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Media and Racism

Mary Beth Oliver
 Pennsylvania State University

Srividya Ramasubramanian
 Texas A&M University

Jinhee Kim
 Pennsylvania State University

The ways that individuals learn about other people and social groups aside from their own is widely varied, including through schools, books, peers, family, and direct contact. Whereas direct contact may provide the most salient (and therefore influential) means of learning about other people, geographical and social boundaries often prevent interpersonal interaction. Consequently, alternate sources of information can be very important in shaping our attitudes and beliefs, although unfortunately, not always in accurate ways or in a manner that encourages social harmony.

The notion that media may play a role in creating or sustaining prejudice has attracted research attention since early in the 20th century when studies of viewers' reactions to cinematic portrayals were examined (Peterson, Thurstone, Shuttlesworth, & May, 1933). Since that time, numerous scholars have recognized that media portrayals likely play important roles in affecting how viewers think about and respond to different racial and ethnic groups. Much of the research on media and racism in previous decades has tended to focus on the nature of the portrayals themselves, providing evidence for the existence of stereotypical media content. In addition, studies that have explored effects of such content on viewers have often tended to employ self-report techniques, with such strategies likely reflecting both assumptions concerning the processes by which viewers' were thought to be affected, and the methodological tools that were readily available.

The last several decades have seen a large increase in interest in the importance of media's role in stereotyping, as researchers have moved be-

yond looking only at the content of such portrayals and viewers' self-reported responses, to examining more subtle manifestations of the role of media in affecting and sustaining stereotypes. In addition, rather than exploring questions of if media stereotypes can affect stereotyping and racism, more recent research has explored how media and racism interact, and the mechanisms that might help to explain this association. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to overview current theorizing concerning media and racism, to explore the mechanisms that appear to fruitfully explain how these variables are related, and to suggest directions for future research. Although the directions that we suggest hold considerable challenges, we believe that they also highlight the idea that media influence may be more pervasive than we may commonly assume, thereby making research in this area particularly urgent.

MEDIA AND THE FORMATION OF STEREOTYPES

The idea that stereotyped media portrayals could play an important role in the formation of prejudiced attitudes and beliefs has arguably garnered the majority of research attention among scholars studying media and racism. A running assumption in this research is that media portrayals represent an important source of information about social groups, and that insofar as individuals employ media in forming impressions and making judgments, beliefs and attitudes should reflect the types of content frequently encountered. With this assumption in mind, however, research exploring perceptions of social reality has emphasized different mechanisms by which media may play a role in stereotyping, with some approaches stressing effects due to long-term, cumulative viewing, and other approaches identifying how even short-term exposure to biased images or information may affect individuals' beliefs about social reality.

Cultivation and Social Reality Judgments

Research from a cultivation perspective generally suggests that long-term, cumulative viewing of television content can lead to distorted perceptions of social reality that mirror the patterns or portrayals featured in television content (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Support for cultivation's general hypotheses as applied to media and racism has been obtained for a variety of stereotypes such as perceptions of African Americans as relatively more impoverished than Whites (Armstrong, Neundorff, & Brentar, 1992; Busselle & Crandall, 2002) and perceptions of greater African American involvement in crime (Oliver & Armstrong, 1998).

Despite some broad support for the general notion that long-term media exposure can be associated with increased stereotypical percep-

tions, it is important to point out that cultivation as a theoretical approach has generated substantial debate and criticism (Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Hirsch, 1980, 1981; Potter, 1993). Arguably, one of the most serious criticisms of cultivation is that it does not clarify the specific mechanisms that explain why media portrayals should affect perceptions of social reality, and particularly when many portrayals are understood by viewers to be fictional. However, Shrum's (Chap. 11, this volume; 1995, 1996, 2002; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993) work on the role of heuristic processing in cultivation effects sheds light on the manner by which media consumption (including consumption of fictional entertainment) may affect social reality judgments. Briefly, Shrum's model suggests that when making judgments or prevalence estimates, examples that come to mind quickly or easily serve to inflate perceptions of the prevalence of the phenomenon under consideration via the availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Insofar as heavy television viewers have a larger arsenal of media examples (many of which presumably differ considerably from reality), these examples should serve to distort social reality judgments. Furthermore, such distortion is predicted to occur even when the media examples come from less-than-veridical sources provided that the decision making reflects heuristic processing whereby the reliability of sources does not come under close scrutiny.

The application of Shrum's model to the issue of media and race has several important implications. First, this model would suggest that the nature of the portrayals that viewers consume is crucial in predicting the types of judgments that may be expected. Whereas original conceptualizations of cultivation emphasized the homogenous patterns of portrayals across media genres, thereby focusing on total amount of television viewing as the primary independent variable, other researchers have suggested that it may be more fruitful to examine how consumption of certain types of content (e.g., news, sitcoms, etc.) predicts viewers' responses, as many content analyses demonstrate that portrayals substantially vary between genres (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Potter, 1993). Shrum's model is consistent with this argument, as television content that contains numerous examples of stereotypical portrayals should be expected to provide viewers with readily available biased examples that, in turn, affect social reality perceptions. For example, viewers who are heavy consumers of news or crime dramas may be expected to have a larger number of accessible examples of "Black criminals" than do heavy viewers of soap operas or educational programming (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Oliver, 1994), thereby implying that crime-drama consumers will report higher estimates of African American crime involvement than would others.

An additional implication of Shrum's cultivation model is that it is important to acknowledge direct experience when considering the role of media in affecting judgments (see Busselle & Shrum, 2003; Shrum & Bischak, 2001). That is, if asked to make social reality estimates on issues that are highly familiar, it may be expected that direct or firsthand experiences would provide numerous, salient, and relevant examples. Consequently, as some researchers have suggested, the influence of media on individuals' perceptions should be expected to be most pronounced when firsthand or direct experiences are lacking or limited, as media portrayals represent the only source of information available (e.g., Fujioka, 1999; Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). On the other hand, if direct experiences are consistent with media portrayals, one might expect to see stronger relations between media consumption and judgments, as media exemplars and real-life exemplars become reinforcing (Shrum & Bischak, 2001). Applied to issues of media and racism, the importance of direct contact cannot be overlooked, as information about many other countries and cultures is arguably acquired (at least among U.S. viewers) almost entirely via news reports (e.g., the war in Iraq). At the same time, media portrayals of racial and cultural groups that viewers frequently encounter are also common and vivid, meaning that predictions concerning the role that media may play in affecting social reality judgments may be largely dependent on the nature of firsthand or direct experiences. As such, future research should consider the utility of assessing not only media consumption in predicting beliefs and perceptions concerning race, but also by examining how perceptions acquired via personal experience moderate the effect of media on stereotypes.

A final, possible implication of Shrum's cultivation model is that the influence of media on racial stereotyping may be attenuated when viewers employ more deliberative processing strategies in arriving at their judgments. Although this implication may seem to provide reason for optimism, its applicability to actual judgments occurring outside of research labs may be questionable. Namely, research on social reality judgments seems to suggest that heuristic processing is the default strategy typically employed, with individuals rarely scrutinizing the veracity of informational sources when making judgments (Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998). Consequently, future research may benefit from exploring how strategies such as media literacy training or the development of critical viewing skills can serve to attenuate media's cultivation of racial stereotypes (see Ramasubramanian, 2004).

Exemplification

Whereas the focus of cultivation has typically been conceptualized as an outcome of long-term or cumulative viewing, Shrum's model does

not imply that long-term exposure is necessarily a requisite. Rather, media examples may be thought to exert an influence on social reality judgments, regardless of whether or not the examples arise from long-term or limited exposure. However, in keeping with the assumptions of traditional cultivation research, Shrum and colleagues have typically assessed media exposure in terms of frequency of viewing (e.g., Shrum, 1995; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993), making it somewhat difficult to determine if accessible exemplars (and their resultant effects) reflect cumulative exposure or exposure to a limited number of media instances.

In contrast, research on exemplification has typically employed experimental designs, assessing how even a single exposure to salient examples can affect individuals' judgments (Zillmann, 2002; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000). In general, exemplification research has demonstrated that when forming judgments based on media information, individuals tend to give greater weight to examples than to any base-rate information that may also be featured. Consequently, insofar as exemplars accurately reflect population parameters, viewers' resulting beliefs or judgments about the topic at hand should accurately reflect reality. As Zillmann and Brosius (2000) pointed out, however, the finite number of exemplars that can be feasibly included in news stories, as well as reporters' tendencies to include sensational examples to enliven what might otherwise be bland information, lead to numerous situations in which exemplars can lead to distorted perceptions.

The notion of the importance of exemplars in affecting individuals' perceptions of race-related information is highlighted by content-analytic research pointing to how individuals from different racial or ethnic groups are featured as illustration of various news issues such as crime (Entman, 1992; Entman & Rojecki, 2000) or poverty (Gilens, 1996, 1999). However, whereas content-analytic research on the race of exemplars in news stories offers evidence that biases exist, such findings do not, of course, demonstrate the specific effects that such exemplars may have on viewers' social reality judgments.

However, Gibson and Zillmann's (2000) research on the effects of pictorial exemplars suggests that exemplification may be a particularly fruitful theoretical framework for exploring how media portrayals and racial beliefs may intersect. In their study, a news story concerning a fictitious tick-borne disease was manipulated to include photographs of White victims, Black victims, or both Black and White victims. Although the text of the news story itself made no reference to race, participants reported greater estimated risk for the racial groups who had been featured in the photographs. Whereas this study suggests that exemplars concerning race may play an important role in individuals' subsequent judgments, it is important to point out that the exemplars

featured in this study were visual (photographic). Although other studies have revealed similar findings based on variations in textual exemplars, the importance that visual (and therefore, perhaps, salient) exemplification may play in affecting perceptions of race is deserving of greater research attention.

In addition to examining the presentational form of exemplars (text vs. visual), future research would also benefit from exploring whether or not Gibson and Zillmann's (2000) research could be replicated for judgments concerning such issues as poverty and crime. Specifically, many exemplification studies (including Gibson & Zillmann's) have employed as stimuli news stories on topics for which participants likely had very little existing information or direct experience (Aust & Zillmann, 1996; Gibson & Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, & Perkins, 1996). Similarly, many news topics employed in exemplification studies have examined issues that are unlikely to be associated with strong preexisting attitudes or judgments. Given the differences between exemplars that have been examined in extant research with those typically featured in race-related news stories, it is unclear how exemplars of race or ethnicity may function in affecting viewers' attitudes or stereotypes. In some respects, exemplars may be expected to have a particularly pronounced influence, as racial information is arguably salient and, for some viewers, emotionally charged. In contrast, racial exemplars may be expected to have weaker effects on judgments, as individuals' existing beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes may serve to attenuate the influence of media information. Given the ambiguous ways that exemplars may function, future work on race-related examples in media portrayals would benefit from identifying the variables that may be important moderators and from examining possible boundary conditions in the exemplification process.

PRIMING

In addition to exploring the ways in which media may play a role in the formation and cultivation of stereotypes, researchers have also explored the idea that media content can serve as a powerful agent in the priming of existing stereotypes. In general, media priming refers to the idea that exposure to one set of stimuli can activate or bring to mind related cognitions, with these activated cognitions affecting the way that new information is processed (see Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002, for a recent review). Much of the work on priming and racial stereotypes in particular is based on a neo-associationistic model that employs the concepts of associative networks and spreading activation to understand priming processes (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994). Briefly, this model conceptualizes thoughts, emo-

tions, and action tendencies as nodes in a cognitive framework, with semantically related nodes interconnected via associative pathways. When one node is activated or brought to mind, activation spreads along pathways to related nodes, resulting in a host of related cognitions being primed. In turn, these activated cognitions may affect interpretations of or responses to subsequent stimuli that are relevant to the primed cognitions, at least for a short time.

Although media researchers have most frequently examined this model in the context of media violence, its application to media and stereotyping is readily evident. For example, priming would suggest that once a stereotype is in place, the priming of any element of the stereotype can serve to prime associated characteristics. For example, Ford (1997) found evidence that the priming of racial stereotypes of African Americans as comical or buffoonish served to prime stereotypes associating African Americans with criminal behavior. Similarly, Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovidio (2000) demonstrated that exposure to music videos of violent rap music was related to subsequent judgments of African Americans as less intelligent (a stereotypical characteristic) but was unrelated to judgments that were not stereotyped (e.g., spatial skills; for additional examples, see Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996; Ramasubramanian, 2004; Valentino, 1999).

In the aforementioned examples, the priming of racial stereotypes was facilitated via exposure to media portrayals of racial stereotypes. However, additional research suggests that stereotypes can also be primed even in the absence of explicit stereotypical portrayals. Namely, Domke and his colleagues suggested that exposure to news stories framed in such a way as to include "racial cues" but with no explicit mention or presentation of race should result in the activation of stereotypes. These activated stereotypes can, in turn, affect subsequent judgments and political attitudes (Domke, 2001; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999). For example, in one study, reading a newspaper story concerning crime resulted in greater stereotyping of African Americans and Hispanics on such characteristics as lazy, unintelligent, and violent, but only if the newspaper story mentioned racial cues such as drive-by shootings or inner cities. Further, when racial cues were present, primed stereotypes of African Americans and Hispanics had a more influential role on self-reported political attitudes *per se*, as well as on perceptions of crime policies specifically. The important implication of this line of research is that blatant portrayals of racial stereotypes are not necessary to prime racist thoughts. Rather, more subtle framing of news stories that contain racial cues can activate stereotypes that are connected via associated pathways, with these stereotypes affecting not only judgments of the stereotyped group, but judgments of related political and social issues.

Whereas research has demonstrated that priming can influence perceptions and judgments of subsequent stimuli in consequential ways, one noteworthy aspect of this model is that the effects of media exposure on the priming of related cognitions is thought to be relatively short term (see Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). Strictly speaking, then, one would not expect media priming of stereotypes to influence judgments or behaviors beyond a very brief duration (e.g., 15–20 minutes after exposure). However, there are ways in which priming models may be applicable when considering longer term effects of media exposure. As Berkowitz (1984; Berkowitz & Rogers, 1986) noted, any given media portrayal (e.g., violence) can be associated with given cues that, when encountered later in the environment, can prime or activate cognitions associated with the portrayal (see also Olson & Fazio, 2001, 2002, for a discussion of implicit attitude formation). For example, should media portrayals of violent crime be repeatedly associated with a given racial or ethnic group, these two concepts may become linked in an associative network. As a consequence, later exposure to one of these elements (e.g., African Americans) should prime thoughts of the other (e.g., violence). Although, to our knowledge, this specific hypothesis has not been tested in the context of media and race, other studies of the influence of context cues on aggressive behavior offer some empirical support for idea that media portrayals may have this type of effect (e.g., Josephson, 1986). Given media portrayals' repeated associations of given minorities with specific behaviors (e.g., Arabs and terrorism), this direction of research may be particularly relevant.

An additional implication of neo-associativistic models of priming is that people who already have stereotypes in place should presumably be most susceptible to the priming effects of stereotypical media portrayals (see Bushman, 1995, for an illustration of this point in the context of media violence). This assumption rests on the idea that for spreading activation to occur there must be an associative network that connects cognitions associated with minority groups to stereotyped characteristics. At first glance, then, this implication would seem to suggest that people who admit to racism or who endorse stereotypes should be most influenced.

However, research on implicit stereotyping points out that regardless of the extent to which individuals endorse a particular stereotype, the pervasiveness of stereotypes through a host of socially and culturally shared experiences (including the media) implies that most people are familiar with them (Devine, 1989), and, as a consequence, have cognitive structures of stereotypes in place. This observation implies that all individuals, regardless of their levels of racial prejudice, may be susceptible to the influence of priming of racial stereotypes (Bargh, 1999; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997).

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the activation of stereotypes is distinct from the application of stereotypes. That is, simply because a stereotype is activated does not mean, necessarily, that it will be applied to subsequent judgments or behaviors. For example, Fazio's (1990) motivation and opportunity as determinants (MODE) model suggests that the activation of stereotypes will be most likely to affect individuals' judgments and behaviors toward minorities when the motivation and opportunity to process deliberately is absent (see also Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). Consequently, although low-prejudice individuals should be less likely than high-prejudice individuals to evidence behavioral manifestations of activated stereotypes, stereotype application may be likely to occur for any individual in situations in which deliberative processing is disrupted, when there is low awareness that stereotypes have been activated, or when the task at hand seems irrelevant to activated stereotypes (Devine & Monteith, 1999; Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). Applied to media priming, then, one might expect to see the strongest influence of media stereotyping when the salience of the stereotyping is minimized, as such situations should be least likely to result in controlled responding and hence any attempt to engage in stereotype suppression. Valentino, Traugott, and Hutchings (2002) argued this point in their research on racial cues in political advertisements, suggesting that as racial cues become more salient, the influence they have on priming likewise increases. However, when racial cues become too salient (e.g., when individuals become cognizant that race has been primed), attempts will be made to suppress the influence that accessible stereotypes may play on judgments.

To summarize, research from a priming perspective suggests that stereotypical media portrayals may serve to activate stereotypical cognitions, with these cognitions, in turn, affecting subsequent judgments. Furthermore, research on implicit stereotyping implies that all viewers, regardless of their levels of racial prejudice, may be susceptible to these types of effects in some circumstances. Consequently, future research would benefit from further exploration of characteristics of media content, aspects of viewing situations, and viewers' motivations for media consumption that may prove to be useful moderators of the extent to which media-induced priming of racial stereotypes affects viewers' judgments.

SELECTIVITY

In addition to examining how media may serve to create or prime racial stereotypes, additional media scholarship has also suggested that media consumption can function to sustain (or even strengthen) stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes. In large part, these types of outcomes

are thought to reflect the idea that viewers' existing stereotypes act as a filter of incoming information, with media portrayals interpreted and remembered in ways that are consistent with existing cognitions and attitudes.

Selective Perception and Enjoyment

The importance of racial attitudes in moderating interpretations of race-related media content is perhaps best illustrated in Vidmar and Rokeach's (1974) now-classic study of viewers' interpretations of *All in the Family*. Consistent with the notion of selective perception, these authors reported that although most respondents, regardless of their racial attitudes, reported enjoying the show, viewers scoring higher on measures of racial prejudice generally interpreted the primary bigoted character on the program as likable and funny, and misunderstood the sitcom to be making fun of progressive politics rather than racism and prejudice. Since this early study was conducted, a number of additional studies have reported similar results for a variety of different types of content, including comedy, portrayals of welfare, and depictions of crime (Cooks & Orbe, 1993; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996).

Research on enjoyment of media entertainment has revealed analogous results, suggesting that individuals tend to report greater liking for media content that reflects their existing racial attitudes. For example, Oliver and Armstrong (1995) examined viewers' enjoyment of reality-based police programs, suggesting that disposition theory may explain the relation between existing racial attitudes and evaluations of these programs. In general, disposition theory suggests that individuals report high levels of enjoyment when characters that are "liked" are portrayed as winning or succeeding, and when characters who are "disliked" are portrayed as losing or suffering (Raney, 2003; Zillmann, 1985; Zillmann & Bryant, 1986). Oliver and Armstrong reasoned, therefore, that programs containing frequent depictions of racial minorities as punished or as "losing" (e.g., Black criminal suspects being arrested) should hold particular appeal among viewers who harbor racist attitudes. Consistent with these expectations, measures of racial prejudice were positively associated with greater viewing and reported enjoyment of these programs, but were unrelated to enjoyment of fictional police programs where criminal behaviors are not as strongly associated with racial minorities.

Although research on viewers' enjoyment and interpretation of race-related media content generally support the idea that people understand and are attracted to media portrayals that are consistent with their existing attitudes, such a description may paint a picture that is too

simplistic to capture the full range of possible responses. For example, in terms of selective exposure, some researchers have suggested that what may appear to be selectivity on the part of viewers may actually reflect the availability of information or the usefulness of information in attaining goals (Freedman & Sears, 1965). In addition, other researchers have suggested that under some circumstances, individuals might selectively expose themselves to information that is inconsistent with existing attitudes, and particularly so if the information is easily refutable (Frey, 1986).

Similarly, in terms of selective perception, although research on viewers' interpretations of media content would seem to imply that viewers with more extreme racial attitudes would be most likely to interpret content as consistent with their existing beliefs, this prediction appears inconsistent with existing research on hostile media perceptions (Gunther & Chia, 2001; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). In essence, the hostile media phenomenon refers to the tendency for people who are partisans on a given issue to perceive that media are hostile to their position.

What might explain the divergent predictions between hostile media and selective perception hypotheses? Recent research by Gunther and Schmitt (2004) provides one possible explanation for these divergent hypotheses that places emphasis on the respondents' focus of attention on the self versus on others when evaluating messages. These authors suggested that research demonstrating an assimilation bias has tended to employ stimuli and questions that encourage research participants to focus on their own opinions. For example, Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) asked respondents what they thought of *All in the Family* and the characters portrayed, and Oliver and Armstrong (1995) assessed viewers' own reactions to reality-based police programs. In neither of these studies were respondents asked to speculate about how other viewers might respond or how the program might influence others' attitudes—indeed, perceptions of other viewers were largely irrelevant. In contrast, research demonstrating a hostile-media effect has tended to employ stimuli (e.g., news reports) and questions that encourage participants to focus on how other people or the public at large are influenced by media messages. Why might this result in perceptions of media as hostile? Gunther and Schmitt (2004) first pointed to literature on third-person perceptions demonstrating that individuals tend to believe that others are vulnerable to harmful media messages (Davison, 1983; Perloff, 2002). These authors then suggested that this perceived vulnerability may translate into perceptions of a hostile media—or at least a fear that other viewers may interpret or be affected by media in ways that are "unfavorable or disagreeable." Applied to the issue at hand, this reasoning would suggest that future research on selective perception may

find weaker, nonexistent, or even negative relations between racial attitudes and perceptions of media content insofar as it encourages participants to focus on how others may be affected. Although this reasoning is clearly in need of empirical exploration at this point, it appears to be a useful framework in exploring the limits of the audience's ability and tendency to perceive media content as consistent with their existing stereotypes.

Selective Recall

In addition to exploring selective interpretation and enjoyment, more recent research suggests that viewers' memories of race-related portrayals may also reflect cultural stereotypes associated with race (Oliver, 1999; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). In general, this research indicates that individuals are likely to misremember racial portrayals—ones that have never been explicitly featured—insofar as these portrayals are consistent with racial stereotypes (e.g., associating African Americans with violent crime). More recently, this type of research has been expanded to include an examination of the visual representations that people may construct when recalling crime-related photographs (Oliver, Jackson, Moses, & Dangerfield, 2004). Similar to prior research on memory of racial groups *per se*, this research suggests that individuals' memories of stereotypical content (crime news) are associated with distorted visual memories of race-related facial features, resulting in prototypical and stereotypical mental images accentuating Afrocentric characteristics (see Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002, for a discussion of stereotypes of physical features).

Surprisingly, research on viewers' memories of race-related information has generally not obtained evidence for the importance of individuals' racial attitudes in moderating effects. That is, unlike prior research on viewers' interpretation and enjoyment, race-related biases reflected in individuals' self-reported memory of media content appears to happen regardless of self-reported racial attitudes. Although it is unclear at this point why these seemingly similar strands of research differ in this regard, one possible explanation is that research on individuals' memories of race-related information has typically taken great pains to disguise any indications in the research procedures that the study pertained to race. In contrast, research on viewers' interpretations of media content has often measured racial attitudes immediately prior to measuring media-related variables. Consequently, in studies of perception and enjoyment, the idea that the research pertained to race may have been apparent to participants, resulting in attempts to control or suppress responses that may have been considered socially undesirable. In other words, existing research on selective perception may re-

fect stereotype application, whereas research on selective recall may reflect stereotype activation. Because this interpretation is only speculative at this point, future research on selective interpretation and recall would benefit from more directly assessing these distinctions.

Future research would also benefit from exploring what selective recall implies for subsequent attitudes and social reality judgments concerning race. At this point, the notion that selective interpretation and recall can serve to sustain or intensify racial stereotyping is largely speculative, albeit intuitively appealing. However, existing research on heuristic processing models of cultivation (Shrum, 2002) or on exemplification (Zillmann, 2002) may provide useful starting points for more systematic explorations of the ways in which mismemory of racial information could lead to distorted reality judgments. Both of these perspectives suggest that exemplars that readily come to mind exert strong influences on judgments, yet neither of these perspectives suggest that the exemplars be true or actual. Consequently, readily accessible media exemplars reflecting mistaken recall may affect perceptions to the same degree as accurate exemplars, and particularly given that errors in recall are likely consistent with prevailing cultural stereotypes. Of course, this interpretation calls for empirical validation—namely a closer examination of the distinction between what was actually seen versus what was misremembered, and the role that each plays in affecting individuals' judgments.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This overview of research pertaining to media and racism provides a broad base of evidence that media portrayals of stereotyping can result in several harmful outcomes: the formation or cultivation of stereotypes, the priming of stereotypes, and the maintenance of stereotypes. Throughout this chapter we have attempted to not only describe the mechanisms that extant research suggests are important in explaining the relation between media and racism, but to also suggest avenues that future researchers may find particularly fruitful or enlightening. In this final section, we provide additional advice to scholars interested in entering this arena, with this advice focused on what existing theorizing suggests are important methodological considerations. These suggestions grow out of the recognition that whereas current scholarship has revealed important ways that media consumption may lead to stereotyping, the magnitude of the effect sizes reported in the studies that we have overviewed are often quite modest.

Ultimately, we believe that one explanation for the modest associations observed in the literature may reflect the ways that racial attitudes have been conceptualized (and hence operationalized) by media schol-

ars over the last several decades. Namely, research from a variety of perspectives has typically employed self-report measures to assess racial attitudes, with many of these measures reflecting what are often considered to be traditional forms of racism. As such, it is important to recognize that many studies, therefore, have narrowed their focus to only those attitudes that individuals are both cognizant of and are openly willing to express to researchers. Not only are such situations vulnerable to problems associated with social desirability, they are also ill-equipped to examine effects that are likely more subtle and sometimes imperceptible to participants. As an analogy, if researchers were to employ only self-reported feelings of well-being to detect cancer among smokers, the association between cigarettes and cancer would probably be very small. However, by employing more sensitive and subtle measures, researchers are able to detect damage at the molecular level that is virtually invisible to the individual whose health is in danger.

The advice that this observation implies for future researchers is to be cognizant of the dangers involved in employing only broad or even obtuse measures of racial attitudes or stereotypes, or in employing stimulus materials that are too obvious or blatant. Racism is insidious, and recognizing its subtleties in manifestation is of crucial importance in capturing its prevalence and influence. As researchers in related disciplines continue to examine the distinctions between stereotype applications and stereotype activation, we believe that future research in media and stereotyping would benefit substantially from greater attention to this issue as well. Although we do not mean to suggest that self-report measures should be abandoned, we would also like to encourage researchers to take advantage of methodological tools now readily available that enable the assessment of implicit stereotyping (e.g., response time techniques, lexical decision tasks, etc.). In addition, we would like to encourage researchers to employ creativity in the design of their studies in such a way that makes the focus of study on race and the racism in their stimuli less evident and therefore less likely to result in deliberative processing or attempts at stereotype suppression.

We realize that to a naive reader, our suggestions may sound somewhat like we are implying that researchers trick respondents into providing evidence of biased attitudes or prejudicial responses. In contrast, though, we believe that a greater acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of racial stereotypes and the extent to which such stereotypes are a commonplace element in most people's cognitive structures is an important step to take, both methodologically and socially. Consequently, if there is any trick to be noticed here, we believe that it may be an unfortunate underestimation of the strength and prevalence of the media's role in the formation and maintenance of racial stereotypes,

even among those of us who like to believe that our attitudes are progressive and egalitarian. Because we all are vulnerable, although perhaps not cognizant of our vulnerability, research on the effects of media on stereotyping and the strategies we may employ to diminish such harmful outcomes is particularly urgent.

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