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Broadcast News Directors' Perceptions of Race: A Survey of Psychological and Sociological Measures

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Introduction

In theory, socially responsible newsrooms should accurately cover and portray all of America's distinct communities. However, mechanisms to achieve coverage of all communities have often fallen short. Often times, racial minority groups are depicted utilizing stereotypes, controversy, crime, drama, conflict, and deviancy as the greatest selling and focal points. This study attempted to "empirically examine that which is deliberately concealed and distorted," and to document whether discrimination:

- 1) exists
- 2) adversely affects ethnic and racial minorities; and
- 3) is founded on a set of social relations and practices that sustain it" (Marvasti & McKinney, 2007, p. 68).

Thus, the central thrust of this thesis is a psychological and sociological perception study of news directors' implicit and explicit perceptions of race when creating news content. The aim is to discover whether an implicit or explicit racial bias can be found amongst some news directors when covering racial minority groups. A better understanding of bias provides valuable insights on what media practices to utilize when covering diverse groups.

References

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Methodology

Fifteen hypotheses and two research questions were advanced stemming from previous research, which condemned the following journalistic practices and sociological demographics, which reinforced racial bias and stereotypes in news content: 1) race; 2) age; 3) education; 4) years in the industry; 5) sex; 6) professional codes of ethics; 7) diverse sources; and 8) diverse content.

The Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986), and Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) were utilized to test for reliability of relationships between the measures and scale items. The hypotheses assumed that:

- Older White males with low education levels, working in the news industry for quite some time would score higher means on modern racism and social dominance scales, compared with other races.
- White news directors would experience less everyday discrimination compared with other races.
- In sum, the hypotheses assumed that younger, non-White news directors with higher levels of education and fewer years in the industry, would score lower means than Whites on modern racism and social dominance scales.

A survey was sent to 615 broadcast news directors working at network affiliate news stations. The survey received responses from 134 news directors, with a response rate of 21.78 percent.

Results

The hypotheses were not supported. Data revealed the problem does not lie within the individual or practice—the news director and gatekeeping process—but somewhere else altogether.

- No matter the race, news directors do not exhibit implicit or explicit racial bias.
- White news directors actually experienced slightly more perceived discrimination than did other races.
- Data analysis has shown that the constructs mentioned do not have strong reliability in terms of relationships with the attitudinal measures of modern racism, social dominance and everyday discrimination.

Conclusion

- It's possible the reoccurring bias resides within mass media institutions as an institution discrimination.
- News staffers should be trained in racial and cultural awareness (RCA) to ensure the accurate coverage of all communities.
- RCA is "the ongoing choice to engage in a process of grappling honesty with the racial/cultural realities of daily life experiences, intentionally bringing to consciousness thoughts and feelings that were previously denied, ignored, or unseen" (Collins & Pieterse, 2007, p. 17).
- The coupling of journalistic practices and training can result in a mental multicultural/sensitivity checklist, when creating news content. Working journalists will be able to determine the overall:
 - 1) environmental effect a news story will have; how will it affect and inform other newsroom personnel in future endeavors when covering racial minority groups?
 - 2) societal effects; how will the news story affect those who consume the news product?
 - 3) national effects; will the news story reinforce or uphold racial bias and stereotypes in news content?

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