeed in contemporary America. The symbolic racism perspective sheds light on how the model minority stereotype might not appear to be blatantly prejudicial but could still foster subtle, symbolic racism by suggesting that Asian-Americans are pushing too hard for their rights and that racism is non-existent in present-day America.

Rather than examine the impact of television exposure on each variable one at a time, a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach will help to simultaneously exploring the direct and indirect relationships amongst the various variables in the model. Specifically, it provides the opportunity to systematically test the comprehensive model as well as its individual components, thus allowing for the researcher to effectively infer the role of mediating variables. The structural model explored in this paper builds on existing research on media stereotypes and racial beliefs and contributes to this scholarship in at least three significant ways. First, it examines attitudes toward Asian-Americans, a racial/ethnic out-group that has not received as much research attention as African-Americans and Latino-Americans. Second and more interestingly, it explores the possible negative ramifications of so-called positive stereotypes. Finally, it proposes a chain of relationships that includes internal causal attribution as a significant mediating variable.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this exploratory project completed a self-administered computer-based survey using an online tool. A convenience sample of upper-level undergraduate Communication student volunteers at a large public university in Southern United States were recruited for this preliminary analysis. Surveys were collected over a one-week period.

The racial composition of the sample (N= 323) was 85.1% White, 8.1% Hispanic, 2.8% Black, 0.6% Asian, 0.3% Pacific Islander, and 3.1% Other. Only questionnaires completed by White participants were included in the final analyses. Males made up 22.8% of the respondents. The mean age was 20.5 years (SD = 1.15).

### *Variables*

*Television exposure.* Rather than use a global measure of TV viewing, respondents were asked "*How many hours in a typical week would you spend on watching the following television genres?*" Viewers' consumption of television news, situation comedies, afternoon soaps, talk shows, sports, music television, reality-based cop shows, crime drama, non-crime drama, game shows, reality-based elimination shows, and talent shows was summed up after eliminating extreme outliers. Respondents were then categorized into heavy (M = 23.57, SD = 11.33) and light television viewers (M = 7.65, SD = 4.24) based on a median split.

*Model minority portrayals of Asian-Americans on television.* This measure assessed participants' recall of typical portrayals of racial/ethnic out-groups on television. Participants were requested to "*Please think about the Asian-Americans on television. Indicate the extent to which you agree that the following traits describe the typical Asian-American on TV.*" Participants were presented a list of traits and characteristics derived from prior research on typical portrayals of racial minorities on TV . 7 point Likert-type scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were used to describe television portrayals typical of these groups. This index was labeled "Model Minority TV Portrayals" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.74$ ) and included three items: *nerdy*, *smart* and *polite*.

*Model minority perceptions.* Based on prior research , real-world perceptions were measured similar to TV portrayals. This time the specific instruction was to "*Indicate the extent to which the following traits describe Asian-Americans in general.*" The "Model Minority Perceptions" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.75$ ) index included *nerdy*, *smart* and *polite*.

*Internal attributions for Asian-American failures.* To understand the extent to which respondents attributed failures of Asian-Americans to internal factors they were asked: "*Please indicate the extent to which the following reasons account for differences in quality of life for Asian-Americans as compared to Caucasian-Americans/White people.*" A list of causes for out-group failures, based on prior research , was included .A 7 point Likert type scale ranging from *not at all an important factor* to *very important factor* was used to indicate the extent to which each of the factors contributed. This index comprised of three items: *lack of motivation*, *lack of social skills*, and *lack of language skills* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.65$ ).

*Negative Racial Attitudes towards Asian-Americans.* Items used to measure negative racial attitudes toward Asian-Americans were modified from the existing Symbolic Racism Scale that has been extensively used in social cognitive literature in various settings. Participants were instructed thus: "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about Asian Americans. Please be honest in your responses". A 7-point Likert-type scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* was provided as answer options. The modified version included two items that emphasized excessive demands by and undeserving advantage given to Asian-Americans: "Asian-Americans are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights" and "Over the past few years Asian-Americans have gotten more economically and politically than they deserve" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.78$ ).

### Data Analyses

Preliminary analyses included examining the bivariate correlations amongst the primary variables followed by multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) to examine the effects of the independent variable on the four dependent measures. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) (AMOS 18.0) using the observed variable method was used to estimate the models. As suggested by Stephenson and Holbert (2003), the chi-square value, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to determine goodness of fit. Although there is not much consensus on any single measure for assessing the goodness of fit, a CFI of over 0.90, a RMSEA value less than 0.06 and non-significant chi-square value are often seen as indicating a good fit of the data with the model.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation coefficients (Pearson's  $r$ ) for the endogenous variables in the model are provided in Table 1. Examining the means and standard deviations revealed that model minority portrayals of Asian-Americans on TV, perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities, and internal attributions for Asian-American failures were moderately high whereas negative racial attitudes relating to Asian-Americans was on the lower side of the 7-point Likert type scale.

In terms of the correlation coefficients, there was a significant positive correlation between model minority portrayals on television and perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities. TV portrayals of Asian-Americans as model minorities were also positively correlated with internal attributions for Asian-American failures. Negative racial attitudes toward Asian-Americans were negatively correlated with model minority portrayals on TV and were positively correlated with internal attributions for Asian-American failures.

Table 1

### Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Endogenous Variables in the Model

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Model minority portrayals on TV	5.49	1.02	--			
2. Model minority perceptions	5.22	1.08	.40**	--		
3. Internal attributions for failures	4.46	1.57	-.04	.19**	--	
4. Negative racial attitudes toward Asians	2.70	1.20	-.35**	-.12	.19**	--

*Note:* \*\* indicates that the correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. All variables were measured on a 7 point scale.

icant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. All variables were measured on a 7 point scale.

### Preliminary Analyses

A preliminary multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with "Television exposure" as the independent variable for four dependent variables: "Model minority portrayals of Asian-Americans on TV," "Perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities," "Internal attributions of Asian-American failures," and "Racial attitudes toward Asian-Americans." Results revealed that there was a significant main effect for "Television exposure" on the dependent measures; Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.965$ ,  $F(4, 272) = 2.460$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.035$ .

Analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA for each dependent variable. These analyses revealed that heavy television viewers ( $M = 5.65$ ;  $SD = 0.97$ ) were significantly more likely than light viewers ( $M = 5.39$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ) to report exposure to televised portrayals of Asian-Americans as model minorities;  $F(1, 272) = 4.284$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . No other significant main effects emerged.

### *Final Analyses*

The results of the SEM suggest a good fit and support for the hypothesized model as evidenced by  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 5$ ,  $p = 0.077$ ) = 9.936, CFI = 0.954 and RMSEA = 0.060. As shown in Figure 1, heavy viewers in comparison to light viewers reported more televised portrayals of Asian-Americans as model minorities, increased perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities, higher internal attributions for Asian-American failures, which in turn lead to stronger negative attitudes towards Asian-Americans.

Focusing on the individual paths within the model in greater detail revealed that television exposure (dummy coded into 1 = heavy and 0 = light viewers) was positively correlated with model minority portrayals of Asian-Americans on TV ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). At the next step of the model, there were two paths: a direct path to negative attitudes toward Asian-Americans and an indirect path mediated by perceptions of Asian-Americans and internal attributions for Asian-American failures. The direct path revealed a negative correlation between televised model minority portrayals and negative attitudes toward Asian-Americans ( $\beta = -0.40$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). In contrast, the indirect paths indicated that televised model minority portrayals increased stereotypical perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), which then increased internal attributions for Asian-American failures in the real world ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ), and finally increased negative attitudes toward Asian-Americans ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

## **Discussion**

The current exploratory study was an attempt to begin to understand the complex relationships amongst television exposure and attitudes toward Asian-Americans. In contrast to earlier research on Asian-American stereotypes that are mainly descriptive in nature, these results focus on viewers' responses to such messages. We found empirical support in this limited convenience sample of undergraduate students for our hypothesis that viewers who spent more time watching television were more likely to internalize stereotypical model minority media messages into their real-world perceptions, attribute internal causes for Asian failures, and have negative attitudes towards Asian-Americans. Overall, the findings suggest that the so-called positive model minority stereotypes of Asian-Americans that are often presented as benign or even laudable could in fact be quite detrimental.

Results largely support cultivation theory in that television seems to act as a socio-cultural agent that shapes, maintains, and cultivates our ideas about Asian-Americans in real life. Heavy viewers were more likely than light viewers to recall model minority stereotypes of Asian-Americans but more importantly, they were also likely to have stronger stereotypical perceptions of Asian-Americans as intelligent, polite model minorities. These results suggest that for those heavy viewers who are able to distinguish television reality from social reality, television does not seem to activate negative racial attitudes. These findings support the notion that stereotype *activation* is not the same as stereotype *application*.

Heavy viewers appear to be further divided into two types: those who internalized media messages as real (stereotype endorsers) and those who recall media stereotypes but do not apply them into judgments about social reality (stereotype activators). Stereotype endorsers internalized the model minority stereotype and applied these stereotypes to their real-world perceptions of Asian-Americans. The greater their perceptions of Asian-Americans as model minorities, the stronger their negative racial attitudes

toward Asian-Americans. In contrast, stereotype activators were able to recall media stereotypes of Asian-Americans but were able to distinguish social reality from television reality. Their perceptions of Asian-Americans were not influenced by media stereotypes. These distinctions amongst heavy viewers are significant because it could explain why cultivation is not necessarily a uniform phenomenon.

The findings from this first round of data from a narrow student sample seems to support prior research on subtle forms of racism. Results from this pilot study show that although model minority stereotypes do not seem to fit the traditional blatant derisive stereotype framework, they could significantly increase subtle, symbolic racism in indirect ways. At face value this finding appears to be counter-intuitive but examining it within the larger discourse of contemporary, modern forms of racism provides some answers. Although Asian-Americans were seen as intelligent and polite model minorities, such perceptions were dovetailed with negative characteristics such as unfriendliness. Those who endorsed aversive racist beliefs felt that discrimination is no longer a problem in contemporary U.S. and that individual factors (such as lack of social skills and language proficiency) rather than societal factors (such as discrimination or lack of opportunities) are to be blamed for Asian-Americans who do not succeed. According to this line of reasoning, Asian-Americans who do not well-integrated into mainstream White culture are seen as socially aloof and "too ethnic," which are then cited as reasons for their lack of social and economic mobility. Such thinking puts enormous pressure on Asian-Americans to "act White" in order to succeed.

In terms of implications for media policy-makers, these findings strengthen the understanding of scholars of media studies and political communication by unpacking a chain of related variables linking media exposure to viewers' policy preferences regarding support for race-targeted policies such as affirmative action. Political opinions and even policy-making decisions appear to be influenced by heuristic processing of media stereotypes. These findings are congruent with prior studies in the context of political decision-making that propose that media messages, including those from entertainment contexts, shape audiences' political ideologies in direct and subtle ways.

Regarding implications for media practitioners, it appears that if indeed television exposure is significantly correlated with real world perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards Asians, efforts have to be made to combat media stereotypes effectively. Viewers need to be conscious of ways in which media messages might powerfully shape not only their racial attitudes but also their political views and policy preferences. Media educators need to promote ways to help audiences become more critical and active consumers of media messages. By analyzing the impact of specific genres of television that might contribute differently to stereotyping of Asian-Americans, media scholars could help identify programming that is particularly problematic. Engaging with and educating mainstream media practitioners towards more responsible and culturally-sensitive programming is a related meaningful endeavor that needs to be supported.

Although the findings of this study seem to establish a relationship between television stereotypes and perceptions of Asians in real life, it is important to note that it is difficult to establish causality with any amount of confidence using cross-sectional data collected from a non-random convenience sample. It is possible that a third unknown variable influenced both television exposure to Asian-American portrayals and racial attitudes towards Asian-Americans. Experimental studies are required to establish causal relationships that could clarify the temporal order of key variables. Future research that follows up on this exploratory study should consider using a national level non-student population to account for greater variability in viewing habits and racial attitudes.

An alternative explanation that those individuals who hold negative racial attitudes selectively seek out television shows that portray Asians in stereotypical ways is equally plausible. Such an explanation would be in line with selective exposure and perception theories that suggest that viewers' existing attitudes guide the types of information that they choose to attend to. People use their selective filters to selectively choose and interpret media messages in ways that keep their current racial frames rather intact. Thus, a person who endorses Asian-American stereotypes would seek out information that supports their prejudiced perspectives while avoiding those programs that do not support them.

However, such an alternative explanation seems quite unlikely for two reasons. One, some of the key third variables such as political ideology and overall television exposure were statistically controlled for

in the analyses while determining the relationship between television portrayals of Asians and racial perceptions of Asians in general. Moreover, a significant number of experimental studies within media effects research provide increasing evidence that exposure to racial stereotypes in the media influence racial attitudes. Given these factors, it seems unlikely that audiences selectively expose themselves to media programming that features Asians in stereotypical roles.

Future research should explore how Asian-American audiences are themselves influenced by media portrayals. Recent research shows that the model minority stereotype puts immense pressure on Asian-Americans to excel. Internalized racism as a reflection of the broader white racial frame and an adaptive mechanism to cope with systematic racism is a complex topic. Asian-Americans often cope by trying to distance themselves from them by appearing non-Asian. There is tremendous pressure on them to assimilate and integrate with the dominant culture. These serious, complex, and inter-related costs of the dominant White racist ideology on how racial minorities perceive themselves need to be explored thoroughly in future research.

Figure 1. *Model linking television exposure and negative racial attitudes toward Asian-Americans*

Note : "Television exposure" was dummy coded with 0 = light viewers and 1 = heavy viewers.

In sum, this exploratory study offers an important first step in the direction of unpacking the logical chain of relationships linking television exposure to audiences' attitudes toward Asian-Americans. Future research could supplement experimental research with qualitative methods such as discourse analysis and reception studies to understand how model minority discourses in popular culture are interpreted contextually by audiences. Preliminary evidence suggest that heavy television viewing cultivates stereotypical perceptions of real-life Asian-Americans, greater internal attributions for Asian failures and increased negative attitudes towards Asian-Americans. Although appearing to be positive, model minority stereotypes do not seem to evoke admiration but appear to strengthen beliefs that racial discrimination does not exist in contemporary America and that race-targeted policies such as affirmative action are no longer needed for racial minorities. In essence, television portrayals of Asian-Americans, even so-called positive model minority stereotypes, might serve to privilege Whiteness and maintain boundaries between various racial groups. Further research with a larger and broader sample is required to validate the generalizability of these findings.

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