

**A COMPARISON OF BLACK AND WHITE REPRESENTATION IN CRIME STORIES
IN LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS IN PORTLAND, OREGON**

by

THOR LUTHER WASBOTTEN

A THESIS

**Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science**

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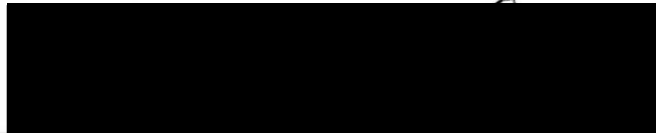
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“A Comparison of Black and White Representation in Crime Stories in Local Television News in Portland, Oregon,” a thesis prepared by Thor Luther Wasbotten in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the School of Journalism and Communication. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:



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Thor Luther Wasbotten for the degree of Master of Science

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Title: A COMPARISON OF BLACK AND WHITE REPRESENTATION IN CRIME
STORIES IN LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS IN PORTLAND, OREGON

Approved:


Dr. Alan G. Stavitsky

This thesis analyzes the depictions of Whites and Blacks in crime stories in local television news in Portland, Oregon. Previous studies have concluded that television news reinforces "modern racism" by the way in which Blacks and Whites are shown in crime stories. This study analyzed two randomly constructed weeks in early 1994. Black suspects were shown more often in handcuffs and in jail uniforms, and each Black suspect depicted in a crime story was a suspect in a homicide. The results were divided into two categories to reflect the influence of the attack on skater Nancy Kerrigan, which dominated the local news because of the Tonya Harding connection.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ever since television was first mass produced in the 1940s, America has been awed by its power and technological capabilities. Like radio, it was able to move sounds over vast distances. Television, though, went even further; it could also broadcast pictures. Some of those pictures would change the way America thought of itself. Television, it can be argued, was the deciding factor in electing a young senator from Massachusetts president, bringing a new era to the Oval Office. Television also facilitated a time of national mourning never experienced to that point when that young president was assassinated, and it showed us -- live -- the murder of his accused assassin. Television brought the entire country to the moon. Television enabled the country to watch from its "living room" a war occurring on the opposite side of the world.

Along with this appreciation for the advanced technology came criticism. Many aspects of television have been brought under Congressional scrutiny, as well as academic and public. Over the last 20 years, Congressional subcommittees have increasingly analyzed television's power and influence on society. There have been hearings concerning the amount of both violence and crime on both fiction and news programs.¹ Other hearings have addressed such issues as sex and alcohol on television.²

This study focuses on at least one aspect of the concerns of those who say television perpetuates racism by stereotyping groups, especially Blacks. Many scholarly studies have been conducted on how Blacks are depicted in fictional television shows, but

few on how they are represented in television news. It is important to distinguish between the two; whereas fiction is non-fact, television news is supposed to represent reality and mirror society. To fully understand the impact television news has on shaping people's stereotypes, however, requires an overview of the history of Blacks in the most powerful mass communication medium: television.

Probably the most comprehensive study of the plight of Blacks in television was authored by J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*.³ MacDonald asserted that in the late 1940s, television was widely thought of as the medium that would promise a "new and prejudice-free era in popular entertainment."⁴ This was the hope after years of demeaning characterizations of Blacks in both motion pictures and radio like the popular radio show "Amos and Andy."

In the 1950s, it seemed as if the "promise" might come true. Many Black entertainers were featured on the variety shows that dominated the airwaves, especially the "Ed Sullivan Show," first known as "Toast of the Town." These entertainers, however, were not necessarily actors. Most were singers, musicians, or dancers who played themselves. Of those Black actors who appeared on fictional television shows, most of the roles women played were the "mammy figure," a Black maid in a White household, or a role similar to those played in motion pictures and radio.⁵ Most of the men acted the character of the chauffeur or butler to a White family. It was the roles Blacks played on fictional television that negated the positive feedback Black entertainers began to enjoy because it was the characters, not the entertainers, with whom the viewing (mostly White) audience became familiar.

Non-fiction television (documentaries), MacDonald wrote, did nothing to circumvent the racist views prevalent in America during the 1950s. Many documentarians were enthralled with the continent of Africa, and they produced many shows featuring the beautiful topography. Included in these documentaries, though, were stories of different

tribes and scenes of a civilization quite opposite of those in the Western world. It was the Africans dancing around a fire with spears and facepaint, the bare-breasted women who had large sticks through their earlobes, that gave some White Americans a first depiction of where the Blacks "came from."

The early 1960s saw a major decline in the number of Blacks who appeared on fictional television shows. Westerns and detective series were the dominant genres, mostly because of America's fascination with the West and the height of the Cold War. African-Americans, except for a few bit parts, were largely invisible in those shows.

The early 1960s also marked the time for the first Blacks to be hired as correspondents on national television news broadcasts.⁶ This was important for racial equality because journalists were looked upon as people of high intellect who were responsible for gathering the information that made a difference in people's lives. The breakthrough achieved by those newly hired at the networks, however, was overshadowed by the news that began to dominate the national news: civil unrest.

Blacks became an extremely visible group in news documentaries. The 1960s signified the height of the civil rights movement, which received extensive television news coverage. Edward R. Murrow and Fred W. Friendly of CBS News were at the forefront of reporting the struggle that Blacks faced in their road to equality. In 1960, they produced two documentaries that focused on Blacks: "Who Speaks For The South," which focused on the crisis of school integration in Atlanta, and "Harvest of Shame," which revealed the exploitation of both Black and White migrant farm workers in America. Both were broadcast on *CBS Reports*, but neither played to large audiences because not all CBS stations aired the programs and most of those stations that did broadcast the show aired it outside of the prime evening viewing hours.

The summer of 1963 saw an explosion of civil rights coverage on both network and local newscasts, and news documentaries. ABC produced a five-part series analyzing the

struggle for civil rights. NBC preempted three hours of prime time to showcase *The American Revolution of '63*. Both local and national newscasts showed White protesters fighting with law enforcement over Blacks attending "White" schools. The newscasts also showed White firemen using fire hoses and dogs to disperse crowds of Blacks who were protesting for their rights. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. received much airtime, especially when he led the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" in Washington, D.C., and delivered his famous "I Have A Dream" speech.

The news coverage of the civil rights movement had both its positive and negative effects on the Blacks' fight for equality. For the first time, the civil rights movement could be seen in every household that had a television. The isolated Black communities were now in the living rooms of every White person who was watching. In television, Blacks had a medium in which they could depict their feelings far more vividly than any other, and a way to show White injustice.

Some negative effects resulted from those positive ones mentioned above. Whites were able to watch the rioting and the looting that occurred during the Watts riots of 1965, and many other civil disturbances as well. Whites watched as some Blacks destroyed their own neighborhoods. As a result, many Whites were intimidated by the possibility that Blacks could one day attain positions of power in the United States.⁷ The news coverage could potentially make Whites more responsive to Black equality, or more against it.

Whatever positive depictions Blacks experienced in the late 1960s, the early 1970s saw a return to minimal positive coverage for Blacks. Conservative Richard Nixon was president, and Vice President Spiro Agnew was critical of how the networks covered the civil unrest, saying the networks created the unrest by giving life to the movement. MacDonald found that the networks responded to the situation by omitting coverage of the Black issues and eliminating actors from television.

The most popular show that starred a Black and survived was *The Flip Wilson Show*. For Blacks though, the show probably did more to foster racist views than it did to suppress them. In the show, comedian Flip Wilson played many different characters, most of whom satirized Blacks. His character Geraldine was one of the most popular characters on television, but Geraldine was a large, Black woman, who was pushy and impetuous. Other characters reinforced the stereotypes held by many racist Whites.

By the mid-1970s, the majority of the widely-viewed shows that centered on Blacks were comedies that reinforced racist stereotypes and attitudes. In *All in the Family*, Archie Bunker represented the epitome of the White racist. Although its creator, Norman Lear, created the character to satirize White racists, Archie Bunker became the most popular character on television.⁸ *Sanford and Son* was about a Black junkyard owner in Watts who tried to take advantage of everyone, including his son. *The Jeffersons* focused on a middle/upper-class Black family who owned a dry cleaners. The lead character, George Jefferson, held racist views toward Whites.

Good Times was another popular sitcom that revolved around a Black character who may have had a negative effect on viewer's beliefs. J. J. was the unemployed, eldest son of a family trying to succeed in the projects in the south side of Chicago. The character was an unintelligent, lazy man who loved women. Jimmie Walker, the comedian who played J. J. was a tall, skinny man with big eyes and a large mouth.

The brightest spot for Black programming during the 1970s also marked one of the brightest spots for all of television. In January, 1977, Alex Haley's *Roots* became the most-watched mini-series in the history of the medium. The series transfixed 150-million, mostly White, viewers to their television sets for 12 hours of prime-time to witness 250 years of a Black family as they evolved from being African slaves to an Black American family. It was an opportunity to see history, a chance for Whites to learn where Africans came from, and reassurance for Whites that Africans had come a long way since the 1700s.

The 1980s offered the most popular sitcom ever that centered around a Black cast. The *Cosby Show*, starring Bill Cosby, rose to the top of the Nielsen ratings and remained there four years in a row (1986-1989), the first for a show starring and centered around Blacks. The show about a gynecologist (Cosby), his attorney wife, and their five children represented the conservative, wealthy image that was made popular by the Ronald Reagan presidential administration.

According to Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, *The Cosby Show* did not do much for the situation of Blacks.⁹ In their book, *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream*, Jhally and Lewis present arguments from both sides, but the negatives outweigh the positives. The show depicted a Black family that had not only succeeded in achieving the American dream but had even reached the upper-echelon of society. Although this cast a Black family in an entirely different light than previous television shows, it still did not represent the lives of the majority of Blacks in the United States. Jhally and Lewis argued that because *The Cosby Show* stayed away from themes that focused on inner-city life and the struggles of Blacks, it actually had a negative effect on the fight for equality. Another problem was the star himself. Bill Cosby had been a major celebrity in America for almost 20 years since he co-starred in *I Spy*. Being Bill Cosby, playing a successful physician, having an attorney for a wife, living in a brownstone, and having five articulate children who attended private schools, made the Heathcliff Huxtable family resemble more traditionally White characteristics than Black. The show did provide a sound argument that maybe the issue of racism wasn't so much the color of one's skin, but how successful the person was socio-economically. In other words, the more economically secure one is, the less skin color may matter to others.

The first half of the 1990s has seen an increase of "reality-based," or "actuality," shows. *COPS*, *America's Most Wanted*, and *Real Stories of the California Highway Patrol*, just a few examples, focus on real crimes, either re-enacting the crime or showing it

“live.” Most of these shows, especially *COPS*, predominantly show crimes in the inner-city where most of the suspects and victims are Black or another minority. Although these shows do briefly state that all suspects are innocent until proven guilty, their pictures can be very influential in forming, or reinforcing, people’s prejudices. For the viewer, the message that comes across is that violent crime is largely an inner-city problem. Another problem is that suspects are rarely identified, but law enforcement officials are often introduced by name. One of the tenets of prejudice is homogenization. Without giving each suspect an identity allows for viewers to homogenize a race into a category such as “violent.” It’s also important to note that most of the time, it is a White officer arresting a minority.

Television shows starring Blacks, or focusing on themes about Blacks, have never been a major part of programming on the three oldest, major networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC. That makes the “reality-based” shows much more significant because viewers do not have many choices that show Blacks in a positive light to counteract the negativity of *COPS* and the other shows.

FOX, the fourth, and newest network, however, seems to be attempting to break the mold of the other networks. The programming goal for FOX is to attract younger viewers, especially those who are not White, almost the opposite of the “Big Three.” From comedies (*Martin*) to dramas (*New York Undercover*), FOX currently broadcasts more shows, both in number and in percentage, that star Blacks than any other network, and although FOX is fighting to get out of last place in the ratings war, the ratings are getting better and network is closing the gap.

Much of what has been said to this point does not support the traditional format of local television news. In the age of cable, and the fight for viewers and advertising dollars, local television news has had to compete with the “reality-based” shows, FOX, CNN, and prime-time fictional programming. Local television news has evolved from the

aesthetically-boring, but informative format of the 1960s to the hyper, computer-animated, style over substance look of the 1990s.

What is more important for this study, however, is another evolution: the one from long, in-depth stories to the quick and easy-to-cover stories, such as crime. In the history of fictional television, Blacks have been depicted primarily in stereotypical roles: butlers and maids, drivers and unintellectual people, mostly poor. In the history of television news and documentaries, in-depth stories of Black issues like poverty and their fight for civil rights have dominated the airwaves. This study will analyze the way in which both Whites and Blacks were depicted in crime stories in the Portland, Oregon, television market in 1994.

Notes

¹ United States. Congress. House. Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee on Crime (1984) Crime and Violence in the Media: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee of the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Ninety-eighth Congress, first session...April 13, 1983 . Washington DC: U.S. G.P.O.

² United States. Congress. House. Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. Subcommittee on Communications (1978). Sex and Violence on TV: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, Ninety-fifth Congress, first session...March 2, 1977 . Washington DC: U.S. G.P.O.

³ J. Fred MacDonald, Blacks and White TV (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1992)

⁴ MacDonald, 3.

⁵ The only central character was a Black maid named Beulah played by Ethel Waters, Hattie McDaniel, and then Louise Beavers, from 1950-1953. MacDonald, 23.

⁶ In September 1962, Mal Goode was the first Black hired (by ABC). CBS hired Ben Holman soon after. NBC was last; they hired Bob Teague as a news writer for TV and radio. From Blacks and White TV.

⁷ Charles E. Fager explores Whites' reactions to the idea of Blacks gaining power in America. In the book, Fager describes that even those who are White and do not consider themselves racist, are still hesitant to relinquishing positions of power to Blacks. As a result, whether a White person is overtly racist may not necessarily have an effect on whether that person wants a Black to succeed. For further reading, see, Fager, Charles E. White Reflections on Black Power. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967).

⁸ MacDonald, 183.

⁹ Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although transmitting pictures is television's most powerful aspect, it can potentially be its most dangerous. Merely being able to view the world through a glass screen does not allow the viewer to make any type of physical, and only limited emotional, contact with what's being broadcast. It is reasonable to say that people who have never been associated with people of another race for an extended period can draw certain conclusions and stereotypes from watching how people of other racial ethnicities are depicted on television.

In other words, in the world of television news, if news organizations mostly show Blacks only when they are involved in a crime, Whites who are not closely associated with Blacks could stereotype most Blacks as criminals.

One way to explain the above example is to refer to the contact hypothesis, which is based upon the premise that contact with another person is the most reliable way to form a belief about and a relationship with that person, and to look at that person as an individual and not just as part of a group.

The scholar James M. Jones referred to the contact hypothesis as a way to triumph over racism. He wrote, "One of the assumptions of the contact hypothesis is that ignorance and negative inaccurate stereotyping preempt the ability to perceive people as individuals instead of as members of a group that is different."¹ Jones asserts that when physical contact is minimal or non-existent, it is easy to create beliefs based on what is televised.

That is why television news is so important in depictions of race: it represent reality and allows viewers to understand individual differences.

The way “visuals contribute to learning from television news” was a subject Doris Graber analyzed in 1990.² She found that visuals can lead to stereotyping, the main component of prejudice, of many people solely because of the way a few people are depicted. Graber wrote, “People draw a multitude of inferences from human physical appearance and movements.”³

One of the foremost scholars in the United States on how Blacks are depicted in television news is Robert Entman, an associate professor of Communication Studies and Political Science at Northwestern University. From his results of both national and local (Chicago) samples, he concluded that television news does reinforce what social scientists term “modern racism.”⁴ Modern racism consists of three parts: (1) an “anti-black effect – a general emotional hostility toward blacks;” (2) “resistance to the political demands of blacks;” and. (3) “a belief that racism is dead and that racial discrimination no longer inhibits black achievement.”⁵

The first component of modern racism, an “anti-black effect” is what this study was concerned with most. Entman argued that the way in which Blacks are depicted in crime stories can foster “a general emotional hostility toward Blacks.” For example, if Blacks are consistently depicted in stories as criminals while positive stories about Blacks are rare, Whites may begin to stereotype Blacks as dangerous.

The second component of modern racism can be a result of the “anti-black effect.” When Whites feel a general hostility toward Blacks, they can resist the Black agenda in the political arena. In Entman’s studies, he hypothesized that local television’s coverage of Black political activities actually fosters opposition to the Black political agenda. Although this study did not focus on politics, it is argued that the first two components of modern racism can be related.

The third component -- a belief that racism is dead -- is a result of the various social programs like Head Start and Affirmative Action that some Whites may say is proof that Blacks have more opportunities now than ever, and in some situations, an advantage over Whites. In television news, the use of Black anchors and reporters can influence viewer's beliefs that Black achievement is a reality and Black oppression is a myth.

Modern racism differs from traditional racism in that it isn't as blatant; it is more implicit than explicit. For example, John McConahay states that traditional racism is comprised of negative "beliefs about black intelligence, ambition, honesty and other stereotyped characteristics, as well as support for segregation and support for acts of open discrimination."⁶ Modern racists, on the other hand, would not openly support the traditional beliefs, but would agree with statements like, "Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to blacks than they deserve."⁷

Entman's first major analysis was titled "Modern Racism and the Images of Blacks in Local Television News." He coded a single week of local news on three network affiliates (ABC, NBC, and CBS) in Chicago. He found that the largest category of stories broadcast reported violent crimes committed by Blacks. For all crime stories, regardless of the suspect's race, Entman said Black suspects were treated much differently in terms of quality of coverage than White suspects. Black suspects were shown more in handcuffs, or in mug shots; none of the White suspects were shown in physical custody or in mug shots.⁸ Entman said that the way in which Blacks were depicted could emanate a sense of danger and foster a White hostility toward Blacks.

In Entman's findings, crime stories where Whites were the victims seemed to have been given higher priority by the television stations, and the stories were told from a White perspective. In one major crime story, the White victims spoke from their homes while the video showed their wounds many times. The Black suspects were never quoted directly, and their family members were interviewed in a police station.⁹

Entman's more in-depth study was titled, "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change." Entman analyzed approximately 55 days of local television news broadcast by three network affiliates and one independent station (ABC, NBC, CBS, and WGN).¹⁰ Selected visual and aural depictions revealed some statistically significant differences in the way White crime suspects and Black crime suspects were shown on the air in both violent crime and all crime stories. In all crime stories, White crime suspects were shown in motion 66.3% of the time compared to 52.3% for Blacks (chi square of 4.3). White suspects were shown well-dressed 69.4% of the time compared to 45.6% for Blacks (chi square of 9.2). In 29% of the stories in which a White was a suspect, the suspect had a least one pro-defense sound bite. In only 11% of the stories in which a Black was a suspect did the suspect have one or more pro-defense sound bites (chi square of 11.7).

In violent crime stories only, White crime suspects were shown in motion 67.7% of the time compared to 52.2% for Blacks (chi square of 4.3). White suspects were shown well-dressed 59.6% of the time compared to 37.5% for Blacks (chi square of 5.8). In 34% of the stories in which a White was a suspect, the suspect had at least one pro-defense sound bite. In only 11% of the violent crime stories in which a Black was a suspect did the suspect have one or more pro-defense sound bites (chi-square of 13.8).

Entman suggested further research was necessary on this topic in other parts of the country. For this study, the focus is on the Portland, Oregon, Designated Market Area (DMA), as listed by the Nielsen Company (a breakdown of the counties is included in Appendix A).¹¹ Although the Black population is less than one percent in Portland's DMA, it is 7% in the City of Portland, where most of its viewers live, and it is the 24th largest television market in America. In following Entman's explanation of modern racism, it is the differences in the depictions of Whites and Blacks in crime stories that lead to an "anti-black effect," the first part of modern racism.

One of the first attempts to touch upon this topic originated in England in 1974. Racism and the Mass Media: A Study of the Role of the Mass Media in the Formation of White Beliefs and Attitudes in Britain, by Paul Hartmann and Charles Husband, includes a section on how American news media address race. They argue that, in a story about a crime for example, the news media simply state the facts of what occurred and do not explain the background and what could have contributed to causing the occurrence (social, familial, economic factors).¹² Not only is their argument important for this study because it was one of the first of its kind, but it also offers one of the reasons how the American news media can reinforce modern racism by what is, what is not, and how crime stories are covered.

Hartmann and Husband argued one of the major problems with the news media in America was that media organizations were owned and operated by Whites while the number of ethnic minorities (the authors mention Blacks) in positions of power was woefully small.¹³ As a result, Hartmann and Husband quote Charles U. Daley: "The world that television...offer(s) to (its) Black audience is almost totally White, in both appearance and attitude."¹⁴

Daley's assertion lends support to the social-psychological theories of "ingroup favoritism" and "outgroup homogeneity."¹⁵ The "ingroup favoritism" hypothesis states that "people tend to be more favorable toward members of groups to which they belong (the 'ingroup') than toward members of other groups (the 'outgroup')." The "outgroup homogeneity" hypothesis states that "people tend to perceive outgroup members as being more homogeneous in their traits and behavior than ingroup members."¹⁶

Because Whites are the ingroup in television news, there may be a non-intentional, but institutionalized bias against Blacks in the way they are depicted in the news. Although television news is founded on objectivity, the information disseminated still is given from a White perspective. Because of this, research on the effects of television news on modern

racism is so important.

Notes

¹ James M. Jones, "Racism in Black and White: A Bicultural Model of Reaction and Evolution," in Phyllis A. Katz and Dalmas A. Taylor, eds., Eliminating Racism: Profiles in Controversy (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 127.

² Doris A. Graber, "Seeing is Remembering: How Visual Contribute to Learning from Television News." Journal of Communication, 40(3), 1990, 134-155.

³ Graber, 138.

⁴ Robert M. Entman, "Modern Racism and the Images of Blacks in Local Television News," Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 7, 1990, 332-345.

⁵ Entman, 333.

⁶ John McConahay, "Modern Racism, Ambivalence, and the Modern Racism Scale," in John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner, eds., Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism: Theory and Research (Academic Press: New York, 1986), 93.

⁷ David Sears, "Symbolic Racism," in Phyllis Katz and Dalmas Taylor, eds., Eliminating Racism (Plenum Press: New York, 1988), 57.

⁸ Entman, 337.

⁹ Entman, 341.

¹⁰ Robert M. Entman, "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change," Journalism Quarterly, v69, n2, Summer 1992, 341-361.

¹¹ KOIN-TV Coverage Map. Source: Nielsen, February, 1994.

¹² Paul Hartmann and Charles Husband, Racism and the Mass Media: A Study of the Role of the Mass Media in the Formation of White Beliefs and attitudes in Britain (Rowman & Littlefield: Totowa, New Jersey, 1974), 149-163.

¹³ For more contemporary information on this topic refer to: Alan G. Stavitsky, "The Rise and Fall of the Distress Sale," Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 36, n3, 1990.

¹⁴ Hartmann and Husband, 153.

¹⁵ Patricia W. Linville and Gregory W. Fischer, "Stereotyping and Perceived Distributions of Social Characteristics: An Application to Ingroup-Outgroup Perception." In John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner (Eds.), Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism, 1986, 165-206.

¹⁶ Linville and Fischer, 167.

CHAPTER III

HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

The first hypothesis for this study stems directly from the first component of modern racism, the anti-Black effect -- a general emotional hostility toward Blacks.

H1: There are consistent differences in the depictions of Blacks and Whites in television news that may stimulate the hostility component of modern racism. For example, of all Black suspects and White suspects in crimes reported by the television news media, a higher percentage of Blacks may be a suspect in a violent crime.¹ By consistently viewing Blacks in violent crime stories, and less in feature stories, Whites may develop a hostility toward Blacks. As stated earlier, Entman found that, in Chicago, Black suspects were shown in handcuffs in crime (especially violent) stories more than White suspects. On the other hand, White suspects were shown more in moving video while Black suspects were shown more in still photographs. Similar results were expected in the Portland DMA.

The second hypothesis is not directly concerned with modern racism but was included to see if there was a difference between coverage of Blacks during February, Black History Month, and January.

H2: During the month of February (Black History Month), the total amount of stories focusing on Blacks will include a higher percentage of human interest stories than in the month of January. Coverage of crime stories is not determined by the month of the year, but a particular month may create more feature stories focusing on a particular

subject. Although Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday is celebrated in January, and there should be more positive stories focusing on Blacks surrounding the holiday, February should have more positive stories because it's designated as Black History Month. There are many events scheduled during February celebrating Black culture. This hypothesis was tested through a comparison of the two randomly constructed weeks. Because February is Black History Month, it was reasonable to assume that H2 would be supported.

The method used in this study was a content analysis. The author focused on the three network affiliates: KOIN (CBS), KGW (NBC), and KATU (ABC). KPTV, the independent station, was not included because it has only a 10:00 p.m. newscast. For this study, it was the evening newscasts (5:00 p.m. on weekdays for all three stations; the evening newscasts' times vary on the weekends) that were important because they played to larger audiences. One of the problems encountered was that on weekends KGW broadcast for one hour while KATU and KOIN broadcast for a half-hour (KATU from 5:00-5:30 p.m.; KOIN from 6:00-6:30 p.m.). Since this study was not a comparison of the three stations, but a comparison of the coverage of Blacks and Whites, all the crime stories on KGW were included in the final results.

Two randomly constructed weeks were chosen by the author, one in January (typical month) and one in February (Black History Month). It should be noted that further research should include a Summer month when the crime rate in Portland tends to be higher.² To randomly construct two weeks, the author placed seven pieces of paper marked with the days of the week in one envelope, and six pieces of paper marked with the numbers 1-6 for the weeks in January (1-5 for February) in another envelope. Then a piece of paper was drawn from each envelope to determine a day and a week when the newscasts would be recorded. Once chosen, the weekday was discarded to avoid repetition. The week was placed back into the envelope. Once the week for January was

chosen, the process was repeated until the week for February was chosen. The dates chosen can be found in Appendix B.

Once the recordings were finished, the analysis began. Each newscast was coded for both crime stories and feature stories. An example of the code sheet is in Appendix C, but a clarification of some of the coding categories is warranted in this section.

Under the category "Story Type," there are two sets of four choices: "Hard News; Crime Feature involving Blacks; Crime Feature not involving Blacks; or, Feature involving Blacks;" and "Package; Voice-over/Sound bite; Voice-over; or, Reader." In this study, hard news is operationally defined as any crime story that is reporting the facts of a crime and focusing on the crime itself, or the investigation, arrest, arraignment, trial, or sentencing of the suspect convicted of that crime. A crime feature is a story in which a person, either a victim, suspect, witness, judge, police officer, or attorney is profiled in a story about a crime that has occurred or profiled in a story about the events that followed (investigation, arrest, arraignment, trial, sentencing, or aftermath of crime). A crime feature acts as a sidebar (a story that supports a main story but focuses on one part of the larger issue) to the main crime story. A feature involving Blacks is a story that is concerned not with crime, but with other human interests, including, but not limited to: winning awards, advancement in political, social, professional arenas, or interesting individuals. Feature stories that do not involve crime were coded in this study to test H2 for reasons explained above.

Regarding the second set of choices for "Story Type," a package is a pre-produced story introduced and tagged (to tag a story is to have an anchor come back on camera after a package is completed and give more information to end the story) by an anchor but put together by a reporter on a specific topic. A voice-over/sound bite is a story in which an anchor reads the story over video and there is at least one instance when someone on tape, other than the anchor, speaks (speaking into a microphone is a sound bite), or when there

is natural sound (ambient sound) heard for any duration of time. A voice-over is when an anchor reads the story over video, and there are no sound bites. A reader is when a reporter reads the story on camera, and there is no video.

There are nine possibilities under "Story Category." According to Lieutenant C.W. Jensen, of the Portland Police Bureau, there are three types of criminal offenses: Part 1, Part 2, and Drug. Part 1 crimes include murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft, and arson. In this study, all Part 1 crimes will be mentioned as violent crimes. Drug stories include the sale, use, or possession of illegal substances. Entman, in "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change," coded violent crime and drug stories together because drugs are often associated with violent crime.³ Although this is true, it is argued here that drug crimes are not always violent. Therefore, in this study, stories involving violent crime, whether drugs are involved or not, and drug stories without violence were coded separately. Part 2 crimes are non-violent and non-drug stories that include political corruption, fraud, and others.

The next group of coding options included other phases of a crime story: investigation, arrest, arraignment, trial, or sentencing. "Legislation" was added after the pre-test because the state of Washington passed the "Three Strikes and You're Out" proposition. The "aftermath of crime" stories focus on feature crime stories as explained above.

When coding for race, "other ethnic minority" was added to keep track of the total number of minorities that are suspects compared to Whites; however, they were not included in the tables because it is the relationship and history of Whites and Blacks that has been at the forefront of racial discourse. A subject was coded only if the person was shown on screen and the focus is on that person, and/or if the person is chosen for a sound bite. On only five occasions were suspects described aurally (three were White, two were Black). Persons who are in the picture but not a part of the story were not coded.

Furthermore, if within a crime story, the reporter or anchor referred to a past crime, those subjects were coded if they met the requirements listed above. Usually there was more than one person coded for each story.

In describing the subjects, there were six choices: Witness; victim; suspect; police; judge; and, attorney (defense or prosecuting). Within the subject choice were five sub-categories. Referring to the first set, it was important to note if a suspect was in handcuffs. To a viewer, the sign of handcuffs could signify "danger," that the suspect is dangerous and cannot be trusted without them. Coding whether a suspect is well-dressed could be a problem because one needs to define "well-dressed." For this study, well-dressed was a suit and tie, a casual button-down shirt with slacks or non-ripped jeans, a dashiki, or a t-shirt without writing or pictures on it. "Poorly dressed" was any other type of clothing. "Jail uniform" was any type of uniform that was given to the suspect by a jail or law enforcement agency. In Entman's study, he included "jail uniform" in the "poorly dressed" category. In this study, they are separate. If a suspect is in a jail uniform, it characterizes that person as an "inmate". If a viewer is merely watching the news and cannot hear it, the visual of a suspect in a jail uniform creates more of an opportunity to contribute to the viewer thinking the suspect is already convicted. When the suspect is wearing his or her own clothes, whether or not the clothes fit into the "well-dressed" or "poorly dressed" category, the viewer may or may not make premature conclusions.

The next set asks whether the suspect is named. Entman proposes that when a suspect is named on television, that suspect then has a personal identity.⁴ If a suspect is not named then the suspect can be identified only by the color of his or her skin. Entman found that Whites were named in crime stories far more often than Blacks.

Motion is the final concern when describing a suspect. Any suspect who is in motion has some animation and vitality. A suspect not in motion shows no emotion and possibly even indifference to the crime for which the suspect was charged. Unless the

suspect is scoffing at the television camera, it is generally more positive to be shown in motion. Again, this study differs from those of Entman in that Entman coded only if suspects were named in still pictures and if suspects were shown in moving video. This study analyzes if suspects were named in either still or moving pictures, and if suspects were shown moving in moving pictures. Just because there are moving pictures does not necessarily mean the suspect is animated.

The numbers of pro-defense sound bites and sound bites supporting the victim will directly compare the tone (pro-defense/pro-prosecution) of coverage given to both subjects.

The final two coding categories are location of story and source of story. These are very important but have not been included in past studies. Where the event takes place is crucial to distinguish because that will influence the way in which a viewer may respond to a story. If a murder happens in a neighborhood in Portland, for example, it will probably have more of an emotional-psychological effect on a Portland resident ("it's in my own backyard"), than if it had happened in Burns, Oregon. Anything outside the state means even less unless the viewer has any ties to where the crime occurred or whether it resonates with their personal situation, as how the Polly Klaas abduction and murder affected parents' views of their children's safety. A crime that occurs outside the country usually has even less of an effect on a Portland resident because there is little or no emotional-psychological attachment. Whether a story is produced with a station's own staff determines how much ability the station has to manipulate the story to make it its own. A story that comes off a satellite feed is generally a national or international one and sometimes a state story. The stations receive both pictures and scripts during feeds and can manipulate the story from that point on. It does not, however, give the station the ability to cover the story any differently.

As in all content analyses, intercoder reliability needed to be significant. To ensure significance, the author thoroughly trained another coder to assist with the study. The

author coded 100% of the stories, and then the second coder coded 10% of the stories.

Utilizing Holsti's measurement for intercoder reliability, a .90 agreement was achieved, a level considered acceptable by Holsti's standards. When correcting for chance, Scott's pi index equaled .80 agreement, a level considered acceptable by Scott's standards.

Notes

¹ According to Lieutenant C.W. Jensen of the Portland Police Bureau, the violent crimes mentioned in this study would be classified as "Part 1" crimes: murder, robbery, arson, rape, grand theft auto, burglary, aggravated assault, larceny. The non-violent crimes noted in this study would be classified as "Part 2" crimes: political corruption and fraud.

² According to Lieutenant Jensen there is a significant increase in both the number of violent crimes and the total number of all crimes in the Summer months than in other parts of the year.

³ Entman, "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism, and Cultural Change," 341-361.

⁴ Entman, 349-353.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Before the results are presented, the "Tonya Harding" factor must be discussed. Without going into detail about the well-known events of the Nancy Kerrigan attack, the extensive media coverage given Tonya Harding, Jeff Gillooly, Shawn Ekhardt, Shane Stant, and Derrick Smith had a great effect on what was broadcast during the two weeks of this study. Out of the 353 crime stories shown on the three stations, 149 (42%) were about Harding and/or the attack. In fact, the three stations devoted more than half (52%) of their "crime time" to the Harding/Kerrigan saga.¹ It was no surprise to see that television news directors across the United States voted the Harding/Kerrigan story the fifth biggest story of 1994.²

This created a complication. It ballooned the number of crime stories over the two weeks. There were still 204 stories about crimes other than the Kerrigan attack, an adequate amount for a valid sample for this study, but it is reasonable to assume that without the attack, the stations would not have produced 149 more crime stories. Where the stations' resources would have gone if the attack hadn't occurred, however, is an important question to ponder.

Because of the extraordinary amount of coverage given to the attack upon Kerrigan, the overall representation of Blacks and Whites in crime stories was distorted. There were no Blacks involved in the attack.

To overcome this problem, two sets of results are discussed: Those including stories about the Kerrigan attack; and, those excluding stories about the attack. All the results were achieved by using a chi-square test with a level of significance at $<.05$.

In Table 1, there were many significant findings in the stories including those about the Nancy Kerrigan attack. Black suspects were shown significantly more often than their White counterparts in handcuffs, poorly dressed, in a jail uniform, and motionless. All of these findings strongly support the first component of modern racism, an emotional hostility toward Blacks.

The only result that was not consistent with those found by Entman was that of the suspect being named. Entman found only 49% of Blacks were named whereas Whites were named 65% of the time. In the Portland study, the results were very close: 94% of White suspects were named to 90.5% of Black suspects.

Based on the significant findings (4 out of 5 categories were significant), H1, a consistent difference in the portrayal of Blacks and Whites in crime stories that may stimulate the hostility component of modern racism, is supported when the stories about the Kerrigan attack are included.

TABLE 1. Percentage of Whites and Blacks Accused of Crimes in Selected Visual Depictions for All Crimes (Including Stories about the Nancy Kerrigan Attack)³

Including stories about the Kerrigan attack	Whites N = 201	Blacks N = 21	X ²
Suspect shown in handcuffs	11.4	23.8	5.3*
Suspect not shown in handcuffs	88.6	76.2	
Suspect shown well-dressed	81.1	47.6	24.5***
Suspect shown poorly dressed	18.9	52.4	
Suspect shown in jail uniform	5.5	19.0	8.5**
Suspect not shown in jail uniform	94.5	81.0	
Suspect named in story	94.0	90.5	.9
Suspect not named in story	6.0	9.5	
Suspect shown in motion	77.6	52.4	14.0**
Suspect not shown in motion	22.4	47.6	

df=1.

* p<.05.

** p<.01.

***p<.0001.

The findings in Table 2 are not as significant. In the stories about the Kerrigan attack, all the suspects were generally shown without handcuffs, well-dressed, in motion, and they were named. After excluding the stories about the Kerrigan attack, only two findings were significant.

As a result, when controlling for the stories about the Kerrigan attack, the coverage seems more fair in terms of how White and Black suspects are shown. In this case, H1 is only partially supported with only two significant findings out of six possible.

TABLE 2. Percentage of Whites and Blacks Accused of Crimes in Selected Visual Depictions for All Crimes (Excluding Stories about the Nancy Kerrigan Attack)

Excluding stories on the Kerrigan attack	Whites N = 74	Blacks N = 21	X ²
Suspect shown in handcuffs	18.9	23.8	.7
Suspect not shown in handcuffs	81.1	76.2	
Suspect shown well-dressed	62.2	47.6	4.3*
Suspect shown poorly dressed	37.8	52.4	
Suspect shown in jail uniform	12.2	19.0	1.8
Suspect not shown in jail uniform	87.8	81.0	
Suspect named in story	85.1	90.5	1.4
Suspect not named in story	14.9	9.5	
Suspect shown in motion	68.9	52.4	5.7**
Suspect not shown in motion	31.1	47.6	

df=1.

* p<.05.

** p<.01.

The fairness of crime coverage is suspect, however, when analyzing the types of crimes White and Black suspects are alleged to have committed, as seen in Tables 3 and 4. Including the stories about the Kerrigan attack, the Portland media reported a total of 326 crimes in which Whites were suspects. In 256 of the stories, the crime was violent (78.5%). Blacks, however, were the accused in 13 stories, and every story was about a violent crime (a homicide). When the Kerrigan attack stories are not included, Whites were suspects in 109 violent crimes out of 123 total (88.6%). The result for Blacks remained the same, 13 out of 13.

TABLE 3. Percentage of Whites and Blacks Accused of Violent Crimes Compared to Non-Violent/Non-Drug Crimes (Including Stories about the Nancy Kerrigan Attack)

Including stories on the Kerrigan attack	Whites N = 326	Blacks N = 13	X ²
Stories in which suspect is accused of violent crime	78.5	100.0	24.1*
Stories in which suspect is accused of drug or non-violent/non-drug crime	21.5	0.0	

df=1.

* p<.0001.

TABLE 4. Percentage of Whites and Blacks Accused of Violent Crimes Compared to Non-Violent/Non-Drug Crimes (Excluding Stories about the Nancy Kerrigan Attack)

Excluding stories on the Kerrigan attack	Whites N = 123	Blacks N = 13	X ²
Stories in which suspect is accused of violent crime	88.6	100.0	12.1*
Stories in which suspect is accused of drug or non-violent/non-drug crime	11.4	0.0	

df=1.

* p<.0005.

Although in raw numbers, far more Whites than Blacks were shown as suspects in violent stories, Whites were at least shown as suspects in non-violent crimes as well. By showing Blacks exclusively as suspects in violent crimes, television news organizations contributed to a perception that Blacks commit *only* violent crimes. This, like the reality-based television shows, allows people to form homogeneous opinions about Blacks, which can lead to modern racism.

According to the Portland Police Bureau's "Count of Those Arrested Persons by Race in 1994," the numbers do not reflect that most Blacks who are arrested are not charged with a violent crime. Whites, in 1994, committed 27,811 total crimes where someone was arrested -- 9,472 of those crimes were Part 1, or violent, crimes. Blacks committed 10,570 total crimes where someone was arrested -- 3,893 of those crimes were violent.

One of the major surprises was in the results regarding H2. During the month of February, the total amount of stories focusing on Blacks did not include a higher percentage of positive human interest stories than in the month of January. Not only was H2 not supported, the data were completely opposite (even statistically significant) of what H2 stated. Table 5 reveals there actually were more feature stories in raw number and percentage in the month of January than there were in February, and there were more than twice as many crime stories in February than there were in January. In fact, there wasn't one story that mentioned Black History Month. In all, there were five stories in January that mentioned Martin Luther King's birthday, and one other feature that did not. In February, there were five features, but two were of the funeral mentioned above. Crime stories in which a Black was a suspect more than doubled from four in January to nine in February.

TABLE 5. Percentage of Total Stories in which Blacks were Either the Suspect of a Crime, or the Focus of a Feature

	January	February	X²
	N = 10	N = 14	
Crime stories	40.0	64.3	11.8*
Feature stories	60.0	35.7	

df=1.

* $p < .0006$.

Notes

¹ There was a total of 30,346 seconds allotted to crime stories on KOIN, KATU, and KGW. 15,700 seconds were dedicated to the events surrounding the Nancy Kerrigan attack. "Crime time" represents the number of seconds that is given to a crime story rather than the number of stories themselves.

² According to the Associated Press' year-end poll of the 10 biggest stories of 1994, voted on by news directors across the United States.

³ A note regarding the number of suspects: Each suspect that could be seen on the air was coded for all categories. Even if the suspect was in a still picture, he (there was only one female suspect, Lorena Bobbitt) was coded for the presence of handcuffs, etc. In all instances, the coder could see at least the garments worn on the torso of the suspect. This explains why there is the same number of White suspects (201 including the attack, and 74 excluding the attack), and the same number of Black suspects (21 in each set of results) in the categories. Another note: Five suspects were described aurally: Three were White; and, two were Black.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Not all the results presented in this paper support what was predicted in the hypotheses. In Tables 1 and 2, H1, which said there would be consistent differences in the depictions of Blacks and Whites in crime stories that may stimulate the hostility component of modern racism, was supported when the stories about the Nancy Kerrigan attack were included and partially supported when the stories about the Kerrigan attack were excluded.

The results that excluded the stories about the attack were a more accurate portrayal of how the Portland television media depict Whites and Blacks in crime stories. It was surprising to find fairer representation according to the variables measured in Table 2 -- that was a positive sign for the Portland stations. Tables 3 and 4, however, do offer very disturbing results about the crimes Blacks are shown to have allegedly committed. Blacks do not commit only violent crimes. One must not overlook the possible effects this coverage has on people. In future studies on this topic, a cultivation analysis would complement a content analysis to attempt to measure the effects the coverage has on viewers. Tables 3 (including stories on Kerrigan attack) and 4 (excluding stories on Kerrigan attack) show strong support for H1. Overall, H1 is supported in this study.

The results of H2, which said during the month of February (Black History Month), the total amount of stories focusing on Blacks will include a higher percentage of positive human interest stories than in the month of January, failed to support the hypothesis. There were many activities supporting Black History Month offered

throughout Portland in February, yet not one was shown during the week studied. Of course, this is not to say there weren't any stories about Black History Month in all of February, but it is surprising that in a randomly constructed week, not one was seen.

In all, there were eleven feature stories about Blacks, and thirteen crime stories (all violent). This ratio is disturbing. Fewer than half of all stories about Blacks were positive. What messages could local television be sending its audience?

The major limitation of this study stems from Tonya Harding's involvement in the Nancy Kerrigan attack. This study should be repeated in the Portland market to see if the results would be different when the stations have more resources to cover other news. This study should be repeated in months other than January or February. Of the six feature stories about Blacks, five were about the Martin Luther King holiday. Would there still be six feature stories in other months? As noted in Chapter 4, a Summer month could be studied because of the rise in the crime rate.

The most significant difference between this research and Entman's Chicago studies, and the probable reason why the results are not similar, is the demographics of the population in the two cities. The Portland, Oregon, DMA is 90% White while the Black population in Portland is less than 7%, significantly less than Chicago's 40%. As a result, there is not a lot of news reported regarding Blacks in Portland. What is important is not *how often* Blacks are shown, but *how* they are portrayed. A goal every television station included in this study should have is to change the ratio of positive to negative stories. There are many more Blacks who do not commit crimes than those who do. In the two weeks of this study, coverage of the Black middle-class was non-existent. In this case, the Portland television stations are not adequately reflecting the nature of the Black community.

Another goal for television stations should be to produce more stories about Blacks where race is not a factor at all. From the author's experience many stories about Blacks are about crime, or positive stories that include how a Black overcame oppression or other

type of racial hardship (in this study, there weren't any of these). A story about a high school prom, for example, might include the story of a Black teenager who said no to gangs, didn't live with his father, and yet will go onto college. Although this is a positive story, it still revolves around the color of the teenager's skin. A "middle-of-the-road" story would show that same teenager raising money from bake sales to help his class go on their senior trip without alluding to the color of his skin. There was not a single story aired during the two randomly constructed weeks that could be categorized as a "middle-of-the-road" story. Comparing the number of news reports where race is an issue to news reports where it isn't can be a separate hypothesis for future analysis.

It should be made clear this paper does not charge that news organizations are intentionally fostering racism. Instead, television news may be reinforcing modern racism by not illuminating the issues behind the crime. It is too simple to report on the crimes themselves and then not on what social or economic situations may have contributed to why the crimes occurred. It is the news organization's responsibility, however, to present explanations, for example, why the level of drug dealing is so high in the inner-cities; many people who live in the inner-cities believe they will never attain the "American Dream" and selling drugs is a way they can be successful financially. Living in an inner-city does not cause a crime, but reporting how life is like living in an inner-city can show a viewer what could have contributed to the crime.

In *Split Image: Blacks In The Mass Media.*, Lee Thornton analyzes the media response to the civil disorders of the late 1960s in the United States. He cites the Kerner Commission (a commission appointed by former President Lyndon Johnson to study many of the riot-torn inner-cities) as concluding that "the chaos -- the violence, looting, and arson -- grew out of grievances about police practices, unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate housing...The media were criticized for failing to analyze and report adequately the racial problems in the United States."¹ For a local news station to be able to dive into

reports like these would require more investigative stories. Unfortunately, investigative reports are becoming more scarce.²

Competition with prime-time television (with the violent scenes that are so dominant in the 1990s) and time constraints have helped force local television into reporting the bare minimum for many stories. Many stations have chosen to follow the trend, and those stations that attempt to retain old line journalistic values are not succeeding financially. News organizations simply do not have the resources to adequately investigate stories in-depth.

For the benefit of society, and because local news is broadcast on the public's airwaves, television news organizations ought to place public information needs above profit considerations. The goal of local television news should be to disseminate civic information that will enable viewers to make decisions that impact their lives and communities. In addition, more Blacks, and other minorities, need to be promoted to positions of authority in newsrooms. Most importantly, television news must make a better attempt at representing reality, becoming the "mirror of society" the public deserves. Otherwise, news organizations will continue to do their part in reinforcing what the Kerner Commission reported in 1968.

The bulk of this study was completed before March 1994, including all of the data collection. It was at that time the author accepted a position as Weekend Assignments Editor for one of the Portland stations included in this analysis. After working for the past year-and-a-half at KOIN-TV, it became clear that there was a lot of valuable experience that needed to be shared in this study -- a first-hand look at how, and why, crime is covered.

Covering crime is not easy. An assignments editor needs to take on the role of gatekeeper; there are many crimes that occur each day, but not many stories. There are three primary ways an editor can find out about a crime: hearing it on a scanner; receiving a news release from a law enforcement agency; and, on beat calls to various agencies. After

discovering a crime has been committed, the next question is what kind of crime it is? Most of the crime stories that are covered are either those where the most visual pictures can be taken (arson fires, murders), or where there is an unusual circumstance (a young girl shoots her brother after their father leaves his loaded gun out). Usually, a crime involving a gun is given the highest priority, but if the victim is not at least severely injured, or if it is not a child or an elderly person who is shot, the story falls in importance, if it is covered at all.

The next question is, where did the crime occur? Was it a drive-by in the "bad" part of town, or was it in an affluent suburb? There have been times when a drive-by has occurred in a specific part of town and the story wasn't covered because, as one news producer said, "Is anyone dead? Otherwise, it's just another shooting in North East (Portland)." Most shootings, however, are covered when they happen in an affluent suburb.

Finally, and this is often the most troubling part, the assignments editor must decide if there is anyone to cover the story. Once in a while, it doesn't matter how "big" the story is because it may not be in the viewing area, or the station may simply not have an available photographer because of either understaffing or it's too close to newstime. Other times, especially on weekends, a crime story is covered because it is the only "hard news" of the day, and there is nothing else on the assignments sheet that can be the lead story.

Most of the time when a crime story is heard on a scanner and then is covered, it is a Part 1 crime: Murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft, arson. The non-violent crimes are typically those an assignments desk hears about through a news release or a beat call. After what, where, and who will cover the story are answered, these "spot news" stories are covered. Because of the quick-paced environment of a newsroom and the inherent deadlines that come with it, the "why" of a crime story usually is not addressed until the next day during a follow-up, if there is one.

Race is a part of every crime, but it is not always the main issue. Obviously, in any crime both the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s) are of a race, whether it be White, Black, or other, but not every crime is a hate crime or has racial overtones. Still, race may help when the suspect's physical description is needed to heighten the public's awareness, and there is a possibility that the public may assist in apprehending the suspect(s).

When race can become more of an issue is in those in-depth stories mentioned earlier, when there is time to explore more than just the facts of the crime. Not all crimes require an in-depth analysis, but when there is a pattern (ie. A series of drive-by shootings in a certain area), an investigation is necessary.

For news organizations, crime is not only easy to cover, but it falls into the category of "hard news," the term upon which all television newscasts are built. Crime is easy to cover because the crime scene usually is easily accessible and will remain marked by police long enough for a news photographer to arrive. In addition to the "real estate" shots (the location of the crime), there are often crying relatives and other emotional video opportunities readily available. Often there is a police spokesperson available to give an official sound bite outlining the pertinent information needed to write the story. If the victim is in a hospital, a quick call will reveal the victim's medical condition. Crimes are usually easy to cover, easy to write, and easy to put on the air because it takes minimal time by the station's staff compared to other types of stories.

Hard news refers to any story that is current, occurring the day of the newscast, that can air in the newscast's first segment. It is not a feature story, but a story that revolves around the facts of an issue. For example, the facts of a crime that occurred the night of a newscast is hard news, but a follow-up feature story on victim of a crime that occurred the preceding week would not be considered hard news.

Recent research, however, shows that viewers would rather see in-depth investigations than the "spot-news" that so dominates the airwaves.³ Television journalists

have always prided themselves on being able to be at the scene before other media, and being able to transmit pictures. The viewers seem to be stating that what they want is more of what newspapers can do best. As a result, these findings suggest local television news stations should produce more in-depth stories, a positive trend of going back to the basics.

This study offers advice throughout that would make television news coverage more fair and balanced. To summarize, local television news should:

1. Produce more stories about the Black middle-class;
2. Produce more "middle-of-the-road" stories about Blacks where the focus is not on a criminal offense or how the subject overcame oppression or other type of racial hardship;
3. Produce more stories where race is not an issue;
4. Cover crime stories that affect a wide segment of the population;
5. When covering a crime, give possible explanations for why a crime occurred;
6. Choose visuals and sound bites more carefully and consciously;
7. Amend the definition of hard news so that crime is not the most sought after form of hard news;
8. Slow down the tempo of stories, providing more information and longer sound bites.

Notes

¹ Lee Thornton, "Broadcast News." In Jannette L. Dates and William Barlow (Eds.), Split Image: Blacks In The Mass Media, 1993, 422.

² Usually local television stations wait to broadcast their investigative reports during the sweeps months: February, June, September, and November. Otherwise, the focus is on "Today's News" (the new promotion slogan from KOIN-TV Newscenter 6 in Portland succinctly describes the current goal of local news).

³ Based on confidential research conducted for some of the local Portland television stations. No cite available.

APPENDIX A

NIELSEN'S DESIGNATED MARKET AREA (DMA) FOR PORTLAND, OREGON

Total DMA TV Households: 890,120 (FEBRUARY 1994)
 Total in Metro area: 727,580

<u>DMA Counties</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>DMA Counties</u>	
Baker	OR	*Clark	WA
*Clackamas	OR	Cowlitz	WA
Clatsop	OR	Klickitat	WA
*Columbia	OR	Skamania	WA
Crook	OR	Wahkiakum	WA
Gilliam	OR		
Harney	OR		
Hood River	OR		
Jefferson	OR		
Lincoln	OR		
Linn	OR		
*Marion	OR		
*Multnomah	OR		
*Polk	OR		
Sherman	OR		
Tillamook	OR		
Union	OR		
Wasco	OR		
*Washington	OR		
Wheeler	OR		
*Yamhill	OR		

* designates Metro area

APPENDIX B**RANDOMLY CHOSEN DATES FOR CODING**

In chronological order:

January

**Tuesday 11th
Wednesday 12th
Saturday 15th
Sunday 16th
Monday 17th
Friday 21st
Thursday 27th**

February

**Thursday 3rd
Saturday 5th
Sunday 6th
Monday 7th
Wednesday 9th
Friday 18th
Tuesday 22nd**

APPENDIX C

CODE SHEET

Station: _____
 Newscast day/date/time: _____
 Duration of story: _____

Story Type:

Hard News _____
 Crime Feature, not
 involving Blacks _____
 Crime Feature, involving
 Blacks _____
 Feature, involving
 Blacks _____
 Package _____
 Voice-over/Sound bite _____
 Voice-over _____
 Reader _____

Story Category:

Violent _____
 Drug _____
 Non-violent and non-drug _____
 Investigation _____
 Arrest _____
 Arraignment _____
 Trial _____
 Sentencing _____
 Legislation _____
 Aftermath of crime _____

Race of Main Subjects:

1= White
 2= Black
 3= Other Minority

Description of Main Subjects:

Witness	_____		
Victim	_____		
Suspect	_____		
		In handcuffs	_____
		Not in handcuffs	_____
		Physically restrained	_____
		Not physically restrained	_____
		Well-dressed	_____
		Poorly dressed	_____
		Jail uniform	_____
		Named in photo	_____
		Not named in photo	_____
		Shown in motion	_____
		Not shown in motion	_____
Police	_____		
Judge	_____		
Attorney (defense or prosecuting)	_____		

Number of Pro-defense Sound Bites: _____

Number of Sound Bites Supporting Victim: _____

Number of Sound Bites Against Suspect: _____

Location of Story:		Source of Story:	
Local	_____	Station	_____
State	_____	Feed	_____
National	_____		
International	_____		

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