Content of News Photos: An Analysis by Race and Sex

Roy E. Blackwood

Content of News Photos: An Analysis by Race and Sex

Abstract

In 1974, Susan H. Miller of Stanford analyzed the roles of men and women in news photos of the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

Content of News Photos: An Analysis by Race and Sex

In 1974, Susan H. Miller of Stanford analyzed the roles of men and women in news photos of the Washington *Post* and the Los Angeles *Times*. She found that news photos generally did not reflect the roles women occupy in life.

This present study was to some extent a replication of Miller's, analyzing news photos of the New York *Times*, the Syracuse *Post-Standard*, and the Ithaca *Journal*. These were chosen because, among other reasons, they are the most widely read in the north-central region of New York State yet are of three distinct types: a large city paper with national circulation; one from a medium sized city, with regional circulation; and a small town paper with local circulation.

Week-day issues for a five week period in October-Novemeber 1974, a year after Miller's study, were chosen.

Newspapers sampled yielded 2,039 photographs. Comparisons were made between the number of women and men portrayed, the number of whites and non-whites, and the roles reflected. Role categories identified were politician, professional, sports figure, entertainer, celebrity, activist, criminal, human interest, spouse, and "other." Sections of the paper in which the photos appeared were classified as front page, inside, business, lifestyle, entertainment, and sports.

Among other findings, 13 percent of the photos showed non-whites and 24 percent showed women. Further, 14 and 22 percent, respectively, were on the front page, 7 and 16 percent in the business section, and 16 and 10 percent in the sports section. The greatest number of non-whites (19 percent) appeared in the entertainment section, while the highest percentage of women (71) appeared in the lifestyle section. (See Table 1.)

Among role portrayals, the highest percentage of non-whites was in the activist category (39 percent) and the highest percentages of women were in the spouse (80 percent) and "other" (77 percent) categories. (See Table 2.)

Interpretation

Considering the number of non-whites in the populations and given the fact that many of the photos of non-whites were of individuals from outside the United States, the representation of non-whites in the newspapers studied probably is not an accurate reflection of life. In regard to women, the 24 per-

37

cent found in the newsphotos obviously falls far short of the percentage of women in the population.

In comparing the data on women in news photos with Miller's finding, it was found that the percentage by section was about the same. Representation by role category was higher in all but one category--business. But the study shows a failure by these three papers to reflect the rapid upsurge in the number of women in the nation's work force and thus to reflect women's contemporary roles accurately. Additional sutdies are needed to see whether these patterns are changing.

TABLE 1: Frequency of appearance by section (to nearest %)

	Non-White	Female	(N)
Front Page	14	22	(266)
Inside	12	25	(1335)
Business	7	16	(140)
Lifestyle	7	71	(361)
Entertainment	19	35	(110)
Sports	16	10	(1244)
TOTAL	13%	24%	(3456)

TABLE 2: Frequency of appearance by role category (to nearest %)

	Non-White	Female	(N)
Politican	12	10	(554)
Professional	6	16	(728)
Sports	16	10	(1202)
Entertainer	17	41	(145)
Celebrity	9	45	(11)
Activist	39	47	(51)
Criminal	*	36	(45)
Human Interest	12	51	(482)
Spouse	15	80	(89)
Other	17	77	(149)
TOTAL	13%	24%	(3456)

*less than 1%

Roy E. Blackwood
Univeristy of Illinois