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Minorities and network news: the role of race in source selection and story topic

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Abstract

The study's author conducted a quantitative content analysis of ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news programs. A stratified random sample of 2005 dates yielded a month's worth of broadcasts from each network. A total of 857 stories and 1530 sources were coded for a broad range of characteristics such as story topic, race of the reporter, race of the sources, and types of sources (e.g. private individual, expert, victim). Results show that Whites dominated television news coverage, comprising more than three quarters of the 1530 sources coded. Nearly 90% of network news reporters were also White. Elite sources such as experts, company spokespeople, and government officials were overwhelmingly White, whereas minority sources appeared most often as private individuals, or ordinary citizens. In addition, White sources clearly dominated all story topics, with a majority presence in every case, except for foreign affairs stories in which foreign sources made up the bulk of soundbites. Minority sources were scattered more sparingly across story topics, barely making a showing in

some, such as stories about science/technology, foreign affairs, and electoral politics. Black and Hispanic sources appeared most often in stories about accidents/disasters/weather events, in both pre-Hurricane Katrina and post-Hurricane Katrina samples. Results indicated that minority reporters were more likely to use minority sources in their stories than White reporters were.

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