

Ethnic minorities in Australia's television news: a second snapshot

Gail Phillips

Abstract

The nightly news on Australia's television screens presents a view of Australia and Australians that is different from what most of us encounter in our daily lives. This paper reports on the results of two content analyses of television news conducted in 2005 and 2007 which demonstrate that instead of a range of peoples and cultures, we see mainly Anglo faces, projecting an archetypal image of a "white Australia" that is more applicable to the 1950s than it is to today. More disturbingly, when we do encounter people from manifestly different racial, cultural or religious backgrounds, they tend to be featured as victims, or as social deviants, or as in some way "unAustralian". This raises questions about current journalistic practice and suggests that in order for television news to present Australians with a true reflection of their "real" world there need to be changes in the processes of newsgathering and storytelling.

Introduction

This paper reports the findings of the second of two studies examining the content and story treatment in Australia's television news services, focusing specifically on the way in which Australia's television news represents people from different ethnic backgrounds. The first study, in 2005, was a three-city analysis (Perth, Sydney, Shepparton) which itself built on an original pilot analysis of the Perth television news services in 2001. In 2007, the study was repeated, now including a fourth centre, Townsville. The purpose of this study has been to critically analyse the material presented on our television screens every night, and to see whether and how it is changing. Studies of television news in other countries have shown how quality has been declining in terms of diversity of stories, diversity of sources and quality of storytelling – with critics decrying the move towards superficial and sensationalist reporting (see, for example, Altheide, 1997; Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Patterson, 2000; Rosentiel et al., 2007). In the current research project, similar trends have been observed in Australia. Previously published papers relating to the 2001 and 2005 surveys have already dealt in some detail with the characteristics of television news as a genre and the way television news is a product of its business model, formats and conventions. The need to attract audiences through attention-grabbing storytelling, the time pressures of newsgathering

and the constraints of the bulletin format have resulted in services which favour easy-to-gather news, focusing on action rather than analysis; on the black-and-white as opposed to the shades of grey (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007a). As for the representation of ethnic diversity in the news, on the basis of the 2005 study it was possible to conclude, again in line with similar studies in other parts of the world, that people from different ethnic backgrounds were overwhelmingly portrayed as “mad”, “bad”, “sad” or “other”, thereby sending a subtle but unmistakable message to the viewer about who is “them” and who is “us” in the wider Australian community (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007b). In the 2005 study, the representation of non-Anglo communities was inflated by a focus on domestic terrorism, because the news sample covered the period of the domestic counter-terror raids on a suspected Muslim terror cell in Sydney and Melbourne. This provided the opportunity to show how the characteristics of television news storytelling contributed to a sense of moral panic, which at that time attached to the Muslim community in particular. The 2007 study provided the opportunity to observe if and how things had progressed since the last snapshot.

Demographic studies on racism in Australia confirm the white bias of Australia’s image of itself. In their survey of racism in Australia, Dunn et al. describe how “old racism” based on racial differences is being supplanted by “new racisms of cultural intolerance, denial of Anglo-privilege and narrow constructions of nation” (2004, p. 409), with the main focus of negative attitudes shifting from Asian and Jewish communities to Muslim groups. While the younger generation appears to be more tolerant than their parents, the researchers nevertheless conclude that “the Australian national imaginary still remains very Anglo-Celtic” (2004, p. 427). This “national imaginary” may be quite divergent from everyday perceived reality. A 2002 study of Australians’ appreciation of cultural diversity within their society showed that while “cultural mixing and matching is almost universal” (Ang et al., 2002, p. 6), the perception of Australia’s national identity lags behind, with “‘Australianness’... still not generally perceived in a manner than recognises and is fully inclusive of the cultural diversity of the Australian people” (Ang et al., 2002, p. 7). Further, the overwhelming view of the people surveyed, both Anglo and non-Anglo, was that “the Australian media are not seen as reflecting the Australian way of life” and do not “represent their way of life” (Ang et al., 2002, p. 8).

Such barely acknowledged and rarely articulated cultural assumptions can become problematic in the realm of news. Are the pictures displayed on our screens each evening presenting an accurate picture of Australia, or are they contributing to a mythical image of Australia which is out of touch with the times? Posing this question also raises the issue of who is telling these stories and how far their cultural identity impacts on the stories they tell and how they tell them.

The journalists who pull together the stories and bulletins are first and foremost human beings who are members of society. Their own backgrounds determine what they are familiar with and what they are most comfortable with, what they identify as the “known” versus the “unknown” or even “unknowable”. As Schudson notes, because journalists inevitably are more familiar with the sector of society to which they belong, they “like other human beings, more readily recognize and more eagerly pursue problems and issues when they concern people like themselves rather than ‘others’ beyond their social circles” (1995, p. 7). Further, Kennamer states that, when it comes to telling their stories,

they very much reflect the societies and cultures in which they operate. Thus they apply the standards and expectations of that dominant culture to everyday news stories, to provide the “framing” consistent with the standards and expectations of the dominant culture. (1992, p. 8)

In this way, television news stories “contain not only content but also an attitude about that content” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 153). This includes a tendency to “categorize the relevant actors based on some established scheme of social taxonomy” (Pan & Kosicki, 2003, p. 41).

In television news narratives, which depend on high drama for their impact, the selected talent are more often than not represented as “causal agents in a morality play about good and evil or honesty and corruption ... media coverage frequently gives people reasons to get angry at somebody” (Gamson, 1992, p. 34). With non-Anglo groups grossly under-represented in newsrooms (Allen, 2004, pp. 167-169; Creeber, 2004; Itule & Anderson, 2007, pp. 304-305; Jakubowicz et al., 1994, pp. 143-158; Manning, Paul, 2001, pp. 72-73; van Dijk, 2000, p. 37), it is fair to say that it is the Anglo journalists who get to define the boundaries of “normal” society in the news narratives. And “normal” society, as Ghassan Hage bluntly notes, is “white”: “the field of power in Australia, even if it is open for non-Anglos to accumulate Whiteness within it, remains above all an ‘Anglo-looking’ phenomenon” (1998, pp. 190-191). In this society divided into Whites and what Hage terms “Third-World-looking people” (1998, p. 19), it is the latter who are conceived of as “a constant source of governmental problems” (Hage, 1998, p. 233), rather than simply as ordinary people. This combination of the tendency of television news to focus on drama and controversy with the tendency of Anglo journalists to ignore non-Anglo communities unless they become a problem creates obvious implications for community harmony. As Johnson-Cartee notes:

If viewers can’t view depictions of such minority groups as people much like themselves, experiencing both the labors and joys of life, then they tend to marginalize the minority group as “the other”, assigning negative attributes to the group. (2005, p. 132)

There have been many studies, especially in the panicky post-9/11 climate, which have highlighted problems with reporting practices that have exacerbated community tensions (see, for example, Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Greater London Authority, 2007; Manning, Peter, 2004; New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board, 2003; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Norris et al., 2003; Poole & Richardson, 2006; Rane & Abdalla, 2008). The focus of this paper is to illuminate the portrait of Australia that emerges from television news and to answer the following questions:

- What sort of Australia do we see in our television news?
- Are there noticeable differences in the representation of people from different ethnic backgrounds compared with Anglo Australians?
- What storytelling techniques do we observe in news stories featuring non-Anglos?
- What lessons can we draw that might improve journalistic practice into the future?

Methodology

The first study in 2005 looked at the flagship prime-time nightly news bulletins of Australia’s three commercial networks (Seven, Nine and Ten) and the two public broadcasting services (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service). In 2007, a fourth centre, Townsville, was added to the three centres of Sydney, Perth and Shepparton featured in the initial study. Shepparton (180km north of Melbourne in regional Victoria) and Townsville (1300km north-west of Brisbane in regional Queensland) were selected because of their diverse ethnic mix, at the suggestion of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (which funded this research), in order to see whether population composition had any impact on content and treatment of news. According to the 2001 census – the latest data available for 2005 – 10.8 per cent of Shepparton’s population was born overseas, with the main countries of origin being Italy, England, New Zealand, Iraq and Turkey (ABS, 2001). As the inaugural site for the Federal Government’s Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot project, in 2005 it also welcomed 10 African refugee families. By the time of the 2007 study, the proportion of people in Shepparton born overseas had risen to 11.4 per cent, with Albania now added to the mix (ABS, 2006a). As for Townsville, according to the 2006 census, 11.6 per cent of the population was born overseas, with

the main countries of origin being England, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and South Africa (ABS, 2006b).

The aim of this study was to duplicate, as far as possible, the methodology of the 2005 study for ease of comparison across both studies. Thus content was collected over a similar time frame: two weeks (14 sequential days) from April 30 to May 13, 2007. The dates were randomly selected with the aim of capturing a news period unlikely to be impacted upon by unusual events such as state or federal elections. As it happened, the 2005 study coincided with the introduction of counter-terrorism legislation by the Howard Government and the counter-terrorism raids in Sydney and Melbourne. In 2007, the news agenda was more anodyne and in line with what might be considered “normal” in the domestic context.

Because of the addition of an extra centre, the 2007 story sample was much larger:

- 2005 news study: 43 hours, 1990 stories;
- 2007 news study: 66 hours, 3121 stories.

Because of the format and content changes at weekends, the analysis concentrated on the news content in the weekday bulletins in both weeks. The sports bulletins were not dealt with here, although sports stories were included as part of the sample for analysis where they were integrated into the main bulletin.

The news bulletins were coded by a four-person team working under the supervision of the research assistant who had done the coding in the 2005 study and had prepared a coding manual. The coders participated in communal coding sessions under the research assistant’s supervision, which allowed for clarification of issues as the coding progressed. The chief researcher was able to rectify remaining inconsistencies when undertaking the content analysis, as the close scrutiny of each story necessitated double checking of the coding.

Stories were coded against 20 content categories, which were subsequently grouped together into six story types that gave a better sense of the kind of news treatment they received:

- **Courts, Crime and Disasters:** Emergencies/Disasters; Courts/Justice; Crime;
- **Clever Country:** Education/Schools; Technology/Science;
- **Fun & Games:** Arts/Culture; Leisure/Tourism; Personalities/Entertainment; Sports News;
- **Money & Work:** Business/Finance; Work/Industry;
- **Power & Policy:** Politics; Military/Diplomatic; Media/Communications; Transport Issues;
- **Social Matters:** Social Issues; Environment; Health/Medicine; Consumer Affairs; Religion/Faith.

This categorisation produced quantitative data on the type and amount of coverage and the relative proportions of news content within and between news services (the full tables are available in the *Reporting Diversity media analysis report May 2008* available online at <http://www.reportingdiversity.org.au>; Phillips, 2008). The qualitative analysis covered the way stories were actually treated: coders noted the talent used for each story; whether they had speaking roles or not; and the sort of context in which they were presented (formal settings, on the street, and so on). Stories were also rated against a nine-point scale (adapted from Media Monitors’ Tone Ratings system), ranging from Extremely Negative to Highly Positive, in order to get a sense of the impression left on the viewer by the way a story was reported. Coders also noted the ethnicity of talent, in so far as this was an observable feature evidenced by appearance, dress, accent, name or title. By applying this group of analytic tasks to the stories it was then possible to identify:

- What sort of stories ethnic minorities appeared in;
- What types of issues these stories were associated with;

- The ways in which people from non-Anglo backgrounds were portrayed;
- The types of talent used;
- The tone adopted in the presentation;
- The role of pictures and graphics on the overall impact of the story.

This study adopts Dunn et al’s terminology of “ethnic minorities” (EM) to distinguish the diverse range of ethnic groups from the “dominant (Anglo-Celtic) ‘host’ society” that defines mainstream Australia (2004, p. 411).

Channels Seven and Nine each have a half-hour news bulletin at 6pm produced in the state capitals (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth in this case). Townsville Seven precedes the half-hour 6pm metropolitan Brisbane-based service with a half-hour local regional bulletin. In Shepparton and Townsville, Nine’s news occupies a one-hour slot which incorporates a half-hour WIN News regional bulletin, followed respectively by the Melbourne and Brisbane 6pm news. Channel Ten has a one-hour local bulletin from 5pm to 6pm tailored to each state. The ABC has a half-hour local evening bulletin at 7pm broadcast from each state capital. SBS’s evening news, which was a half-hour bulletin in 2005, has now been expanded to a program of one-hour duration running from 6.30pm to 7.30pm, and this service is the only one networked around the nation from Sydney without alteration.

Australia in our television news

The Australia reflected in our television news is overwhelmingly Anglo. Minority groups of all kinds are less visible in the 2007 survey compared with 2005 (Tables 1a and 1b). When averaged out, EM content represents 4.6 per cent of the total news content in 2007, compared with 7.5 per cent in 2005.

Table 1a: Multicultural content – 2005

Network	Percentage of total multicultural news across all services	Multicultural news as percentage of each station’s news
Perth SBS	11.64%	39.60%
Sydney ABC	9.62%	30.87%
Shepparton Ten	9.34%	24.17%
Shepparton ABC	9.22%	31.01%
Shepparton Nine	8.21%	18.81%
Sydney Nine	7.50%	41.38%
Perth ABC	7.22%	25.60%
Sydney Ten	7.07%	27.61%
Perth Ten	6.77%	19.51%
Sydney Seven	6.52%	42.03%
Perth Nine	5.81%	24.72%
Shepparton Seven	5.70%	25.37%
Perth Seven	5.39%	25.83%

Table 1b: Multicultural content – 2007

Network	Percentage of total multicultural news across all services	Multicultural news as percentage of each station's news
SBS	26.69%	45.43%
Sydney Ten	7.07%	16.04%
Sydney ABC	6.70%	18.09%
Perth ABC	6.48%	19.12%
Townsville ABC	6.34%	18.30%
Shepparton ABC	6.29%	18.92%
Townsville Seven	5.49%	12.12%
Townsville Ten	5.23%	12.45%
Shepparton Ten	4.97%	12.79%
Perth Ten	4.48%	11.75%
Shepparton Nine	4.40%	9.19%
Shepparton Seven	3.78%	15.24%
Sydney Seven	2.91%	11.63%
Townsville Nine	2.56%	5.70%
Perth Nine	2.39%	9.69%
Sydney Nine	2.13%	8.40%
Perth Seven	2.10%	9.02%

SBS's proportion of that total has more than doubled (up to 26.69 per cent from 11.64 per cent) and is now more than three times as high as its nearest rival, Sydney Ten with 7.07 per cent. This is because of the large amount of international news in its bulletin. In the earlier study, the more evenly balanced levels across all stations probably resulted from the distorting effect on Australia's domestic news of the focus on the counter-terror raids, which inflated the EM content across all services. Without that focus, the 2007 levels may well reflect a more "normal" news agenda. The ABC stations share consistent figures in the 6 per cent range, which is indicative of the way in which the same material is distributed among them and used in the same way.

Not only do fewer stories focus on ethnic communities in 2007, but also EM faces rarely feature in contexts that could identify them as generic Aussies. They are largely absent from random crowd shots, unless the story calls for it. For example, EM talent is on display in a story about Townsville's local Greek festival (Seven, May 8), but absent from coverage the previous day of the city's local Labour Day rally (Townsville Seven, May 7). Most of the faces in the crowds are Anglo – the cameras focus on faces that represent the archetypal white Australian (crowds at the Royal Show, Perth Nine, April 30; the entirely Anglo talent in a story on the manners of young people, Perth and Townsville Ten, April 30; Anglo students in the MS Readathon, Townsville Nine, May 2). EM talent is also rarely encountered in vox pops as exemplars of the broader Australian community. While there are a few instances where EM talent is featured (for example, a Muslim woman in headscarf interviewed as the victim of a petrol fuel scam, Sydney Nine, Ten, May 9) the majority of vox pops tend to feature exclusively Anglo talent (for example, in the reaction to the State budget, Perth ABC, May 9; and community reaction to the Federal Budget, Townsville Seven, May 9).

Differences in representation

Given the comparative rarity of appearances of EM talent, it is interesting to examine the stories in which they do feature. In 2005, the top category for EM stories was Crime, compared with Anglo stories, where Crime was in fourth place (2005 tables can be accessed in Phillips & Tapsall, 2007a). In 2007, Crime was in fourth place for both, and story numbers were more even.

As Table 2 shows, almost 41 per cent of EM news in 2005 related to Crime, showing the impact of the counter-terror scare. By 2007, levels are lower and closer to the levels seen for Anglo news.

Table 2: Comparison of levels of Crime news content, EM and Anglo

Category	Percentage of Anglo news	Percentage of EM news
2005 Crime	9.05%	40.98%
2007 Crime	8.40%	10.42%

As for story type (Table 3), a similar pattern emerges. The category of Courts, Crime and Disasters was the number one category for both Anglo and EM news in 2005, dropping to second place for both in 2007. Again, the impact of the counter-terror scare pushed up the EM figures in 2005, while by 2007 these are closer to the levels for Anglo news.

Table 3: Comparison of levels of Courts, Crime and Disaster story type, EM and Anglo

Story type	Percentage of Anglo news	Percentage of EM news
2005 Courts, Crime and Disasters	28.89%	72.49%
2007 Courts, Crime and Disasters	25.25%	29.93%

However, when the stories are assessed for tone, it is clear that EM news tends to be more negative. In 2005 when EM stories were rated against the nine-point tone scale, 70.74 per cent were in the aggregated Extremely Negative to Somewhat Negative range – which was perhaps to be expected given the news climate of the time. In the 2007 study, both EM and Anglo stories were rated to enable a comparison, and Table 4 compares the tone across both. Again aggregating the levels in the Extremely Negative to Somewhat Negative range, we see that the negativity of EM news has declined – but at 53.3 per cent is still substantially higher than in Anglo news, of which 29.05 per cent is negative, with the bulk of Anglo news content falling into the Neutral/Balanced to Positive categories.

Table 4: 2007 EM and Anglo stories by tone

Tone	% of EM news	% of Anglo news
9 Highly Positive	0.25%	5.04%
8 Very Positive	5.60%	13.40%
7 Positive	5.60%	17.03%
6 Balanced to Positive	14.82%	33.63%
5 Neutral	20.70%	18.04%
4 Somewhat Negative	30.14%	8.50%
3 Negative	19.30%	1.80%
2 Very Negative	3.08%	0.61%
1 Extremely Negative	0.51%	0.10%

This is interesting in the light of Chiricos & Eschholz’s (2002) study of crime, race and ethnicity in local television news in the US. They distinguish between that which they term the “racial typification of crime” and the “criminal typification of race” (2002, p. 402). In the former, “crime is stereotypically portrayed as a Black phenomenon”, while in the latter, “Blacks are disproportionately portrayed as criminals”. The former relates to the “typical media criminal”, while the latter relates to “the typical media representation of blackness” (Chirico & Eschholz, 2002). The current study, with a similar focus on media representation, produces results similar to the American study: when they appear in the news, EM people are more likely than Anglo people to be associated with crime and negativity.

The 2007 data include three positive stories, and a smattering of non-Anglo “experts”, but otherwise the situation is similar to 2005: in the 4.6 per cent of total news content that features

EM talent, they figure predominantly as either deviants or victims. There are eight stories featuring “deviants”. These include: the “Australian citizens of Sri Lankan descent” in the most terror-linked of the domestic stories, following allegations that two Melbourne men were fundraising for the Tamil Tigers (all services, May 1); a Chinese medical intern who was the focus of local media attention in Queensland over the issue of unqualified foreign-trained doctors in a Cairns hospital (Townsville Seven, Nine, Ten, ABC, May 2 and 3); and the man of Arabic background accused of predatory behaviour after groping a breastfeeding woman in a shopping centre in Melbourne (commercial services only, May 3 and 4). In none of the stories do the EM talent have a speaking role. There are 10 stories portraying EM talent as victims, mostly of crime. In four stories the victims are interviewed, although in two cases their English is rendered via subtitles, which suggests a judgement has been made that they don’t speak enough “like us” to be understandable by the wider community.

Thus, when we compare the representation of people from different ethnic backgrounds to Anglo Australians, we see that in 2007 EM talent features only rarely compared with Anglo talent in television news stories. This makes all the more salient the features that distinguish the few stories where they do appear. We have seen that, while negative EM content has reduced, EM talent still appear predominantly in the roles of deviant or victim rather than as ordinary members of the community. They are less likely to have a speaking role, and where they do have a speaking role the use of subtitles may underscore the sense of “difference” between them and the perceived mainstream. In this way Australia’s television news is no different from news elsewhere in the Western world, where similar features have been noted by other scholars (Cottle, 2000; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2003; Poole & Richardson, 2006; van Dijk, 2000; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995). When it comes to ethnic minorities, as Hage notes, “Journalists ‘talk *about* them – not *to* them” to an audience “invariably imagined as White” (Hage, 2003, pp. 76, 77).

Storytelling techniques in EM news stories

In 2007, as in 2005, the storytelling conventions of television news often exacerbate the negative impressions of the EM talent who feature in the stories. There are often legal reasons that people wanted for criminal activities may not be pictured, or may not give interviews. Equally there are valid privacy reasons for victims of trauma to be out of bounds for journalists. However, the effect of the repeated portrayal of EM talent as voiceless and even faceless underscores a sense of depersonalised menace on the one hand, or patronised inferiority on the other. This is often compounded by other aspects of the story. This can be illustrated by a more detailed analysis of two stories from this period.

The Tamil Tiger fundraising story, May 1

On Nine, the story is covered most fully in Melbourne where the action has taken place, leading the bulletin. The story entitled “Terror scam” shows pictures of the two alleged fundraisers being taken away in a car. We also see pictures of their families and supporters outside the court, and they answer “no comment” when asked to speak to reporters. The reporter refers to the men having taken money from “charitable Australians”, and in a grab from a police news conference the Victorian Deputy Police Commissioner says “Australian citizens have been duped”. A Federal Police spokesperson in the same conference states that there is “no evidence these men were engaged in any activity which would have led to an attack on Australian soil”. While the other Nine services feature abbreviated versions of the story, all retain the quote from the Deputy Police Commissioner. The “dogwhistle” power of the term “Australian” as a signifier for “us” as against “them” was noted in the previous survey (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007b, pp. 27-28). The

coded implication is that the “Australian citizens of Sri Lankan descent” are not real Australians like the rest of us.

The ABC puts first the Federal Police comments that there was no evidence of any domestic threat, while still carrying the grab from the Victorian Deputy Police Commissioner about Australians being duped. The story additionally refers to the complaint by the men’s lawyer that the police held their press conference before one of the men had even been charged. While the ABC appears to present a more toned-down version of the story, it is bracketed with two other terror-related stories, one concerning the setting of a trial date for the suspects from 2005 Sydney counter-terror raids and the other from the UK concerning new information relating to the 2004 foiled terror attack there. As was noted in the 2005 study, the way stories are bracketed together can lead to a bleeding of associations from one story to another (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007b, p. 31).

Ten’s version of the story features an interview with the uncle of one of the men, who is stunned by the events and says he had no knowledge of any links with the organisation. The story also refers to a previous raid on one of the houses in November 2005, with file footage of a book seized at that time with a large artillery gun on the cover and “what appears to be Tamil writing”. While the association with the November 2005 counter-terror raids is implicit here, it is made explicit in Seven’s coverage where it is noted that the men have the same lawyers as the November 2005 counter-terror suspects.

SBS’s coverage is the briefest of all, restricted to a newsreader voiceover over pictures of the men in cars, although it is also part of a bracket including international terror stories.

We see here how the bare facts of the story are coloured by implied or explicit connections with other local or global terrorism threats, and by the focus reporters choose to give to language which sets the two accused men apart from “genuine” Australians. The varied treatment across the stations, and in particular the contrast between the public broadcasters and the commercial stations, shows that, while news cannot be a “paint-by-numbers” exercise, put together to satisfy ideological prescriptions, nevertheless there are choices in the way stories are covered. Under-scoring race and difference was the route the commercial stations chose to heighten the drama of the storytelling. The more modulated approach of the ABC, and the even more downbeat account on SBS, were the product of different editorial choices.

The “Do Not Call” Register story, May 3

In this story concerning the introduction of a “do not call” register to reduce the incidence of nuisance telemarketing calls, Channels Seven and Nine go to Anglo members of the public to articulate the intrusiveness of telemarketers, and illustrate the telemarketers themselves with file vision of employees at an Indian call centre. Thus “we” are pitted against a dark-skinned alien “them” who threaten our very domestic space. However, interesting differences in treatment emerge on the ABC and SBS, which feature Anglo telemarketers from an apparently Australian operation. Ten features Anglo and non-Anglo talent in its vox pops, as well as a local telemarketing operation, although the camera homes in on the single Asian employee among all the other Anglo staff as the reporter refers to “annoying telemarketers”. The WIN news services in both Townsville and Shepparton do their own versions of this story, which contain no foreign telemarketers and which are more neutral in tone. (This is interesting given that in the 2005 study Shepparton’s WIN service was singled out for its more positive coverage of ethnic news (Phillips & Tapsall, 2007b).)

This example shows the extent to which the selection of images and talent is a potent tool for conveying different subtextual messages to the audience. Deliberate editorial decision-making selected the Indian images for the Seven and Nine stories, and excluded them and the associated racial undercurrents from the ABC and SBS versions. Meanwhile, Ten’s inclusion of an EM vox

pop intentionally or otherwise broadened the definition of who was “us” in the community. These may be subtle choices but they make a difference in terms of story tone.

Improving journalistic practice

Throughout these successive studies into the reporting of diversity, it has been stressed from the outset that television news is a genre of its own and tells its stories in its own way. As Schudson notes:

The reporter may be scrupulously professional ... but it is the conventions of the genre, not the competence of the reporter, that determine what can or cannot become a story, what angle will or will not make sense. (1995, p.14)

This analysis confirms the evidence of the 2005 study: that the peculiarities of the genre often do no favours to people from ethnic minorities, and indeed, whether deliberately or otherwise, may encourage the audience at worst to fear them, or at best to assume they are not there at all. This matters because of the power television news has, and retains, to provide a representation of what Dunn et al referred to as our “national imaginary” (2004, p. 472). In the medium which remains the main source of news and current affairs for the Australian population (Roy Morgan, 2007), who is “in” and who is “out” is of crucial importance in terms of how we see ourselves. As Johnson-Cartee notes:

the news media confer both status and legitimacy on people, groups, issues, and objects. But what is absent or missing in the news is just as important as what is contained in the news. When people, groups, issues or objects are ignored or left out of news media coverage, they do not exist in the public sphere; and, therefore, they have no status or legitimacy. (2005, p. 234)

Even more dangerously, what we don’t know, we tend to fear. While the 2007 study features less EM news content and fewer negative stories than the 2005 study, the characteristics of EM news noted in the earlier study are even more noticeable in the later one. Ethnic minorities mostly feature in the news when they are either villains or victims. The selection of footage, the decisions about who speaks, what grabs are used, the placement of the story in the bulletin, even the decision about whether or not to use subtitles, all convey implicit or explicit judgments about the people in the story. But these are controllable variables, the subject of conscious editorial decision-making. The question is: would changes to practice deliver a different result?

In their study of SBS television news, Hawkins and Ang describe how addressing the requirements of a multicultural channel actually required inventing a whole new form of television “that distinguished it from the cosy culture of whiteness” (2007, p. 2). In the SBS universe, for example, rather than isolating and dividing minority groups from the mainstream, subtitles are used as a way of opening Australian audiences up to foreign cultures in a “much more delicate and empathetic engagement with how complex worlds of meaning could be communicated from one linguistic realm to another” (Hawkins & Ang, 2007, p. 5). No one is suggesting the SBS serve as a model for the other services. Nor is there any suggestion that all services should aspire to a common standard: the commercial stations and the ABC all have their own specific briefs and specific audiences to which they seek to appeal. However, all might benefit from making their product more attuned to the realities of modern-day Australia. The 2007 survey provides examples of things being done differently, and perhaps these can point the way to future best practice.

Reflecting diversity in crowd shots and vox pops

In the analysis, it was noted that most of the random crowd shots focused on Anglo faces and most of the vox pop talent was also Anglo. There is no doubt journalists have to work with what

they are given and we are not talking here about distorting or fabricating a different sort of reality. However, by making newsgatherers aware of this tendency, they may be encouraged to look with different eyes and to attempt to capture pictures and voices which reflect the observable diversity in the general population.

Reflecting diversity in expert talent

Ethnic minorities feature only rarely as professional experts, compared with the occasions when they appear as either villains or victims. The media can broaden the range of their diaries of expertise by proactively searching for new talent outside the traditional stamping grounds. And as Dreher (2003) notes, this can be assisted by efforts within ethnic communities themselves to train members so they can intervene more proactively to exert their own influence on the news agenda and news practices in general.

Deciding who speaks

It can be challenging and even uncomfortable for Anglo reporters to approach people from ethnic communities. Their uncertainty may result from doubts about culturally appropriate behaviour and even extend to fears for their own safety. Reporters need to be actively encouraged to build relations with people from ethnic minorities so they don't feel like strangers when they are doing a story. By normalising their own relations with these groups, they will be better able to represent them as normal human beings rather than as alien "others". By reducing their own distance from ethnic communities, reporters may find they are more comfortable approaching EM talent and have greater confidence in letting them speak for themselves, without the often superfluous and distancing contrivance of subtitles.

Deciding how they speak

While subtitles are essential when people are speaking in a foreign language, they convey a different message when used for people speaking English, underscoring a sense of difference from the mainstream. While there are undoubtedly occasions when a person's accent may make their speech difficult to follow, evidence from this study showed a tendency to err on the side of caution by including subtitles when the person was easily understandable. In this way news services can appear patronising, not just towards the ethnic minorities as talent, but also towards their audiences who are assumed to be unable to make sense of something for themselves. In a diverse society where people are adjusting to English delivered in a rainbow collection of accents, news services can afford to be more relaxed in their treatment of linguistic variation.

Expanding the reporter base

As Schudson notes, "who writes the story matters. When minorities and women and people who have known poverty or misfortune first-hand are authors of news as well as its readers, the social world represented in the news expands and changes" (1995, p. 8). While there were a few reporters from ethnic minorities observed in this study, they were no different from Anglo reporters in their conformity to the established model of television news reporting. In fact, it appeared quite discordant to see, for example, an EM reporter bringing us conventional anti-Muslim scare stories (SBS, May 11). Instead, reporters from ethnic minority backgrounds could and should be an invaluable resource in the sort of bridge-building that is necessary to increase the cultural diversity of television news. Rather than simply getting them to report "our" way,

they could help increase awareness in newsrooms and build up the confidence of Anglo reporters in extending their range beyond the “Anglo” known.

While acknowledging that drama and sensationalism are the very stuff of modern television news as it tries ever more frantically to counteract the dwindling of its audiences (Patterson, 2000; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008; Rosenstiel et al., 2007), it can be argued that what we see on our screens is increasingly divergent from what we witness in our daily lives. Our television news remains resolutely “Anglo-looking” (to use Hage’s term), despite the demographic changes that have taken place over the years, and, as has already been noted, the viewing public is beginning to notice this disjunction. Just as the community has had to accept the reality of a diverse population drawn from all parts of the world, so do Australia’s news services need to accept the realities of the 21st century. If they are to continue to have relevance for the community at large, they have no choice but to modernise their look. Said commented that: “There is never interpretation, understanding, and then knowledge where there is no *interest*.” (1981, p. 157) What is needed to create that interest is “self-awareness animating an awareness of what is distant and alien but human nonetheless” (Said, 1981, p.157). This may require changes to previously safe, comfortable and familiar routines, but more importantly it is about changing the mindset and culture of the newsroom.

References

- Akbarzadeh, S., & Smith, B. (2005). *The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media* (The Age and Herald Sun newspapers). Melbourne: Monash University.
- Allen, S. (2004). *News culture* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Altheide, D. L. (1997). The news media, the problem frame, and the production of fear. *Sociological Quarterly*, 38(4), 647-668.
- Ang, I., Brand, J. E., Noble, G., & Wilding, D. (2002). *Living diversity: Australia’s multicultural future*. Sydney: Special Broadcasting Service.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006a). Shepparton-Mooroopna 2006. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ProductSelect?newproducttype=QuickStats&btnSelectProduct=View+QuickStats+%3E&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=UCL248400&geography=Urban+Centre%2FLocality&method=&productlabel=&producttype=&topic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=LP&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=201&action=401&textversion=false>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006b). Townsville-Thuringowa 2006. Retrieved April 4, 2008, from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ProductSelect?newproducttype=QuickStats&btnSelectProduct=View+QuickStats+%3E&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=UCL357200&geography=Urban+Centre%2FLocality&method=&productlabel=&producttype=&topic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=LP&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=201&action=401&textversion=false>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2001). Shepparton-Mooroopna 2001. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ProductSelect?newproducttype=QuickStats&btnSelectProduct=View+QuickStats+%3E&collection=Census&period=2001&areacode=UCL248400&geography=Urban+Centre%2FLocality&method=&productlabel=&producttype=&topic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=LP&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=201&action=401&textversion=false>.

- Chiricos, T., & Eschholtz, S. (2002). The racial and ethnic typification of crime and the criminal typification of race and ethnicity in local television news. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 39, 400-420.
- Cottle, S. (2000). Media research and ethnic minorities: mapping the field. In S. Cottle (Ed.), *Ethnic minorities and the media* (pp. 1-30). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Creeber, G. (2004). 'Hideously white': British television, glocalisation, and national identity. *Television & New Media*, 5(1), 27-39.
- Dreher, T. (2003). Speaking up and talking back: news media interventions in Sydney's 'othered' communities. *Media International Australia*, 109, 121-137.
- Dunn, K. M., Forrest, J., Burnley, I., & McDonald, A. (2004). Constructing racism in Australia. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 39(4), 409-430.
- Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greater London Authority. (2007). *The search for common ground: Muslims, non-Muslims and the UK media: a report commissioned by the Mayor of London*. London: Greater London Authority.
- Hage, G. (2003). A viable ethics: journalists and the 'ethnic' question. In C. Lumby & E. Probyn (Eds.), *Remote control: new media, new ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hage, G. (1998). *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press.
- Hawkins, G., & Ang, I. (2007). Inventing SBS: televising the foreign. *Australian Cultural History*, (26), 1-14.
- Itule, B. D., & Anderson, D. A. (2007). *News writing & reporting for today's media* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jakubowicz, A., Goodall, H., Martin, J., Mitchell, T., Randall, L., & Seneviratne, K. (1994). *Racism, ethnicity and the media*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Johnson-Cartee, K. S. (2005). *News narratives and news framing: constructing political reality*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Ltd.
- Kenamer, J. D. (1992). Public opinion, the press, and public policy: an introduction. In J. D. Kenamer (Ed.), *Public opinion, the press, and public policy*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Lipschultz, J. H., & Hilt, M. L. (2003). Race and local television news crime coverage. *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education*, 3(4), Retrieved June 8, 2007, from <http://utpjournals.metapress.com/content/x0636n54l8g7/?p=0277e53ae8bf46fcb58610830cd4786f&pi=15%20>.
- Manning, Paul. (2001). *News and news sources: a critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- Manning, Peter. (2004). *Dog whistle politics and journalism: reporting Arabic and Muslim people in Sydney newspapers*. Sydney: Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, University of Technology Sydney.
- New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board. (2003). *Race for the headlines: racism and media discourse*. Sydney: Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales.
- Noakes, J. A., & Wilkins, K. G. (2002). Shifting frames of the Palestinian movement in US news. *Media Culture & Society*, 24, 649-671.
- Norris, P., Kern, M., & Just, M. (2003). *Framing terrorism: the news media, the government, and the public*. New York: Routledge.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (2003). Framing as a strategic action in public deliberation. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy Jr. & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 35-65). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Patterson, T. E. (2000). *Doing well and doing good: how soft news and critical journalism are shrinking the news audience and weakening democracy – and what news outlets can do about it*. The Joan Shorenstein Centre on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University. Retrieved January 31, 2007, from http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/research_publications/Reports/softnews.pdf.
- Phillips, G. (2008). *Reporting diversity: media analysis report May 2008*. Retrieved November 11, 2008, from <http://www.reportingdiversity.org.au>.
- Phillips, G., & Tapsall, S. (2007a). Australian television news trends. first results from a longitudinal study. *Australian Journalism Monographs*, (9), August.
- Phillips, G., & Tapsall, S. (2007b). Ethnic diversity in television news: an Australian case study. *Australian Journalism Review*, 29(2), 15-33.
- Poole, E., & Richardson, J. E. (2006). *Muslims and the news media*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2008). *The state of the news media: an annual report on American journalism*. Retrieved April 4, 2008, from http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/narrative_networktv_intro.php?cat=0&medi+6.
- Rane, H., & Abdalla, M. (2008). Mass media Islam: the impact of media imagery on public opinion. *Australian Journalism Review*, 30(1), 39-49.
- Rosenstiel, T., Just, M., Belt, T., Pertilla, A., Dean, W., & Chinni, D. (2007). *We interrupt this newscast: how to improve local news and win ratings, too*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy Morgan Research. (2007). Television remains main source of news & current affairs – NineMSN leads the way in internet news. Finding No. 4182. Retrieved April 2, 2008, from <http://www.roymorgan.com/resources/pdf/papers/20070627.pdf>.
- Said, E. (1981). *Covering Islam. How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Schudson, M. (1995). *The power of news*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2000). New(s) racism: a discourse analytical approach. In S. Cottle (Ed.), *Ethnic minorities and the media* (pp. 33-49). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wilson, C. C. II, & Gutierrez, F. (1995). *Race, multiculturalism, and the media: from mass to class communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.

Author

Gail Phillips is associate professor and director of research in the Division of Arts at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia.

Note: This study was undertaken as part of the Australian Government's Diverse Australia Program. administered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. For more information, visit <http://www.harmony.gov.au>. The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of Andrew Tapsall and Jo Morrison to this research.

The first study was reported in *AJR*, 29(2), in December 2007.