Pasifika in the news: The portrayal of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand press

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INTRODUCTION

• News media do more than transmit information. Reports shape information and comprise forums for diagnosing social relationships, characterising groups, and offering prescriptions for addressing social concerns.
• Researchers have documented how ethnic minorities are often disadvantaged in mainstream media coverage, which function to silence minority voices and to privilege majority voices. Such representational practices have very real implications for the position of ethnic minorities in society, and their associated rights and life chances.
• Negative portrayals constitute serious public health risks and threats to positive social relations both within and beyond the boarders of minority communities. Such portrayals are associated with higher rates of mental and physical ailments among these communities. Therefore, deconstructing and challenging discriminatory representational practices becomes a public health promotion strategy.
• The promotion of positive identities among marginalized communities is associated with increased civic participation and health gains.
• Academic research on media portrayals of Pacific Islanders is virtually non-existent. We document the portrayal of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand print media reports.

METHOD

• Print news items (65) published in 3 major New Zealand newspapers (1 Oct - 30 Dec, 2004) were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques. The analysis adopted a ‘text-and-context’ approach, which involved moving the focus beyond the description of trends in coverage to broader observations about socio-cultural processes and relationships underlying media representations. In this poster we present simple descriptive statistics from the quantitative analysis.

RESULTS

• Portrayals of Pacific Islanders in newspapers reflect processes whereby media monitor marginalized groups and give prominence to negative attributes. Figure 1 shows the frequency of issues covered in news reports, which reflect the stigmatizing of Pacific communities. If one uses a broad definition of health to include social determinants there were 184 instances associating Pacific Islanders with health concerns. Combined with the 52 references to considerations of governance, the focus on health issues reflects a storyline in which Pacific Islanders are characterized as unhealthy people to be managed by public institutions.
• Coverage associated both negative and positive attributes with Pacific people, but favored negative attributes. Figure 2 reveals that there were 99 instances of negative attributes characterizing Pacific people as dependent, lazy, violent, criminal, and drug abusers. The largest category was comprised of 52 references to Pacific Islanders as foreigners or inferior others who are out of place in Aotearoa. Conversely, Figure 3 reveals only 38 positive references to Pacific Islanders as hardworking and community orientated individuals who have leadership qualities and are generous and honest people.
• Researchers have documented how ethnic minorities are often disadvantaged in mainstream media coverage, which function to silence minority voices and to privilege majority voices. Such representations have very real implications for the position of ethnic minorities in society, and their associated rights and life chances. Negative portrayals constitute serious public health risks and threats to positive social relations both within and beyond the boarders of minority communities. Such portrayals are associated with higher rates of mental and physical ailments among these communities. Therefore, deconstructing and challenging discriminatory representational practices becomes a public health promotion strategy.
• The promotion of positive identities among marginalized communities is associated with increased civic participation and health gains. Academic research on media portrayals of Pacific Islanders is virtually non-existent. We document the portrayal of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand print media reports.

CONCLUSION

• The media need to raise health and social concerns for public consideration. However, the reliance on one-dimensional characterizations of Pacific Islanders effectively reduces the claims of Pacific peoples to public attention to their problems.
• A worrying finding from our analyses is the lack of space for Pacific peoples to speak beyond restrictive roles, and the displacement of Pacific Islanders from their own stories. Such representations have very real implications for the position of ethnic minorities in society, and their associated rights and life chances. Negative portrayals constitute serious public health risks and threats to positive social relations both within and beyond the boarders of minority communities. Such portrayals are associated with higher rates of mental and physical ailments among these communities. Therefore, deconstructing and challenging discriminatory representational practices becomes a public health promotion strategy.
• The promotion of positive identities among marginalized communities is associated with increased civic participation and health gains. Academic research on media portrayals of Pacific Islanders is virtually non-existent. We document the portrayal of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand print media reports.

Figure 1: Frequency of issues covered in news reports

Figure 2: Negative attributes associated with Pacific people in news items

Figure 3: Positive attributes associated Pacific people in news items

Figure 4: Sources cited in news items