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MINORITY REPRESENTATION AND
CULTURAL DIVERSITY

ON

PRIME TIME TELEVISION

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kenya E. Edwards

March 2005

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Acceptance Page

Thesis Acceptance

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree,
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MINORITY REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON PRIME TIME TELEVISION

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University of Nebraska, 2005

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Abstract

The rapid growth of minority groups over the past few decades has dramatically changed the face of American society. Current census figures suggest that minority groups will exceed 50% of the total U. S. population by the middle of the next century. As a result of this rapid demographic change, interest has been rekindled in the issue of race on network television. The present study reviewed prime time dramas and situation comedies in 2003 to identify changes in the representation of minority characters in recent years.

Major findings of the present study include the following. Minority characters continue to appear in prime time television programs and as primary characters less frequently than non-minority characters. However, progress has been made in how minority characters are portrayed in that stereotypic differences between minorities and non-minorities are lessening.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1

Introduction

America prides itself in being a “global melting pot” and recent U. S. Census figures support this claim by suggesting that a record number of Americans – nearly one in three-claim non-European ethnicities (United States Census, 2000). According to 2000 U. S. Census figures, minorities (African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans) comprised 31.5% of the total population (United States Census, 2000). Given present rates of growth, these groups are expected to exceed 50% of the U.S. population by the middle of the next century (United States Census, 2000).

This demographic change has increased the need for better understanding of multicultural issues and therefore examining minority representation and cultural diversity has become even more critical. According to a study by Dr. Sondra Thiederman, 90% of white Americans live in predominantly white neighborhoods (Theiderman, 2000). This is significant upon consideration of the importance of people who are different living and working together. It is only in this way that individuals can learn to overcome fears, biases, and communication problems that plague our nation.

It is first important to distinguish the difference between cultural diversity and minority representation. Minority representation is a quantitative evaluation of minorities that examines the numbers of minorities in a particular setting. Minority representation concentrates on analyzing population numbers, frequencies, and targets. Cultural diversity, on the other hand, is a qualitative assessment that focuses on

understanding these differences and exploring variety within minority groups. Cultural diversity explores the context in which minority characters appear and emphasizes both the uniqueness and the similarities of the various groups. Cultural diversity attempts to teach more than simple tolerance of differences, but embracing and celebrating differences within the various cultures.

However, even as more emphasis is placed on promoting cultural diversity, racism, and discrimination still plague our nation; and in the case of race relations, television is a key socializing agent. As a window to the world, television is a means of providing individuals with experiences and information otherwise not available to them, their families, or their communities.

Research has explored the effects of television on human interaction and has found that television has proven to impact how audiences view themselves in relation to the world in which they live. Research on the portrayals of minorities on television has consistently concluded that television presents limited depictions of minority groups and often emphasizes both negative and stereotypical images.

Televised portrayals of minority characters can prove to either perpetuate or dispel stereotypes and although considerable progress has occurred in the fight against unfair and unflattering portrayals, the question still remains if the mass media is still guilty of insensitivity in this area. The present study attempted to explore minority representation and cultural diversity on television in order to expand existing understanding of these issues.

In recent years, the entertainment industry has been pressured to increase cultural diversity on big and small screens to reflect our current society in its portrayals.

Minority advocacy groups have demanded immediate change in what they call a “whitewash.” For example, in a 1999 magazine article, ABC boasted that the network offered “the broadest range of programming” on television. In the article ABC listed 10 of the network’s biggest stars: all were white. In addition for the four major networks at that time, there were 26 new prime time shows, and nearly all the regular cast was white. One ABC executive stated that when hiring, “unless it’s stated otherwise, it’s assumed the character is white... colorblind casting rarely happens” (Lowry, 2000). As suggested by minority advocacy groups, entertainment media do not reflect the cultural diversity of the real world

Television programming provides information about social groups in two ways: by inclusion and by exclusion. When diverse groups are included, television content offers specific examples of physical, psychological, social, cultural, and economic characteristics of each group. When diverse groups are absent from television, there is the implication that the missing groups are unimportant, inconsequential and powerless (Maestro, 2000).

Several studies explain the effects of interracial interaction and impression formation. The Contact Hypothesis states that close contact between members of different races fosters positive racial attitudes, and conversely, lack of such contact leads to prejudice and negative stereotypes (Tan, Fujioka & Lucht, 1997). Graves (1999) maintained that in prime time television nonwhite characters were rarely presented, making cross-cultural connections with those of other ethnic distinctions (Graves, 1999).

Social Cognitive Theory suggests that under certain conditions, learned behavior is emulated. Social Cognitive Theory also posits that the manner in which images are presented on television influences how viewers interpret and respond to the modeled acts (Bandura, 2002). Consequently, individuals not exposed to outside sources of information are more likely to interpret what they view on television as real. Substituting televised portrayals and interracial interactions, as sources of vicarious experience, contributes to the development of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

A study by Dana Maestro analyzed prime time television during the 1996 - 1997 television seasons. Maestro explored minorities on prime time television and found that 80% of characters were Caucasian. African Americans represented 16%. Hispanic-American characters represented 3%. Asian-American characters represented 1% and there were no Native American characters (Maestro, 2000). The study also found that minority characters were portrayed more stereotypically than non-minority characters.

A study by Dr. Darnell Hunt (2002) examined a program sample from prime time programs aired in October and November of 2001 and found that African Americans and Caucasian Americans combined represented 92% (13% and 79%, respectively) of all prime time characters in the sample. Yet combined, these groups only comprised 82% of the nation's population at that time (Hunt, 2002). Hunt's study found that Hispanic Americans accounted for only 2% of all characters. Asian Americans comprised 3% of all characters, and similar to Maestro's study, Hunt recorded no Native Americans in prime time programming (Hunt, 2002).

A similar study by the organization Children Now entitled, "*Fall Colors 2001-02*," examined prime time programming from the 2001-2002 television seasons. The study concluded that prime time remained overwhelmingly white, with people of color appearing largely in secondary and guest roles. The study found that Caucasian characters accounted for 73% of the prime time population, followed by African Americans (16%), Hispanic Americans (4%), Asian Americans (3%) and Native Americans (.2%) (Children Now, 2002). The present study should highlight an interesting comparison with previous program samples in order to identify specific changes in the representation and portrayal of minority characters.

Review of Literature

Prime Time Programming

Prime time programming (7 p.m. - 10 p.m. CST) is considered the most watched time frame for networks. Television, particularly prime time programming, occupies a central position in American culture as a storyteller conveying much about what is normal, acceptable and expected, as well as what is irrelevant and outside the mainstream. Concern about minorities on television emerged in response to issues raised by the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). Until the late 1960s, minorities were most notable for their “invisibility” to the mass media. The invisibility of minority characters on television, alongside alleged discriminatory hiring practices at the networks, led to a presidentially commissioned investigation by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights to study the impact of television on perceptions of minorities.

The resulting commission report suggested that such portrayals of African Americans, as well as other ethnic minorities, influenced the way in which both Whites and non-Whites perceived minorities. The study found that in 1970 only 12.2% of all characters on prime time were non-White. Their findings also indicated that portrayals of minorities were both infrequent and stereotypical (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977).

Attitudes/Beliefs

Television viewing has proven to impact audience perceptions of reality. Among theories of long-term media effect, the Cultivation Hypothesis of Gerbner (1973) remains the best documented and most investigated. Gerbner’s Cultivation

Hypothesis likened the effects of stereotypic television portrayals to the cumulative effects of cultivation on a crop. The Cultivation Hypothesis holds that television has acquired such a central place in daily life that it dominates our “symbolic environment” by substituting its (distorted) message about the world (McQuail, 1998). Similarly, the cumulative effects of viewing particular kinds of people over and over in the same kinds of roles can strongly impact viewer’s notions of their own and other’s place in the world.

According to Robert M. Entman in the 1998 report to the board for “*The Presidents’ Initiative on Race*, ” when it comes to race, viewers look to television to form their opinions. In that report Entman wrote:

The media’s portrayal of race is probably the most important factor people use when they form opinions of other races and shape their own racial identity ... The implicit and explicit messages are transmitted, but the media help to shape the attitudes, assumptions, anxieties and hopes that people in each group have about themselves and those belonging to other groups. People categorized as Asian, Afro- American or Black, Hispanic American and White or Euro- American learn much about the meaning of those categories from the media, perhaps more than they learn from any other source (Shultz, 2001, p.2).

There is also ample evidence to support that media portrayals affect cultural attitudes of children. Psychologists suggest that children have three sources of reality: what they learn at home, what they learn at school and what they learn on television (Children’s Television Resource and Education Center, 1992). The Social Learning

Theory posits that children learn about themselves and the world around them from observing others. Consequently, attitudes and behaviors can be influenced by simply viewing televised material (Dorr, 1982). Studies reveal that children are more likely to report identifying with and wanting to be like media characters of their own ethnic background (Greenberg & Atkin, 1982). Given that minorities (African Americans and Hispanic Americans particularly) have been found to be among the heaviest television consumers, research on minority representation and cultural diversity on television becomes critical (Nielsen Media Research, 1998).

While television has the potential to affect the attitudes of children of all races, it is necessary to look specifically at the unique ways that television influences both minority group and majority group children's attitudes toward other racial groups, their own racial group and themselves. A study by Dorr (1982) on the effects of television found evidence of social learning among African Americans, Cambodians, Chinese Americans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cubans, Japanese, Laotians, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans and Caucasians. In addition, there was no evidence that this process of learning differed in any substantial way among any of these groups (Dorr, 1982).

The 1999 Kaiser Family foundation study, *"Kids and the Media at the New Millennium,"* examined viewing habits of more than 3000 children age 2 to 18. The study found that overall children spent an average of nearly three hours a day watching television, most of that time without adult supervision. Among children eight and older, a quarter of them spent more than five hours a day in front of the television (Schultz, 2001).

According to Nielsen media research, children watch television during prime time more than any other time of day (Nielsen Media Research, 2000). More than ten million children, on average, watch television from 8 to 9 o'clock in the evening. The "family hour," as it has been called, is the most popular time for children to watch television, yet it remains the least diverse of any hour in all of prime time (Nielsen Media Research, 2000).

Children Now's study, "*Fall Colors 2001-02*," also found that prime time cultural diversity dramatically increased as the evening progressed, with the 8:00 hour being the least racially diverse, and the 10:00 hour being the most racially diverse. Thus, children are more likely to see a much more homogenous prime time world than are adults who watch television later in the evening.

African Americans

Since network television began, it has projected an image of African Americans that is narrow and restricting. Ferguson and Haitman described the changes in the characterizations and images of Blacks in American television network comedy and drama series over a three-decade period (1944-1974). The authors concluded that there was no significant change in kinds of images. Blacks have been portrayed as either extraordinarily "white" (programs like "*Julia*," "*I spy*," etc.) or extraordinarily "bad" (drug pushers, hustlers or hookers). However, the authors pointed out that during that time Blacks progressed from being only servants in episodes to playing starring roles (Ferguson & Haitman, 1975).

Bowmani (1977) explored whether television tends to foster, maintain, or close the socio-economic political gaps between Blacks and Whites in America. The main

conclusions were: Television maintains and probably fosters existing gaps between Blacks and Whites; television tends to provide homogenized, imitative programming that reinforces the domestic colonialism mentality and status of Blacks (Bowmani, 1977).

A study conducted by Tan explored television use and self-esteem of Blacks. The study concluded that constant exposure to white oriented television entertainment programs or those that depicted Blacks in low social status roles caused low self-esteem in black audiences (Tan, 1979).

The 1960-1970 decade was probably the most significant for Blacks on television. This decade offered a depth of roles, which had never been available before. Blacks were seen as doctors, nurses, secretaries, law enforcement officials, entertainers, social workers and more.

The decade from 1970-1980 stunted this growth. Blacks were integrated into white television, but in much smaller numbers. The roles portrayed in general lacked true depth and offered a sterile picture of black people (McDonald, 1982). Historically, the black television shows that were most popular and managed to last the longest were usually comedies or musical variety shows, not dramatic programs (McDonald, 1982).

A study conducted by Berry & Mitchell-Kernan (1982) found that among racial minorities, African Americans received the most air time compared to other minority groups. However, in comparison to Whites, African Americans were still underrepresented on television (Berry and Mitchell- Kernan, 1982).

In the past 20-30 years a body of literature (summarized in Greenberg and Brand, 1994) showed an evolution in African-American representation across that time frame. In 1971, African Americans represented 6% of the prime time characters in comedies and dramas, and 11% of the population. In 1980, they were 8% of prime time characters and 12% of the population. By 1993, Blacks were 11% of the prime time characters, and 12% of the population. Thus, in sheer frequency at any rate, Blacks have achieved one measure of parity (Maestro, 2000).

According to the 2000 Census, African Americans number 36.4 million. Quantitatively, African-American faces today do appear more often on television than other minority groups. Still, such appearances are often limited to portrayals of pimps, drug dealers, gun toting gang members, rapists or murderers (Hunt, 2000).

Hispanic Americans

The latest U. S. Census figures show that Hispanic Americans are the fastest growing segment of the U. S. population. Hispanic Americans number 35 million, or 12.5% of the population (U. S. Census, 2000). According to the 2000 Census, Hispanic Americans are America's fastest-growing minority, having recently surpassed the number of African Americans. The U.S. Hispanic-American population grew by 58% from 1990 to 2000, making it the fastest growing minority group. It is estimated that there will be 40.4 million Hispanic Americans in the year 2010 (U. S. Census, 2000).

In the 1970's, Hispanic Americans were found on television half as often as their presence in the population (Maestro, 2000). Gerbner and Signorielli (1979), in a decade long study of minorities on prime time dramas, found that Hispanic Americans averaged about 3% of televised characters. In a 1980 analysis, Greenberg and Baptista-

Fernandez identified that Hispanic Americans comprised 1.5% of the television population while comprising 9% of the overall population (Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980).

The media offers a limited range of Hispanic models that Hispanic Americans can identify. Cortes (1979) discussed the development of the Hispanic American media stereotype. Hispanic Americans have been consistently portrayed as violent lawbreakers and misfits. Stereotypes associated with Hispanic Americans dealt mostly with talk and dress. Across a decade of studies, characterizations featured images of poor and uneducated Hispanic Americans commonly depicted as criminals, buffoons, Latin lovers, or law enforcers (Berg, 1990; Faber, O'Guinn, & Meyer, 1987; Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980).

Hispanic Americans were least articulate, had the heaviest accent, and were least spontaneous in their conversational interactions; they were less professional in their attire and used accessories excessively. Disproportionately, their conversations were about crime and violence. In 2000, Poniewizik & McDowell found that Hispanic Americans still have trouble getting parts other than the perpetrators of crimes, the victim or that newly resurgent figure, the maid/nanny (Poniewizik & McDowell, 2001).

According to a study by Graves (1999), Hispanic Americans have few national prime time roles (Graves, 1999). According to Hunt's research, in all of prime time Hispanic Americans accounted for only 47 out of 2,251 characters (Hunt, 2000). In addition, Hispanic-American characters actually dropped, from 3% to 2% in the 2000 television season (Hunt, 2000). According To *Fall Colors 2001- 02*, Hispanic American faces have increased, although the majority was found in secondary and

tertiary roles and nearly half of these characters held low status positions and occupations (Children Now, 2001).

Another essential element specific to Hispanic American characters is the question of what qualifies as a "real" Hispanic character. This question is more complicated for Hispanic Americans than it is for African Americans or Asian Americans, whose physical characteristics help distinguish them. Having "authentic" Hispanic American actors appear as Hispanic American characters on television is an area which has received much scrutiny (Torres, 2001). Concern over the message sent to Hispanic Americans when Hispanic American actors portray non-Hispanic characters is of specific concern to Hispanic American audiences.

What message does Ramon Estevez, a.k.a. Martin Sheen, playing Anglo President Josiah Bartlet on "*The West Wing*" send to Hispanic viewers? Spokeswoman Lisa Navarrete of the National Council of La Raza says the answer is not cut and dried:

"We want [Hispanic] actors to be able to play Shakespeare and the whole gamut of roles," she says... "but we're also concerned about kids' self-esteem and self-image when they don't see themselves [on TV]" (Torres, 2001, p.32).

The character Patty Pryor, played by a young actress named Sarah Ramos on "American Dream," is of Hispanic descent. However, on television she plays an Irish Catholic girl. Similarly, Frankie Muniz, born Francisco Muniz, part Irish, Italian and Puerto Rican, and star of the hit comedy series, "*Malcolm in the Middle*," consistently plays non-Latino roles.

Asian Americans

According to the 2000 Census, Asian Americans number 4.2% of the total population in the United States. However, Asian Americans have been virtually invisible on the television screen. *Fall Colors 01-02* reported that the number of Asian-American characters on prime time was 3% (Children Now, 2002).

Shawn Wong, a Chinese-American professor of Asian-American studies at the University of Washington explored the confusion, racism and contradictions that surround the image of Asian-American men in the media. Wong asked a class of 120 Asian-American students at the University of Washington to name a celebrity Asian-American couple, specifically a husband and wife. Students could not name one. Historically, Asian Americans have been most often portrayed as gardeners, houseboys, ruthless foreign businessmen or cooks (Wong, 1994). Even after 150 years of Asian-American presence on U. S. soil, on television Asian Americans are still portrayed as foreigners who speak pidgin English, preserve only their old country traditions and refuse to assimilate into American culture (Doo Boo, 1998).

According to Willimas and Condry (1998), Asian Americans were characterized by rare appearances as a parent or spouse (Willimas & Condry, 1998). Likewise, Asian-American children were usually portrayed in a group setting. Asian Americans always appeared in supporting roles (Bianco, 1999). Asian-American men are very rarely portrayed as husbands, fathers or lovers in television and movies (Bianco, 1999).

There are fundamental stereotypes of Asian Americans today—the gook, the geek and the geisha (Society of Professional Journalists, 2000, p. 72). Asian men, when given the “good” role, are portrayed as good fighters through the martial arts. In

other words, most Asian men in the media are given the “Bruce Lee” character. However, when they take on the “bad” role, Asian men are portrayed as cunningly evil and sneaky. Asian women in the media are shown to be exotic, or specifically, they are marked as a particular sex object. The differences in Asian Americans are minimized as the media finds limited representations for Asian American characters (Choi, 2003).

Native Americans

Native Americans are descendants of the first inhabitants of the United States. Recent census figures suggest that Native Americans number 4.1 million (1.9% of the population). In film and television, Native Americans have been the most misunderstood and stereotyped of all the ethnic groups. However, no study of Native Americans on television provides sufficient numbers of portrayals to permit any conclusion other than that they continue to be “invisible,” typically falling in the 1% range (Steenland, 1990). *Fall Colors 01-02* found that the number of Native American characters on prime time was 0.2% (Children Now, 2000). *Fall Colors 01-02* found a world where there are few Native Americans and a world where Native American women did not exist.

There is no excuse for television producers to ignore the harm caused by repetitious distortion of historical facts pertaining to the way of life of any race or creed including Native Americans. Native Americans on television are virtually absent or restricted to historical westerns. Popular stereotypes are that Native Americans are alcoholics, lazy and live on reservations (Tan, Fujioka & Lucht, 1997). Native Americans are not seen on television as doctors, lawyers, businessmen, or as everyday

people. The message this sends to Native American children (which have the highest suicide rate in the nation) is that there is no place for them in modern society, that they are part of an antiquated culture.

In a summary examining media images of Native Americans, Weston (1996) asserted that scarce depictions are often accompanied by narrowly defined portrayals, which suggest an adherence to and reinforcement of white, mainstream conventions (Weston, 1996). Weston further suggested that these notions ignore the group's cultural diversity and instead promote notions of uniformity, poverty, savagery, alcoholism, and folklore, among others.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine minority representation and cultural diversity on prime time television programming to better understand what influence television representations may have on attitudes, beliefs, and misperceptions of minority groups. For years, television has been accused of misrepresenting certain groups. Minimal representation, in conjunction with possible stereotyping, accentuates the probable impact of television on racial perceptions. Therefore, it is especially important to examine current network programming to note the types of portrayals depicted.

Documenting the trend in the portrayals of racial minorities on prime time television serves several purposes. First, it is socially significant to identify the extent to which television networks represent U.S. ethnic minorities and especially to determine what changes have occurred among the least represented groups. Second,

the nature of the portrayal of ethnic minorities has been conceptualized as a potential contributor to perpetuating or diminishing racial stereotypes, and examining the dominant attributes of contemporary portrayals will provide further information on that issue.

Research on the relationship between mass media and ethnic perceptions suggests that the media shape knowledge and beliefs of the majority about minority groups and, in turn, influence minority responses to the majority (Faber, O'Guinn, & Meyer, 1987). Nonetheless, the paucity of current studies of minority portrayals and the seemingly minimal changes, which have occurred despite cries from minority advocates, strengthens the need for recurring examinations of those portrayals. The present study updated the current status of minority portrayals and identified prevalent attributes of minority portrayals that may influence viewer perceptions.

Hypotheses

The first objective of this study was to determine whether minority characters continue to appear less frequently than non- minority characters in prime time programming. Therefore, it was necessary to calculate the total number of minority characters in the sample. In addition, each minority group was coded to determine if there were significant differences in portrayals of any particular minority group. Given the number of portrayals currently represented by minorities in entertainment television programs, the present study hypothesizes that:

H1. Minority characters will appear in prime time programs less frequently than non- minority characters.

The second goal of this study was to determine if minority characters appeared more frequently as primary characters or if they continued to be portrayed in mostly secondary roles. This information was collected by calculating the number of primary and secondary characters in the sample. The results were analyzed to determine the number of minority characters and Caucasian characters represented in primary and secondary characters within each ethnic group. Given the types of roles historically played by minority characters, the study hypothesizes that:

H2. Minority characters will appear less frequently in prime time programs as primary characters than non- minority characters.

The third objective of this study was to determine if minority characters are represented as lower status than non- minority characters. Higher perceived income level and education level was used to determine status. For the present study information was gathered on income level and education level. Given the present portrayals of minority characters, the present study hypothesizes that:

H3. Minority characters will be portrayed at a lower status level than non-minority characters.

The final objective of this study was to determine if minority characters continue to be depicted more stereotypically than Caucasian characters. This information was gathered from coding behavioral, physical, and conversational characteristics. These are the attributes that the literature suggests as primary components of image formation and stereotyping (Berg, 1990). Given the present representations on prime time television, the present study hypothesizes that:

H4. Minority characters will appear in more stereotypical roles than non-minority characters.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Sample

A program sample consisting of situation comedies and dramas during prime time (7p.m. - 10 p.m.) for ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox was constructed to represent broadcast programming for 2003. For the pretest, the sample consisting of three 30-minute situation comedies was used. The full sample for this study consisted of one week of taped situation comedies and dramas which totaled 31 hours.

Coding

In a systematic content analysis, the frequencies and attributes of ethnic minority characters were documented, with particular emphasis on minority characters. To answer the hypotheses, a coding instrument was developed that sought to obtain individual, behavioral, physical, and conversational characteristics. Coders were instructed on how to use the coding instrument (see Appendix A). Two African-American females and one Caucasian female were trained as coders. A pretest was conducted to ensure inter-coder reliability using the coding instrument. For the pretest, the coders viewed a program and coded each program using the coding instrument (see Appendix B). Results of the pretest are listed in the results section.

Categories of analysis for characters included character type, age, gender, income level and education level. Behavioral, physical and conversational attributes were also coded characteristics. Attributes included on the coding instrument were those that the literature suggests as primary components of image formation and stereotyping (Berg, 1990). Content analyses specified the extent of inclusion and the

nature of portrayals assigned to African-American, Asian-American, Caucasian, Hispanic-American and Native American characters.

Programs were coded for network and genre. At the individual character level, coding was for age, income level, race, sex and role prominence (primary or secondary). Role categories included primary characters (essential to the evolution of the story line for the given episode) or secondary characters (involved, but not integral to the episode's story line). Background characters (e.g., people passing on the street, groups on the dance floor, a waiter asking for orders, a policewoman greeting a colleague) were not included in the analysis.

The first category observed was race. The racial categories consisted of Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American. Race focused on five identifiers: Caucasian (White, European), African-American, Asian American (Chinese, Japanese, Pacific Islander, Indian), Hispanic American (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, or of other non-European, Spanish speaking origin), and Native American (American Indian, Alaskan Native). Each of these categories was determined based on appearance, speech dialects, and mention of race.

The second category observed was age. Ages were grouped by decade (<20, 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, >50). Each of these ranges was determined based on appearance, speech, or mention of age. The next category observed was income level. Income level was rated as lower (< \$20,000 per year), middle (\$20,000-\$70,000), and upper (> \$70,000). Each of these categories was determined based on occupation, appearance, or mention of salary. The final category observed was education level. Education level

was estimated as high school, college, or professional degree (Masters Degree or professional degree). Each of these categories was determined based on occupation, speech, appearance, or mention of education.

Three sets of coded variables (behavioral, physical and conversational characteristics) were assessed on seven- point, bipolar adjective scales. Items in each set reflected an attribute or characteristic that had been associated with an ethnic stereotype.

A set of six behavioral characteristics was observed on seven-point, bipolar adjective scales. The second set of physical attributes was also coded on seven- point, bipolar adjective scales. The final set of attributes examined conversation characteristics on seven- point, bipolar adjective scales.

A set was considered to be in agreement if the scores coded were within one score of each other. Lack of agreement occurred if scores were more than one score from each other. In the pretest, there was unanimous agreement on race, age, type, income, and education. On the six behavioral items (B1-B6), the five physical item C1-C5 and the two conversational items (D1-D2) there was agreement with $r > .8$ or higher on 24 out of 28 questions.

Chapter 3

Results

Reliability

A pretest for this study was conducted to ensure inter-coder reliability using the coding instrument. Inter-coder reliability was determined by calculating Holsti's (1969) coefficient for reliability with the goal of obtaining $r > .8$.

Holsti's Formula

$$\text{Coefficient of Reliability} = \frac{3M}{N1+N2+N3}$$

M= The number of coding decisions on which the coders are in agreement

N1, N2, and N3 = the number of decisions made by each coder

The overall reliability for the pretest was $r = .97$. Coders were in agreement on 24 of 28 characters observed. The discrepancies on the four areas were discussed among coders and instructions were modified on three of these areas to provide further clarification in the areas of height, attire, and skin tone. The fourth discrepancy was attributed to coder error and was corrected.

The overall reliability for the final study was $r = .99$. Instructions for the coding instrument are presented in Appendix A. The coding instrument used in the study is presented in Appendix B. The program sample used in this study is presented in Appendix C.

Results of Hypothesis 1

The first objective of this study was to determine whether minority characters continue to appear less frequently than non-minority characters in prime time programming. Results indicated that Caucasian characters represented 80.4% of the

sample population and minority characters represented 19.6% of the sample. These results are almost identical with Maestro (2000) (see Table 1).

Using the United States Census (2000) finding that 31.5% of the United States population was minority, a binomial test showed significant difference ($p < .001$); minorities were underrepresented in prime time programming in comparison to their representation in the general population. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

Table 1
Frequency Table for Prime Time Characters

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic-American	Asian-American	Native American	Total
Current Study	480 (80.4%)	85 (14.2%)	28 (4.7%)	3 (.5%)	1 (.2%)	597
Maestro (2000)	(80%)	(16%)	(3%)	(1%)	(0%)	

Results of Hypothesis 2

The second goal of this study was to determine if minority characters appeared more frequently as primary characters or if they were portrayed primarily in secondary roles.

Again, using the United States census (2000) finding that 31.5% of the United States population was minority, a binomial test showed significant difference ($p = .002$); minority characters, when compared to non-minority characters, were portrayed more as secondary characters than as primary characters. Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Further analysis revealed interesting findings. In the overall sample there were significantly more secondary characters than primary characters ($\chi^2 = 68.67$, $df=1$, $P < .001$). This was consistent within each ethnic group *except* African Americans. Among

African-American characters, results indicated there was no difference between their portrayal as primary and secondary characters (see Table 2).

In the program sample, Caucasians represented 77% of total primary characters and 32% of Caucasian characters were primary. African Americans represented 18% of total primary characters and 43% of African-American characters were primary. Hispanic Americans represented 3% of primary characters and 21% of Hispanic-American characters were primary. Asian Americans represented .5% of primary characters and 33% of Asian-American characters were primary. Native Americans were not presented as primary characters. The sample of Asian Americans and Native Americans was too small to determine significance.

While minorities were portrayed less as primary characters than non-minorities, when African-Americans were portrayed, they were just as likely to be portrayed in primary roles as in secondary roles. Hispanics, like Caucasians, were more likely to be portrayed in secondary roles than in primary roles.

Table 2

Chi –Square Analysis of Character Type by Race

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic-American	Asian-American	American Indian	Total
Primary						
Frequency	155 (78%)	37 (19%)	6 (3%)	1 (.5%)	0	199
Secondary						
Frequency,	324 (81%)	48 (12%)	22 (5%)	2 (.5%)	2 (.5%)	398
χ^2	59.62	1.42	9.14	na	na	
value of (p)	p<.001	.233	.002	na	na	

Results of Hypothesis 3

The third goal of this study was to determine if minority characters are represented as lower status than non- minority characters. Higher income and

education levels were used to determine status. Results of ranking means of characters by income using Kruskal-Wallis tests showed no overall difference ($\chi^2 = 7.97$, $df = 4$, n , $p = .09$). Results of ranking means of characters by education using Kruskal-Wallis tests showed no overall difference, however follow up Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated that there was a difference between Caucasian and African-American characters ($\chi^2 = 13.99$, $df = 4$, $p = .007$).

Results of ranking characters by education using a Kruskal-Wallis test concluded that Asian Americans scored the highest followed by Caucasians, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans. The rank order was the same for education; Asian American followed by Caucasian African-American, Hispanic American, and American Indian. Hypothesis 3 was proven to be false for income, but true for education levels between Caucasian and African-American characters.

Results of Hypothesis 4

The final objective of this study was to determine if minority characters are depicted more stereotypically than non-minority characters. Results of t- tests comparing Caucasian and African Americans found significant differences in four categories B1, B2, B6 C3, C4 and D2. African Americans were more articulate ($p < .001$). Caucasians were dressed more professionally ($p = .001$). African-American women wore more makeup ($p < .001$). Caucasians had lighter hair color ($p < .001$). Caucasians had lighter skin color ($p < .001$).

Results of t- tests comparing Caucasian to Hispanic Americans found significant differences in four categories, C3, C4, C5, and D1. Caucasian characters had lighter hair color ($p < .001$). Caucasian characters had lighter skin tone ($p = .001$).

Hispanic characters had a stronger accent ($p < .001$). Hispanic characters were more relaxed in their speech ($p = .002$).

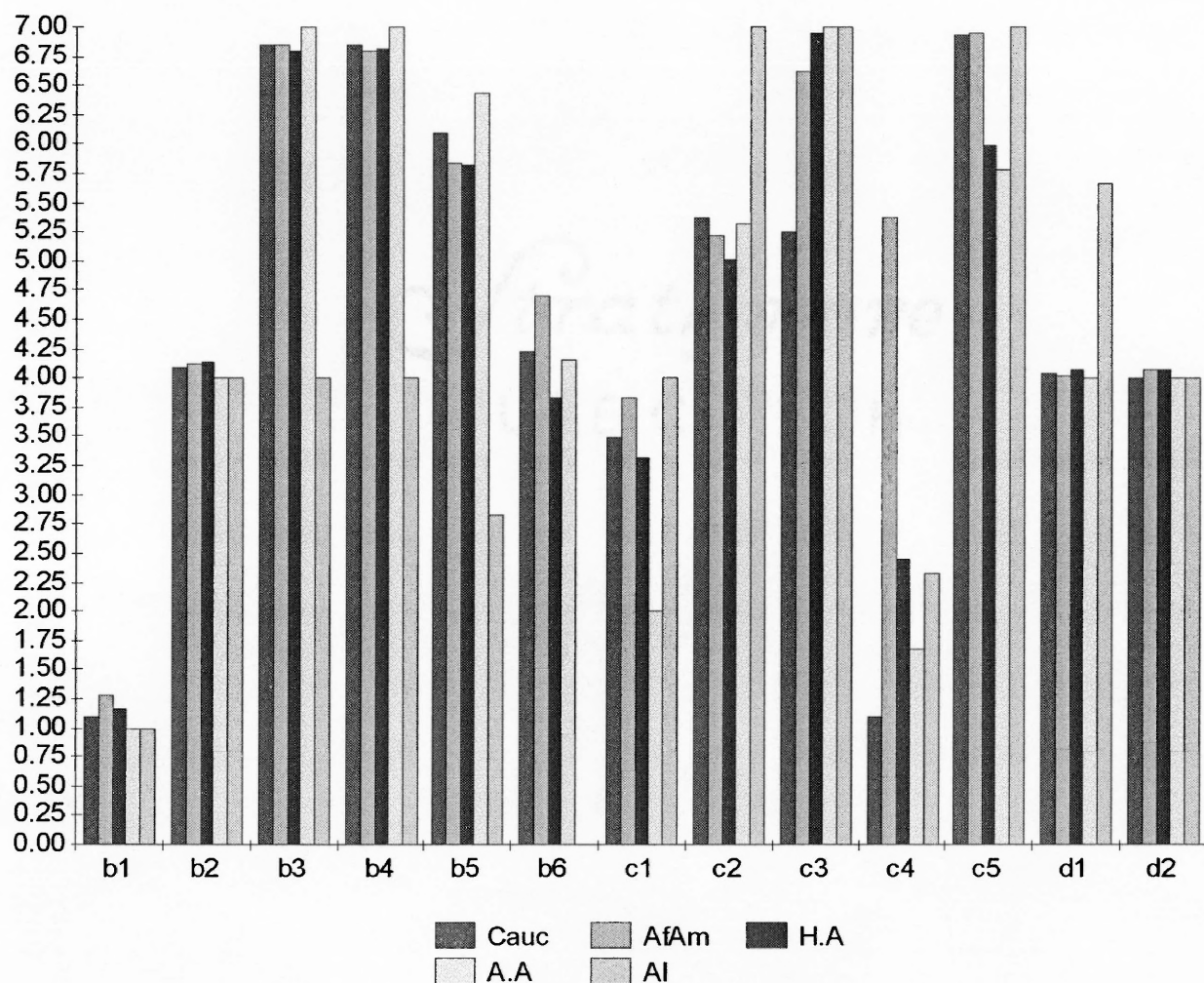
Results of ranking means in each category found that African-American characters were most articulate followed by Caucasians and then Hispanic Americans. Asian Americans and Native Americans tied. Hispanic Americans were loudest, followed by African Americans. Caucasians, Asian Americans and Native Americans tied. Caucasian characters were cleanest, followed by Hispanic Americans, African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Caucasians ranked the highest in overall appearance followed by African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. African-American women wore the most makeup followed by Caucasians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. There were no female Asian-American characters.

Caucasian characters were thinnest followed by African-American, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Native Americans were tallest followed by Caucasians, Asian Americans, African Americans and Hispanics. Caucasian characters had the lightest hair color followed by Asian-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and African Americans.

Caucasian characters had the lightest skin tone followed by Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans. Hispanic characters had the heaviest accent followed by Asian Americans, Caucasians, African-Americans, and Native Americans. Native Americans were the most tense in their speech followed by Hispanic American, African Americans, Caucasians, and Asian Americans. Native Americans and Asian Americans were the most spontaneous in their speech followed

by African Americans and Hispanic American and Caucasian characters. Hypothesis 4 was proven to be true.

Table 3
Rank by Means



Additional Findings

Age

Results of ranking means of characters by age using a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated ($\chi^2 = 20.87$, $df = 4$) that Asian Americans scored highest followed by

Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. The ranking order was the same for age, income and education. According to the Kruskal Wallis test, there was a significant difference in the area of age. Follow-up Kruskal Wallis tests revealed a significant difference in age between African American and Caucasian characters ($\chi^2 = 14.57$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

Gender

Males for the overall sample and for Caucasians appeared more often than females, but results were not significant within any of the other minority groups (See Table 4). Caucasian men represented 49% of the total sample and 61% of Caucasian characters. African-American males comprised 8% of the total sample and 57% of African-American characters. Hispanic American males comprised 2.5% of the total sample and 53% of Hispanic characters. Asian American men comprised .1% of the total sample and 33% of Asian American characters. Native American males comprised 1% of the total sample population, and 50% of Native American characters.

Table 4
Chi- Square Analysis by Gender and Race

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic-American	Asian-American	American Indian	Total
Male						
Frequency	296 (49%)	49 (8%)	15 (2.5%)	1 (.1%)	1 (.1%)	362 (61%)
Female						
Frequency	184	36 (6%)	13 (2.1%)	2 (.3%)	1 (.1%)	237 (39%)
χ^2	26.3	1.99	.14	.33	.00	29.74
value of (p)	<.001	.16)	.71	.56	1.00	<.001

Chapter 4

Discussion

The present research sought to answer questions about the representation of minority characters and cultural diversity on modern prime time television. This study attempted to see if the face of America as shown on American television is a true picture of itself. Previous research has consistently suggested minority characters appear less frequently, are more often secondary characters, appear in lower status roles, and are depicted stereotypically. Therefore, this study focused on those main issues.

As with many other studies cited in the literature review, the proportion of minority characters in the present sample does not reflect the proportion of minorities in the United States. According to recent U. S. Census figures 31.5% of Americans claim ethnic minority status (United States Census, 2000). However, the present study found only 19.5 % of the characters in the sample were minority characters.

Consistent with Maestro's (2000) sample from seven years earlier, the present study found that 80.4% of characters in the sample population were Caucasian. African Americans represented 14.2%, a decline of 1.8% from Maestro's study. Hispanic Americans represented 4.7% in the present study, increasing 1.6% from Maestro's study. The present study found .5% Asian-American characters which represented a decline of .5% from Maestro's study. The present study found .2% American Indian characters while Maestro's study found no American Indian characters.

In Hunt's (2002) inaugural report of a five-year study that will track the on-screen presence of African Americans in prime time network television and issues pertaining to behind-the-scenes control, he asserted that:

"Much of the promise of change on behalf of the networks has been lip service to appease people. "There's been all this anticipation of change and there has been very little. Most of the networks have thrown out a few symbolic gestures and left most of the programming practices intact."

The present study supports Hunt's claims, but for Hispanic American, Asian Americans and Native Americans. African Americans represent 12.9% of the total population and 14.2% of the program sample. African Americans were the most represented minority group in the program sample. In addition, when African American characters are present they have a better chance of being represented in primary roles than other groups. Although some changes have occurred regarding portrayal of minority characters, the change has been minimal for Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans.

Hispanic Americans have seen a slight increase in prime time presence (up 1.6%) of all minority groups. Hispanic American characters also portrayed a vast range of characters in the present study.

Asian American and Native American characters were grossly underrepresented.

However, stereotypes typically associated with Asian American characters were not evident in this study. Asian Americans, although results were not significant, were ranked as having the highest education, highest income and were oldest.

Another finding of this study that is supported by past research found insufficient numbers of Native Americans to permit any conclusion other than that they continue to be “invisible.” There was only one Native American character and, consistent with existing stereotypes, he was portrayed as a drug addicted mugger. This study shows positive changes in the portrayals of minority characters concerning income. There was no significant difference in the income levels of minority characters versus non-minority characters.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Conclusions

The present study suggests that there has been some change in the number of minority faces on television, but television race portrayal is still not reflective of our current society. African Americans and Hispanic Americans have shown the greatest increase. Asian American characters are still grossly underrepresented. Therefore this study supports the claim that minority characters are still underrepresented on prime time television. Progress has been made in how minority characters are portrayed. Minority characters are represented in similar income and age levels as non-minority characters. However, African American characters were portrayed as having significantly lower education levels when compared to Caucasian characters.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the present study. One such limitation involved the sample size. A larger sample size (similar Hunt's 85 program sample or Maestro's 44.5 hour sample) would have been preferred. A larger sample size would have allowed for a wider range of ethnic groups for analysis. However due to the number of coders and the time constraints, this was not feasible. Another limitation involved one of the key elements used to determine status level. The process for coding of income should have been modified. The second income category allowed for a range of 50K, which could significantly impact status level. Ranges should have been divided into smaller intervals. Another limitation of this study involved the manner in which categories were evaluated. Coders used visual indicators as part of the

assessment process which could allow for errors due to different interpretations by the different coders.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research would include examining a wider range of ethnic groups. Another area of interest would be to include additional networks (UPN and WB) as well as cable channels in the study. It would be important to assess the type of programs in which minority characters appear more frequently since historically minority characters have been more prevalent in situation comedies. In addition, future researchers might compare different eras of specific genres (e.g. comedies, dramas); to further explore changes in the portrayal of minority characters in these specific genres.

Using focus groups instead of a coding instrument would be useful in gathering additional and more immediate feedback. Focus groups would be useful in evaluating how audiences respond to the different character portrayals. The use of focus groups would allow for discussion of imbalances and stereotypic portrayals.

Expanding the genre of programs evaluated to include reality shows, talk shows, and soap operas to note any specific demographic differences would prove useful for future researchers. Finally, it would be interesting to conduct a more in-depth programs study. It appeared that situation comedies generally contained either predominantly minority or non-minority casts. This imbalance should also be reviewed.

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Appendix A Instructions for Coding Instrument

1. Program Title

- a. Indicate the Network
- b. Indicate whether the program is a Drama or Situation Comedy

For questions A 1-5 Mark the line that corresponds to your answer.

A. Individual Characteristics

1. Occupation- Indicate the number that corresponds to the occupation of the character.
(1-Blue Collar 2-Homemaker 3-Teacher 4- Laborer 5- Child 6-Unemploye d7-White collar (Prof.) 8- Self Employed 9- Actor/Performer 10- Waiter/Waitress 11-Sales Clerk 12- Lawyer/ Doctor 13- Other
2. Gender-indicate if character is male or female
3. Race- indicate race of character based on mention of race or physical appearance or other nonverbal indicators
4. Age-indicate age of character based on appearance or mention of age.
5. Indicate character type either Primary (character essential to the main story line) or Secondary (characters other than background characters that are nonessential to the story line).
6. Indicate income of character based on mention of income, occupation or other verbal or non-verbal indicators.
7. Indicate education level of character based on mention of education level, occupation, or other indicators

B. Behavioral Characteristics

Mark the box closest to the adjective that describes each character.

1. Articulate- Inarticulate- use of proper English, absence of slang
2. Quiet- Loud to describe volume of speech of character
3. Disheveled- Well-groomed – to describe the overall appearance (e.g. wrinkled attire, soiled clothing, ill-fitting clothing)
4. Casual Attire- Professional Attire –to describes attire of character (e.g. casual=jeans, tennis shoes, work uniforms, t-shirts Professional=suits, gowns)
5. Excessive Makeup- No Makeup

C. Physical Characteristics

Mark the box closest to the adjective that describes each character.

1. Thin-Obese
2. Short- Tall based on adult standards (answer only if character is an adult)
3. Blonde- Black
4. Fair Skin- Dark Skin – describes skin tone based on ethnicity and other variations (e.g. variety of tones exhibited by African-American characters)
5. Accent- No Accent

D. Conversational Characteristics

Mark the box closest to the adjective that describes each character.

1. Tense- Relaxed- to describe the characters demeanor when speaking.
2. Premeditated- Spontaneous- to describe whether the character's language is thought out or sporadic

Appendix C Program Sample

<u>ABC</u>	<u>NBC</u>	<u>CBS</u>	<u>Fox</u>
1. According to Jim	1. American Dream	1.Becker	1. A Minute with Stan Hopper
2. Alias	2. Ed	2. Cold Case	2.Bernie Mac
3. George Lopez	3. Frazier	3. CSI	3. Boston Public
4. Hope and Faith	4. Friends	3. Everybody Loves Ray	4. Malcolm in the Middle
5. It's all Relative	5. Happy Family	4. Jag	5. That 70's Show
6. Less than Perfect	6. Las Vegas	5. Joan of Arc	6.The OC
7. Life with Bonnie	7. Law and Order	6. King of Queens	7. Tru Calling
8. Married to the Kelley's	8. Miss Match	7. Still Standing	8. 24
9. My Wife and Kids	9. Scrubs	8. The Guardian	
10. Threat Matrix	10. Tracy Morgan	9.Yes Dear	
11. 10 8	11. Whoopi	10. 2 1/2 Men	
	12. West Wing		
	13. Will and Grace		