Representations of Minorities in Utah's Local News
Sarah Janel Jackson

An analysis of Utah’s primary local news sources was conducted to discover if and how people of color are represented. The results were also manipulated to discover if the exclusion of classically stereotypical news categories would significantly alter representation. Findings reveal that Utah’s largest ethnic group is primarily ignored while other ethnic groups often but not always fall into stereotypical representations or no representation at all.

As research shows, many American’s opinions and values are influenced by what they see in the media. Because of this, it is important to closely examine media outputs (Holtzman, 2000). News programming is especially important because it is perceived as factual rather than fictional and because the local news media often serve as the primary news source for local citizens (Campbell, 1995). This study attempts to ascertain if and how people of color are represented in Utah’s local news media.

In a homogeneous state like Utah, many people may lack experience with other races and ethnic groups. Because of this, the local population may be influenced by the ways in which minorities are depicted in local news. Understanding the realities of the diverse country we live in is an important part of approaching life’s events in a fair, equal, non-biased way.

This research is based on the hypothesis that Utah’s local television news lacks adequate minority representation. It is important that possible stereotypical representations be discovered because a deficiency of factual news output regarding
people of color may lead to a lack of awareness of diverse issues within the community. In turn, individual’s perceptions of specific racial and ethnic groups can affect the social and political standings of those groups (Gorham, 1999).

This paper will first addresses why it is important to examine the Utah news media followed by a discussion of the three types of previous related research. Next the research questions and methodology pertaining to the current study are introduced. The results of the study are then presented and discussed.

**Literature Review**

The majority of previous research falls in three categories; representations of people of color in network news, representations of people of color in local news, and the implications and effects of underrepresentation, overrepresentation and stereotypes.

Media critics and scholars have suggested that people of color are often marginalized within the news media (Greenberg, 1994). Examinations of both network and local news programs have been conducted with often similar results. Several studies have found that certain ethnic and racial groups are overrepresented or underrepresented depending on variables such as type of news story and whether the programming is national or local (Dixon, 2003; Entman, 1990). Studies have also concluded that news representations of people of color can impact how audiences perceive these groups in reality (Lester, 2003).

Research on network and local news often reflect the same themes. These themes include the overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as criminals, the negative representation of African American political leaders, the overrepresentation of
African Americans as athletes and entertainers, and the overall scarcity of representations of other ethnic and racial groups (Cropp, 2003; Deepe Keever, 1997; Dixon, 2000; Entman, 1990; Greenberg, 1983; Peffley, 1996). The minimal research that has been conducted on news representations of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Hawaiian Natives, Arabs, and Native Americans and Alaskan Natives reflect a tradition of either stereotypical portrayal or complete disregard (Cropp, 2003; Dines, 1995; Greenberg, 1994; Lind).

More research is needed in all areas but especially concerning representations of Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian and Arab peoples. Although African Americans and Latinos have been the subject of more media representation research than the afore mentioned groups, more research will add to the overall understanding of if and how people of color are presented in the news media.

Research on the implications and effects of news representations of people of color reflect that the all too often themes of stereotypes and disregard in the news can have an important impact on how people perceive the world around them. It has been concluded many times that positive and negative representations can confirm pre-existing prejudices (Coover, Summer 2001). Stereotypes in the media can maintain unjust, harmful, and dominant understandings of race by influencing the way individuals interpret media texts (Gorham, 1999). Research also suggests that the images promoted by the media often are reflected in individual’s social and political beliefs, which in turn impact public policy (Entman, 1989; Peffley, 1996).

There has been significant previous research focusing on representations of people of color in the media, specifically on stereotypes (Gorham, 1999; Holtzman, 2000;
Wilson, 2003). However, there appears to be a lack of individual state specific research addressing the representation of people of color in local news media and if these representations reflect reality. This study is an attempt to address this issue.

According to the 2000 U. S. census, 30.9 percent of Americans are from some other racial or ethnic background than white. Because of this, it is important to examine if past trends in underrepresentation and stereotypical representations are continuing. It is also important to specifically address the representations of people of color in local news mediums because research has shown that a majority of Americans get their information about the country and world from the local news media (Campbell, C. P. 1995).

**Research Questions and Method**

This study specifically addresses the representations of people of color in Utah’s local news media in an attempt to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: Are the number of people of color presented in Utah’s local news representative of the state’s actual racial and ethnic population?

RQ2: Are the number of people of color presented in Utah’s local news representative of the nation’s actual racial and ethnic population?

After answering the first two research questions, this study will examine a third and fourth. These questions, in addition to numbers of representation, examine how people of color are represented within Utah’s local news.

Past scholars have suggested that people of color (especially African Americans and Latinos) are over represented as criminals, entertainers and athletes while other groups (e.g. Asians and American Indians), are completely ignored (Dixon, 2000; Cropp,
2003; Deepe Keever, 1997; Entman, 1990; Greenberg, 1983; Rodriquez, 1998). The subsequent research questions address this concern, discussing how people of color are represented in Utah’s local news media and how the results of the previous questions change when sports, entertainment and crime are dropped from the results.

RQ3: In what kinds of stories do people of color appear in Utah’s local news?

RQ4: If the categories of sports/entertainment and crime are not coded, do the results of RQ1 and RQ2 change?

In order to answer these four research questions, a study was conducted focusing on four weeks of recorded programming from Utah’s local news stations KSL5 (NBC affiliate), KUTV2 (CBS affiliate), KTVX/ABC4 (ABC affiliate) and KSTU/FOX13 (Fox affiliate). A different station was recorded on a different evening each week. The weeks consisted of seven days, Monday through Sunday and each station was recorded successively (e.g. Ch. 2 on Monday, Ch.4 on Tuesday, Ch. 5 on Wednesday, Ch. 13 on Thursday, Ch. 2 on Friday, Ch. 4 on Saturday, and so forth). In total, 17.5 hours of local news was recorded from June 8, 2004 to July 5, 2004.

After recording was complete each newscast was carefully coded for race or ethnicity and type of news story.

Racial and ethnic group classifications used in this study were derived from the U.S. Census. These classifications include: African American, Latino, Asian, Native American and Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander and Hawaiian Native and White not of Hispanic/Latino origin. The classification of Arab did not come directly from the Census, (there is no category for people of middle-eastern descent) but from a report
published by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2003. The classification of “undetermined” was also added for use in cases in which race or ethnicity could not be clearly determined.

The story types included in the study are as follows: Sports and Entertainment, Crime, Government, Community, Special Interest, War in Iraq, Accidents and Natural Disasters, Non-crime related deaths, Racial Issues, and Other for any news story that did not fit in any of the other categories.

In order for a person appearing in the news to be coded they had to meet one of the following criteria; be shown speaking, be the subject of the story or be shown in a related picture.

The race or ethnicity of the reporter was included in each story however the race of the program anchors were not. For example, if a story was simply read by the anchor, the anchors race or ethnicity was not recorded, however if someone besides the anchor reported on the story this person’s race or ethnicity was recorded. The only exception to this was if an anchor performed the duty of a reporter (this was most likely to happen in special interest stories that could be recorded previous to the newscast).

News stories that were repeated in an individual newscast were ignored the second time so long as all the people appearing in the second report matched those in the first report. In order to maintain consistency, teasers for upcoming stories were excluded from coding.

Results

The following tables and explanation describe the results of this study. The results are discussed in terms of the research questions they answer.
RQ1: Are the number of people of color presented in Utah’s local news representative of the state’s actual racial and ethnic make up?

RQ2: Are the number of people of color presented in Utah’s local news representative of the nation’s actual racial and ethnic make up?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>AfAm</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>PI/NH</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>AI/AN</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of</td>
<td>73.25%</td>
<td>10.88%</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>85.30%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff.</td>
<td>-12.05</td>
<td>+10.08</td>
<td>+1.85</td>
<td>-4.40</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>+4.40</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Actual % UT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>AfAm</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>PI/NH</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>AI/AN</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff.</td>
<td>+4.15</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-7.90</td>
<td>+0.11</td>
<td>+4.18</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reflects the answers to RQ1 and RQ2, numbers in bold indicate the percent of underrepresentation or overrepresentation. A positive number reflects overrepresentation while a negative number reflects underrepresentation.

The findings initially reveal that there is a significant underrepresentation of whites and a significant overrepresentation of African Americans in terms of the actual population of Utah. These discrepancies can be explained in several ways. A hypothesis predicts that because sports stories tend to name and picture more people, and because African Americans are strongly represented in sports stories (see table 2), there is an

---

1 The population numbers reflecting Arab ancestry did not come directly from the census because there is no category for people of Arab descent, but from a report published by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2003 based on the results of the “long form” of the 2000 census questionnaire which allowed respondents to identify their ancestry.
overrepresentation of African Americans. The results of RQ4 support this hypothesis. The apparent underrepresentation of whites could be explained in two ways; one is that because Salt Lake City, the capital of Utah and the headquarters of all the local news stations, is more ethnically diverse than the rest of the state the numbers may more accurately reflect the make up of the city (U.S. Census 2000). It was also predicted that when the categories of sports, entertainment and crime were excluded from the findings, the underrepresentation of whites would significantly decrease.

When looking at the comparison to the actual ethnic make up of the U.S., the previous trend is changed and African Americans become underrepresented while whites are overrepresented.

Asians too are overrepresented when compared to the Utah population but underrepresented when compared to the national population. However, the underrepresentation here is so small that it could be asserted in this particular study that the number of Asians portrayed is representative of the country’s actual Asian population.

The most noticeable discrepancy comes with the representation of Latinos. According to the U. S. Census, Latinos are the largest ethnic group in Utah and are now also the largest ethnic group in the U. S. However, compared to the actual population of both Utah and the U. S., Latinos are significantly underrepresented.

Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians are underrepresented compared to Utah’s population but overrepresented in terms of the actual U. S. population. It is important to note that both the under and overrepresentation here are less than 1 percent and that
Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians make up less than 1 percent of the populations considered.

Arabs were significantly overrepresented in both areas of comparison however this is likely due to the current international political situation; a breakdown of the results reflects that the majority of people of Arab decent were represented in stories about the war in Iraq (see table 2).

American Indians and Alaskan Natives are underrepresented compared to both the actual Utah and U. S. populations. Despite the fact that the numbers here appear small it is important to remember that American Indians and Alaskan Natives make up only 1 percent of the U. S. population and 1.3 percent of the Utah population, this means that in both cases underrepresentation is actually 100 percent. Not a single Native American or Alaskan Native was represented in this study.

RQ3: In what kinds of stories do people of color appear in Utah’s local news media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>AfAm</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>PI/NH</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>AI/AN</th>
<th>UD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports and Entertainment</td>
<td>57.90%</td>
<td>27.02%</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td>4.91%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>62.70%</td>
<td>5.95%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>9.19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>87.10%</td>
<td>5.38%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>84.10%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
<td>5.07%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Int.</td>
<td>95.50%</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War in Iraq</td>
<td>43.80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>56.30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidents/Disasters</td>
<td>87.10%</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-crime deaths</td>
<td>91.40%</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Relations</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 reflects the answers to RQ3, numbers in bold reflect the two highest areas of representation. Whites are the most represented in the majority of almost all the story types and are the only ethnic group that appears in every type of news story. The story types in which whites were most highly concentrated are Special Interest stories followed by Non-crime related deaths.

African Americans are most highly concentrated in stories about Race Relations followed by Sports and Entertainment. However, it is important to point out that there was only one story throughout the entire study that fell into the Race Relations category, the police brutality against an African American man in L. A. In this case, only two African Americans were represented, the victim of the crime and Rodney King (the reporter made a connection between the two), and only one white person was represented, the reporter.

Representations of Asians are the most concentrated in the areas of Crime followed by Sports and Entertainment. Both these areas are classically stereotypical however are not usually applied to Asians.

Latinos were most represented in Crime stories followed second by Community with Sports and Entertainment coming in at a very close third. The representation of Latinos in Crime is consistent with the Latino population in Utah however the Community representation is nearly half that of the crime representation and actual population of the state.

Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians were only represented twice in all of the news stories. The representation here is most highly concentrated in the area of accidents
and disasters simply because this was the only category that members of this ethnic group were portrayed in.

People of Arab descent are most represented in stories about the war in Iraq followed by the Other category.

Again, American Indians and Alaskan Natives are not represented in any type of news story.

RQ4: If the categories of sports/entertainment and crime are not coded, do the previous results from RQ1 and RQ2 change?

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>AfAm</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>PI/NH</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>AI/AN</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total each</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>86.04%</td>
<td>3.29%</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
<td>3.08%</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>4.52%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual % UT</td>
<td>85.30%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff.</td>
<td>+0.74</td>
<td>+2.49</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-5.92</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>+4.32</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual % US</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff.</td>
<td>+16.94</td>
<td>-9.01</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>-9.42</td>
<td>+0.31</td>
<td>+4.10</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reflects the answer to RQ4; numbers in bold represent an overrepresentation or underrepresentation. A positive number reflects an overrepresentation while a negative number reflects an underrepresentation.

In discussing the results reflected in this table it is important to compare them to Table 1. RQ4 asks specifically how the results of each groups’ numerical representation
changes with the exclusion of the categories of sports/entertainment and crime. In order
to better access the differences table 3A had been created.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>AfAm</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>PI/NH</th>
<th>Arab</th>
<th>AI/AN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utah</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff table 1</td>
<td>-12.05</td>
<td>+10.08</td>
<td>+1.85</td>
<td>-4.40</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>+4.40</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff table 2</td>
<td>+0.74</td>
<td>+2.49</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-5.92</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>+4.32</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>U. S.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff table 1</td>
<td>+4.15</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-7.90</td>
<td>+0.11</td>
<td>+4.18</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% diff table 2</td>
<td>+16.94</td>
<td>-9.01</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>-9.42</td>
<td>+0.31</td>
<td>+4.10</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reflects a very clear difference in the results of the representations of
whites from table 1 to table 2. Table 1 appeared to suggest that whites were significantly
underrepresented compared to their actual population in Utah. When compared to table 2
we see a large change in the results; whites are now overrepresented, suggesting that
whites appear primarily in stories not concerned with sports, entertainment or crime. The
national results reflect a similar conclusion. Whites were already shown to be
overrepresented compared to the actual national population, but with the removal of
sports, entertainment and crime the amount of overrepresentation jumps significantly.

The change in the representation of African Americans reflects an opposite trend
to that of whites. Although still overrepresented on the local scale and underrepresented
on the national scale, the degree to which these over and underrepresentations occur
change significantly. Both changes reflect a significant drop in the representation of
African Americans when sports, entertainment and crime stories are excluded from the
calculations. These findings support previous research that suggests that African Americans are overrepresented as athletes, entertainers and law breakers on local television news (Entman, 1990; Campbell, 1995; Dixon, March 2002).

The comparisons of the results from table 1 to those of table 2 also reflect a change in the representation of Asians. When compared to the actual Utah population, Asians appeared to be overrepresented; however with the exclusion of sports, entertainment and crime Asians become underrepresented. Table 1 reflected that the representation of Asians compared to the national population was an accurate reflection; however, the results of table 2 show an underrepresentation. These results suggest that compared to both the Utah population and national population, Asians are underrepresented when sports entertainment and crime are excluded from the equation.

The findings of table 1 reflect a significant underrepresentation of Latinos compared to both the Utah and U. S. population. The results of table 2 reflect an even larger underrepresentation of this group in comparison to both populations. These findings are important because they reveal not only that the state’s and country’s largest ethnic group is significantly ignored by Utah’s local news media but also that Latinos become more underrepresented when the categories of sports, entertainment and crime are excluded. These results not only suggest that Latinos are underrepresented in the Utah news media, but also that when they are represented they are portrayed in a classically stereotypical manner.

When comparing the results of table 1 and table 2, the findings reflect that representations of Pacific Islanders and Hawaiian Natives, people of Arab decent and American Indian and Alaskan Natives remain consistent.
In both cases Pacific Islanders and Hawaiian Natives are similarly underrepresented compared to the Utah population and similarly overrepresented compared to the national population.\(^2\)

Arabs remained significantly overrepresented compared to both the local and national population. Although Arabs are overrepresented as an ethnic group, their overrepresentation remains consistent with the exclusion of sports, entertainment and crime. Because the majority of people of Arab decent were represented in stories about the war with Iraq, it can be assumed that the results would change significantly if this category was excluded rather than sports, entertainment and crime. Future research may want to address this question.

The representation of American Indians and Alaskan Natives is the only area of this study that remained exactly the same no matter the research question. No American Indian or Alaskan Native was represented in this study, a finding that supports previous researcher’s assessments that claim that American Indians are habitually invisible in the news media (Cropp, 2003; Deepe Keever, 1997).

**Discussion**

This study was an attempt to examine if and how people of color are represented in Utah’s local news media. Finding reveal that African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately portrayed in news stories about sports, entertainment and crime. These findings support pervious research concentrating on the stereotypical portrayal of African Americans and Latinos as athletes, entertainers and criminals (Tovares, 2000;  

\(^2\) Keep in mind that only two Pacific Islanders were represented in all of the news stories analyzed but that they also only make up 0.70 percent of the Utah population and 0.10 percent of the national population. The percentage of over and underrepresentation here does not exceed 1 percent.
Simultaneously, this research reveals that although Latinos are the largest ethnic group in Utah and the U.S., and although they are overrepresented in stories about sports, entertainment and crime, representation in other types of news stories severely underrepresent the reality of the Latino population.

It was also concluded that Asians are disproportionately represented in stories about sports, entertainment and crime however not to the same extent as African Americans and Latinos. Previous research has suggested that Asians often take two roles in the media, that of the model minority or that of the threatening outsider (Deepe Keever, 1997; Cropp, 2003). In the case of this study it appears that Asians are regularly represented as outsiders. Future research may want to address this problem.

The representation of Pacific Islanders and Hawaiian Natives is difficult to determine. The population of these groups in Utah and the U.S. is less than 1 percent (U.S. Census 2000). The amount of underrepresentation on the local scale and overrepresentation on the national scale is also less than 1 percent. For the purposes of this study it appears that there is neither a significant over nor a significant underrepresentation of this group. Future research should attempt to determine the representation of Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians on a larger scale.

The most consistently overrepresented group found in this study is people of Arab descent. Past research has found that Arabs are often portrayed in stereotypically negative ways in the news media (Lind; Cropp, 2003). Although this group was significantly overrepresented, this study did not reveal a specific stereotype. Both negative portrayals (i.e. Saddam Hussein) and positive portrayals (i.e. the family of
kidnapped marine Corporal Wassef Ali Hassoun) were found. The primary conclusions about the representation of Arabs are that they are overrepresented and that the primary type of news story they appear in are those about the war in Iraq.

Regarding the question of if Utah’s local news media represents people of color; there is one group to which the answer is an incontestable “no”. This study found that Native Americans and Alaskan Natives were never represented. Despite the fact that American Indians and Alaskan Natives make up a small portion of the Utah population, their individual numbers are greater than those of Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians, African Americans and Arabs. These findings reflect complete disregard of the American Indian people by the media (Cropp, 2003; Deepe Keever, 1997).

Conclusion

The results of this study are not unique. Significant research has pointed to two types of minority representation in the media; that of stereotypes or that of invisibility (Campbell, 1995; Cropp, 2003; Deepe Keever, 1997; Dixon, Spring 2000; Lester, 2003; Wilson, 2003). This study illustrates that there is a need in Utah’s local news media for a more accurate portrayal of people of color, both in representing population and in combating stereotypical representations.

There is not an easy solution to this problem although some scholars have suggested a need for more diversification in the news room while others suggest more education for the generally white, male-dominated workforce in the news industry (Tovares, 2000; Rodriquez, 1998; Cropp, 2003; Holtzman, 2000). In considering what can be done to solve the shortcomings found in this study, we must also consider the
implications of continuing to ignore fair and equal representation of all racial and ethnic
groups. Research has shown that news can support or refute pre-existing racial, social and
political beliefs (Coover, 2001; Entman, 1989; Entman, 2000; Gorham, 1999). Utah’s
local news media must bear in mind their part in influencing individuals and remember
that the racial, social and political policies the people of Utah subscribe to do more than
influence the lives of the majority population.

Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world,
looking out of it, if at all, with white men’s eyes and a white perspective. That is no
longer good enough. The painful process of readjustment that is required of the
American news media must begin now. They must make a reality of integration- in both
their product and personnel. They must insist on the highest standards of accuracy…
They must report with compassion and depth.

-Kerner Commission (1968, p. 389)
References


