

Media representations of majority and minority groups

HAZEL ATUEL, VIVIANE SEYRANIAN
AND WILLIAM D. CRANO*

Claremont Graduate University, USA

Abstract

This research series replicated and extended earlier findings of Gardikiotis, Martin, and Hewstone (2004), who examined via content analysis UK media representations of numeric majority and minority groups. Using news articles from North and South Dakota, where majority/minority population characteristics mirror those of the UK in terms of number and power, Study 1 replicated the patterns of results found in Gardikiotis et al. Study 2, in which articles from California newspapers were analyzed, yielded findings contrary to Gardikiotis et al. and our Dakota analyses: Minority headlines were more frequent in California, and majority articles were longer than minority articles. Consistent with UK and Dakotas findings, majority headlines in California were associated with politics and identity adjectives, whereas minority headlines were linked to social issues and ethnicity-based adjectives. Arguably, these differences occurred because in California, unlike the UK and the Dakotas, Whites are not simultaneously the social power and the numeric majority. Variations in power and number associated with majority and minority status were discussed in explaining differences across contexts, and in signaling possible shortcomings in the conceptualization and methods used to investigate minority and majority influence. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

When applied to groups, the descriptors majority and minority often evoke considerations of *number* (e.g., Asch, 1956; Bond & Smith, 1996) or *power* (*status/expertise*; Clark & Maass, 1988; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Experimental studies typically focus on number as the sole delineator of these factions (Martin & Hewstone, 2001), but theoretical conceptions often consider power as the primary differentiator (Tajfel, 1981). Recent evidence (Seyranian, Atuel, & Crano, 2004; Lücken & Simon, 2005) suggests that majority and minority groups, particularly in real-world contexts, are viewed multidimensionally (Crano, 2001; Perez & Mugny, 1987), possibly leading to different group typologies. The lack of equivalence between real-world and experimental operationalizations of majority and minority groups is critical if experiments are to yield ecologically sound and socially relevant findings (Crano & Brewer, 2002). Equally important, these definitional variations have important implications for related areas of research on, for example, persuasion (Crano & Prislín, 2006), intergroup discrimination (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984), and social identity (Simon, 2004). Thus, considering public conceptions (Seyranian et al., 2004; Seyranian, Atuel, & Crano, Under

*Correspondence to: Dr. William D. Crano, Department of Psychology, Claremont Graduate University, 123 East 8th Street Claremont, California 91711 USA. E-mail: William.Crano@cgu.edu

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Review) as well as media representations (Gardikiotis et al., 2004; Nafstad, Phelps, Carlquist, & Blakar, 2005) of majority and minority groups has theoretical and empirical utility.

For these reasons, Gardikiotis et al.'s (2004) study on media representations of majority and minority groups merits close consideration. Their content analysis of British newspaper headlines containing the words majority or minority yielded a reliable preponderance of majority over minority headlines. Furthermore, majority headlines more often referred to political issues and contained adjectives stressing the majority's identity and numeric size. In contrast, minority headlines pertained more to social issues, and used more ethnicity and evaluation descriptors. Based on these results, Gardikiotis et al. suggested that experimental studies on social influence consider the types of adjectives and evaluations that accompany source status, the type of consensus information offered participants, the nature of the influence topic, and the social categorization of the source's group. Further, they noted that as majority (vs. minority) positions are more frequently covered in the press, experimental studies should consider source-frequency expectations: if participants anticipate greater exposure to majority than minority sources, message processing might be adversely affected if these expectations are violated (p. 644). Overall, Gardikiotis et al. point to significant variations in media portrayals of real-world majority and minority groups, which may have substantial implications for experimental research.

Several features of Gardikiotis et al.'s (2004) study warrant further consideration. First, it is unclear whether newspapers outside the UK similarly represent majority and minority groups. It may be that media depictions of majority and minority groups vary across national contexts. For example, although the UK and the US are comparably individualistically oriented (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998), whether the media reflect similar or different content in reference to majority and minority groups is an empirical question (Gunter, Harrison, & Wykes, 2003). Therefore, the goal of Study 1 was to test the generalizability of Gardikiotis et al.'s results in another national context, the US. Given appropriate constraints, replication of the UK results using US data would bolster the presumption that Gardikiotis et al.'s results are not culture-specific.

In addition, Gardikiotis et al. (2004) suggest that the relative popularity of majority titles may be explained by the pull of market forces: the media seeks to serve the majority, and thus may cover majority positions more readily than minority ones. This argument certainly is plausible, but there is no evidence as to what occurs when the population contains a variety of distinct minority groups, which in total might outnumber the smaller but socially powerful majority. In this circumstance, will the press represent majority and minority groups as in Gardikiotis et al.? This question is addressed in Study 2.

In two studies, we sought to replicate and extend the research of Gardikiotis et al. (2004) using a sample of newspapers in North and South Dakota (Study 1) and California (Study 2). Considering both the Dakotas and the California data facilitates a test of UK/US cross-cultural differences in news accounts of minority and majority. These particular US states were chosen because they feature different population characteristics, which in theory might affect media representations. Similar to the UK, North and South Dakota are characterized by a relatively homogeneous ethnic composition: 91.7% of North Dakota and 88% of South Dakota residents are classified 'White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin' (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Thus, there is a clear ethnic majority in the Dakotas—as in the UK—and this majority is widely acknowledged as the more socially powerful group. Examining newspapers in the Dakotas provides the opportunity to replicate the findings of Gardikiotis et al. in a geographic area similar in ethnic composition to the UK, but in a different national context.

Study 2 replicates Gardikiotis et al. (2004) in a state with an ethnic composition very different from the UK and the Dakotas. In California, 'White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin' represent only 46.7% of the Californian population. Whites co-exist with an array of numerically robust ethnic minority groups (Latino/Hispanic 32.4%; Black/African-American 6.7%; Asian/Pacific Islander 10.9%). California differs from the Dakotas in other ways as well (e.g., political orientation), but

perhaps the most striking difference is ethnic composition, where California lacks an overwhelming numeric White ethnic majority. As there is no clear ethnic majority and minority in California, but a socially powerful White population, we expect the press to represent the terms majority and minority in ways that differ from the Dakotas and the UK.

Turning to predictions concerning Study 1, we expect that in the Dakotas, where one ethnic group is simultaneously the numeric majority and the social power relative to other ethnic groups, a content analysis of newspapers will yield findings similar to Gardikiotis et al. (2004), insofar as group size is conflated with power (Simon, 2004), as in the UK. Owing to the pull of market forces aiming to serve the majority (Gardikiotis et al.), it is assumed that the *quantity* of majority versus minority headlines will reflect numeric differences. Thus, we expect more majority than minority headlines. Political headlines will be associated with the majority, as Western democracies assign power to majority rule (Gardikiotis et al.). Majority headlines also will contain more identity adjectives (e.g., Senate majority) to identify the groups constituting the majority, and consensus adjectives (e.g., large majority) to highlight their relative size. The minority will be associated with social issues as minorities typically mobilize social movements (e.g., immigration reform) and call attention to social issues. Because ethnicity is a salient social category associated with minority groups (Seyranian et al., 2004), minority headlines will use more ethnic adjectives (e.g., Latino minority). No differences are predicted for mean majority/minority article length.

STUDY 1

Method

Sample

The sample, retrieved from LexisNexis and NewsBank, consisted of headlines and articles from four newspapers and their Sunday editions from 2000 to 2003. The newspapers were: *Aberdeen American News*, *Argus Leader*, *The Bismarck Tribune*, and *Grand Forks Herald*, and constitute the totality of Dakota newspapers available through the combined online repositories. These newspapers account for 41% of the total circulation in the Dakotas. To increase (headline) sample size from 166 to 247, we added *Associated Press* (AP) headlines supplied to the Dakotas, which were mutually exclusive of headlines and articles in the above newspapers. In rare instances when the headline contained the terms majority *and* minority, it was classified under the term that appeared first.

Procedure

Two raters coded the headlines. They were unaware of the results of Gardikiotis et al. (2004) and the hypotheses of the current research. As there was acceptable interrater agreement (Cohen's kappa = 0.92) the first coder's data were used in all analyses.

Measures and Coding Scheme

The coding and context units of analysis and the coding scheme used were identical to those of Gardikiotis et al. (2004). The coding unit was the headline; the context unit, the article. Each headline

and corresponding article was addressed in four coding tasks. First, we counted *source status*: did the headline refer to majority or minority? Second, the *issue under consideration* was coded via examination of article content. Coders read each article and placed the headline and corresponding article into one of five categories: *political* ('Lawmakers suggest spending bulls pass with more than just majority,' *Aberdeen American News*, 01/13/02); *social* ('UND nickname activists can't claim majority support,' *Grand Forks Herald*, 03/25/02); *economic* ('Tyson begins cash offer for majority stake in IBP,' *AP*, 12/12/00); *international* ('Women make up the majority of workers in the factories of Shenzhen,' *Grand Forks Herald*, 07/28/02); and *other* ('Judge says Air Force must pay majority of settlement to family,' *Bismarck Tribune*, 01/20/00).

Third, group characteristics were defined by coding headlines for *source adjectives* or adjectives immediately preceding the terms minority or majority. Each headline was coded into one of five exhaustive categories: *identity adjectives* explicitly named the majority or minority ('State house minority leader running for governor,' *AP*, 12/18/03); *consensus adjectives* pertained to the numeric size of the group (small, large or exact size) ('Few minority staffers in Minnesota offices,' *Grand Forks Herald*, 07/08/03); *sound adjectives* referred to whether or not a minority or majority was 'silent' ('Silent majority quietly use their faith for good,' *Grand Forks Herald*, 04/13/02); *ethnicity-race adjectives* ('Alabama businessman seeks to be first Black majority owner in baseball,' *AP*, 01/11/02); *evaluative adjectives* consisted of positive or negatively valued words assigned to the majority or minority; and *other adjectives*, which did not fit into any of the other categories. Finally, we examined *article length* via word counts for each article. The counts excluded the words in the headlines.

Results

Source Status of Headlines

Of the 247 headlines containing the word majority or minority in the sample, the *Grand Forks Herald* supplied 37% of the titles. The *AP* contributed 33%, the *Argus Leader* 13%, *The Bismarck Tribune* 13%, and the *Aberdeen American News* 4%. Consistent with Gardikiotis et al. (2004), the Dakotas contained significantly more majority ($n = 161$) than minority ($n = 86$) headlines, $\chi^2(1) = 22.78$, $p < 0.005$.¹

General Issues Under Consideration

Analyses *within* majority and minority headlines disclosed significant differences in frequency of issue, $\chi^2(4) = 304.68$ and 100.04 , for majority and minority headlines respectively, both $p < 0.001$ (Table 1). Analyses *between* majority and minority headlines yielded significant differences for political and

¹We performed auxiliary analyses and eliminated international headlines to test the preponderance of majority and minority terms referring to American domestic issues. Results continued to yield differences between the distribution of majority and minority headlines in the Dakotas, $\chi^2(1) = 22.96$, $p < 0.001$. Also, we conducted analyses similar to that of Nafstad et al. (2005), who replicated Gardikiotis et al. (2004), by testing the frequency of the singular and plural form of the terms majority and minority. Similar to Nafstad et al., we found greater frequency of majority ($n = 161$) than majorities ($n = 10$), $\chi^2(1) = 133.34$, $p < 0.001$, in the Dakotas headlines. However, contrary to Nafstad et al., we found that when *both* plural and singular forms of majority and minority were combined, there were significantly more majority/majorities than minority/minorities headlines ($n = 171$, 117, respectively), $\chi^2(1) = 10.13$, $p < 0.01$; and, more minority ($n = 86$) headlines compared to minorities ($n = 31$) headlines, $\chi^2(1) = 25.85$, $p < 0.001$. The Dakotas findings indicated greater coverage devoted to the majority as a singular entity. Greater use of minority than minorities suggests either the presence of a strong or salient minority group or perceptions of minorities as separate and distinctive entities.

Table 1. Type of news in majority and minority headlines in The Dakotas

	Political*	Social*	Economic	International	Other	Total
Majority	120 (98)	16 (41)	7 (6)	1 (1)	17 (14)	161
Minority	31 (53)	47 (22)	2 (3)	1 (1)	5 (8)	86
Total	151	63	9	2	22	247

Numbers in parenthesis indicate the expected values, $\chi^2(4) = 59.99$, $p < 0.005$. Asterisk (*) denotes significant differences between majority and minority titles, $\chi^2(1) = 52.46$ and 15.25 , $p < 0.05$, respectively.

social issues, $\chi^2(1) = 52.46$ and 15.25 , respectively, both $p < 0.005$. As hypothesized, and similar to Gardikiotis et al. (2004), politics (75%) was most frequently covered in majority headlines; social issues (55%) were most frequently mentioned in minority titles.

Overall Analysis of Source Adjectives

From the 247 majority/minority headlines in the Dakotas, 113 contained adjectives that modified the source. Analyses *within* majority and minority headlines revealed significant differences in the use of modifiers, $\chi^2(4) = 156.96$ and 19.00 , respectively, $p < 0.001$ (Table 2). Analyses *between* majority and minority headlines showed differences only in the distribution of identity adjectives, which were attached more frequently to the majority, $\chi^2(1) = 26.16$, $p < 0.005$. Five of seven consensus adjectives were attributed to the minority; the term 'large' was associated with the minority. Owing to sample size, this difference is not statistically reliable.

Similar to Gardikiotis et al. (2004), majority headlines in the Dakotas most frequently contained identity adjectives (77%). Unexpectedly, minority headlines were most frequently modified by identity (42%), followed by ethnicity (31%). Collapsing across headlines, identity adjectives (65%) comprised most of the adjectives used in the Dakotas.

Article Length

As with Gardikiotis et al. (2004), no significant length differences were found between majority ($M = 603.6$, $SD = 314.47$) and minority ($M = 601.8$, $SD = 416.99$) headlines, $t(245) = 0.003$, *n.s.*

Summary

Findings largely supported expectations, with minor variations from Gardikiotis et al.'s (2004) work. Parallel to their earlier research, the majority received significantly more press attention than the

Table 2. Adjectives used in majority and minority headlines in The Dakotas

	Identity*	Consensus	Sound	Ethnicity	Evaluation	Total
Majority	59 (51)	2 (4)	1 (1)	6 (12)	9 (10)	77
Minority	15 (23)	5 (2)	0 (0)	11 (5)	5 (4)	36
Total	74	7	1	17	14	113

No adjectives were found in the 'other' category and therefore this category was excluded from the analysis. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the expected values, $\chi^2(4) = 20.88$, $p < 0.005$. Asterisk (*) denotes significant difference between majority and minority titles, $\chi^2(1) = 26.16$, $p < 0.05$.

minority, political issues were most frequently covered overall, and majority headlines were more likely to focus on political issues. More identity adjectives also were associated with the majority. In addition, minorities were most often associated with social issues. Finally, no differences in minority/majority article length were observed.

The Dakota analyses replicated the findings of Gardikiotis et al. (2004). National context variations (US vs. UK) were not associated with variations in media depictions of majority and minority groups. We believe the congruence of power and number accounts for the similarity of these representations. To examine this possibility, Study 2 examines headlines in California, where power and number vary between ethnic majority and minority groups.

STUDY 2

Different societies may exhibit variation on important population parameters (proportion of males/females, literacy, wealth), but for our purposes, differences in ethnic distributions are central, as they may affect media representations of majority and minority groups. In California, Whites represent 46.7% of the population. Numerically, they are *primus inter pares*, but they are not, strictly speaking, the numeric majority. Rather, Whites are widely recognized as the most powerful social group. To determine if perceptions of White number and power were consensually shared, we administered a brief survey to 67 California university students ($n = 24$ White, 11 Black, 21 Latino, and 6 Asian). Participants rated their ingroup's numeric size and power relative to Whites'. Exactly half the non-White sample believed Whites to be more numerous in California. There were no reliable differences in perceptions of White numerosity among the three non-White groups. Regarding the relative social power of Whites compared to their ingroup, 30 of 38 (79%) non-White participants felt Whites were more powerful. There were no differences among the three non-White groups in perceptions of White power. Whites' perceptions of number and power were congruent with those of the non-White group.

This small pilot-study suggests that while there is some uncertainty concerning Whites' numeric majority, there is considerable consensus in perceptions of Whites' social power. We hypothesize the coexistence of distinct ethnic groups varying along power and number dimensions creates a situation of increased awareness of minority issues, insofar as no ethnic group has claim to numeric superiority—and the media will reflect this heightened sensitivity to minority (over majority) issues. Conversely, when Whites are simultaneously more numerous and more powerful than other ethnic groups, as in North and South Dakota, their presence as the numeric majority will result in greater coverage, as found in Study 1 and by Gardikiotis et al. (2004).

We hypothesize that the lack of a numeric ethnic majority in California will contribute to the salience of this social category (Brewer & Miller, 1984; McGuire & McGuire, 2001; Seyranian et al., 2004), which in turn, will influence media depictions of majority and minority groups. We speculate that in societal contexts comparable to California's, in which no ethnic group claims numeric majority, but one group is perceived as more powerful than the others, the media will lean towards covering this salient ethnic diversity. Thus, we predict that California headlines may reflect more minority than majority titles. We anticipate that majority press coverage in California will be focused on politics and identity adjectives. Because minority ethnic groups in California are not as powerful as Whites, minority coverage will be associated with social issues. Further, we anticipate that ethnic adjectives will dominate minority headlines. We do not make specific predictions concerning consensus adjectives as our Dakota results showed no differences on this measure. Finally, no differences in article length are anticipated.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of newspaper headlines containing the words majority or minority from five California daily newspapers and their Sunday editions from 2000 to 2003. The newspapers were *The Los Angeles Times*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Sacramento Bee*, and *The San Jose Mercury News*. These newspapers were chosen as they account for 41% of all newspaper circulation in California. Headlines and their accompanying articles were retrieved from LexisNexis and NewsBank using keyword searches on the terms minority or majority.

Procedure

A subsample of the coded headlines was used to determine interrater agreement. Agreement (Cohen's kappa = 0.84) was acceptable and the first rater's coding was used in all analyses. As in Study 1, the coding scheme involved enumeration of the *source status (minority/majority) of headlines*, evaluation of the *issues under consideration*, examination of *source adjectives*, and *word counts* of majority and minority articles.

Results

Source Status of Headlines

Across the total headline sample, 1464 contained the word majority or minority. The *LA Times* contributed 45% of the headlines, the *San Jose Mercury News* 19%, *The San Diego Union Tribune* 16%, *San Francisco Chronicle* 12%, and *The Sacramento Bee* 8%. As hypothesized, California headlines were significantly more likely to contain the word minority (62%) than majority (38%), $\chi^2(1) = 80.83$, $p < 0.0001$.²

General Issues Under Consideration

Issue-focus differences were found *within* majority and minority titles, $\chi^2(4) = 250.78$ and 362.17, respectively, both $p < 0.001$ (Table 3). Political issues (44%) were found most frequently in majority headlines, with social headlines a distant second. This pattern was reversed in minority headlines, where social issues (43%) were the most frequent focus, appearing at twice the rate of political issues

²Auxiliary analyses eliminating international headlines yielded similar differences in distributions of majority and minority headlines, $\chi^2(1) = 94.52$, $p < 0.001$. Similar to the Dakota analyses and Nafstad et al.'s (2005) results, we found more frequent use of majority ($n = 560$) than majorities ($n = 16$) in the headlines, $\chi^2(1) = 513.78$, $p < 0.001$. Similar to the Dakotas findings, but unlike Nafstad et al., when the frequency of *both* plural and singular forms of majority and minority were combined, there still existed a greater ratio of minority/minorities ($n = 1138$) to majority/majorities ($n = 576$), $\chi^2(1) = 184.27$, $p < 0.001$, and greater use of the term minority ($n = 904$) versus minorities ($n = 234$), $\chi^2(1) = 394.46$, $p < 0.001$. Using majority/majorities versus minority/minorities did not significantly alter the proportion of headlines attributed to each type of group in the Dakotas or in California. However, our results corroborated the claim that the majority is conceived of in the singular form (Nafstad et al.). Divergent from the UK studies (Gardikiotis et al; Nafstad et al.), the California and Dakotas analyses also yielded greater use of minority than minorities, perhaps as a function of the strong presence of a salient minority group or perceptions of minority groups as distinctive and differentiated entities.

Table 3. Type of news in majority and minority headlines in California

	Political*	Social*	Economic*	International	Other*	Total
Majority	246 (166)	143 (203)	61 (86)	61 (41)	49(63)	560
Minority	189 (269)	388 (288)	165 (140)	47 (67)	115 (101)	904
Total	435	531	226	108	164	1464

Numbers in parenthesis indicate the expected values, $\chi^2(4) = 123.56$, $p < 0.005$. Asterisk (*) denotes significant differences between majority and minority titles, $\chi^2(1) = 7.47, 45.87, 47.86, 113.04$, and 26.56 , $p < 0.05$, respectively.

(21%). Analyses *between* majority and minority headlines revealed significant differences on political, social, economic, and other issues, $\chi^2(1) = 7.47, 45.87, 113.04$, and 26.56 , respectively, all $p < 0.05$.

As anticipated, political issues were covered more frequently in majority headlines, whereas minority headlines showed greater coverage of social, economic, and other issues. Collapsing across headlines, social issues (36%) received the greatest coverage, a result at variance with Gardikiotis et al. (2004), who found that political headlines were most frequent.

Overall Analysis for Source Adjectives

Across all 1464 headlines, 356 contained source modifiers. Analysis *within* majority and minority headlines yielded significant differences, $\chi^2(5) = 59.18$ and 95.23 , respectively, both $p < 0.001$ (Table 4). Analyses *between* majority and minority headlines revealed significant differences in the use of identity, ethnicity, and other adjectives, $\chi^2(1) = 14.09, 11.23, 9.85$, respectively, all $p < 0.05$. Majority headlines referred more frequently to identity, whereas minority headlines more often featured ethnicity. Although there were no overall differences found for consensus adjectives, California headlines referred to both small and large majority and minority groups.

As in Gardikiotis et al. (2004), majority headlines most frequently made use of identity adjectives (e.g., House majority leader), whereas minority headlines were more typically associated with ethnicity (e.g., Asian minority). Collapsing across majority and minority headlines, results confirmed expectations: Ethnicity was the most commonly used source qualifier in the California headlines.

Article Length

Majority articles contained significantly more words ($M = 782.40$, $SD = 456.60$) than minority articles ($M = 728.95$, $SD = 475.40$), $t(1462) = 2.12$, $p < 0.05$. This result is not consistent with Study 1's results.

Table 4. Adjectives used in majority and minority headlines in California

	Identity*	Consensus	Sound	Ethnicity*	Evaluation	Other*	Total
Majority	64 (53)	32 (32)	2 (3)	32 (56)	33 (39)	32 (21)	195
Minority	28 (39)	26 (26)	3 (2)	65 (41)	34 (28)	5 (16)	161
Total	92	58	5	97	67	37	356

Numbers in parentheses indicate the expected values, $\chi^2(5) = 46.08$, $p < 0.005$. Asterisk (*) denotes significant differences between majority and minority titles for Identity, Ethnicity, and Other adjectives, $\chi^2(1) = 14.09, 11.23$, and 9.85 , $p < 0.05$, respectively.

Summary

In sum, Gardikiotis et al. (2004), the Dakota, and the California analyses all found political issues most frequently mentioned in majority headlines. Social issues were most frequent in minority headlines. Identity adjectives were more frequently applied to the majority, whereas ethnicity was more frequently used in minority titles. Social issues and ethnicity seemingly pertain to the diversity of ethnic groups that vary along the dimensions of number and power. At variance with both Gardikiotis et al. and Study 1, the California analyses confirmed expectations of more minority than majority headlines. Regardless of status, California headlines focused most on social issues, which also occurred most frequently in minority headlines. Finally, majority articles were lengthier than minority articles, suggesting greater elaboration of majority than minority issues.

These disparities suggest that a population's *relative* ethnic composition is associated with differential effects on media representations of majority and minority. Although it is arguable that these differences are attributable to cross-cultural variations in press coverage, Study 1 renders this possibility implausible. In the Dakotas, where Whites constitute both the clear ethnic majority and the most powerful ethnic group, as they do in the UK, results largely replicated Gardikiotis et al. The Dakotan confluence of number and power, however, is not characteristic of California. The natural covariation between the US groups enhances the plausibility of the relative ethnic composition hypothesis over the cross-cultural discrepancy proposition (Crano & Brewer, 2002).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies, we replicated and extended earlier findings on newspaper representations of majority and minority groups. These findings illuminate similarities and differences in majority and minority depictions in the media across different societal contexts. Across the UK (Gardikiotis et al., 2004), the Dakotas, and California, majority headlines more frequently considered political issues and identity adjectives, whereas minority headlines reflected social issues and ethnicity-based adjectives. Gardikiotis et al.'s suggestion that social influence researchers should be sensitive to adjectives and evaluations moderating source status, the nature of the influence topic, and the social categorization of the source's group was reinforced in analyses across three diverse contexts. However, the California dataset did not support their contention that experimenters should consider source-frequency expectations, based on people's anticipation of greater exposure to majority than minority positions. Inconsistent with both Gardikiotis et al. and our Dakota headlines analysis, the California findings yielded more minority titles and more words in majority articles. These results suggest that Californians may expect greater exposure to minority-related issues and positions, while simultaneously anticipating greater elaboration of majority positions. The current research underscores the idea that source-frequency expectations do not necessarily favor the majority. Rather, coverage may be contingent on the *relative positions* of majority and minority groups in the society. The California results also call into question the assumption that the media seek to serve the majority, and thus cover more majority than minority positions (Gardikiotis et al.). An alternate explanation that reconciles this possibility with the California results may be derived from a consideration of the press coverage that multiple ethnic groups receive. As the majority of the Californian population consists of ethnic minorities, the media may lean towards serving this ethnic diversity rather than the ephemeral majority, if, as we have proposed, ethnicity is a significant social category associated with majority *and* minority groups, which affects media representations in general. Minority and majority groups, after all, do not

exist in a vacuum—they are embedded within a social category (Crano, 2001), or reflect a certain position within society (Moscovici, 1976; Tajfel, 1981).

Power and Number: An Alternate Explanation

Media representations of majority and minority groups clearly reflect more than numeric distinctions. In Gardikiotis et al. (2004) and the Dakotas, the ethnic majority was simultaneously the social power. The position of Whites in California is more complex. As noted, Census 2000 indicates that Whites constitute 46.7% of the Californian population, a numeric minority. Results from our survey indicated mixed perceptions of the numeric status of Whites. Although Whites clearly were perceived as more socially powerful than other ethnic groups, their numeric status is ambiguous. Numerically, the data of our investigation suggest that Whites might have been construed as constituting a ‘small’ numeric majority, as comprising the largest ethnic minority, or as constituting a large numeric minority, with the aggregate of non-Whites representing the majority. Regardless of which conceptualization best describes the consensually perceived social position of Whites in California, the present study highlights the possibility that when a relatively powerful group does not possess an overwhelming numeric majority, minority and majority issues may be represented with differential frequency and elaboration than when there is a clear majority, where clarity is defined by congruence of power and number. These representations are important, as they may shape intra- and intergroup identities, cognitions, and behavior.

Although the approach used here does not allow for causal inferences, it does provide information that may be useful in stimulating future study. Based on census returns, data from our California survey, and the growing size and influence of ethnic minority groups in California, we speculate that although Whites in California are the most powerful social group, they are viewed as comprising a *numeric minority*. The total population of ethnic minority groups other than Whites is a *numeric majority*. This perspective helps regularize the apparently inconsistent results obtained in California as opposed to the UK (Gardikiotis et al., 2004) and the Dakotas. In the UK (Gardikiotis et al.) and the Dakotas, the majority received greater media coverage; in California, this difference was reversed. The socially powerful numeric majority in the UK and the Dakotas, and the socially powerful numeric *minority* in California, secured the lion’s share of press coverage. The more socially potent group received greater media attention irrespective of group size. It is true that in all cases, that group consisted of Whites, but it seems extremely unlikely that such would be the case in circumstances in which non-Whites constituted the social power, as in many African states. Analyses across the UK (Gardikiotis et al.), Dakotas, and California support the conclusion that the majority is associated with political issues and identification, whereas the minority garners more socially relevant headlines and ethnicity-based adjectives.

Previous research on majority and minority groups suggests that in naturalistic, non-contrived settings, power differentials or status hierarchies may be the central delineator of status. Using a numeric definition of majority and minority alone is insufficient to explain the results reported by Gardikiotis et al. and discovered in our own analyses. In defining majority and minority groups in terms of *both* power and size, different group types emerge (e.g., powerful minority, powerless majority, etc.) as a consequence of the concordance or discordance of size and power. These group types deserve further investigation.

The similarities and variations found across the UK (Gardikiotis et al., 2004), the Dakotas, and California in media depictions raise a critical issue, namely, how should we define majority and minority groups in our research? Coming to a consensual definition of majority and minority based on real-life group depictions and perceptions may be a significant and pressing issue for the validity of

scientific inquiry into the workings of majority and minority groups. A widespread and databased consensus on these issues will contribute significantly to the ecological validity of our work, and ultimately to a better understanding of intergroup relations and social influence.

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