Depictions of race: An analysis of local television news

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DEPICTIONS OF RACE: AN ANALYSIS OF
LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS

by

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1995

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ABSTRACT

Depictions of Race:
An Analysis of Local Television News

by

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This study examined the depictions of African Americans and Euro-Americans aired on four local television stations in Las Vegas, Nevada. The study covered a one-week period with a sample set of 20 newscasts and 1,780 individual camera shots. One hypothesis of this study suggested that there are significant differences in the use of camera composition and the coverage of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local television news. Another hypothesis suggested that there are significant differences in the use of camera angles and the depiction of race. A research question examined the number of crime-related stories aired and depictions of African Americans and Euro-Americans within those stories. Findings suggest that there are differences in how African Americans and Euro-Americans are depicted in local television news.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origins of Racism Toward African Americans In The United States

The origins of racism toward African Americans in the United States are unknown and perhaps began in the early days of human socialization when diverse groups came into contact. Before the British had ever encountered a human being with dark skin, British culture had already determined the color black as a representation of something negative and evil (Jones, 1972). To the British, the enslavement of human beings with dark skin was merely seen as the encapsulation of an evil force in need of transformation for the good of society. The only information the British were given regarding Africans was that they were considered unruly heathens (Bohannan & Curtin, 1988). African culture was different than British culture. Africans had a style of dress that appeared primitive to the British. Africans spoke in an unfamiliar language and worshiped unfamiliar deities (Bohannan & Curtin, 1988). The differences between the African and British cultures were so diverse that the British, fearing the unknown, did what they could do to persuade Africans into accepting and adapting British culture (Bohannan & Curtin, 1988).
Colonial forms of racism clearly identified Blacks as inferior and undesirable (Entman, 1992). Race classification was a contributing factor in the ideals behind racism. Often the meanings between racism and race classification are confused. Race classification is a means of classifying different races of human beings. The early idea behind race classification followed a path of scientific inquiry where distinct differences in human beings were noted and classified (Smedley, 1999). Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist from the eighteenth century, developed the concept of race classification into what historians now consider modern classifications of human populations (Smedley, 1999). Linnaeus’ early works classified all humans as members of the same species, descended from an original ancestry and were capable of intergroup mating and reproduction (Smedley, 1999).

Later Linnaeus elaborated on his work by identifying four human groups classified by physical features along with behavioral and psychological traits to arrive at race classifications. Much of the information noted by Linnaeus came from the speculations and opinions of travelers; however, the effects of his findings were long lasting (Smedley, 1999). The effects of Linnaeus’ classifications: (1) gave off a perception of permanence, meaning once something was classified, it could not be reevaluated and reclassified later, (2) group categories were accepted without question, (3) mixed cultural boundaries with biological boundaries, (4) lent themselves to hierarchical structuring where one group was perceived more favorably than another, and (5) made mankind part of the natural order, assigning natural inferior qualities to non-Europeans (Smedley, 1999). The early effects of race classification crossed into the lines of racism.
As time went on, scientists became more critical of visual observations. Race classification was not inherently wrong and it permitted scientists to study groups of people, to record, and discuss differences in physical and behavioral characteristics. Scientists now know that there is no biological evidence to the behavioral or psychological classification portions of Linnaeus’ grouping structure because physical features cannot predetermine specific behavioral traits. Modern day race classification is focused on differences in physical characteristics (Corcos, 1997). Some classifiers have identified as few as three races where others have classified as many as thirty (Corcos, 1997). There are two assumptions used to interfere with race classifying; (1) the assumption that all races were created pure, meaning that the characteristics of each race are alike, and (2) the assumption that humankind is a result of the mixing of races (Corcos, 1997). Both assumptions are incorrect. Anthropologists have determined that there are no pure races. Each race has variations of physical characteristics. Changes in physical characteristics among a single race are not necessarily from race mixing, rather from transformations in genetic development (Corcos, 1997). Modern race classification of human beings is difficult because of the diversity within each group. Many times classifications come from social constructs of ideology rather than from biological determinants, which is why many scientists believe that Linnaeus’ grouping ideologies reflect modern grouping techniques (Smedley, 1999).

As society became more interested in scientific discovery, the effects of early race classifications opened the door to overt racism in the form of slavery. After the U.S. Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, overt racism continued to be a dominating factor among Americans. Overt racism did not begin to give way until the Supreme Court
began to issue mandates against segregation in the mid-1950s (Carson, 1981). The 1960s brought about leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael and began Black movements with protests, marches, and lunch counter sit-ins (Carson, 1981). In the mid-1960s the civil unrest grew, creating the March on Washington in 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the rise of the Black Panthers, and the 1965 Watts Riots (Carson, 1981). It was not until the late 1960s, early 1970s that the protesting against racial violations began to decrease. It took over 100 years to break away from the oppression of slavery and overt racism yet racism still exists today.

Entman (1992) defined racism toward African Americans in two forms; traditional racism and modern racism. For Entman, traditional racism clearly identified Blacks as inferior and undesirable while modern racism infers racist beliefs through subtle rejections of ideals, denial that racism is still a social problem, and through the media’s encouragement of continued hostility toward Blacks. Subtle rejections of ideas stem from comments made about African Americans who push too hard with Black ideals. Other forms of subtle rejection stem from comments of resentment toward racial quotas in employment or in education, excessive access to welfare, and special treatment by the government (Entman, 1992). Modern racism includes the rejection of political agendas by Black leaders claiming them to be for the good of only African Americans excluding White America. Modern racists also deny that racism still exists. Many believe that the appearance of Black role models in society is an indication that racism toward African Americans no longer exists, not realizing that the majority of Black America subsists in the lower economic class (Entman, 1992).
Racism in Media

There have been studies that show increased depictions of Blacks in entertainment media while those same results indicate that the display of personal friendliness and mutual respect between Blacks and Whites were nearly nonexistent (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). Poindexter and Stroman (1981) concluded that there is a positive relationship between the increase in visibility of Blacks and the negative stereotyping of Blacks. Many Blacks are cast in minor, low-occupational roles. Poindexter and Stroman (1981) also found that Blacks are among television’s most frequent viewers and rely heavily on television figures for information, while Black children tend to believe in the reality of the television world. Many stereotypical roles portray Black Americans as uneducated or undereducated, either unemployed on welfare or underemployed, as comedic personalities or as characters with violent tendencies. Another key element of perpetuating hostility toward Blacks is seen in the manner in which media continue to identify African Americans by color or ethnicity (Tiemens, Sillars, Alexander, & Werling, 1988). Consistently identifying a person by skin color has the potential to replace the element of individuality with group association. When group association is used on a consistent basis, the outcome suggests that the faults or achievements of the individual are really a result of being associated with a particular group (Tiemens et al., 1988). There is no logical reason to treat the achievements or faults of an individual as if an entire group of people had something to do with those behaviors.

Media continue to group African Americans in stereotypical roles that perpetuate racism. Some theorize that media effects are long lasting. Gerbner conducted numerous studies based on the premise that viewing television on a consistent basis creates
heightened perceptions of danger, mistrust, alienation, and an expectation of violence in the viewer; his theory is called, Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, Gross, Beeck, Fox, & Signorielli, 1978). Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1986) argued that television is such an integral part of our every day life that even those who are not exposed to television are exposed to its effects through other influenced viewers. Gerbner et al. (1986) believed that television does not create or reflect images and opinions in the minds of its viewers; rather, it is an integral aspect of a dynamic learning process. Television producers develop programming ideas based on societal influences and trends while the members of society develop ideas and concepts of how to portray themselves from images observed on television.

Gerbner (1996) studied the effects of mediated violence in children and determined that people with limited reference points, children in particular, tend to believe that television portrays an accurate reflection of society. Gerbner further theorized that these effects could cause children to form long-term perceptions of society.

Cultivation theory is not limited to the effects of violence. Negative stereotypes portrayed in the media also form inaccurate perceptions in the minds of those with limited reference points. Stereotyping individuals then becomes a part of the personal schemas of those that either watch a lot of television or have very little knowledge on cultural diversity. One scenario to consider is that the socioeconomic standing of a great number of Black Americans is at the lower class while the socioeconomic standing of White Americans is predominantly in the middle and upper classes (DeBarros & Bennett, 1997). These results suggest that many White Americans have very little interactive roles
with Black Americans, thus perpetuating the mediated ideal that Blacks are inferior or undesirable.

Credibility of Journalists

Local television news plays an important part in disseminating messages to communities. In judging journalist credibility, Kenney (1993) stated that credibility is low due to news staging and therefore, journalists cannot be trusted in disseminating news adequately. Kenney cited the 1992 airing of Dateline's news magazine story on the dangers of GM trucks. Dateline had planted an incendiary device under a GM truck and videotaped it exploding without alerting viewers that Dateline had staged the incident, allowing for a biased interpretation. Kenney also cited an ABC News network story that aired a video reenactment of a United States diplomat engaging in an espionage role without telling the viewers the piece was a reenactment. Kenney argued that when journalists stage news, it reduces the credibility of all journalists.

In cultivation theory, there is a relationship with the amount of television watched and the perception that the world is a mean place (Gerbner et al., 1978). Cultivation theory can be applied to the viewing of local television news as well. The more a person views the news, the more this person might tend to believe the world is a mean place. Cultivation theory has been challenged many times. Pearlstein (1996) surveyed jurors, who did not serve on the O. J. Simpson jury, of their perceptions of Simpson's guilt in his double murder trial. Pearlstein (1996) found that those who watched a great deal of televised news tend to believe that Simpson received a fair verdict. Light viewers tend to believe that Simpson should have received the guilty verdict. Based on Pearlstein's
results, it would appear that cultivation theory is not 100% absolute and that news reporters do have some influence in how viewers make decisions.

Gunther (1992) argued that group membership plays a role in the public’s perception of the fairness and the credibility of the mass media. People with high involvement in community, academic, political, or religious groups tend to be more skeptical of news reporting than those less involved. Credibility perceived in news reporters seemed to have a direct relationship with the amount of group involvement by the viewer. Gunther (1992) believes that journalists understand this concept and use group involvement as a strategy in forming messages. Nonetheless, reporters still present new information that provides community members with topics of discussion.

Local news reporters act as gatekeepers to the issues surrounding events in the community, framing news in such a way to offer emotional appeals, boost station ratings, and to allow for predetermined time slots (Fallows, 1996). When creating a story with limitations, the outcome may lend itself in a way that perpetuates existent fears. Although journalists today appear to take steps in remaining objective in their presentation of racism, subjectivity still exists in the manner in which the story is constructed (Entman, 1994b).

Although there are many individuals affected by racism, Blacks in America represent 13% of the population with 34.2 million residents in the United States and an estimated population of 125,346 in the state of Nevada (DeBarros & Bennett, 1997). According to the 1997 Nielsen media research findings, 9% of Las Vegas’ population is African American. So far, there are no studies on depictions of African American in Nevada’s local newscasts.
Definition of Terms

Racism is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial difference produces an inherent superiority of a particular race (Webster, 1995). In this study, the definition of racism encompasses discrimination and negative prejudice against a person or group based on race comparison. Race classification and racism are often incorrectly intertwined. Racism suggests that a hierarchical structure of human beings exists based on differences in physical and cultural characteristics, whether real or imagined, allowing one group of human beings to believe they are superior in mind and body to another group of human beings (Smedley, 1999).

There are three overall categories of racism, individual racism, institutional racism, and cultural racism (Jones, 1972). Individual racism suggests a superiority of one’s own race over another and this superiority is enacted through negative attitudes, behaviors, and social separation of the different races. Institutional racism is the manipulation of institutions to achieve racist objectives and cultural racism is a perceived superiority of cultural heritage over that of another race. Cultural racism encompasses religion, music, personal philosophies, values, needs, and beliefs. Cultural racism manifests itself into a way of life where some people believe that their entire value structure is superior to any other structure and to even acknowledge less would be devastating.

This study will focus toward cultural racism because the ideals of cultural racism parallel Entman’s (1992) ideals of modern racism. Both include subtle rejections of cultural values and the denial that racism is still a social problem.
The defining of race in this study is done for identification purposes only. This study maintains that race classification by social determinants is inherently wrong, yet in order to code data, a set of identifying factors must be established. In this study the terms, “African American” and “Black(s)” are used interchangeably to define an American citizen who is perceived to be of African descent, Puerto Rican descent, Jamaican, Nigerian, West Indian, or Haitian descent, with skin tone that appears light brown, dark brown, or black in color (DeBarros & Bennett, 1997). The terms “Euro-American” and “White(s)” are also used interchangeably to define an American citizen who is perceived to be of European descent, Canadian, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish descent with skin tone that appears as a light ivory to light beige in color (DeBarros & Bennett, 1997).

When referring to racial stereotyping, this study infers that racial stereotyping is initially negative unless conversations of positive aspects are mentioned and are defined as positive aspects of racial stereotyping. Stereotyping in and of itself is not inherently negative. A stereotype can create a standardized pattern to represent an oversimplified opinion or uncritical judgment. An example of a positive racial stereotype would be to say that all Asian people hold a high regard for their elders. The statement is a generalization of Asian people; however, it is neither negative nor completely true. Another example of a stereotype would be to say that men generally like sports. Neither example may be a full truth, but both are easily accepted. Stereotypes become negative when they include negative racial connotations. A common, yet negative, stereotype is to believe that one human being is better than another human being based solely on the color of his or her skin.
This study focuses on negative racial stereotyping detected in local television news. Any mention of stereotyping hereafter refers to a negative association unless the text explicitly defines the association as positive. An example of this would be to say that entertainment television portrays African Americans in too many stereotypical roles – this statement refers to negative portrayals. Another example would be to say that some television programs create positive stereotypes of Blacks by depicting Black characters in upper socioeconomic class with higher levels of education.

Camera angle refers to the manner in which the videographer moves the camera lens in relation to the subject in view. A camera positioned lower than eye level pointed up at a subject not only intensifies an effect but provides a sense of power to the subject (Zettl, 1999). Using a close-up view along with a camera angle below eye level pointed upward amplifies the element of power. When a camera angle is placed higher than eye level pointed downward at a subject, the camera then takes on the superior role and provides an element of weakness to the subject (Zettl, 1999). Using a close-up view with a camera angle above eye level pointed downward amplifies the element of weakness.

Camera angles in this study will include the number of times the camera is positioned above eye level, below, and directly at eye level. The videographer, and the reporter to some extent, choose what elements of the news scene are included in the camera shot. Camera composition in this study refers to the how the subject is positioned in the shot.

Camera composition includes an extreme close-up point of view, including the face and head of the subject with the extreme borders being the very top of the head and the base of the neckline. An average close-up point of view includes the person’s chest from
below the neckline, with a borderline of just above the waistline and a wide-angle point of view contains the majority of the subject’s body including below the waistline.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if the depictions of Blacks in local television news are presented differently from Whites. Studies have been conducted on racism and negative stereotyping in the news, but only few focus solely on the visual elements in local television newscasts (Graber, 1990). Many studies address the issue of whether or not people learn from audio-visual messages (Graber, 1990). More studies are needed in the area of visual message building in the accompaniment of disseminating news. In visual aesthetics, composition is an essential element in developing a memorable image. Camera composition includes techniques of making the viewer feel distant or close-up to a subject, while camera angles can make the subject appear strong or weak. Camera composition and angles juxtaposed with the story context can become very persuasive tools for journalists. For example, if the camera was above eye level pointed downward at the subject, in an average close-up position, and the story reader was describing how this person just robbed a store, it then provides the viewer a perception of weakness in this accused person. If the camera angle on the same person were positioned below eye level pointed up including an average close-up, that subject would appear powerful. This study will examine the number of times both Black and Whites are framed both above and below eye level, along with the number of times the shot is accompanied by close-up to wide-angle point of views. If there are notable differences between the depictions of Blacks and Whites, and those differences include
one group producing a significant number of more favorable positions than the other, then the ideal of modern racism in the designing of visual elements in news would require further research.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

The following chapter is a review of literature where relevant studies are examined. The literature will include studies of racism in the media and how mediated images have filtered into news reporting. Also included are studies that illustrate the effects of racism in the media, the manner in which violent crimes are discussed and portrayed by reporters, followed by literature that discusses the importance of studying the visual aesthetics of news reporting. Although media effects cannot be identified in a content analysis study, it is important to look at different studies to fully understand why other individual elements should be studied. If certain behaviors are said to cause certain effects, then perhaps each element of that behavior should be studied to determine whether or not inconsistencies exist. A content analysis should act as an additional support to studies which have already provided specific conclusions.

The most appropriate type of research for this study is a content analysis of local television news. The chapter on methods outlines the manner in which sampling and coding will be conducted, and define the types of statistical analysis to be used in determining results. Following the chapter on methods will be a chapter devoted to the results of the content analysis, a statistical analysis and summary of the results, concluded by a chapter on the discussion of the results, the limitations found, and ideas for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Most households in America have a television set, which makes the study of media effects a crucial element in the development of American society. Gerbner, who conducted studies that emphasized the effects of television rather than the behavior of its viewers, believes that television cultivates perceptions of an unfavorable world (Gerbner et al., 1986). Cultivation research looks at mass media as a socializing agent. Gerbner et al. (1986) argued that to watch one television program will not alter the behavior of the viewer, rather heavy viewing would develop long-term attitudinal effects. Studies have been conducted where questions are asked based on general television observations, such as: how many men are employed or how many people have had an extra marital affair, and the answers include statistical information according to television facts, and real world facts (Stossel, 1997). Heavy television viewers overwhelmingly answered the questions with the television facts where light viewers answered with both television and real world facts (Stossel, 1997).
Heavy viewers may think that television represents reality, that our world is a mean place, but in reality, television does not accurately reflect real world statistics. Over half the major characters on television are involved in some type of violent action (Gerbner et al., 1986) yet statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicate that crime rates have remained at a relatively steady rate in the past few years (FBI, 1996). With crime rates down, crime cannot be the reason for the increased depictions of crime on television. Even local news reporters report on crimes and violence more frequently than any other type of stories (Entman, 1990).

Gerbner et al. (1986) presented a pattern labeled as mainstreaming. This pattern produces significant differences in how heavy viewers respond to cultural, social, and political characteristics as compared to light and moderate viewers. Studies have shown that on average, African Americans viewers tend to be heavy television viewers (Poindexter & Stroman, 1981). Gerbner et al. (1986) produced a test in which the non-White participants scored higher on the Mean World Index (an index that measures an individual’s perception of the world). The heavy viewers in the study hold more mistrustful and suspicious views of the world. News reporters seem to perpetuate the mean world syndrome by excessive reporting on crime, political scrutiny, and the continuing depictions of modern racist ideals (Entman, 1992).

There are other theories of learning through television viewing such as, social learning theory. In social learning theory it is theorized that the viewer learns an aggressive behavior from observing it in the media either directly or indirectly (Jeffires, 1997). Another theory of learning is called the agenda-setting theory. This is where the media decide what is or is not important to the viewer (Jeffires, 1997). Newscasters have
to choose what goes in a report and what has to be eliminated due to time constraints or condition available footage. Over a period of time the newscaster then becomes an agenda-setter deciding what is and what is not important to the viewer.

Fallows (1996) wrote a critical review of news reporting trying to expose journalists as uncaring and only out to make money. Fallows argued that reporting had moved away from disseminating news and had turned into a game of survival. In keeping up with media trends, reporters have reduced the news to quick sound bites with as many stories delivered in one newscast as possible. In this quest for quantity, reporters also strive at presenting the most dynamic stories as possible, which would serve as a ploy to maintain or increase television ratings. The end result then favors the financial aspect of news reporting and not the overall good of the American public. Fallows (1996) concluded by calling on all reporters to take more responsibility in reporting the news by providing more information to each story.

Pan and Kosicki (1996) found that televised news does help in the dissemination of information and ultimately the viewer is the one who interprets news through previous knowledge of the topic. Both the validity of the information presented and the background of the viewer needs consideration when results are measured. If the story is framed in such a way that the viewer is only told one side of the argument, and the background of that viewer is such that the framed story is presented as believable, then the opposing side or the omitted information begins to lack validity in the eyes of the viewer.

Journalists try to avoid slanting a story; however, personal bias in storytelling can show through, which works its way into the personal schemas of viewers. The viewers
then tend to take on the beliefs of the journalist (Entman, 1989). If the journalist frames a story in such a way that it creates a negative image, it can damage credibility on a wide scale.

African American Racism in Television Entertainment Media

Many programs on television such as crime dramas, action adventures, or even news depict African Americans as undesirable or undereducated, with a natural tendency for criminal behavior (Entman, 1994b). One example of African American racism in television media, aired in 1985 by CBS in the form of a news report entitled, *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America*. This report concluded that the underclass Black community was a direct result of apathy with no mentions of the effects of racism, social organization, economic dislocation, unemployment or the changing economy (Gray, 1989). Tying this program to the ideals of cultivation theory, which states that people with limited reference points tend to believe what they see on television (Gerbner, 1996), this program could easily create a false image of African Americans.

Another form of misrepresentation of African Americans stems out of a program called *The Cosby Show*. This was a program that depicted an upper middle class Black family where both parents had a higher degree of education and held professional positions in society. The outcome of this series, although it appeared positive, resulted in a belief that African Americans were no longer victims of oppression, that most Blacks had risen to a middle class economic level, and that racism no longer existed (Gray, 1989). Gray (1989) claimed that statistical evidence during the run of *The Cosby Show* provided evidence that the majority of Black Americans were still listed in the lower
economic class. Those who are not around the lower economic class on a regular basis may not realize the level of oppression that is felt in those communities, the statistical evidence which lists the number of people in that category, and their ethnic backgrounds. Simple ignorance can lead to the cultivation of a world that does not entirely exist.

Greenberg and Collette (1997) argued that new television seasons bring out new programs based on demography and have shown an increase of minority characters; however, there is still an inadequate representation of African Americans in television. Greenberg and Collette (1997) conducted a study, which included 27 different television seasons, and found that African American appeared in lead roles in CBS programming 8% of the time, NBC and ABC had an 11% rate of Black lead roles in programming and FOX had 13%. The United States Census Bureau lists the number of Black Americans at 13% (DeBarros, & Bennett, 1997) which means the FOX television network is the only major network that produces a representative number of African Americans in television. The under representation of African Americans on television suggests a hierarchical placement with African Americans at the lower end. When analyzing cultivation theory, people with limited reference points, those who confuse television facts with real world facts, might tend believe that this hierarchical placement is both natural and warranted.

Many times African Americans are seen in roles that depict an undereducated, low income-earning comedian. A modern day example of this type of programming can be seen in a show called *The P.J.'s: Life in the Projects*. This is a program that incorporates claymation type characters to represent an all minority cast living in the inner city projects. This program not only trivializes the plight of the people unfortunate enough to live in the projects of an inner city community, it sends a message that perhaps
Blacks and Hispanics enjoy living in such degradation. In a way, this cartoon-type program mirrors the 1985 new report aired by CBS on the crisis in Black America in that it misleads the audience to believe that living in such depravity could actually be desirable (Gray, 1989). There is one huge difference between this program and the 1985 report, and that is that the creator of the P.J.'s program is an African American man. This allows viewers to believe that Black people find it appropriate to trivialize oppression and lower economic status. A form of modern racism states that the denial of the existence of racial prejudice can itself be a racist ideal (Entman, 1992). By denying that racism exists, racism then perpetuates making it more difficult to eliminate.

Local television news can perpetuate the ideals of modern racism by underinforming viewers. Pearlstein (1996) conducted a study that surveyed the opinions of jurors participating in local trials on the perception guilt or innocence of O. J. Simpson in his double-murder trial. Pearlstein found a relationship with the amount of television viewed by these jurors and the perception of Simpson’s guilt. What Pearlstein found was that people who watched two or less hours of television tend to believe that Simpson should have received a guilty verdict. When framing stories, journalists have to present stories in a predetermined amount of time, which often means that not all the facts can be presented. Shortened stories and facts left out can lead a viewer to uniformed opinions (Fallows, 1996). The facts presented from the Simpson case brought about much public controversy, with some believing Simpson was the victim of a carefully crafted, racially motivated crime while others thought he was a cold-blooded criminal.
Effects of African American Racism in the Media

Studies show that racist depictions in media create lower self-esteem in those victimized by racism. Averhart and Bigler (1997) read eleven stories to a group of 56 elementary school children (74% African American children, 21% Hispanic, and 5% Euro-American). In each story were depictions of Black people with varying levels of skin color. The significant findings in this study showed that children perceived people with darker skin to be undesirable (Averhart & Bigler, 1997). Children who had darker skin perceived themselves to have a lighter skin tone and had trouble recalling the counterstereotypes presented in those stories. Averhart and Bigler (1997) concluded that media depict darker skin color as undesirable and that the youngest of the generations assigns truth to those depictions. The end result could lead to a group of children growing up preserving and teaching the same negative ideals.

Liebert, Sprafkin, and Davidson (1988) showed that Black children exposed to both negative and positive media portrayals of Blacks tend to recall just the negative portrayals while White children recalled both the positive and negative portrayals. Liebert et al. (1988) concluded that it is easier to influence the minds of children than it is to redefine the attitudes of adults. Once children grow up continually exposed to the same types of messages, it becomes difficult to alter those perceptions.

Metabane (1988) showed that, as the amount of television viewed by African Americans increased, self-esteem in African Americans decreased. Programs like the Cosby Show, which depicted African Americans as upper middle class citizens, actually harmed self-esteem in Blacks by setting a standard that was difficult to achieve and by creating a false sense of racial integration to the American public. Metabane concluded
that Euro-Americans who are heavy television viewers believe racial integration exists, that Whites and Blacks are similar, and that most Blacks are of middle socioeconomic class.

Poindexter and Stroman (1981) concluded that African Americans watched more television than Euro-Americans. Of those African Americans who watched the most television, Poindexter and Stroman noted a lowered level of self-esteem. In Poindexter and Stroman's experiment, White and Black participants had to recall images of African Americans seen in the media. Whites recalled African Americans portraying athletic abilities while Blacks more frequently recalled just the negative depictions of African Americans. The noteworthy results of this study showed that higher income Blacks watched more television than lower income Blacks, which suggested that heavy viewers have a higher level of education. Ideally, higher educated Blacks should have a higher self-esteem, but in this case, the results show otherwise.

Tan and Tan (1979) conducted a study on television use and the self-estees of Blacks. The authors wanted to determine whether television viewing led to lower self-esteem or if low self-esteem led to an increase in television viewing. Tan and Tan found that high television viewing and low self-esteem existed in Blacks but not in Whites. Although a relationship between the amount of television watched and low self-esteem became evident, Tan and Tan could not arrive at a conclusive answer to which behavior came first; increased television viewing or low self-esteem.

An overwhelming factor in most of the studies mentioned in this report recognized the relationship with heavy television viewing and lowered self-esteem in Blacks. The importance of this finding should weigh heavily in the development of news
writing for local television news but researchers have shown that in many cases, news imitates entertainment media in its framing techniques.

Depictions of Violent Crimes Involving African Americans

Versus Actual Statistics

Entman (1990) conducted a content analysis of local news aired in Chicago and noted that 41% of local television news was devoted to the reporting of violent crimes. Of the violent crimes reported, 46% of the stories depicted an African American as the criminal suspect. According to the FBI crime statistics of 1997, 56.8% of violent crimes were committed by Whites while 41.1% committed by Blacks (FBI, 1996). Entman (1990) noted that the images of African Americans as criminals surfaced more often than images of Whites as criminals. Many times camera angles of Black criminals on the news depicted an extreme close-up of a Black criminal in the custody of police officers, hands cuffed behind the back, head lowered, and face covered while most White criminals mentioned in the news had no video representation. Video images were seldom used when depicting White criminals and more often White suspects were presented in a controlled judicial setting, usually in court or in the custody of a lawyer, reacting calmly (Entman, 1990). Entman concluded that although reporters appear to report objectively, subjectivity in story framing still exists.

Following the national election in 1992, the University of Michigan conducted a public opinion survey. Entman (1994a) reviewed the survey results and found that 66% of the White respondents rated Blacks as more violent prone. Entman attributed this survey response to the disproportionate depictions of violent crimes committed by Blacks.
versus Whites news reporting. Entman (1994b) concluded that in journalists' quest to present the news without bias, their overindulgence in Black issues makes Blacks appear inferior and undesirable.

Gandy (1994) found that the over representation of Blacks as violent criminals reproduced racism by creating an audience unwillingness to support the public policies designed in helping Blacks escape poverty and criminal victimization. Gandy believed that journalists want to perpetuate the villain and victim roles in news reporting because it kept viewers interested; however, the roles needed to be portrayed more accurately in terms of statistical evidence.

Studies of Visual Depictions in Televised News

Studies have been conducted on the depictions of African Americans in television entertainment media and in the verbal content of news, but few have specifically examined visual depictions of African Americans as presented in local televised news (Graber, 1990). Some of the studies of visual elements in news focused on the influential factors in judgment making (Enteman, 1996; Graber, 1990; Tiemens, Sillars, Alexander, & Werling, 1988). Graber (1990) focused on the verbal content juxtaposed with the visual elements of news, analyzing which elements were retained longer by the viewer. The overwhelming conclusion in these studies is that the viewing audiences tend to remember the visual elements more so than the textual elements of the story (Enteman, 1996; Graber, 1990). In light of this discovery, it is crucial that visual depictions receive attention from every angle possible to find a better understanding of how individual elements guide viewer judgements.
Elliott (1996) stated that any pictorial image presented publicly is worthy of concern and analysis in determining whether or not its presentation caused a viewer to suffer harm. Just because people perceive harm from certain images does not necessarily mean that the person presenting those images is at fault (Elliott, 1996). Certain images aired in local newscasts do not necessarily mean that they should be in that newscast. Other factors exist such as the economic concerns of the station. Journalists seem to make the effort at not presenting news in a prejudicial manner, and sometimes there really is no one to blame for images that harm viewers; however, each instance of harm should be an indicator to initiate conversation and perhaps arrive at an amicable solution.

There is nothing inherently wrong about depicting a criminal on the news who happens to be African American, it is when that newsroom behavior becomes the norm that it should be questioned (Elliott, 1996). According to FBI statistics, Whites commit more crimes than Blacks (DeBarros, & Bennett, 1997) so news reporting should include more pictorial representations of White criminals rather than Black criminals. Entman (1990) found that Blacks suspected of committing violent crimes were the number one focus on all the local news stations in Chicago. These portrayals reinforce negative stereotypes and a more proportional pictorial representation should be explored.

Racial discrimination goes beyond prejudice. Some hold prejudices that are not meant to be harmful, rather are a manner of personal protection, a way to keep from harm (Enteman, 1996). Racial discrimination, on the other hand, is an intentional attitude directed at a specific group for the purpose of establishing hierarchical boundaries (Smedley, 1999). Entman (1996) concluded that the combination of racial stereotyping, racial prejudice, and racial discrimination in visual representations is lethal. Racial
stereotyping reduces the realness of a person into an artificial construct. Racial prejudice and discrimination magnify the dangers of stereotyping by providing an image of generalization that has no truth (Enteman, 1996). Visual messages are generally the product of one's own perspectives derived from transgressions of the past, as well as from the formation of new experiences of which the viewer holds few referent points (Enteman, 1996). In other words, visual images help the viewer understand stories by calling on the past experiences of the viewer, as well as help to form judgements on areas of little knowledge to them. Reporters have taken many steps over the years to clean-up the textual elements of the newscasts as so not to offend viewers. Doing the same with the visual elements has not been as easy (Enteman, 1996). Video editors in the newsroom have a certain amount of footage they can use to help enhance stories. Images that gain reaction are most often used for maintaining an audience. Unfortunately, some of those images end-up causing harm to certain viewers (Enteman, 1996).

Visual elements in both news and entertainment media have been studied in many ways. Copeland (1989) studied the camera framing of men and women in primetime television and found that men are generally seen more in a close-up position while more of the woman's body is seen on camera. Copeland stated that there two explanations for this relationship: (1) images are depicted according to cultural myths with men showing more intellect – head shot, and women showing more heart and emotion – full figure shot, and (2) images are meant to present a nonverbal likeness of women as life givers – full figure shot. This may explain why images of men and women appear differently in television news, but it does not offer an explanation as to why images of African Americans are presented differently in televised news. Entman (1990) found that images
of criminal suspects who were Black were seen in more of an up-close and in custody angle while White suspects were seen in a further away juridical manner.

Graber (1990) claims that although most researchers treat text as the primary carrier of information, pictorial images have been shown to create greater recall of news stories. Graber found that 33% of news stories lasted less than one minute and 79% last under three minutes and that one-third to one-half of news stories are complimented with pictorial images. Graber listed many cameras framing techniques designed to hold the attention of the viewer. Facial close-ups typically reveal mental status such as fear, embarrassment, doubt, curiosity, sadness, happiness, and pain (Graber, 1990). Looking directly into the camera lens usually denotes honesty while avoiding eye contact with the camera denotes dishonesty. Body cues such as movements, postures and grooming may disclose wealth or poverty or whether or not a person does or does not conform to the issue at hand.

Many times the pictorial images in news stories do not portray the actual information of the story, rather they are designed to evoke a feel or create an opinion on the piece. An example used by Graber was that of political negotiations. Many times the images seen are that of politicians gathering inside a building or the outside of the meeting place and rarely are the images of the topic being discussed by the politicians. Graber found that more than half the images in news stories failed to enhance the verbal story line. Graber then ran an experiment testing recall of news stories with images and without images. Graber found that on 16% of the verbal themes were recalled while 34% of visual themes were recalled. In light of these results, it is critical that further research be conducted concerning visual imagery and racist portrayals in the news.

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Leo (1994) claimed that news stories are created in a “newsroom culture” with no means of abiding in a hidden agenda. This may be true; however, stories need to be designed with less zest for the personal appeal and ratings and geared more toward presenting the complete facts. Leo mentioned that in the Susan Smith case, where a mother told the public that her car, with her two children inside, was hijacked by a Black man. The media focused initially on the facts presented by the mother when later it was discovered that mother had disposed of the car and murdered her two children. Like Graber, Leo states that news reporters are framing the wrong picture.

Tiemens, Sillars, Alexander, and Werling (1988) studied the television coverage of Reverend Jesse Jackson’s speech at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. They claimed that the event was immediately grouped into being a “Black event” by Walter Cronkite who went on to say “the networks were invited to focus...on the Black delegates tonight and their emotional reaction to their leader, for most of them here, Jesse Jackson” (p. 1). The convention was categorized as a group event rather than a gathering that should have focused on the achievements of certain individuals. Instead, Cronkite’s message alluded to all those who were not black that they should only be a spectator, alienated from participation. The visual elements of the events were split into two main shots, that of Jackson speaking and audience reactions. Tiemens et al. studied the manner in which the camera moved from one shot to the next and the manner in which the image was composed in the camera. All the news stations overwhelmingly used the medium close-up to close-up shot when showing the audience with over 55% of audience shots were of Black attendees while less than 17% of the audience was actually Black. When Tiemens et al. conducted a comparison study, they found that during Senator Gary Hart’s
speech only nine reaction shots were of Black attendees compared to the 115 reaction shots included while Jackson was speaking. What news reporters had done was take the individuality out of Jackson’s speech and turned it into a speech from a group leader to the followers of his group.

Barnhurst and Steele (1996) studied the pictorial images included in presidential campaign coverage from the years 1968 to 1988. In that time period, Barnhurst and Steele (1996) found that there were significant increases of visual elements added to the coverage of presidential campaigns over the years while the stories told by journalists became shorter. The faster paced stories accompanied by an increase of visual elements left the visual elements available for the viewer to interpret the story. For instance, in the 1960s presidential debate, Richard Nixon was seen on television the void of theatrical make-up and covered in perspiration. There was an interesting outcome of perceptions of who won the debate. Those who only listened to the debate on the radio said that Nixon was the clear winner. Those who watched the debate on television clearly identified Nixon as the loser (Barnhurst & Steele, 1996). This outcome clearly indicates that visual elements in news play a role in perception forming.

Television is centralized in the United States in that it has almost become a ritualistic habit of most viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Certain behaviors like social cohesion, cultural dependence, resistance to change, self-direction, and self-government can be explored through television research of the contextual and pictorial content of programming.

Images on television play a major role in how Black children interpret the world. Poindexter and Stroman (1981) concluded that Black children tend to believe in the
reality of television and are easily influenced by television ads. Another conclusion by Poindexter and Stroman (1981) was that Black adults tend to rely heavily on television figures for information about the world. If the news uses the pictorial representation of Blacks as violent criminals as a norm, then Poindexter and Stroman could conclude that many Black adults tend to believe in that erroneous fact, thus initiating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although Greenberg and Brand (1994) cited an increased representation of minorities in the news, the qualitative attributes of those representations still need to be examined. Predisposition plays a big role when viewers interpret meaning in images. When television reinforces those beliefs by depicting minorities in stereotypically negative roles, it becomes a tool in the perpetuation racist ideals (Greenberg & Brand, 1994).

Summary of Previous Research

Gandy (1994), Gray (1989, 1995), Liebert, Sprafkin, and Davidson (1988), Metabane (1988), Tan and Tan (1979) have all examined negative racial stereotypes in entertainment media. All of these studies have found similar results where perceptions were altered through the viewing of the negative stereotypes on television. Stereotyping of African Americans remained constant with identities such as an uneducated, undereducated, unemployed, criminally prone, sports minded, and comedic in nature.

Current studies show that racism has moved from traditional racism, where Blacks were openly categorized as undesirable and inferior, to a new form of racism called modern racism. Modern racism infers racist beliefs through subtle rejections of ideals, denial that racism is still a problem, and through media’s continuing
encouragement of continued hostility toward Blacks. Walter Cronkite’s comments heading up the 1984 Democratic National Convention is an example of modern racism.

Studies have also shown that these subtle inferences of racist beliefs have an effect on African American self-esteem. Younger children are learning that the lighter their skin color, the more accepted they would be in society. Socioeconomic conditions have also been studied to find out if low self esteem is a factor for apathy and the perpetuation of that status. Did television create low self esteem or do people with low self esteem look to television for guidance?

Researchers have also studied African American depictions in the news. Overwhelmingly, stories on crime committed by African American suspects are reported much more often that crime stories involving Euro-American suspects. Studies show that statistically, Whites commit more crime than Blacks, yet Blacks receive more coverage in on the news. Statistical records also show that Blacks comprise 13% of the U. S. population which should equate to, at the very least, 13% of featured representation in the news and in entertainment media, which is not the case. Blacks are not adequately represented in news or in entertainment media.

Studies regarding the visual elements of news have been done, but only a very few with little focus on the effects of racism and African Americans and more toward the manner in which a story is framed with its visual elements. Studies suggest that viewers recall story images easier than verbal stories. Studies have also shown that many times news packages use visual elements that do not complement the text which leaves potential for the viewer to remember the story inaccurately.
There are many possibilities for future research. Entman, a professor at Northwestern University in Chicago, conducted many content analyses of local news aired in Chicago. He chose a period of one week to study, then 30 days, and then 10 days a month for 6 months. Entman claimed that since Chicago fell into the top 13 markets, his results would be able to provide generalizability for other studies in different markets (Entman, 1990). According to the latest information provided by the Census Bureau, Chicago has a Black population that exceeds one million. This may account for the higher number of Black representations in the local news aired in Chicago versus the lower number in Las Vegas’ local newscasts. The state of Nevada has a Black population of 125,346 (DeBarros & Bennett, 1997) with only 9% Black within the city of Las Vegas (Nielsen, 1997).

If Entman’s conclusions about local news and racist representations of African Americans still exist, then a content analysis of local television news in Las Vegas should be able to provide validity to Entman’s argument. Perhaps regions with smaller representations of Blacks deal with racism on a much smaller scale. Perhaps journalists have continued the fight to eliminate racist ideals from news reporting to the point where Entman’s argument of subtle racism in news reporting no longer exists. A content analysis which counts the number of pictorial depictions of Blacks and Whites, noting significant differences, should be able to determine if local television news perpetuates racist ideals through pictorial representations.

Overall the area lacking the most research is the area of visual elements as they relate to modern racism in local television news. Another key element is that the majority of the significant research available on the topic of racism in the media has been
conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s and new studies on this topic are needed. Media research needs to keep up with the changing times in order to develop appropriate methods of remedying imbalances in news reporting.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Design

This study is based on a content analysis of local television news programming in Las Vegas, Nevada. The design of this content analysis will examine pictorial depictions of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local newscasts along with the camera perspectives within those depictions. The findings in this study are intended to identify either the existence or nonexistence of a relationship between pictorial depictions of race and the manner in which camera framing is executed.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses and one research question were generated for this study. The first research hypothesis, stated that there are significant differences in the use of camera composition and the coverage of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local television news. The second research hypothesis, stated that there are significant differences in the use of camera angles and the coverage of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local television news.

A research question analyzed the number of crime-related shots aired and depictions of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local television news.
FBI statistics indicate that there are more white criminals in the nation than there are black (FBI, 1996). If this is the case then the number of pictorial depictions of Euro-American criminal suspects should outnumber the pictorial depictions of African American criminal suspects.

**Operational Definition of Terms**

The premise of this study is to examine the visual representation of African Americans and Euro-Americans in local television news reporting. Elements of news without visual depictions will not be a part of this study unless they include a graphic image for the audience to view while the story is being read. The dependent variables in this study are the camera composition and camera angles used on human subjects and the independent variable is race. News that does not have a visual accompaniment in which a human being is depicted will not be included in this study. This study will not use the race identification of the journalist reporting the news as part of the sample set.

Camera composition refers to the manner in which the videographer frames the subject in the camera lens. Camera composition includes three points of view, an extreme close-up, an average close-up, and a wide-angle point of view. An extreme close-up includes the face and head of the subject with the extreme borders being the very top of the head and the base of the neckline, connecting to the top of the shoulders but not including the entire shape of the shoulders. An average close-up includes the person’s chest from below the neckline, including the shoulders with a borderline of just above the waistline. A wide-angle view includes below the waistline all the way to an entire body shot.
Camera angles known as, power angles, straight-on camera angles, and weak camera angles refer to the position of the camera in relation to the eye level of the subject being depicted (Messaris, 1994). A power shot is when a camera is placed lower than eye level pointed upward at the subject. A straight-on shot is when the camera is even with the eye level of the subject and a weak shot is when the camera is placed above eye level pointed downward at the subject.

A change of camera shot is defined by a cut, dissolve, or wipe transition. A cut refers to one visual image that is replaced abruptly with the presence of another visual image. A dissolve is when one image seems to fade into another image with the overlap of images visible for a brief moment. A wipe is when one visual image moves off the screen and as it leaves a new image moves in taking its place. Digital video effects (DVE) also act as wipes, where a computerized designed appears to push one video image off the screen replacing it with another. Camera shots will not include camera movement as a transition. Examples of camera lens movements include a push (where the camera lens zooms in on a subject) and a pull (where the camera zooms out on a subject). Examples of camera movement also include a pan (where the camera remains on a stationary plane, rotating from left to right or vice versa), a tilt (where the camera lens is tilted upward or downward), and either dolly or truck movements (where the camera is moved into or away from a subject or from side to side).

In this study, there are three categories of race, Euro-American, African American, and shots including both races within an individual shot. If a shot includes someone of a different race passing in the background, only the individuals in the foreground will be categorized by race.
Sampling

Sampling will include five newscasts, airing Monday through Friday, from four different broadcast stations in Las Vegas. Sample size will include 20 different newscasts for a period of two weeks beginning early to mid-March, 1999. The 11:00 p.m. newscasts from ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates, as well as the 10:00 p.m. newscast from the FOX affiliate will be recorded. The choice to use the late night news as opposed to the early evening, afternoon, or morning news had to do with the perceived viewing audience. Since the general public assumes that children typically have access to television during the day hours and early evening hours, it would seem that newscast designers would be more inclined to gear their late night news for an adult audience. It would also seem that during the late night news, reporters might be more inclined to include information considered too graphic for family viewing hours. The choice in using Monday through Friday came about because FOX5 News in Las Vegas does not air local news on weekends.

Since the weather segment in news is typically recorded in the news room studio and its visual elements typically reflect data and/or statistics relating to weather, the weather portion of the news will not be a part of this study. Sports reporting will also not be included in this study. Promotional spots are often aired during newscasts but will not be evaluated in this study. Promotional spots include the announcement of news stories that will air once the commercial break has concluded, the announcement of stories that will air on a following newscast, the airing of movie trailers, or news stories including spots from television or movie entertainment programming. News programs will be
recorded on VHS cassettes and reviewed as many times as it takes to include every unit outlined in the coding scheme.

Coding

Coding will focus on the visual depictions of both African Americans and Euro-Americans in the news, measuring the number of times each depiction occurs, the manner in which the depiction is portrayed, and the amount of times each depiction occurs within a story relating to a crime. Each individual shot examined will be given a shot number. For example, the first individual shot will be labeled shot 00001, the second will be 00002, and so on. Race will be given a code number with the number 1 representing Euro-Americans, the number 2 representing African Americans, and the number 3 representing an individual shot that includes both races.

Elements of camera composition will be given the following code numbers; the number 1 represents a wide-angle point of view, 2 represents an average close-up point of view, and 3 signifies an extreme close-up point of view. Camera angles will be split into three categories, with the number 1 representing a power shot (below eye level), 2 representing a straight-on shot (at eye level), and 3 representing a weak shot (above eye level).

Individual shots within the reading of a crime story will be coded as a 1 and shots within non-crime stories will be coded with the number 2. Television stations will be coded with KTNV, the ABC affiliate as 1, KLAS, the CBS affiliate as 2, KVVU, the FOX affiliate as 3, and KVBC, the NBC affiliate as 4. Coder identification numbers will include the number 1 for the primary coder and the number 2 for the second coder used.
only in the inter coder reliability tests. (See APPENDIX I for a copy of the coding sheet.)

Inter Coder Reliability

Inter coder reliability was tested between two coders on 10% of the sample. The desired results was an accuracy level of 80%. The secondary coder was first given a copy of the methods chapter of this study to review and then discuss questions or concerns. The secondary coder indicated a clear understanding of cut, dissolve, and wipe transitions within camera shots. A clear understanding was also indicated of how to identify race within crime reports and how to identify the different camera composition and camera angle shots. The primary coder then viewed and coded 205 individual shots without the secondary coder present. Upon completion, the secondary coder was asked to review the first 20 shots and stop so that data could be compared for discrepancies. It was noted that the secondary coder did indicate one discrepancy by identifying extreme close-up shots in a different manner from the primary coder. To alleviate the misunderstanding, the definition of an extreme close-up shot was revamped to specifically state that the baseline of the shot was the bottom of the neck, to include only the top of the shoulders but not to include the entire shape of the shoulders. The secondary coder then completed coding the sample and of the 205 shots analyzed, the level of accuracy recorded was 80.5%.
Statistical Analysis Plan

All the data collected in this study are nominal data. Statistical analyses for this study will include frequency summaries and crosstabulations including chi-square. Reporting of results will include frequencies, percentages of occurrences, and standardized residual values of crosstabulations. Residual values are the result of the difference between the observed count and the expected count. A standardized residual divides the residual by an estimate of its standard deviation (Norusis, 1986). Within a normal distribution, a 95% confidence level falls between cases with no more or no less than a ±2.0 standardized residual value (Norusis, 1986). Therefore, any standardized residual values outside the ranges of ±2.0 in this study indicate potential areas for future research.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

Of the 1,780 individual shots examined, 27.5% were aired on KVBC (NBC affiliate), 26% were aired on KTNV (ABC affiliate), 24.5% were aired on KLAS (CBS affiliate), and 22% were aired on KVVU (FOX affiliate) television broadcast stations in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Of the subjects depicted in individual shots, 81% of those depictions were of Euro-American, 8.3% African American, and 10.8% representing both race categories within a shot. Of the shots examined, 43.3% depicted a wide-angle point of view, 49.1% at an average close-up point of view, and 7.6% revealed an extreme close-up point of view. Camera angles portrayed a power angle (camera below eye level pointed upward at the subject) 31.6% of the time. Straight on placement was recorded 14.3% of the time, and weak angles (camera above eye level pointed downward) were recorded 54% of the time. Of all the shots examined, 27.4% were related to crime.
Visual Treatment and Race

The first hypothesis examined the interaction between camera composition and race. When inspecting crosstabulations of camera composition and race, there is a significant difference in the manner in which camera composition varies among racial depictions, $\chi^2(4, N = 1,780) = 100.157, p < .001$. Euro-Americans were depicted in a wide-angle point of view 76% of the time, African Americans 5.4% of the time, and Euro-Americans and African Americans together in a shot 18.5% of the time. Euro-Americans were seen in an average close-up shot 84.7% of the time, African Americans 9.7% of the time, and images depicting both races were noted 5.6% of the time. Extreme close-up shots of Euro-Americans were depicted 85.2% of the time and African Americans 14.8% of the time. The most significant differences noted were in the depictions of both races within a shot with a 6.6% increase in wide-angle views and a 4.7% decrease in average close-ups. The next most significant difference was in African American depictions with a 2.7% increase in extreme close-up shots and a 2.7% decrease in wide-angle shots. Table 1 represents the first of seven tables of data that indicate the number of times that the unit of analysis for each variable was observed and the corresponding percentage for that observation. See Table 1 to examine depictions of race and the frequency of occurrence in camera composition.
Table 1
Depictions of Race and Frequency of Occurrence Within Camera Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Shots and Percentage of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide Angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=586)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ²(4, N = 1,780) = 100.157, p < .001

The second hypothesis examined the interaction between camera angle and race. When inspecting crosstabulations of camera angles and race, there was a significant difference in the manner in which camera angles varied among racial depictions, χ²(4, N = 1,780) = 14.939, p < .005. Euro-Americans were depicted in a power shot 81.9% of the time, African Americans 10.5% of the time, and a combination of both groups in a power shot was noted 7.6% of the time. Shots examined also included straight-on camera angles where Euro-Americans were depicted straight-on 83.5% of the time, African Americas 5.1% of the time, and shots including both Euro-Americans and African Americans 11.4% of the time. Weak angles of Euro-Americans were noted 79.7% of the time, African Americans 7.8% of the time, and shots including both Euro-Americans and African Americans 12.5% of the time. The most significant difference noted was in the use of power shots and the depiction of both races within a shot, noting a decrease of 2.3% with a 1.6% increase in the use of weak shots. The next most significant difference
noted was a 1.8% increase of African American power shots and a 1.8% decrease of African American straight-on shots. See Table 2 to examine depictions of race and the frequency of occurrence within camera angles.

Table 2
Depictions of Race and Frequency of Occurrence Within Camera Angles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Euro-Americans</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Both in Shot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Shot</td>
<td>(N=461) 81.9%</td>
<td>(N=59) 10.5%</td>
<td>(N=43) 7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-On Shot</td>
<td>(N=213) 83.5%</td>
<td>(N=13) 5.1%</td>
<td>(N=29) 11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Shot</td>
<td>(N=767) 79.7%</td>
<td>(N=75) 7.8%</td>
<td>(N=120) 12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(N=1441) 81.0%</td>
<td>(N=147) 8.3%</td>
<td>(N=192) 10.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ²(4, N = 1,780) = 14.939, p < .005

Race and Crime

The research question in this study examined the interaction between visual shots depicting race and the reporting of crime. When examining crosstabulations of race and crime, there was a significant difference, χ²(2, N = 1,780) = 23.983, p < .001. Euro-Americans were depicted within a crime report 74.6% of the time and African Americans 13.1% of the time. The most significant area was in depictions of African Americans and the reporting of crime, with a 3.7% increase of African Americans associated with crime and a 1.6% decrease of Euro-Americans associated with crime. See Table 3 to examine depictions of race and the frequency of reporting crime.
Based on observations in initial frequency data, additional analyses conducted included the four broadcast stations and individual shots depicting race. There was a significant difference in the number of depictions from each broadcast station, $\chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 19.907, p < .005$. KTNV depicted Euro-Americans 86.8% of the time, KLAS 76.8% of the time, KVVU 77.5% of the time, and KVBC 81.8% of the time. KTNV depicted African Americans 5% of the time, KLAS depicted African Americans 10.1% of the time, KVVU 9.5% of the time, and KVBC is 8.8% of the time. When presenting both groups, KTNV depicted both in a shot 8.2% of the time, KLAS 13.1% of the time, KVVU 13% of the time, and KVBC 9.4% of the time. The most significant difference was seen in KTNV’s broadcast where Euro-Americans were depicted 1.4% higher than expected, African Americans were depicted 2.5% less than expected and both races together depicted 1.7% less than expected. See Table 4 to examine depictions of race and the frequency of occurrence from individual television broadcast stations.
Table 4
Depictions of Race and Frequency of Occurrence Within Individual Television Broadcast Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Shots and Percentage of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euro-Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTNV (N=402)</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLAS (N=335)</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVU (N=303)</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVBC (N=401)</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=1441)</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 19.907, p < .005 \]

Television Stations and Visual Treatments

After examining data to support the hypotheses in this study, a subset of data were examined in the area of individual television broadcast stations and the frequency of occurrence in camera composition, camera angles, and the reporting of crime. When examining the four television broadcast stations and frequency of occurrence in camera composition, a significance was noted, \( \chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 13.218, p < .05 \). KTNV used the wide-angle point of view 26.5% of the time, KLAS 24.6% of the time, KVU 24.4% of the time, and KVBC 24.5% of the time. KTNV used the average close-up point of view 25.6% of the time, KLAS 24.5% of the time, KVU 21.1% of the time, and KVBC 28.8% of the time. KTNV used the extreme close-up point of view 25.9% of the time, KLAS 23.7% of the time, KVU 14.1% of the time, and KVBC 36.3% of the time. The most significant findings were a 2% decrease of an extreme close-up point of view by
KVVU, the FOX affiliate station, and a 1.9% increase in the use of extreme-close-ups by KVBC, NBC affiliate station. See Table 5 to examine the number of camera composition shots and the frequency of occurrence within the individual television broadcast stations.

Table 5
Number of Camera Composition Shots and Frequency of Occurrence Within Individual Television Broadcast Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>KTNV</th>
<th>KLAS</th>
<th>KVVU</th>
<th>KVBC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wide Angle</td>
<td>(N=204) 26.5%</td>
<td>(N=190) 24.6%</td>
<td>(N=188) 24.4%</td>
<td>(N=189) 24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>(N=224) 25.6%</td>
<td>(N=214) 24.5%</td>
<td>(N=184) 21.1%</td>
<td>(N=252) 28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-Up</td>
<td>(N=35) 25.9%</td>
<td>(N=32) 23.7%</td>
<td>(N=19) 14.1%</td>
<td>(N=49) 36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(N=463) 26.0%</td>
<td>(N=436) 24.5%</td>
<td>(N=391) 22.0%</td>
<td>(N=490) 27.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 13.218, p < .05\]

The next area examined included the four broadcast stations and the use of camera angles, with a significant difference noted, \(\chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 20.384, p < .005\). KTNV used the power shot 27% of the time, KLAS 24.9% of the time, KVVU 20.2% of the time, and KVBC 27.9% of the time. KTNV used the straight-on shot 21.6% of the time, KLAS 33.7% of the time, KVVU 23.9% of the time, and KVBC 20.8% of the time. KTNV used the weak shot 26.6% of the time, KLAS 21.8% of the time, KVVU 22.5% of the time, and KVBC 29.1% of the time. The most significant findings were a 3% increase in the use of a straight-on angle by KLAS, the CBS affiliate station, and a 2.1%
decrease of straight-on shots by KVBC. See Table 6 to examine the number of camera angles within shots and the frequency of occurrence within the individual television broadcast stations.

Table 6
Number of Camera Angles Within Shots and Frequency of Occurrence Within Individual Television Broadcast Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Shot</th>
<th>KTNV (N=152) 27.0%</th>
<th>KLAS (N=140) 24.9%</th>
<th>KVVU (N=114) 20.2%</th>
<th>KVBC (N=157) 27.9%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straight-On Shot</td>
<td>(N=55) 21.6%</td>
<td>(N=86) 33.7%</td>
<td>(N=61) 23.9%</td>
<td>(N=53) 20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Shot</td>
<td>(N=256) 26.6%</td>
<td>(N=210) 21.8%</td>
<td>(N=216) 22.5%</td>
<td>(N=280) 29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(N=463) 26.0%</td>
<td>(N=436) 24.5%</td>
<td>(N=391) 22.0%</td>
<td>(N=490) 27.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2(6, N = 1,780) = 20.384, p < .005$

The final area examined included the reporting of crime and individual broadcast stations with a significant difference noted, $\chi^2(3, N = 1,780) = 16.226, p < .001$. KTNV reported crime 27.5% of the time, KLAS 26.6% of the time, KVVU 15.6% of the time, and KVBC 30.3% of the time. The most significant findings were a 3% decrease of crime reporting by KVVU, and a 1.2% increase in crime reporting by KVBC. See Table 7 to examine the number of crime related shots and the frequency of occurrence within the individual television broadcast stations.
Table 7
Number of Crime Related Shots and Frequency of Occurrence Within Individual Television Broadcast Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Shots and Percentage of Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KTNV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Story</td>
<td>(N=134) 27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Crime Story</td>
<td>(N=329) 25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(N=463) 26.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

χ²(6, N = 1,780) = 16.226, p < .001
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study has examined the visual elements in local television news to determine if racism exists in the dissemination of local news. Past research of visual elements in media has been conducted and even incorporated into studies as an addition to the original focus; however, there are no reported studies that focus entirely on the visual elements within local television newscasts. Past research has mostly examined specific political events, (Barnhurst, & Steele, 1996; Tiemens et al., 1988). Graber (1990) focused more on the visual elements in news reporting; however, her study examined the manner in which the viewer retains visual images. Enteman (1996) focused his study more toward visual images and stereotypes across a diverse group of people. Each person studying the visual elements of media have concluded that either stereotyping or racism was present within their study leaving the examination of visual elements within local television newscasting a necessary study.

Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest that a difference does exist based on race and the manner in which a shot is composed. African Americans are portrayed in an extreme-
close-up position much more often than Euro-Americans. Study results indicate a
significant difference in the manner in which both races together in a shot are depicted,
with a significant increase in the wide-angle point of view. This finding is questionable
because camera lenses need to be set at a wider setting in order to capture two or more
people within a shot. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see groups of people consistently
displayed in a wide-angle point of view.

Another significant finding was in the area of camera angles and depictions of
race. African Americans were depicted less often at a straight-on point of view while
Euro-Americans were depicted more in a straight-on point of view. African Americans
were also depicted more often in a power shot than Euro-Americans.

Another finding displayed a significant difference in the portraying of African
Americans and Euro-Americans in the reporting of a crime, with African Americans
depicted much more often than Euro-Americans within crime reports.

The findings of this study indicated differences in how each broadcast station
depicted race. Upon further investigation, significant differences were found in the
manner in which individual broadcast stations depicted African Americans and Euro-
Americans with KTNV, the ABC affiliate, producing a notable variation in each
category. KTNV included a much larger than expected number of Euro-American
depictions, a less than expected number of African American depictions and a less than
expected number of images depicting both races within its nightly news reporting.
KLAS, the CBS affiliate and KVVU, the FOX affiliate both show an increase of African
American depictions and less Euro-American depictions. KVBC, the NBC affiliate
produced only slight differences in all three categories with a little more coverage of
Euro-Americans and African Americans and slightly less coverage of groups depicting both races.

Individual stations were also examined for the frequency in which crime stores were aired with KTNV, KLAS, and KVBC reporting slightly more crime than expected and KVVU reporting significantly less crime than expected. When examining camera composition by station, KVVU used the wide-angle point of view more often than the other stations and KVBC used the average close-up and extreme close-up point of view more often than the other stations. The last category examined was in the area of camera angles. KTNV used the power shot slightly more than the other stations, while KLAS used the straight-on shot significantly more than the other stations, and KVBC used the weak perspective slightly more than the other stations.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, there are differences in how African Americans and Euro-Americans are depicted in local television news. Zettl (1999) states that specific shot choices are influenced by personal experience along with the context of the event. It might be possible that videographers rely heavily on personal experiences when framing subjects. If a videographer holds a personal bias toward certain people, he or she may have the inclination to frame those people in such a manner that accentuates that bias. The idea behind an extreme close-up view is that it can abstract a pictorial representation, draw the viewer closer to the subject, and expose an element of persuasion to help guide the viewer into belief of the issue being presented. The wide-angle point of view generally suggests a sense of distance between the viewer and the
subject depicted. The wide-angle point of view is typically used to frame large groups of people, provide a sense of distance from the viewer and the subject, and to disengage the viewer with the subject presented. When using the extreme close-up and even the average close-up, reporters are able to place more emphasis to a point of view. In this study, reporters depicted African Americans more in an extreme close-up point of view. If the reporter were reporting on crime, the extreme close-up point of view can accentuate the power of the criminal so that the viewer might develop a sense of fear in the presence of the criminal. If the reporter were reporting on strife, the extreme close-up point of view can accentuate the strife so that the viewer might develop a sense of empathy for the cause presented. If the reporter were reporting on a tragedy, the extreme close-up point of view can accentuate the horror associated with the tragedy, evoking a sense of sorrow in the viewer. When an extreme close-up point of view is over-used in the depiction of one particular race, African Americans to be specific, African Americans are then more often associated with emotional appeals, accentuating the theme behind the reported story. When a wide-angle point of view is over-used, emotional ties to the subject are few, suggesting to the viewer that interest in the subject depicted need only be minimal.

Another implication in this study is that African Americans are depicted more often in a power angle, with the camera below eye level pointed upward at the subject. Power angles accompanied by an extreme close-up point of view can intensify the emotion of the reported piece (Messaris, 1994). Of the shots examined depicting African Americans, nearly half were at a power angle. Depicting a person with a power angle suggests an element of grandeur about the person depicted. If the person depicted at a power angle was within a criminal report, it might suggest to the viewer that fear of the
suspected criminal as an individual is warranted. If a person trying to persuade a point, either positive or negative and is coupled by a power angle, the person depicted might be viewed as more of an authority figure on the subject.

One finding that was not part of the hypotheses was in the area of criminal mug shots used when reporting crime. More often, the African American suspect was depicted in an extreme close-up point of view from a power angle, perhaps suggesting to the viewer that the criminal suspect is an immense threat to society. Criminal mug shots of Euro-Americans, on the other hand, were more often depicted in an average close-up point of view, usually with a straight-on angle, perhaps suggesting to the viewer that the criminal suspect is more of an insignificant threat to society. The framing of mug shots is entirely up to the criminal justice system; however, the choice to incorporate those images within a newscast is up to the reporter.

When reviewing the local broadcast stations, only KVBC, the NBC affiliate, came close to the expected percentages when depicting race. KTNV, the ABC affiliate, was the only station to have significant variations in all three areas of race depiction. Overall, the depiction of African Americans did not measure up to the expected number of depictions. In this study, 8.3% of the depictions of race were of African Americans and in Las Vegas, NV there is a 9% African American population (Nielsen, 1997) so depictions on a whole are slightly below expectations.

In reviewing Gerbner’s cultivation theory, over time and repeated viewing, a notion of inequality could develop in the mind of the viewer. Cultivation theory suggests that the more an individual watches television, the more he or she begins to believe that the world is a mean place. Cultivation theory also indicates that people with limited
reference points tend to associate television facts to real world facts. If a viewer consistently views a difference in depictions, then it might be possible that the viewer may begin to believe that a difference in depictions is warranted. In trying to remove the ideal of modern racism in news, depictions should not vary by race.

The implications of this study suggest that modern racism still exists in the area of local news reporting. This implication does not suggest that racist depictions are intentional on the part of the reporter; it merely identifies the fact that differences in depictions do exist where they should not. This study implies that the manner in which race is depicted is still suspect. It may be that the videographer actively chooses shots based on his or her experiences or beliefs. It may be that the shot choice is nowhere near intentional, but perhaps driven from a subconscious level. Another explanation might be found in the use of news consultants. The sole job of a news consultant is to find better ways to generate revenue for the television news business. News consultants try to find efficient ways to complete daily tasks and better methods of boosting ratings. News consultants may also be given control over editorial content, suggesting to the reporter what visual elements to include, and what type of persuasion to use within a news report.

Limitations

This study indicates limitations in the area of story context juxtaposed with visual depictions. Examining race depictions shot by shot is good in terms of reporting the frequency of occurrence; however, there are many more elements to examine before a thorough conclusion can be determined. Images should be examined for juxtapositions within other individual shots. A still image on its own can be recorded; however, when
accompanied by a questionable shot just before and immediately after might imply a different conclusion.

Although this study recorded the frequency in which a story relating to crime was reported, it did not record the race identification of criminal suspects. Some of the shots examined in this study depicted one race within a story about crime while the criminal suspect was of a different race classification.

Another limitation of this study was that it only examined depictions of race where depictions along with portrayals should be examined. There was one story in particular covered by all four broadcast stations where the portrayals were different on each station. The story was about a pawn shop robbery that turned into a hostage situation. There were three African American criminal suspects involved and most of the onlookers were African American with loved ones inside. The portrayals ranged from African Americans screaming, running, to shouting out prayers, which were seen on two of the broadcast stations, while the other two stations included individuals who seemed controlled, concerned, speaking rationally and calmly. The first two portrayals made African Americans appear uncontrolled, skittish, and unintelligent. The second two portrayals made African Americans appear like average human beings faced with adversity. The second portrayal is the void of racial stereotype and is therefore, more favorable.

Another limitation of this study was in the identifying of the original source of the video footage. There are times when journalists use file footage to complete the visual package. As a courtesy, the television broadcast station should identify file footage; however, that is not always the case. Journalists, with permission, also use video footage
shot from different news stations or outside crews. When trying to determine visual discrepancies, it should be noted that certain discrepancies belong to the source from where it originated and not to the station from which it was aired. Journalists do have a conscious choice of which footage to include in stories; however, it is not always practical to report on a story without including a visual package to compliment the story.

One final limitation to this study is the possibility of Type II errors. A Type II error accepts the null hypothesis when it should be rejected. There is always a possibility of Type II errors in tests of significance. In this study, significance levels ranged from .001 to .005, which is interpreted as one out of every 1000, or 5 out of every 1000 units sampled, the null hypothesis is accepted when it should be rejected. Both of these significance values, .001 and .005, are highly significant ratings and generally, larger sample sizes produce more reliable significance values thus, reducing the probability of Type II errors. The sample size in this study was 1,780 units of analysis, which is considered a large sample size, which minimizes the probability of Type II errors but does not eliminate them altogether.

Future Direction

One direction of future research should be in the examining of images and story semantics. A journalist may report on a vicious crime and portray a criminal suspect in a controlled juridical environment then later tell a similar story portraying a criminal suspect handcuffed and head down being led into a police vehicle. If this type of behavior is commonly portrayed, then a study of the reasons behind those portrayals
should be executed. If the difference between these portrayals identifies two different races, then a study into the reasoning behind those choices is also important.

Studying visual elements without studying the accompanying verbal elements of a story have the potential to mislead results. The unit of analysis should be an individual story and every element that makes up that story, from visual images to style in storytelling.

It is crucial that studies constantly review new emerging elements in news dissemination. Televised news has gone from a person reading a story on screen to several people telling stories accompanied by visual elements, sound bites, package roll-ins, editing with quick-cuts, shortened stories, and graphic enhancements. It is important that all the new elements are studied both separately and collectively. This study was an examination of individual elements where the subsequent study should be an examination of stories in addition to the individual elements that enhance the storytelling.

The battles against racism have been many and although it may appear to be greatly diminished by some, it still exists in subtle forms not necessarily by intent, rather, done out of a subconscious manner of behavior. Local television news reporters should strive to depict every individual with an equal style of depictions. Local stations should also portray human beings similarly, void of racial stereotypes.

For this nation to come together it must treat all races as members of one race, the human race. The ideals of separate but equal do not work and that was proven in the 1960s. Although the separate but equal doctrine is no longer law, the idea is still recognized in media depictions where Whites are typically seen with other Whites and Blacks with other Blacks. If journalists want to eliminate the idea of modern racism
toward African Americans, one way to start would be to depict African Americans in the same manner as Euro-Americans. Another way would be to provide a more balanced representation of both groups, providing an equal representation of both groups individually and together. These suggestions are only a start. There are still many improvements to make in order to eliminate racism toward African Americans altogether.
APPENDIX I

CODING SHEET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot Number</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Camera Composition</th>
<th>Camera Angles</th>
<th>Crime Story</th>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Coder I.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning with 00001</td>
<td>Euro-American 1</td>
<td>Wide Angle View 1</td>
<td>Power Shot - Below Eye Level 1</td>
<td>Yes 1</td>
<td>ABC 1</td>
<td>Primary 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00002</td>
<td>African American 2</td>
<td>Average Close-Up 2</td>
<td>Straight On - Even With Eye Level 2</td>
<td>No 2</td>
<td>CBS 2</td>
<td>Inter Coder Reliability Tester 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00003</td>
<td>Both 3</td>
<td>Extreme Close-up 3</td>
<td>Weak Shot - Above Eye Level 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>FOX 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NBC 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


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