







# Screens to See the World. Television Stereotypes of the Mexican Indigenous Population and the Generation of Prejudice

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** Stereotypes are socially-structured beliefs about a particular social group, which can be derived from direct or indirect contact with members of that group. In this regard, it has been pointed out that media representations can generate and reinforce stereotypes that lead to the development of more or less prejudiced attitudes. **Objectives.** This study seeks to examine whether this process occurs with respect to the Mexican indigenous population, in the context of the metropolitan area of Monterrey. **Methods.** The study combined two methods: the first one consisted of the content analysis of fiction TV programmes in order to identify possible stereotypes about Mexico's indigenous population; the second instrument was a survey applied to high school students of the metropolitan area of Monterrey in order to investigate the relationship between their beliefs and prejudiced attitudes towards indigenous people. **Conclusions.** Results confirmed the impact of the consumption of media stereotypes on the level of prejudice towards indigenous people, but not on the stereotyping of this sector of the population.

## Keywords

Indigenous; prejudice; media stereotypes; stereotyping; television consumption.

## Contents

1. Introduction. 1.1. Stereotypes of the Mexican indigenous population. 1.2. Process of stereotyping in the media. 1.3. Media impact on prejudice. 2. First study. 2.1. Method. 2.2. Findings. 3. Second study. 3.1. Method. 3.2. Findings. 4. Discussion and conclusions. 5. References.

## 1. Introduction

Previous studies carried out in Mexico on the image of indigenous peoples within the Mexican population, such as the one by the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas [National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples] (CDI, 2006), reveal a considerable distance and lack of knowledge about indigenous issues on an important part of Mexicans. This situation “complicates even further the vision on this sector, whose image is typified by myths, vague ideas, and stereotypes (CDI, 2006: 46). In any case, it is possible that the ideas about this social group held by the majority of the Mexican population is not necessarily backed up by personal experience. On the contrary, stereotypes come more from information received from others acting as agents that generate a vicarious contact (Seiter, 1986).

One of these agents is the media, particularly the television, which functions by means of a stereotyped presentation of social groups in news or fiction programs that remains constant in the time. This has been discovered to be an important explicative factor in the increase of stereotyped and prejudiced ideas towards members of minority groups (Schiappa, Gregg, Hewes, 2005; Tan, Fujioka, Lucht, 1997). This exercise of representation turns the media imaginary into a real source of information taken as common knowledge (Brown-Givens y Monahan, 2005). This is the hypothesis suggested by cultivation theory, which analyses the images transmitted by television, in as much as it is “a centralized system of story-telling” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1996: 36).

From this starting point, this study aims to identify the role played by television in the transmission and creation of the imaginary of indigenous groups in the Mexican case. More concretely, it aims to determine what stereotypes or features define the presence of indigenous characters in fiction programs (series, soap operas, films, etc.) shown by the main national-level channels in Mexico. Yet, beyond this diagnosis of the content that is broadcast, the study also aims to ascertain the impact of this content on audiences. Consequently, the study will also evaluate the stereotype of the indigenous Mexican according to a key sector of the population: final-year high school students. It will determine to what extent exposure to different television contents contributes to the generation of ethnic prejudice via the stereotypes transmitted by the TV.

## **1.1. Stereotypes of the indigenous population in Mexico**

According to official data (CDI, 2010; INEGI, 2010) the Indigenous population in Mexico is relatively small, constituting no more than 10% of the whole population, but with a strong historical presence in the diverse populations that integrate the broader society in Mexico today. This situation has generated a social imaginary about this ethnic group characterized by specific social stereotypes. The study carried out by the CDI (2006) detected three dominant stereotypes related to the Mexican indigenous population.

In the first place, the perception is of a historic indigenous person, with positive and idealized characteristics, given that he is considered to be the keeper of the Mexican culture and essence. There is also a stereotype of the indigenous person in his community, characterized by adversity to change and a barrier to civilization. Finally, there is the indigenous person in the city, as someone who does not adapt, contaminates, corrupts, and innocently lets others take advantage of him. Therefore, there is a degree of ambivalence in the stereotypical ideas that guide Mexican thinking on the indigenous population (Muñiz, Serrano, Aguilera, Rodríguez, 2010). This situation is not exclusive to Mexico, since there is empirical evidence to suggest that there are contradictory stereotypes in the imaginary of the population with regard to other national indigenous communities, such as the case of Chile where ideas about the Mapuche in the past and present are very different (Saiz, Rapimán, Mladinic, 2008).

Stereotypes have been defined as “more or less structured beliefs in the mind of a subject with regard to a social group” (Páez, 2004: 760). That is to say, a group of beliefs that the members of an in-group share about the attributes that characterize, or they believe to characterize, the members of the out-group (Saiz et al., 2008: 27). They are generalizations that constitute, in a certain way, a rejection of the individual differences that define the members of the out-group. Consequently, the stereotypes mean that the variability of the members of the group is unknown. In this way, when a person is characterized within a specific ethnic group, certain attributes are assigned to him due to his belonging to this concrete group (Tamborini, Mastro, Chory-Assad, Huang, 2000; Tan et al., 1997). These attributes are normally negative in nature, although they can co-exist with others that are more positive in nature.

They are a product of cognitive type processes that are carried out in order to categorize people into different groups, a process that entails the creation of certain stereotypical beliefs (Casas, Dixon, 2003). These beliefs are characterized by “simplification or exaggeration”, the “justifying and rationalizing” character of behavior in relation to the outgroup, their “consensual” nature given that they are shared, and their “rigidity”, since they are resistant to change. Certain authors point out that stereotypes are cognitive structures or categories used to evaluate groups and their members (Dixon, 2000; Domke, 2001; Brown-Givens, Monahan, 2005) and that “help simplify a complex social environment by quickly and efficiently processing incoming stimuli based on the presence of a few relevant characteristics” which are assigned to certain social groups (Gorham, 2009: 94).

Stereotypes are generated from certain descriptions about a) physical appearance; b) the behavior of the role; c) personality characteristics; and d) the occupation of the members of the out-group (Páez, 2004). In his study, Martínez (1996) points out that they are made up of *defining features*, which are the characteristics that help identify and categorize subjects, and the *ascribed characteristics*, which tell us about the psychological characteristics attributed to the behavior of the members of the groups and which allow us to predict and explain their conduct. As a result of these features, individuals, but also societies as a whole, generate an imaginary of the different groups that make up a society, or other societies that are not always well-known. This dimension is defined by Saiz et al (2008) as the content of stereotypes, constituted by the attributes assigned to the stereotyped group.

It is interesting to discover the way in which these stereotypes are formed and internalized by people, helping them to elaborate their judgments, maintain attitudes and, even, modify their behavior with regard to a social group (Dixon, 2000). A first channel for their creation is personal experience via, for example, social roles, that constitute more or less socially consensual perceptions of certain groups. These roles can help to perpetuate certain stereotypes, and even prove harmful to the members of those groups who wish to break with this traditional social image. However, on other occasions, generalizations are stereotypes that can be learned without having direct contact with the people from the stereotyped social group.

It is a learning process that comes from the information that is transmitted and that the individual receives from other people or via the media (Saiz et al., 2008; Seiter, 1986) and that is particularly effective when direct contact with the members of the other groups is very limited (Aboud, Tredoux, Tropp, Brown, Niense, Noorf, 2012). In this sense, Lippmann (1922) already suggested that stereotypes are images that we have in our minds and which we use to capture the world that surrounds us.

## 1.2. A stereotyping process in the media

Different studies show the crucial role played by the media in the creation and diffusion of images or social representations of minorities and ethnic groups (Dixon, 2000; Entman, 1992; Seiter, 1986; Tamborini et al., 2000; Gorham, 2009). It is not without cause that it has been stated that “the information that we gain from the mass media results in the production of stereotypes that help us simplify our environment” and, therefore, to “process information” (Dixon, 2000: 62). But, if there is one type of media that plays an important role in this process it is television, given that it is a cultural instrument that socializes social behavior and roles, creating effects via the cultivation of more basic assumptions on social reality (Gerbner, 1993). This process of stereotyping, and its contingent effects, has been explained by cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1996), according to which the media constantly transmit stories that help audiences understand how society operates and why things happens and are as they are. That is to say, they transmit cultural indicators, with stereotypes being one of the main sorts of indicators.

Thus, media contents affect peoples’ perceptions in a considerable way due to the fact that they constitute a process of accumulative internalization as a result of a massive exposure to messages over time. Consequently, the portraits of social groups tend to be considered valid and real by those who refer to the media frequently. If the aspects of the members of the groups that are normally portrayed are negative, it is to be expected that the audience will also internalize a list of negative stereotypes that will be used later on to evaluate this social group (Fujioka, 1999). Thus, the media acts as a source of social learning and, inevitably, also has a predominant role in the teaching and strengthening of ideas and stereotypes that the members of a society have in relation to groups that are different from their own (Muñiz et al., 2010; Ramasubramanian, Oliver, 2007).

Currently, the study of media stereotypes is marked by a theoretical approach based on social psychology from which the process of racial or ethnic stereotyping is studied. A classic proposal on this process is the pre-activation of priming stereotypes that determine the existence of two automatic and controlled stages (Brown-Givens, Monahan, 2005; Casas, Dixon, 2003; Gorham, 2009; Mastro, 2009). In the first stage, the stereotypes are activated unconsciously, due to the fact that they have already been pre-activated frequently in the past and, therefore, will act with the mere presence of the members of a stereotyped group. A personal belief system is activated which associates certain groups with certain stereotypes – for example Latinos as lazy or Afro-Americans as criminals – which rapidly come to mind when thinking about or coming into contact with members of this social group, giving them a certain degree of inevitability (Brown-Givens, Monahan, 2005).

In the second stage, the stereotypes activated in people’s minds are used to interpret the information received. They are, consequently, applied consciously by the subject given that at this stage there is a possibility of accepting or rejecting the stereotyped information that is being received. However, if the stereotype is accepted without a critical reflection that could lead to a process of counter-stereotyping, it could be used to interpret the actions of the members of the stereotyped group in a schematic way (Brown-Givens, Monahan, 2005). Thus, the cognitive impact of the stereotypes generates structures of knowledge or schemas that, when activated frequently or recently by the media, become more accessible for audiences when elaborating their judgments or determining their attitudes towards certain objects (Domke, 2001; Fujioka, 1999; Mastro, 2009). As Gorham (2009: 95) points out, “Schemas help us categorize the world by telling us the basic characteristics of the things we encounter”.

Thus, it is to be expected that when it is necessary to think about or relate with members of concrete groups, the schemas emerge to “help” the person formulate evaluations and make decisions (Gorham, 2009; Muñiz et al., 2010). Therefore, it is assumed that the media images received can activate pre-existing racial or ethnic stereotypes that will help make evaluations later on, which in many cases are prejudiced. There are studies that have found this *priming* effect, where individuals

exposed to media contents that include stereotyped contents have are more likely to use this same content to process later information than those who have not been exposed. Furthermore, it is difficult to correct the distorted evaluations later on due to the stimuli induced by means of an activation process (Brown-Givens, Monahan, 2005; Domke, 2001; Entman, 1992; Fujioka, 1999; Gorham, 2009; Oliver, Jackson, Moses and Dangerfield, 2004). In contrast to this model of *priming*, other perspectives assume that the media do not only activate pre-existing stereotypes but also that they can generate new cognitions, as well as changing pre-existing ones (Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz, 2013).

Television plays a crucial role in this process of activating racial stereotypes, by means of the stereotyped presentation of certain social groups in their news or fiction contents. This is particularly the case when these stereotyped images are repeated constantly in time, which turns this imaginary into a real news resource taken by people as common knowledge (Brown-Givens y Monahan, 2005). The studies carried out in this line show that the association of racial groups to determined stereotypes foments the use of these same stereotypes when evaluating members of those stereotyped groups. Thus, it is to be expected that when it is necessary to think about or relate to members of concrete groups, stereotypes emerge to “help” the person make his decisions (Domke, 2001; Entman, 1992; Fujioka, 1999; Lee, Bichard, Ireya, Walta, Carlsona, 2009; Oliver et al., 2004).

Obviously, the indigenous populations of different countries have also been shaped by this media prime that exacerbates certain representative attributes of the group, generating a dominate archetype of the indigenous person (Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz, 2013; Mastro, 2009; Nahmad, 2007). In the case of the United States, their presence in the media is minimal, but the few representations of native Indians in television have been traditionally linked to images such as the “general Indian”, reflecting the dominant power of the majority white or anglo-saxon group, that of the “good Indian”, according to which features of benevolence, friendship, or gentleness are emphasized, but also the image of the “bad Indian”, linked to alcoholism or another type of degradation in contrast to the virtuosity of the majority group (Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz, 2013; Mastro, Greenberg, 2000). In the case of the indigenous population in Mexico, there is no clarity on the media impact of the generation of stereotypes. For example, in their study Muñiz et al. (2010) did not detect a relationship between the consumption of television and the stereotypes held by University students on indigenous people. Consequently, three research questions are formulated:

- RQ1: What are the main portrayals used in fiction programs in Mexican television in order to characterize indigenous people?
- RQ2: Which stereotypes are dominant in the imaginary of participants when defining the members of the Mexican indigenous group?
- RQ3: To what extent is there a relationship between the consumption of this type of programs and the maintenance of stereotypes of indigenous people?

### **1.3. Media impact on prejudice**

In his study, Allport (1958) pointed out that the negative stereotypes of social groups led to prejudiced behavior towards these groups, derived from the process of generalization that in many cases is followed in order to make judgments on these groups or their members. This process is normally carried out in a hurry and is generally based on incomplete or erroneous information (Schiappa et al., 2005). The formation of prejudiced ideas is driven by the tendency people have towards categorizing, simplifying, and ordering the social world in order to understand it much more rapidly and easily (Cea D’Ancona, 2004). In this way, people create certain categories of attributes

that are assigned to members of a group due to the simple fact that they belong to it (Pettigrew, Meertens, 1995; Rueda, Navas, 1996). Prejudiced manifestations have developed, and in contrast to a manifest and more traditional prejudice that approved of the inequality between people, today we talk of a subtle and modern prejudiced based more on opinions and subtle attitudes of rejection which are camouflaged (Busselle, Crandall, 2002; Espelt, Javaloy, Cornejo, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Tamborini et al., 2000).

These attitudes can be due to the process of socialization of the person that belongs to the majority group, negative experiences, or the media stereotypes received (Schiappa et al., 2005). In fact, it has been shown that direct contact can favor the reduction of prejudice (Dixon, 2000; Fujioka, 1999; Tan et al., 1997). Yet, not all members of the majority group have a direct access to the minority group in order to maintain an interpersonal relationship with their members. On many occasions, the only relationship that these people will have with ethnic groups that are different from their own will take place via the media (Dixon, 2000).

Thus, an indirect or vicarious contact is produced, which is also known as a para-social contact (Schiappa et al., 2005), that is to say a relationship that is not direct but rather symbolically mediated (Aboud et al., 2012; Tan et al., 1997). As is evident, one of the effects that the stereotyped television contents can have is the generation, maintenance, and/or reinforcement of certain prejudices towards minority groups (Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz, 2013; Entman, 1992; Richardson, 2003). The result is greater when the representation in negative roles is constant over time, and the members of the majority group have considerable exposure to this type of media portraits (Busselle, Crandall, 2002).

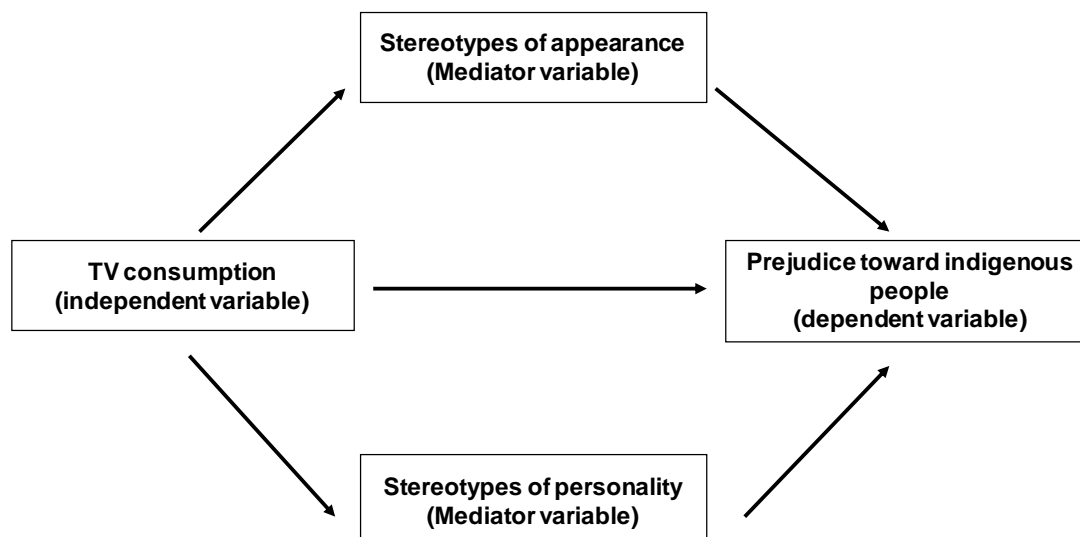
In their recent study, Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz (2013: 256) argue that the “exposure to media stereotypes of racial/ethnic minorities can increase individuals’ propensity for making prejudicial real-world judgments of these groups”. In this way, the –positive or negative- examples of minorities offered by the media can play a fundamental role in the learning process about these groups, as well as the development of more or less prejudiced and discriminating attitudes (Entman, 1992; Mastro, 2009). Although the literature on the subject is still recent and scarce (Behm-Morawitz y Ortiz, 2013), several studies validate this effect, normally carried out by an experimental approach that evaluates the effects of media consumption in the short term (Mastro, 2009). For example, such is the case of the study carried out by Oliver et al. (2004), who detected that the exposure to stereotyped news contents about violent crime could affect the stereotyped perception of the perpetrators on the part of those participating in the study.

However, other studies show that exposure to positive examples can reduce negative attitudes towards the minority group and increase the perception of discrimination as a social problem. Such is the case of the studies by Ramasubramanian (2011) and Ramasu-bramian, Oliver (2007) on ethnic minorities or by Schiappa et al. (2005) on homosexuals and transsexuals. There are few examples of studies carried out using survey data, as for example in the case of Busselle, Crandall (2002), who detected some effects of exposure to television programs on racial perceptions that were unfavorable towards the Afro-American minority or the study by Muñoz et al. (2010) which found a general impact of television on the increase of prejudice towards indigenous Mexicans.

All of this means that, taking up the process of stereotyping explained previously, it is possible that the media have an effect on the prejudice shown towards a social group, as in the case of this study with the Mexican indigenous group, via the activation of pre-existing stereotypes, or the generation of new ones, derived from exposure to contents with portrayals of this group. Thus, the existence of a possible communicative mediation between television watching and prejudice is suggested, following the proposal of the media priming perspective (Behm-Morawitz, Ortiz, 2013; Ramasu-bramian, Oliver, 2007), which is the approach most often used to study the influence of media stereotypes in consumers (Mastro, 2009). Thus, the argument is that the exposure to media contents

activates the stereotypes stored in the memory, and these cognitions are made more available to be used when making judgments about these groups. All of this can be seen in a mediational model (See Figure 1) between exposure to media and prejudice, via stereotypes, similar to that which has already been analyzed by Ramasubramanian (2011).

**Figure 1: Model of communicative mediation on prejudice towards indigenous people**



However, according to Preacher, Hayes (2008), various conditions have to be fulfilled in order for a mediation to occur. First of all, the predicting variable (TV consumption) must be statistically related with the dependent variable (prejudice). Then, the predicting variable should be related with the mediator variables. In study, the stereotypes about indigenous people held by the population will act as mediators. In order to measure them, the work by Mastro, Greenberg (2000) was taken as a reference point, grouping the characteristics that the authors suggest into stereotypes of appearance and personality in order to study the image of racial minorities in the media. In a third step, the mediator variable must show a relationship with the dependent variable once the direct effect of the predicting variable has been controlled. If a complete mediation occurs, the independent variable should stop affecting the dependent variable whereas if it only reduces this effect it would be considered to be a partial mediation. Taking into account this design, the study establishes the following hypothesis and research questions:

- RQ4: What is the participants' level of prejudice towards indigenous people?
- HI1: The consumption of television will explain in a meaningful and positive way the increase of prejudice towards indigenous groups.
- HI2: The stereotypes of the indigenous populations will have an effect, modifying the level of prejudice held towards this group.
- RQ5: Is there a process of mediation whereby the exposure to television explains prejudice via stereotypes?

## 2. First study

### 2.1. Method

In order to carry out the first study, which consisted in a content analysis, a sample was selected of the characters in fiction programs on the Mexican national TV Channels *Televisa* and *TVAzteca* during a full week in the months from March to November 2010. In the first phase of the search all of the fiction programs broadcast by these channels and that were produced in Mexico were identified. This produced a total of 65 units to analyze, corresponding to the episodes of 5 series or soap operas, given that no indigenous characters were detected in films. Within these episodes the total number of characters was revised ( $n = 756$ ) and those characterized as indigenous ( $n = 65$ ) were selected, which meant 8.47% of the total number of characters.

A codebook was elaborated with the characteristics or variables of the characters to be analyzed, taking as an example the study of de Mastro, Greemberg (2000).

Specifically, the role of the character within the program was codified (1 = principal; 2 = secondary; 3 = background), different socio-demographical data, and the character's occupation. Aspects of the character's appearance were also evaluated, for example their physical characteristics (hair color, complexion, etc) and their characterization (if they are wearing make-up or accessories, etc).

Finally, the personality of the characters focused on the study of aspects such as, for example, being grateful, friendly, bad, or mistrustful. Once the codification had taken place, the inter-coder reliability of the study was estimated. The mean value obtained (Scott's Pi Formula) was .94, which indicated a high degree of reliability.

## 2.2. Findings

Although there were two characters in television series, the majority of the characters were detected in episodes of soap operas ( $n = 62$ , 97%). Of all of the characters, only one occupied the principal role or part in the program. The majority of the characters were in secondary roles ( $n = 42$ , 66%) or background parts ( $n = 21$ , 33%).

With regard to these characters, it is worth pointing out that, although supposedly all of them were characterized as indigenous, no reference was made in any case to which community they belonged to.

With regard to their occupation, the role as a "peasant or farm worker" was dominant, with 24 characters characterized as such (37.5%).

The roles of maid, which appeared on 18 occasions (28.2%) as well as fisherwoman (26.6%), were also very relevant. The other professions scarcely appeared on one or two occasions, such as shaman (two occasions), students, and midwife on one occasion each.



**Table 1. Aspects related to appearance present in the characters analyzed**

Physical appearance	% total	Physical appearance	% total
Dark eyes	100	Make-up	93.7
Slim	7.9	Natural (no make-up)	6.4
Average weight	69.8	With accessories	98.4
Fat/obese	22.2	Without accessories	1.6
Tall	26.9	Modern clothing	1.6
Average height	42.9	Traditional clothing	98.4
Small	30.2	Styled hair	98.4
Black hair	100	Messy hair	1.6
Fair skinned	65.1	Dirty appearance and clothing	1.6
Dark skinned	34.9		
Different accent or language	23.8		

*Note:*  $N = 63$ . The data offered represent the percent of occasions on which the characters analyzed presented the aspect analyzed.

With regard to the aspects related to the character’s physical appearance, it can be affirmed that the indigenous people maintained in general certain stereotypical features. As a whole, they had black eyes and hair with a normal or obese physical complexion, of a normal or short stature. Furthermore, characters with white skin dominated in comparison with those with dark skin and only 24% were characterized with some kind of accent (See Table 1). Concerning the aspects related to the external appearance of characters, a particular tendency of the actors characterized as indigenous was also detected. They were normally presented with accessories, evidently made-up, dressed with traditional clothes, with a well-kept hairstyle, and clean in appearance and clothes. On the contrary, the number of characters that appeared without make-up was much lower (6.4%), with more modern clothing, with no accessories, unkempt hair, and with a dirty appearance or clothes (1.6% for all groups).

Finally, as part of the study, aspects of personality of the characters that evidenced their attitudes and behavior were also analyzed (See Table 2). In general terms, the characters represented as indigenous in the series and soap operas analyzed were friendly, grateful, good, open, loyal, hard-working, trusting, fair, and respected. All of these positive features were the most frequently-used features to characterize them. However, there also appeared –albeit to a lesser extent– features such as being passive, anti-social, bad, mistrusting, disloyal, unjust, lazy or ridiculed by other characters. On one hand, the high frequency of indigenous characterized as affected by the happenings or occurrences lived and suffered was surprising, as well as how seldom they were represented as intelligent. Therefore, a predominant media representation is detected with positive attitudinal and

personality features of indi-genous people, although with a lack of knowledge about their level of intelligence given that their educational background was not cued anyway.

**Table 2. Features related to personality present in the characters analyzed**

Personality	% total	Personality	% total
Grateful	58.7	Ungrateful	0
Friendly	60.3	Anti-social	1.6
Good	57.1	Bad	1.6
Fair	28.6	Unfair	1.6
Calm	4.8	Nervous	41.3
Hard-working	47.6	Lazy	1.6
Respected	22.2	Ridiculed	1.6
Educated	1.6	Uneducated	0
Open	50.8	Closed	0
Passive	7.9	Agressive	0
Trusting	42.9	Mistrusting	1.6

*Note:*  $N = 63$ . The data offered represent the percentage of occasions in which the characters analyzed presented the personality feature analyzed.

### 3. Second study

#### 3.1. Method

In the second study, a correlational analysis was carried out with a total of 418 students enrolled at the time of the study in the last two years of high school in the municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey in Mexico. A probabilistic sample was taken, with a confidence level of 95% and an error margin of 4.8%, via a random procedure in stages: first, the area’s high schools were selected –taking into account if they were state-run or private– and then different classrooms were also selected, applying the questionnaire developed to all students present in them. The study was carried out in 4 state-run and 8 private high schools, with 68.2% of students from the former and 31.8% from the latter, in line with data of the general population. From the first sample, cases with atypical scores and inconsistent replies were eliminated. Furthermore, with the aim of offering more consistent results, the sample was reduced to the age segment between 15 and 17 years of which, in which 92% of the originally obtained sample was concentrated.

The questionnaire consisted of various items designed to measure exposure to television and its specific contents. Thus, participants were asked how often they watched television on a standard weekday, expressed in terms of average minutes. They were also asked about the intensity of their attention to media contents and programs, such as entertainment programs on local television, entertainment programs on national television, Mexican soap operas and television series, using a Likert scale of 5 points that went from not at all to a lot. Using these variables, an indicator of exposure to entertainment and fiction programs was created which, although it did not achieve a high internal consistence ( $\alpha = .57$ ), was considered appropriate and applicable to the proposed measuring study. Furthermore, participants were asked about the stereotypes that they perceived as characteristic of indigenous people. With this aim in mind, a scale was created from the results obtained in the content analysis and other previous studies and they were asked to indicate if the features and characteristics included in it defined indigenous people. They were divided into physical characteristics with a negative charge (for example: thin, short, dark haired, dark skinned, ugly, with artisan accessories, with messy or dirty hair,  $\alpha = .68$ ) and characteristics with a more positive charge (for example: calm, hard-working, good, sincere or honest,  $\alpha = .78$ ).

With regard to the measurement of prejudice on the part of those surveyed towards the Mexican indigenous population, the scale developed by Pettigrew, Meertens (1995) was adapted. The scale consisted of 20 items that measure cognitions, feelings and behavioral intentions towards that segment of the population. Each of the affirmations was answered with a Likert scale that ranged from not at all (1) to a lot (5). The scale of prejudice was used as one dimension (Espelt et al., 2006) and thus all of the items were added together in the same way, obtaining an acceptable reliable level ( $\alpha = .72$ ).

The fieldwork was carried out in the months of August and October 2012. In a first stage, a pilot study was carried out applying the questionnaire to 62 students in one state-run and one private high schools. This exercise made it possible to detect slight problems in the way the questionnaire was written that were corrected in its final version. Later on, the analysts that participated in the study were asked to apply the questionnaires in the different classes of the participating schools, inviting students to participate in the study in a voluntary and anonymous way. The data obtained were captured and aggregated into a single database with the statistical software SPSS 20.0.

### 3.2. Analysis of the findings

A descriptive analysis of the variables and scales studied made it possible to discover that the subjects dedicated an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes per day approximately to watching television ( $SD = 82.95$ ), similar to what was found in previous studies by Muñiz et al. (2010). With regard to individual exposure to Mexican entertainment and fiction programs, a low level is detected on average with 2.07 points out of 5 ( $SD = 0.71$ ). On the other hand, it was found that in the vision of the students that participated, a dual perception of the indigenous person dominates. On one hand, the positive personality stereotype stands out when thinking about this sector of the population ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). But, at the same time, a very stereotyped vision is very present from features related to the indigenous person's physical appearance and clothing, with negative aspects ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ) when linking features such as being ugly and dirty to this group. Both stereotypes, furthermore, correlated in the imaginary of the indigenous person,  $r(361) = .140$ ,  $p < .01$  (See Table 3).

In general, the sample studied showed a moderate prejudice towards Mexican indigenous people, scoring on the scale with an average of 2.69 ( $SD = 0.48$ ), slightly below the theoretical half point of the scale situated at 3. This low level of prejudice seems to be confirmed when correlated with other

variables. Thus, it was shown that prejudice tended to decrease between two subjects when the imaginary of the indigenous person was elaborated from the presence of stereotypes on the personality of the group with a positive valence,  $r(381) = -.350, p < .001$ . However, the presence of stereotypes related to the physical appearance of the indigenous person was not correlated with an increase or reduction of prejudice. Finally, co-variation between prejudice and general exposure to television was not observed but prejudice did tend to increase amongst those who showed a greater exposure to entertainment and fiction programs in television,  $r(406) = .204, p < .001$  (see data in Table 3). However, that does not necessarily mean that the stereotype or exposure to television are explicative factors of prejudice and so in the next phase of the study analytical techniques were used in order to see this possible causality in the explanation of prejudice with greater clarity.

**Table 3. Correlations (Pearson) between the independent and dependent variables, and descriptive statistics of the items**

	N	M	DE	1	2	3	4	5
Scale of prejudice	418	2.69	0.48	-				
Negative appearance stereotype	385	3.89	0.46	.057	-			
Positive personality stereotype	383	3.92	0.56	-.350***	.140**	-		
Exposure to television	418	147.5	82.95	.040	.060	.084	-	
TV program watching	408	2.07	0.71	.204***	.060	-.054	.283***	-

Note: Each variable had a theoretical range of variation from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot), except that related to exposure to television measured openly from the average number of minutes expressed by the participants. \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Thus, a multiple, hierarchical, linear regression was carried out via successive steps, using the *scale of prejudice* as a dependent variable or criteria (see Table 4). In each group different independent variables were incorporated such as those related to socio-demographic aspects (group 1), exposure to television (group 2), exposure to entertainment and fiction programs on television (group 3) and the stereotypes of appearance or personality about indigenous people held by the participants (group 4).

All of these variables met the supposition of independence with relation to the dependent variable, according to the the Durbin-Watson test, which gave 2.03 and was over 1.5 and less than 2.5, the maximum limits permitted.

Despite the fact that first group only explained 8.1% of the variance,  $F(4, 345) = 7.570, p < .001$ , the impact of two of the variables together was statistically significant. Thus, being male ( $\beta = -.232, p < .001$ ) and going to a state-run high school ( $\beta = -.135, p < .05$ ) were the best predictors of prejudice. The incorporation of the variable exposure to television did not entail a change in the variance explained, with the equation resulting equally significant for the variables pointed out before  $F(5, 344) = 6.070, p < .001$ . The third group, which incorporated the variables related to the stereotypes used by the participants to define indigenous people, managed to increase significantly the prejudice explained, going to a variance of 14.7%,  $F(9, 340) = 6.503, p < .001$ . That was due to the considerable impact of the exposure to entertainment programs by the sample studied. Thus, those who watched entertainment programs in national television ( $\beta = .145, p < .01$ ) and above all in local television ( $\beta = .218, p < .001$ ) the level of prejudice increased significantly.

**Table 4. Linear regression of the explicative variables of the level of prejudice**

	Bloque 1	Bloque 2	Bloque 3	Bloque 4
Control variables				
Sex of the interviewee	-.232***	-.233***	-.224***	-.220***
Age of the interviewee	-.041	-.043	-.006	.014
Type of school	-.135*	-.130*	-.096	-.082
Religion of the interviewee	.029	.029	-.002	.019
Exposure variable				
Minutes of television		.020	-.053	-.021
Attention variables				
Local television entertainment programs			.218***	.205***
National television entertainment programs			.145**	.117*
Soap operas			.022	.021
Mexican TV series			-.093	-.109*
Mediating variables				
Negative appearance stereotype				.131**
Positive personality stereotype				-.310***
$\Delta R^2$	.081	.000	.066	.097
$R^2$	.081	.081	.147	.244

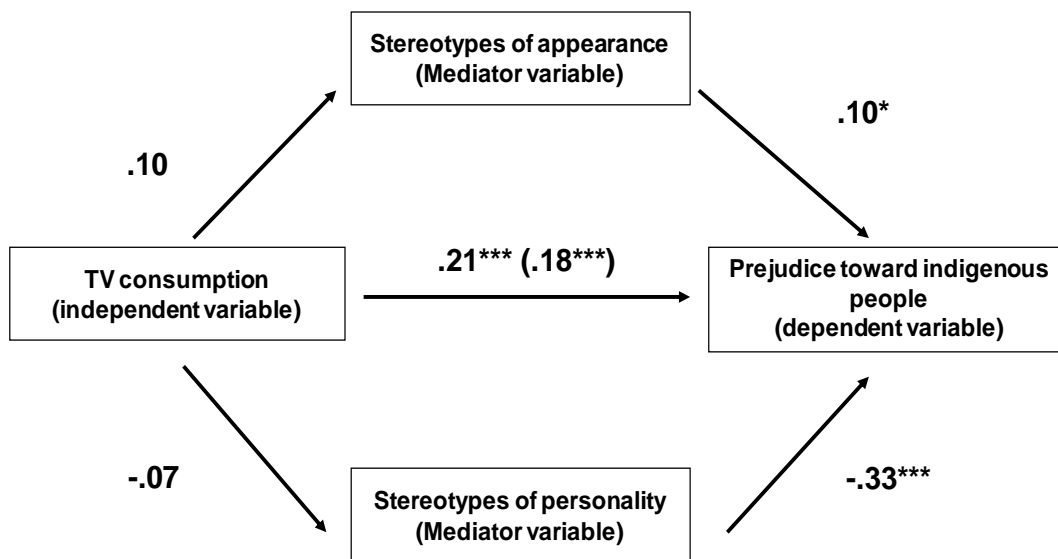
Note:  $N = 350$ . The variables of the sex of the interviewee and the type of school were recodified using *dummy* variables, where 1 means women and private school respectively. The scale of religiosity was taken from the study by Zuckerman, Kasl, Ostfeld (1984) and adapted to México by Muñoz et al. (2010). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Finally, incorporating the stereotypes used by participants to define indigenous people generated a significant increase in the variance of the prejudice explained  $F(11, 338) = 9.921, p < .001$ , reaching 24.4% of the total. The presence in the imaginary of the participants of a stereotype about indigenous people based on a negatively valenced appearance ( $\beta = .131, p < .01$ ) and the absence of a stereotype based on positive aspects of personality ( $\beta = -.310, p < .001$ ) explained the increase in prejudice. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the incorporation of these stereotypes moderated the influence of the variables on the exposure to television programs detected before as explicative and generated the appearance of an explicative degree on the part of exposure to Mexican television series, in this case reducing prejudice ( $\beta = -.109, p < .05$ ) (See data in Table 4). Consequently, an effect that was more moderating than mediating linked to the presence of variables on stereotypes in the equation studied.

In light of these results, and with the aim of checking the hypothesis on the process of stereotyping in the case of Mexican indigenous people, a study was carried out on the mediating role of stereotypes in relation to exposure to television programs and prejudice towards indigenous people. With this aim in mind, the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008) were followed, using the procedure

of *bootstrapping*, with 1000 repetitions in order to estimate the confidence intervals of 95% and verify the mediating effect of the stereotypes measured. The analysis was carried out with the macro of SPSS indirect, using the typified values of each variable of the model (Z values) with the aim of being able to standardize the variables and interpret better the results obtained in the analysis.

**Figure 2. Mediation model for the general sample**



In the first place, there is no direct effect of the exposure to television programs on the stereotypes present in the imaginary of participants about indigenous people. However, there is a direct effect of the stereotypes on the level of prejudice. In this sense, the direct effect of the presence of the negatively-valenced stereotype of appearance on the level of prejudice was  $.10$ ,  $t(999)$ ,  $p < .05$ , whereas that of the presence of the positively-valenced personality stereotype on the level of prejudice was greater, at  $-.33$ ,  $t(999)$ ,  $p < .001$ . For its part, the direct effect of watching television programs on the prejudice shown was  $.21$ ,  $t(999)$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas the indirect effect was  $.18$ ,  $t(999)$ ,  $p < .001$ . That points to the existence of a partial mediational effect, given that the stereotypes moderate the influence of watching television programs on the prejudice shown towards indigenous people (See Figure 2).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The presence of fictional characters portrayal as Indigenous people in Mexican television programs is reduced given that they are placed only in secondary roles and their range of occupations is very limited. Specifically, three professions were detected: farm worker or fisherwomen, housemaid, and shamans. However, all programs tend to include at least one character depicted as an indigenous person at least, albeit performing secondary-level roles and with unskilled employment. With regard to the first research question: What are the main portrayals used in fiction programs in Mexican television in order to characterize indigenous people?, there was a tendency to standardize or dilute the prominent features relating to the different Indigenous groups in Mexico while generating (or

maintaining) the historical media-archetype of the indigenous person. This propensity is evident due to the lack of references to the native-community where the character belongs.

In general terms, an indigenous character is white, of short-normal height, with black hair and eyes, and with a tendency to be overweight.

On the other hand, a common pattern can be observed regarding their appearance characterized by thoughtfully-planned makeup and dress: the indigenous person is typically represented in the media by wearing old, folkloric Mexican clothes, traditional accessories, a groomed hairstyle and with noticeable makeup. Finally, in terms of their personality, positive traits are dominant with features such as being good, friendly, grateful or kind: all of them related to a pleasant personality rather than an educated or an intellectual one – something that is systematically absent.

Based on all of these results, it seems likely that stereotypes of members of Indigenous groups are reinforced by the television diet due to the lack of group variability depicted. This is the case of the Mexican indigenous group with all of its richness and diversity, which instead is presented according to a homogenized idea that is generalized to the other members of the group. In light of these results, it seems that this type of media representation, that started in the golden age of the Mexican movies, which established homogeneous characteristics, is still prevalent. As shown in this study, exposure to these stereotyped traits can reinforce pre-existing beliefs among audiences regarding members of the Indigenous community in Mexico. This is highlighted in general terms with the fictional representation in the media, with a lack of differentiation among the more than 60 subgroups that comprise the Indigenous population. In fact, it is even more likely that the stereotyping process, which was mentioned above at the theoretical level, will be re-produced in the greater Mexican population taking into account the narrowed sort of roles and the frequent introduction of certain physical and attitudinal aspects of indigenous people.

The survey results discovered that the beliefs held by the participants about the Indigenous group did not include negative stereotypes. In relation to the second research question, “which stereotypes are dominant in the imaginary of participants when defining the members of the Mexican indigenous group?” a predominance of positive stereotypes related to the indigenous personality was observed on the part of respondents when they were asked to think about Mexican indigenous people. The fact that negative perceptions –mirrored by descriptions of traits such as unfair, false, betrayers and hostile– had low frequencies among the respondents is an important and encouraging result. This outcome is similar to those results obtained in previous studies that assessed cognitive and emotional factors in respondents when thinking about minority groups, such as immigrants or gypsies in Spain and Indigenous people in Mexico. Nevertheless, these results also shed light on a negative imaginary of indigenous people’s appearance: there is a strong tendency to identify them with archetypical or anachronistic features. This suggests that both cognitive groups have different impacts on prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and behavior.

The third research question of the study aimed to determine the relationship between the exposure to entertainment and fiction programs and the permanence of stereotypes. The results suggest a possible relationship, since statistically significant zero order correlations were not detected between both variables. Furthermore, this result was confirmed via the mediational model studied, in which direct explicative relationships did not occur either. The results are surprising, particularly in the case of the negative stereotypes, since they openly contradict the hypotheses of stereotyping, that suggest the impact of a considerable exposure to the media in the generation and/or maintenance of stereotyped ideas and opinions, particularly negative, to minorities. However, this result is consistent with that detected in a sample of Mexican university students already highlighted in the theoretical framework. Therefore, we cannot speak of a process of pre-activation of stereotypes by the media since, although they exist in the subjects’ memories, they are apparently not affected by exposure to television.

With regard to the fourth research question “what is the level of prejudice in the attitudes of participants concerning indigenous people?”, the respondents’ prejudiced attitudes registered were again found to be low with a mean score of 2.69, just below the theoretical middle point of the scale ( $M = 3$ ). Therefore, these results are similar to those in previous studies applied in different contexts and to different minority groups, including the Mexican Indigenous population. Additionally, the two hypotheses related to the literature on media consumption and the growth of prejudiced and stereotyped beliefs were confirmed. In this sense, general exposure to entertainment programs led to an increase in prejudice among participants to increase, although this was not predicted by watching soap operas. This particular outcome is curious due to the fact that most of the Indigenous characters were found in this kind of television contents, reflecting an evident need for deeper research on this reality that could be moderated by demographic variables such as the gender of the interviewee.

On the other hand, the second hypothesis related to the impact of stereotypes on levels of prejudice towards indigenous people was corroborated. In this case, the negative-valenced stereotype about the Indians appearance produced an increase in levels or prejudice, while the positive-valenced stereotyped related to personality led to a decrease in prejudice. Thus, the literature about this process was confirmed in the sense that the cognitive structures in the person’s memory, in the form of schemas made up of stereotypes, can influence people’s prejudiced perceptions about minority groups. Nevertheless, the mediational model proposed in this study was not corroborated since the stereotypes did not mediate the indirect effect of television watching and prejudice. In contrast, a partial mediational effect was detected when stereotypes were included in the model by reducing the impact of the exposure to the media on prejudice. An accumulative effect seems likely to have occurred where both variables come into play by reinforcing levels of prejudice towards Indigenous people. This is supported by the regression test that confirms the considerable impact that both the Indigenous personality-related stereotypes and the exposure to entertainment programs in local television have on prejudiced attitudes in the young population.

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