



THIRD EDITION

DIVERSITY IN U.S. MASS MEDIA

CATHERINE A. LUTHER • NAEEMAH CLARK
CAROLYN RINGER LEPRE



WILEY Blackwell

Diversity in U.S. Mass Media

The third edition of *Diversity in U.S. Mass Media* presents a review of the evolution and the many issues surrounding portrayals of social groups in the mass media of the United States. Research has clearly shown that mass media depictions play a crucial role in shaping our views about individuals and social groups, sometimes for the good such as broadening individual understandings of our complex world. However, too often media present harmful stereotypes and one-dimensional representations of certain social groups. Filled with instructive insights into the ways social groups are represented through the mass media, *Diversity in U.S. Mass Media* offers a better understanding of groups and individuals different from us.

The revised third edition is filled with recent, illustrative examples from the media. Comprehensive in scope, it addresses a wide range of issues that include representations of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class, and religion in films, television, and the press. Additionally, this edition delves into contemporary issues such as gaming, media influencers, and #MeToo. The authors encourage readers to question what is being presented, explore the extent to which they agree with the book's perspectives, and generate their own examples of representations based on the media they utilize.

Diversity in U.S. Mass Media is an important resource that:

- offers an understanding of how various social groups are being represented in the mass media,
- explores how diverse communities inform and intersect with one another,
- draws on past and updated studies on the topic and presents original research and observations,
- includes new chapters on how social activism groups have used media outlets to support marginalized groups in the United States and how AI and social media influence the public's perception of social groups,
- introduces concepts related to inclusive workplaces such as intimacy, choreography, and techniques to create a compassionate collaborative film set, and
- is accompanied by a companion website for instructors that include many useful pedagogical tools, such as a test bank, viewing list, exercises, and sample syllabi.

Revised and updated, the third edition of *Diversity in U.S. Mass Media* offers a broad perspective on the myriad issues that influence how the media portray social groups. Throughout the text, the authors show consistencies as well as differences in media representations of minority groups in the United States.

The companion website with additional resources is available at www.wiley.com/go/luther3e

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Preface

Diversity in U.S. Mass Media was conceived by one of its authors during the first semester in which she was teaching a course on “Media and Diversity” at her university. She perceived a need for a book that attempted to comprehensively cover the various areas associated with representations of diversity within the mass media. At that time, studying social identities was largely focused on race and gender, or the texts that existed were largely edited books that covered a wide array of areas but did not necessarily flow in and out of each other. The authors of this book endeavored to show consistencies as well as differences in media representations of social identity groups in the United States.

Now that *Diversity in U.S. Mass Media* is in its third edition, the book still compares representations, but it also strives to deepen the conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in the media industries that are occurring inside and outside of the classroom. These conversations are important because segments of the media consumers are demanding that the industries are more responsive to and reflective of their audiences. This discourse now includes artificial intelligence, social media, intersectionality, and social activism. This edition also offers guidance and examples that can help its readers create an inclusive working environment on and off campus. This addition is not only good for readers’ professional development but also timely, as it responds to a new expectation from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication that asks more than 115 accredited academic programs to prepare students to work in diverse teams.

The number of research studies addressing diversity within the mass media has grown over the years with the increasing awareness that inequities in portrayals and coverage of various groups remain an important issue. This book refers to many of the well-known studies on this topic and presents some original research and observations that have been provided by the book’s authors. Although the authors have made strenuous efforts to be uniform in the writing across the chapters in terms of themes and topics covered, some variations do exist, of course, because of the differing subject matter and the extent to which the phenomenon being discussed has been researched within scholarly circles and among practitioners. For example, in the African American and Latino/Hispanic American chapters, we present discussions of how these groups have been represented in music and have used music as a channel of communication. The amount of research conducted on this topic with regard to these two groups is quite large, and not including it would have been negligent. However, similar research pertaining to American Indians, Arab Americans, and Asian Americans is not as prevalent, and so this topic was not discussed in these chapters. Another example in terms of the variation in presentation is with regard to gender. The fact that years of research pertaining to mass media and gender have produced large quantities of studies and insight in this area prompted the decision by the authors to provide two separate but related chapters on gender. In sum, decisions regarding which areas to cover in the chapters were driven by the importance of the topics as they related to the specified social groups and the amount of pertinent existing research.

In this third edition, the book's authors offer updated references and studies. Some of the updates reveal that the media landscape has changed quite a bit since the first edition was published in 2012, and the second edition was published in 2018. In some cases, media content better reflects the identities discussed in the book. In other cases, there has been little or no movement in the way these groups are represented. The third edition also diverges from its previous editions' structures. Previously, the book's chapters focused on social identities, beginning with foundational information and moving through various media forms. This edition additionally offers two chapters that look at concepts related to how artificial intelligence, gaming, social media, and social activism construct, challenge, and defend identities. These chapters were added because the authors recognized that the topics and conversations are of increasing importance and that students are often asking questions pertaining to these topics. The authors also recognized the burgeoning scholarship in these areas.

We hope that the readers of this book will approach it with a critical eye. While introducing the material, the authors also encourage readers to question what is being presented and explore the extent to which they agree with the perspectives that are described. The book includes many examples to help illustrate the concepts and perspectives discussed; however, readers should consider alternative examples from their own media use that support or contradict those included. We hope that the book will enlighten but also evoke further important questions that need to be considered at the personal and broader social level.

Several people need to be thanked for their individual input into the fruition of the book's first, second, and now this third edition. For the first edition, our continued thanks go to editors Deirdre Ilkson and Elizabeth Swayze as well as editorial assistant Margot Morse and project manager Alec McAulay. For the second edition, many thanks go to project manager Hazel Bird, project editor Dhanashree Damodar Phadate, commissioning editor Haze Humbert, and assistant editor Mark Graney. Also, much gratitude goes to copyeditor Caroline Richards for her keen editorial eye, and Arlene Naranjo as well as Justin West for their Spanish-language translations.

For this third edition, we would like to acknowledge the late Kevin "West" Bowers, PhD, former associate professor of communication at Radford University, for his invaluable assistance in updating four of the chapters appearing in this book. Thanks also go to Sowjanya Kudva, Garrett Hozza, and Eli Boldt for their research contributions and helpful suggestions. Finally, much gratitude goes to this third edition's commissioning editor, Nicole Allen, and managing editor, Pascal Raj Francois.

The first author of this book, Catherine Luther, would also like to express her heartfelt thanks to her husband, Yosh, and her two boys, Gennick and Jovan, for always providing her with support and moments of humor. She would also like to dedicate her effort in this book to her mom, Sadayo. With each passing year, she has come to better understand the huge amount of courage it took for her mom to come to the United States as a young bride of an American serviceman with little knowledge of English but a strong determination to learn the language and everything there was to know about her new home.

Naemah Clark, the book's second author, would like to thank her family – Kacie, Kam, Betty, and Ken – for their unending suggestions of song lyrics, movie clips, and magazine titles. She is grateful for the opportunity to discuss these important topics at a time when understanding one another's humanity is needed more than ever.

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About the Companion Website

Diversity in U.S. Mass Media is accompanied by a companion website:

www.wiley.com/go/Luther3e



The website includes:

- Test Questions
- Suggested Viewing Guide
- Book Assignments
- Clarke Syllabus
- Lepre Syllabus
- Zarkin Syllabus

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Introduction

In 2020 and 2021, protests across the United States ensued following the racist-fueled killings and harassments of individuals from the Black and Asian communities. On college campuses, students, faculty, and staff joined in those protests and called for their academic institutions to more rigorously address issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and asked that underrepresented student populations be better served. Universities and colleges suddenly found themselves scrambling to set up new programs and ways to enhance campus diversity.

When you were exposed to news or creative representations (e.g., through music or television episodes) about the above events and movements, what sort of thoughts came to your mind? What emotions did you find yourself feeling? How people interpret information and images that they encounter is shaped by their own backgrounds and personal identities as well as their perceptions of other individuals. Every day, individuals make judgments about others based on embedded ideas regarding race or ethnicity, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, class, and age. These judgments, whether fair or unfair, accurate or inaccurate, are based on information gathered not only over years of experience and interactions with family, friends, and other social networks but also from the constant bombardment of media images and messages that most humans encounter from an early age. The extent of diversity that is reflected in these images and messages is at the core of this book.

But what exactly is meant by the word “diversity”? According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021), diversity is defined as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements.” Incorporating the social aspect of the term, the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2021) defines diversity as “the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people.” The concept of diversity in relation to social groups embraces the ideals of acceptance and respect and an understanding that groups are made up of unique individuals. When considering diversity within the context of mass media, it is important to consider the degree to which an array of representations of individuals or social groups are being presented and if a multiplicity of voices are being heard or reflected. This importance is underscored by research (e.g., Bandura 2002; Bissell and Zhou 2004; Grogan 2008; Leavitt *et al.* 2015) that has shown that the mass media play significant roles in contouring how individuals perceive and feel about themselves and others.

Exploring and discussing media representations of social groups can be quite complicated. Clear-cut social groups actually do not exist. They run across each other, with each individual being a composite of various social groups. For example, you might be a Latina lesbian female college student

whose family background is upper middle class. Which part of your identity is most important in defining you is really your decision. Nevertheless, as a society, we tend to identify individuals with a main social group. So, although you might believe that your identity of being a female college student is most important to you, another person may consider that your main identity is that of a Latina.

Thus, one of the challenges in writing this book was to decide which social groups to focus on and how to avoid the tendency to oversimplify these social groups and disregard how they relate to each other. We address the following major social group categories: race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and class. For race/ethnicity, the book covers American Indians, African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, Arab Americans, and Asian Americans. The selection includes groups that had the earliest experiences of underrepresentation or distorted portrayals in the US mass media (i.e., American Indians and African Americans) and also includes those groups that are growing in population in the United States and that are increasingly being represented in the mass media (i.e., Asian Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Arab Americans). Within the United States, the number of individuals who identify themselves as being of mixed race has grown. Thus, an additional chapter is devoted to mass media representations of mixed-race individuals and couples.

The authors acknowledge that many other social groups could have potentially been discussed in this book, including such groups as Russian Americans, Italian Americans, lawyers, Uber drivers, or doctors. The list is endless. Think of this book as a starting point for you to go on and explore some of the other social groups in society. As you read through the text, consider issues of intersectionality. It is our combination of identities that makes us individuals. Social groups do not experience things as a monolithic entity, reacting as one mind. One race, gender, age, or class of people will not respond as one mind to a media representation of their group. As you read about the media examples in this book, consider them critically, and make connections for yourself, in addition to considering the connections the authors of this text have tried to make for you between social groups. Think about how one depiction might be viewed positively by some and negatively by others, and how there are varying levels along this continuum. It is important to contextualize issues, placing one social group within the framework of others, and to consider how diverse communities inform and intersect with one another.

To provide you with a basis for understanding why it is important to consider how social groups are being represented in the mass media, in the remaining sections of this introductory chapter, we will first introduce you to the concept of social identity and then present you with a preliminary picture of why the social group categories we explore in the book should be examined.

Social Identity

Social identity is a concept that came to the fore in the 1960s and early 1970s, primarily due to increased concerns regarding group conflict. With events such as the Vietnam War, civil and women's rights movements, and the Arab–Israeli conflicts, researchers began to make efforts to understand the roots of the conflicts and how identities might come into play in these group conflicts. Social psychologist Henri Tajfel was one of the more prominent scholars to delve into this question. He was interested in understanding the sources of group conflict and the role of social identity. In his influential work on social identity, Tajfel defines social identity as a self-concept that is based on group membership and the emotional attachments associated with that membership (Tajfel 1974). When an individual identifies himself/herself as a group member, his/her beliefs, interests, and actions tend to become aligned with those of the group.

Social identity develops as a social process whereby people categorize not only themselves but also the people around them (Abrams and Hogg 2004). Humans have a natural drive to categorize or partition the world into units in order to cut down and simplify the amount of information they need to deal with and process. They create schemas or interrelated conceptual units of information that help them encode, remember, and react to incoming information. What often results is the emphasis on differences between the schemas and a de-emphasis on differences within them. In terms of the categorization of people, the same process occurs. Individuals have an inclination to accentuate the shared qualities that they have with members of their own group while stressing the differences they have with people belonging to other groups. What results is a clear distinction between in-group members and out-group members.

As stated earlier, the groups to which an individual belongs and with which identification takes place can be widespread. An individual's social identity can be considered as being made up of multiple identities. Some of the core identities recognized by researchers (e.g., McCann *et al.* 2004; Wander, Martin, and Nakayama 1999) include gender, age, racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, national, religious, and class, with many of these identities intersecting. Given the understanding that identities are developed through a social process, one can see the potential role of mass media and social media in influencing the development of each of these identities. Through various forms of media, individuals can be exposed to information related to their identities. The information can play a part in creating, reinforcing, modifying, negotiating, or adding to identities.

Racial/Ethnic Identity

When discussing the social inequities that exist within societies and between nations, one of the most often discussed underlying reasons for the inequities is race or ethnicity. In such discussions, the terms “race” and “ethnicity” are often used interchangeably, even though in actuality they are distinct.

Race was originally understood as a classification of individual genetics. An assumption was made that if a person was of a particular geographic origin, he or she would have certain physiological characteristics. With a better awareness of the variance that exists across individuals, the categorization of individuals based on biology was recognized as unrealistic. Several scholars from the social scientific community and the humanities called for the entire abandonment of the term “race.” Instead, many have called for the use of the term “ethnicity” instead.

Ethnicity encompasses one's own heredity, national origin, and culture (i.e., beliefs, norms, and values associated with one's own heritage). The word combinations often found in terms of individual background (e.g., Jewish American, Japanese American, Portuguese American) are reflective of this. They highlight an acknowledgment of not only the citizenship but also the deeper cultural background of the individual. In other words, the combined term assumes that Americans from a particular ethnic group share certain cultural norms and even historical backgrounds. Clearly, ethnicity is a much more fluid concept than race.

Even with efforts to eradicate the term “race” and replace it permanently with the term “ethnicity,” usage of “race” persists. Which term is the proper one to use remains a point of controversy. As such, the term “race” is still used not only by the US government, but also by private and public institutions to identify individuals. The federal government assumes that individuals who are defined as a specific race may come from different ethnic backgrounds (Hobbs and Stoops 2002). By the same token, those who come from a particular ethnic origin may be of any race. Because both “race” and “ethnicity” are used in existing literature, both of these terms will also be used in this book.

Race/ethnicity is an important and frequently sensitive part of our broader social identity. With globalization and the advancement of communication technology, more individuals have the opportunity to encounter individuals from other races or ethnic backgrounds either at firsthand or through a mediated source such as the mass media. Thus, it is crucial to nurture a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity of individuals that make up the world populace.

In terms of the United States, with the increase in immigrants from certain sectors of the world, the racial/ethnic landscape has been dramatically changing over the last few decades. Based on US Census population comparison data, the populations of Asians and Hispanics are growing at faster rates than any other racial ethnic group (see Table 1.1). The Asian alone population grew from 2010 to 2020 by 35.5 percent, from 14.7 million in 2010 to 19.9 million in 2020. Hispanic or Latino population went from 50.5 million in 2010 to 62.1 million in 2020, representing a growth of 23 percent. Note that, as reflected in the table, the 2020 Census asked respondents to respond on whether or not they were of Hispanic or Latino origin.

The percentage of individuals who identify as having two or more races also grew dramatically from 2010 to 2020. In 2010, the percentage of the US population who identified as such was 2.9. This grew to 10.9 in 2020. These figures represent a percentage change in population of 275.7 percent. This growth is significant considering that for some time in the history of the United States, the mixing of races, especially between Whites and non-Whites, was frowned upon, and children from biracial or multiracial backgrounds often had to endure ridicule. In fact, legislation prohibiting marriage or even sex between individuals of different races (anti-miscegenation legislation) had been in place in the United States for hundreds of years until the US Supreme Court overturned it in 1967 (Basson 2008). The 2000 US Census was the first to recognize multiracial individuals by providing people with the option of choosing multiple racial backgrounds.

Table 1.1 Population size by race and ethnicity: 2010 and 2020 comparison as a percentage of total population.

Race/Ethnicity	2010 Percentage of US population size of 308.7 million	2020 Percentage of US population size of 331.4 million
White (alone)	72.4	61.6
Black or African American (alone)	12.6	12.4
American Indian and Alaska Native (alone)	0.9	1.1
Asian (alone)	4.8	6.0
Hispanic or Latino	16.3	18.7
Two or more races	2.9	10.2
White in combination, Hispanic or Latino	4.9	30.5
Black or African American in combination, Hispanic or Latino	1.3	2.4
American Indian and Alaska Native in combination, Hispanic or Latino	1.0	2.4
Asian in combination, Hispanic or Latino	0.8	1.0
Two or more races in combination, Hispanic or Latino	6.0	32.7

Source: Adapted from US Census Bureau (2021).

With such fluctuations in the racial/ethnic makeup of the United States, it is important to understand how these groups have been historically, and are currently, represented in the media. After all, it is often through the media that understandings or misunderstandings are brought about regarding the different racial/ethnic communities.

Gender Identity

Many people view gender as something you are born with. Gender, however, is distinct from biological sex. It is a social construction generated within a particular cultural context. From a very young age, individuals learn the roles and attributes that are associated with males and females (Bem 1993). If resistance surfaces against these accepted roles or attributes, discomfort or even hostility toward the resistance may result. The opposition is looked upon as an affront to the societal or cultural beliefs that exist regarding gender.

Those individuals who represent the opposition might be ridiculed or ostracized as being different. In some cases, a new category might even be created to explain those people who do not quite fit into the established gender stereotypes. For example, when men began to outwardly express interest in designer clothing and skin and hair products, writer Mark Simpson coined the term “metrosexual,” and, thanks to media attention, the term’s usage took off. In a 2002 Salon.com article, Simpson described a metrosexual as follows (Simpson 2002):

The typical metrosexual is a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight, or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference.

In a follow-up to his essay, Simpson (2014) claimed there has been a generational shift and that for the new metrosexuals, it is less about stylish clothes and hairstyles and more about their own muscle-bulging bodies. He wrote that men’s bodies “have become the ultimate accessories, fashioning them at the gym into a hot commodity – one that they share and compare in an online marketplace.” To describe this new group of men, he created yet another term – “spornosexuals,” so coined as these individuals take cues for their appearance from sport and porn.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that just as societies and cultures evolve, so too do our notions of masculinity and femininity. Though these notions have changed somewhat over time in the United States, traditional views are still quite widely held. For instance, masculine qualities include being strong, ambitious, successful, aggressive, rational, and emotionally controlled. Feminine qualities include being nurturing, sensitive, thin, emotionally expressive, deferential, physically attractive, and concerned with people and relationships. Since gender is learned, not biologically coded, media messages, along with other societal sources, contribute to how individuals define themselves.

Gender scholar Julia T. Wood (2005) notes that just because social meanings of gender are taught, it does not mean individuals passively receive cultural meaning. Choices are made whether to accept or reject messages and whether to reinforce gender norms or to step outside them. When people choose to step outside accepted social boundaries, they tend to provoke change in societal views. For example, years ago, many would have looked down upon women who played basketball on a team in the United States. Now, however, many girls and women are encouraged to be actively involved in the

sport, and there are professional basketball teams under the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). Although the WNBA games were at first only relegated to cable, the games have gained in viewer popularity and have attracted more television network coverage in recent years. In 2020, ESPN expanded its WNBA schedule, making the games available on ABC Television Network, ESPN, ESPN 2, and its app. CBS Sports also picked up the WNBA games for the first time that year. The games were broadcast on CBS Television Network and on CBS Sports Network.

Still, female sports are not universally or wholeheartedly accepted. Even in the Olympics, men's basketball is given more airtime than women's basketball. In one study on the 2000 Summer Olympics, only two minutes was given to the US women's team, whereas over two hours of coverage was provided to the men's team (Tuggle, Huffman, and Rosengard 2002). Another study (Adams and Tuggle 2004) that examined the content of ESPN's *Sports Center* found that a majority of the stories carried pertained to male athletes. In analyzing 30 days of content, the researchers found a total of 778 stories about men and only 16 about women; the remaining 13 stories featured both men and women. Focusing more on male athletes than on female athletes might be inadvertently conveying to audiences that female athletes or even women's sports are not worth the viewer's (and, as a result, advertiser's) time or money.

Sexual Identity

For a long time in the United States, heterosexuality was considered the only norm, and same-sex attraction was viewed as abnormal. Being gay was deemed a mental illness, even by the medical profession, and the common thought was that individuals could and should be "cured" of the illness. It was not until 1987 that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) dropped "homosexuality" from its classifications of mental disorders. It is against this social backdrop that individuals for the longest time formed their sexual identity. It goes without saying that for those who identify as gay, it was a time of personal turmoil both externally, at the social level, and internally, at the personal level. The mainstream belief of who they should be was counter to their own sense of self.

Through the social and political efforts of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, understandings regarding sexual orientation have advanced. Although still fighting an uphill battle, the LGBT community has found greater acceptance at the social and political levels. For example, as a result of years of activism, several states in the United States have passed legislation recognizing same-sex marriages.

Signs of advancement of understandings regarding sexual orientation have also been noted in the mass media. Whereas any mention of sexuality that veered away from the heterosexual norm was taboo in the early days of mass media, positive depictions and more well-rounded images can now be seen in much of the content. Celebrity culture and admired celebrities coming out have certainly helped in this realm. For example, T.J. Osborne of the popular country music group Brothers Osborne came out as gay in an interview with *Time* magazine in 2021. Colton Underwood featured in the show "The Bachelor" also came out as gay that same year. In 2015, former Olympic athlete and reality television star Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner revealed her transitioning from male to female. As will be further discussed in Chapter 11, the experiences of a well-known celebrity going through the different stages of the transition process in front of the peering lens of television cameras brought about greater public awareness of the transgender community and some of the formidable obstacles they face in society.