Abstract:

In a society that claims to be post-racial, race and ethnicity are still problematically situated as fruitful ground for the construction of target markets by the advertising industry. This process of ethnicity-based market construction largely ignores how members of these racial and ethnic groups see themselves, and has serious consequences for how communities are courted by political and commercial factions (Davila, 2008). Perhaps more importantly, ethnicity-based market construction consistently situates the identities of these populations as "other" relative to an equally essentialized notion of American identity. Through a discourse analysis of the advertising trade publication Advertising Age, this paper attempts to decipher how this industry has worked to shape Hispanic markets since 1981, imbricating language, class and culture to craft often contradictory portrayals of a diverse group of people. Linking this process to concerns about immigration, assimilation, authority and belonging, this paper asks the following questions: what constitutes a Hispanic market or markets according to the advertising industry? How has this construction changed over the last three decades? Who gets to speak for this market? What are the potential consequences of this construction?