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**Black & white TV: An Omaha case study of the role of race in local television news employment.**

Laura Charlotte Shelton

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BLACK & WHITE TV:  
AN OMAHA CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF RACE  
IN LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS EMPLOYMENT

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Laura Shelton

November 2000

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Abstract

**Black & White TV:**

**An Omaha Case Study Analysis of the Role of Race in Local  
Television News Employment**

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University of Nebraska, 2000

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This study is a qualitative inquiry into the role race plays in hiring and promoting in the Omaha television market. By interviewing news directors and on-air talent, the researcher attempted to develop some bases for perceptions of race on the job. There also was an attempt to gather recommendations for ways to change the role of race in TV news.

The responses were organized into themes that best summarized the feelings of the respondents. In the area of diversity in hiring, news employees talked about themes of **competence** and the **negative impact** race-based hiring can have. The themes that emerged from the news director interviews were that of the **unresponsive audience** and the **race matters** theme which suggested race does play a part in their hiring decisions. Half of the minorities interviewed helped to develop the **Omaha is diverse theme**, while

the rest of the respondents added to the **long way to go** theme. When asked about the reasons to diversify, respondents helped develop four themes including **varied perspectives, connecting with the audience**, unsilencing the **silent other**, and **diversity makes cents**. And when they were asked about ways to make changes in the future they suggested **active recruiting, changing management**, providing **role models**, and **integrating life** so the work place could follow.

The results suggest that there is discrimination based on race in the industry, but that discrimination is not limited to racial minorities because Caucasians also reported experiences of racial discrimination. News Directors claimed that their decisions to hire or promote a candidate were never based solely on race, but that race did fit somewhere into the decision-making equation. There was overall agreement that racial diversity was important in a television news room in order to achieve a balance of perspectives as well as in order to connect with the audience, ultimately benefiting the bottom-line.

These results suggest that, although much has been done to eliminate racial inequalities in the newsroom, discrimination still exists. There still needs to be more done to promote equality.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Lipschultz for his patience, to Dr. Sherer for the inspiration to pursue a qualitative study, to Dr. Mordaunt for whetting my appetite for research into race and ethnicity, and to Dr. Hilt, for so generously stepping up to the plate when I ran short on committee members. I'd also like to thank my parents for emotional and financial support through the most turbulent period of my life, thus far.

Most of all, I'd like to thank all of the participants for their candid participation and willingness to talk about an issue that is not always easy to discuss. It has been an eye-opening experience. The participants have been incredibly open and willing to share their personal experiences on a sensitive topic. They are all to be commended for sharing their views on the topic of diversity and for their collective concern about the industry and where it is headed. After hearing their comments, I am reassured that, although broadcast news has some flaws, there are plenty of good people in it who are trying to make a difference. Thanks to all who helped my study and made a difference to me.

## Preface

Since I was a teenager, running studio cameras and ripping scripts at WDAF in Kansas City, I knew I wanted to be in TV news. I have now worked at six stations in four markets, from Kansas City (WDAF) to Dallas (KXAS & WFAA), then to Hastings, Nebraska (KHAS) and finally to Omaha (KPTM & KMTV). My experience in the industry has reinforced my interest in news, but it has also led me to question some of the practices I see in the newsroom. Those questions, along with my heartfelt belief in racial equality, influenced this research project. I have personally pondered some of the same questions I posed to the participants and I, too, have speculated on possible solutions that will bring more equality to the newsroom. It's been an enlightening journey through this project and it certainly has broadened my understanding of the role of race in local TV news.



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

As the world enters the next millennium, the clock does not speed up, but the pace of change is accelerating. The broadcast industry is entering the digital age, marking a huge step for the senders of information. On the receiving end of broadcasting, the audience is changing too. The Census Bureau predicts that in 50 years, racial minorities will make up 47 percent of the U.S. population (Canavale & Stone, 1995).

With the minority population expanding, communication scholars are looking for new ways to communicate that are inclusive of the diverse members of the community. Scholar Julia Wood (1998) suggests a new approach to understanding the growing diversity of society. "The once prominent view of America as a melting pot has given way to other metaphors that reflect greater respect for differences among people" (Wood, 1998, p. 172). Wood compares American society to weavings or mosaics suggesting that this culture is made up of multiple parts that have both independent identity and contribute to a larger collective identity.

There are many things that help to make up our collective identity other than our racial heritage. Today, television plays an important role in the cultural

identity of the United States, especially television news. The popularity of television news provides Americans with a major source of information about current events and has the potential to confer either status or acceptability about minorities (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977).

Minority groups including the NAACP and La Raza say that what Americans are watching is often not a representative portrayal of life in the United States. NAACP President Kweisi Mfume called television programming a “virtual whitewash” and charged that there needs to be more diversity on air (Associated Press, 1999).

Both groups threatened boycotts of the four networks in 1999 in protest of the lack of minorities on air in hopes of forcing NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox to change their hiring and programming practices. The threats got results and the networks all agreed to implement diversity training programs. Many shows were revamped before their fall premiers to include more minority cast members (“Instant P.C. TV,” 1999, p. 3).

The minority groups such as the NAACP are not the only ones involved in the push for greater racial diversity on TV. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been involved in regulating equal opportunity employment in broadcasting since the 1970s (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “Equal Employment,” 1977). Although minority gains have been made since then, there

are still fewer minorities on TV than there are in the population at large. In 1994, minorities made up about 18 percent of all news staffs (Stone, 1996).

Those numbers are skewed by greater minority representation in television news staffs on the coasts while the midwest lags behind. A study of television stations in the Midwest found that more than half the stations had no minority journalists at all (Gutierrez & Wilson, 1985). Omaha is certainly not leading the way in local television news diversity. TV markets are ranked by the Designated Market Area (DMA) system which measures households that have the potential to watch a station. The local affiliates serve a broadcast area that is currently ranked as DMA 73, constituting a solid medium-sized market. As of March 1, 2000, there were eight minorities on-air in Omaha out of 78 on-air employees, translating roughly into a 10 percent racial minority representation (Shelton, 2000). And while the U.S. Census Bureau (1999) cited the Hispanic population as the largest minority group in Nebraska with a population that has nearly doubled in the past decade, local news has failed to reflect that growing diversity. As of March 1, 2000, only one Hispanic worked on-air in the Omaha market (Shelton, 2000).

What the Omaha audience sees at home when they flip on the local news is the on-air talent, but there are others who work on the final news product. Producers, directors, photographers, editors and news directors all have a

hand in every news cast. And while there is a lack of diversity on-air, there is also a lack of diversity in the newsroom. All four Omaha newsrooms are headed by Caucasians (Shelton, 2000).

Borrowing from NAACP president Kweisi Mfume, the “virtual whitewash” of local news can influence the decision-making process. That happens from a sort of tunnel vision that is described by Ramachandran in an on-line publication. “People tend to reflect themselves and if you have only one color represented in the newsroom, they tend to reflect that culture” (Ramachandran, 1995). So with a lack of diversity in the newsroom, there can also be a lack of diversity in news content and product.

That product is then presented to the audience as a representation of society. This is referred to as the cultivation process and can have a social impact. According to Gandy and Baron (1998), “Exposure to news and other information about race ... has a significant main effect on social comparisons and attributions, consistent with the cultivation hypothesis” (p. 505).

The cultivation hypothesis in relation to race is explained by Ferguson (1998) as creating a racial mythology. In this mythology, television news mainly covers blacks in criminal roles and, therefore, presents to the public a negative stereotype of African Americans. Some would argue that this could be solved by diversifying the newsroom and bringing different points of view into the

decision-making process as well as presenting a more diversified face on the delivery of the news by hiring more minority on-air talent (Brand & Greenberg, 1998). In a survey of minority community leaders, Brand and Greenberg found this sentiment echoed again and again. The leaders called for better coverage of their community through the hiring of more minorities and the concentration of coverage on issues important to their culture (Brand & Greenberg, 1998).

The purpose of this study is to explore why there is not a better representation of Wood's racial "mosaic" in local television news and what kind of impact Kweisi Mfume's notion of "virtual whitewash" of mass media (Associated Press, 1999, p.3) has on the news product. This was accomplished through in-depth interviews with people of different racial backgrounds in the broadcast news business as well as with the managers who make the hiring and promoting decisions. The goal is to better understand why the racial diversity of Omaha's community is not brought into the television newsroom and how the lack of diversity impacts what is broadcast to the audience. This study will also examine employment practices that might influence decision making and final news product.



## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

We have generally thought that if many individual voices are heard, our society will be better informed than if only a few voices are heard. The greater the diversity in our broadcast media, the more likely it is that truth will emerge (FCC, 1979, p. 5).

The Federal Communications Commission not only promotes the importance of racial diversity in media, the government agency also is charged with regulating the hiring of minorities in order to provide the “truth” to the American public. Despite the FCC’s agenda, Omaha television news remains mainly a forum for a few voices, rather than many individual voices. Those few voices are overwhelmingly the voices of white journalists. Most stations in Omaha have one or two minority journalists on-air, while the most diverse station has only four minorities on-air (Shelton, 2000). The FCC encouraged diversity of voices and Omaha stations have responded in unison, with a chorus, all singing one note.

It can be argued that racial diversity is hard to categorize. According to Carlson (1999), race has long been a problematic category that “confounds all attempts to define it” (p. 111). The problem with defining race begins with slotting people into racial categories. Those categories are assumed to have a



biological basis, but it is often difficult to identify cultural lineage in today's society where races are mixed more and more (Carlson, 1999).

Race is further confused when it is sometimes used to describe an entire culture with all of its complex social and economic relationships (Carlson, 1999). The fascination with making racial distinctions is confounded by the inability to come to a consensus on the true meaning of the word race. So while the FCC regulates diversity, diversity becomes harder and harder to regulate as the face of Americans continues to change.

### **The Need to be Separate versus the Pressure to be the Same**

Despite the difficulties of accurately describing what race means to people, many cling to their individual perceptions of race: "Opinions about race seem to be more coherent, more tenaciously held, and more difficult to alter" (Gandy & Baron, 1998, p. 506). That grip is clenched even tighter by the reinforcement of racial beliefs perpetuated by mass media. Exposure to news and other information about race tends to mainstream opinions of the marginalized groups, which in turn typifies members of a racial group into one category where all is the same (Gandy & Baron, 1998). This not only figuratively lumps all people in a cultural group together, it actually holds them down, reinforcing the social hierarchy where Eurocentric masculinity rules.

According to Gandy and Baron (1998), this is how it works: first media put forth a stereotypical image of the Other, such as the black welfare mother. Next national surveys test public opinion, verifying that the country indeed does accept this stereotypical image to be true. Then the politicians make decisions based upon these polls. This often leads to the dismantling of social programs that were designed to help the disenfranchised overcome historic barriers to social and economic equality. The flow of information and communication creates a vicious cycle where there is little room for understanding the true state of things, and even less room for the marginalized groups to change their position.

The assumption that members of an ethnic group are the same is not only perpetuated by mass media, but also by researchers (Orbe, 1995). Much of the existing research on race and diversity ignores differences within groups. Past research has focused on contrasting two cultural groups and has obscured the heterogeneity among the individual groups. Orbe (1995) called this universal iconography, which supports the illusion that all members of an ethnic group communicate in the same way regardless of their sexual orientation, age, gender, or class.

## **Researching the Silent Other**

Muted group theory is one tool commonly used to explore the role of race in communication. However useful, this theory tends to categorize all members of a racial group into one cluster, again ignoring differences within the group (Orbe, 1998a). Orbe defines the Other as anyone who does not fit into the category of European American males which is so often used by scholars as a reference point (Orbe, 1998a).

The theory of the silent Other was first applied to the communication field to address the experiences of women, but more recently has become useful in the exploration of different groups of people who do not fit into the European American male category (Orbe, 1998a, p. 230). The theory suggests that different co-cultural group members, including people of different races or ethnicity, adopt the communication style of the group at the top of the social hierarchy (Orbe, 1998a). This phenomenon is often studied within organizations where the white male perspective is the dominant view.

After researching muted group theory, Orbe (1998a) created a model for how marginalized group members learn to adopt the communication style of the dominant group in order to serve them. His model included a weighing of the costs and rewards involved in engaging in these communicative practices,

and suggested group members alter their approaches to fit the situation. Orbe's approach was an effort to bring the experiences of the non-dominant group members into the scholarly arena. He noted that communication literature is largely void of the experience of the Other (1998a, p. 230). But it was not just for the benefit of the marginalized groups that he did this research. Orbe (1998a) also pointed out that recognizing and trying to understand a more diverse workforce will give a company an advantage over a homogeneous organization.

Although Orbe looked at co-cultural communication within an organizational setting, this type of interaction takes place everywhere. Neuliep and Ryan (1998) explored communication apprehension and uncertainty reduction during initial cross-cultural interaction. They had the participants complete a measure of intercultural communication apprehension before and after interacting with unknown partners from another culture. Their findings suggested that intercultural communication apprehension is associated with uncertainty. Neuliep and Ryan (1998) argued that when individuals encounter cultural differences, they often equated people from other cultures as strangers. Those strangers from different cultures or ethnic groups decreased the degree of familiarity an interactant feels and led to intercultural communication apprehension (Neuliep & Ryan, 1998).

There has also been a recent emphasis on cultural research and the need to give equal space to the voices of the marginalized Other. “This turn both reflects an impulse to be sensitive to the experiences and expressions of ‘Others’ and suggests that multiculturalism has influenced scholarship” (Delgado, 1998, p. 420). Delgado explored the language that helped define the Latina and Latino identity. Delgado used an examination of reader letters submitted to a Latino magazine to help define the experience of this marginalized group. Although there are very few similar studies, Delgado (1998) referred to this kind of research as the first step toward changing the power relationship between the Eurocentric, masculine ways of thinking and the marginalized Other.

Researchers have followed this lead and have focused their attention on particular marginalized groups rather than researching the Other as a whole. Orbe (1998b) analyzed the restrictive coding of black masculinity on MTV’s “The Real World” and, from the findings, he argued that mass media help perpetuate the image of the Other by stereotyping African American men, citing the representations of cast members from six seasons of the show. He found there was a typification of black men as inherently angry, potentially violent, and sexually aggressive, and that image holds constant with the stereotype of black men across mass media. These representations

“contribute to the hegemonic power of racial images in reinforcing a general societal fear of black men” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 33).

Phillip Harper (1998) argued that minority representations on television were something that deserved inquiry and debate since those representations ultimately could effect the status of an entire racial group of people:

It is, I think, safe to say that one of the reasons the televisual representation of black people has for so long served as a focus of debate is that it is seen as having effects that extend beyond the domain of signs as such and into the realm of African Americans' material well-being, which comprises, among other factors, the social relations through which black people's status in this country is conditioned (Harper, 1998, p.62).

Harper's worries are echoed by the researchers who have already delved into the subject from different angles. Orbe (1998a) looked at how those in the muted groups altered their communication style to fit the dominant group after they weighed the costs and rewards of doing so. Orbe (1998b) also examined the stereotypes presented in the media of certain disenfranchised groups, specifically African American males. Delgado (1998) looked at the apprehension and uncertainty involved in communication between interactants of different cultural groups. Neuliep and Ryan (1998) focused on trying to better understand the voices of the Others. If there is one string that ties all of these different approaches to communication research together, it is that all of these

scholars agree that more time needs to be spent listening to the voices that have for so long been silenced.

### **Diversity and News**

The impact of immigration and the growth of the population within the United States is already changing the racial makeup of this country and it is expected to do so even more radically in the next 50 years (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). According to moderate estimates by the Census Bureau, the population is expected to grow almost 50 percent by the year 2050. Along with the total growth, there will also be a growth in the minority population. In fact, racial and ethnic minorities will comprise 47 percent of the total population, making the term "minority" virtually obsolete (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). It was estimated that by the year 2000, more than half of the nation's school children will be non-white.

Looking specifically at the population demographics of Omaha, the most recent numbers collected in the 1990 census indicate that there is less racial diversity in Omaha than there is on a national scale. The population data show that Omaha is 83 percent White, 13 percent Black, 1 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, and 3 percent Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). From these

numbers, it can be concluded that about 17 percent of the population is made up of minorities. The data from the 2000 census are not yet available.

In an effort to better reflect the ever-changing and more diverse population, mass media have attempted to change hiring practices. In 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) set a goal. They targeted the year 2000 as the date when the diversity in newsrooms would match the general U.S. population. As of now, they are no where near that goal and will not even reach it by 2050 if the rate of diversifying continues to stay the same. If the rate of change stays the same until 2050, 15 percent of jobs in radio news, 26 percent of TV news jobs, and 35 percent of daily newspapers jobs will be held by minorities (Stone, 1996).

The most recent numbers collected in the 2000 Radio-Television News Directors Association/Ball State University Survey are encouraging. They show the most gains to date for minorities in the broadcast industry. In 1999, the survey reported 19 percent of television news employees were minorities (RTNDA, 2000). The 2000 numbers showed that minorities made up 21 percent of the staff. That matched the all-time high. Even bigger gains were made at the management level where the percentage of minority TV news directors went from 8 percent in 1999 to 14 percent in 2000. In this survey, every minority group made gains except Native Americans (RTNDA, 2000).



In the 1996 President's column of the on-line publication of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Bailon claimed that racial diversity within a news organization gives that organization many advantages. Among those advantages are the ability to cover all communities and issues; a greater understanding of once-ignored topics; the desire to mainstream minorities into all facets of coverage; an appeal to the fastest-growing demographic segments; and an improvement of the hiring and promotion of minority employees (Bailon, 1996)

If those arguments were not enough to persuade management of the benefits of diversity, Bailon also suggested that racial diversity in news gives a voice to some of our nation's citizens who have been without a voice for so long:

One of the most salient arguments for diversity is that it allows minorities into public debate and moves them beyond voiceless subjects. You can't cover the world or immigration issues very well with monolingual English speakers. It's difficult or impossible to accurately cover inner-city America with an all-white newsroom (Bailon, 1996).

Ramachandran asserted it is not only important to have diversity in newsrooms, but also in university journalism departments so tomorrow's journalists will have a good understanding of the importance of diversity instead of just the basic mechanics of journalism. He argued that people reflect

what they know, and if you have only one color represented in the newsroom, the news that comes out tends to reflect that culture (Ramachandran, 1995). Without minority representation in the newsroom, the minority viewpoint could be lost in the final product. When that happens, the news loses its accuracy and the information it conveys falls victim to Mfume's "virtual whitewash" of media ("NAACP Threatens," 1999).

### **Racial Mythology**

Diversity also helps avoid the practice of racial profiling which is the practice of associating a societal problem with a particular racial group. This phenomenon has been well documented, and often appears as the black drug user or the black welfare cheat (Muharrar, 1998). Research of newscasts from 29 cities in North America uncovered some definite patterns that Ferguson (1998) called the racial mythology. For blacks, this mythology has both a positive and a negative side. Over and over again, newscasts portrayed the positive side of the stereotype showing blacks as successful athletes or musicians. But on the other side of the coin, blacks were portrayed as criminals, mothers who leave their children home alone, and in other antisocial or criminal roles. There is not much middle ground when it comes to the "racial mythology" TV news has created for blacks.

Through a lack of racial diversity, Muharrar (1998) accused news media of perpetuating racial profiling and putting a blackface on societal problems. Muharrar described blackface as stereotyping through indirect association. "Once portrayed in blackface, the 'blackness' of the problem encourages suspicion, polarizing antagonism, and typically leads to the targeting of the racial group for punitive (public policy) action" (Muharrar, 1998, p. 1). As an example, Muharrar described how media were responsible for putting a blackface on the country's drug problem. He cited statistics that found that whites are the biggest drug users in America. He then linked that information with the results of a survey which found that most Americans had little first-hand experience with the drug problem, but what they did know about it, they got from the news media. Muharrar suggested that the mainstream press was responsible for leading the public to believe that America's drug problem was mainly a black problem (Muharrar, 1998).

Another study by Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon and Wright (1996) was based on the well documented phenomenon of news coverage heavily influencing the public political agenda. They suggest that when the media become preoccupied with certain issues, the public follows (Gilliam, et. al., p.7). In their research, they examined the news content of the local ABC affiliate in Los Angeles. In crime coverage, they found that viewers had grown so accustomed to seeing black

crime suspects that even when race was not mentioned, the viewers often assumed the suspect was black. They argue that those assumptions lead to a reinforcement of stereotypes based on race. "The media has, in effect, defined crime in racial terms, and this serves to activate widely shared stereotypes about racial minorities" (Gilliam, et. al., p. 8).

On a national level, Gilens (1996) made similar discoveries from analysis of network news coverage. He found that blacks make up 29 percent of the country's poor, but they constitute 62 percent of the images of the poor in leading news magazines and 65 percent of the images of the poor on the leading network television news programs. "I find that network TV news and weekly news magazines portray the poor as substantially more black than is really the case" (Gilens, 1996, p.515). He concluded that the poor were not only disproportionately portrayed as black, but they were also portrayed in the most unsympathetic light. Gilens found that the most sympathetic groups of the poor, including the elderly and the working poor, were under represented. At the same time, the least sympathetic group, including unemployed working-age adults, was over represented (Gilens, 1996).

This disparity in representation placed an inappropriate emphasis on disparities between races. Entman (1997) documented the emphasis and shortcomings of the news coverage and took a look at what it meant for race

relations and the field of communication. He found that, "For the mass public, repeated messages emphasizing the absence of common ground between whites and blacks could undermine long-term feelings of social trust and empathy across racial lines" (Entman, 1997, p.32). By emphasizing simplified, dramatic conflict to generate interest in the news, mass media fuel this fire.

Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli (1986) attribute this shared disparity to the cultivation hypothesis which explains social perceptions of racial inequality by assuming that exposure to a homogenous representation of the social world will help to shape perceptions of social reality. They argue that if people spend a lot of time watching television, and if what they are watching does not accurately reflect society, the viewers will assume that the misrepresentation is actually accurate (Gerbner et. al., 1986).

Gandy and Baron (1998) used the cultivation hypothesis to show that not only are the viewers influenced by what they see portrayed on television, but the more the viewers watch, the stronger their belief that the world is as it is portrayed on television. In a sense, what is seen on television becomes one's reality.

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1957) also looked at the power of television to influence the public's reality. They called this phenomenon of broadcasting the "status-conferral function." They argued that television can give importance or

status to the people or events which make the news, making them appear to be prestigious. Mass media audiences then draw the conclusion that if you really matter, you will be the focus of media attention, and if you are the focus of media attention, then you really matter (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1957).

The status-conferral function can also work the other way. In a report by The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the authors raise questions about the status or acceptability that the news conveys about women and minorities when white males make up 78.7 percent of all newsmakers (“Women and Minorities,” 1977). To explore the issue, the Commission analyzed a composite week of network news. The survey results showed that white males outnumbered minority and female correspondents by almost nine to one. They also found that minority and female correspondents rarely covered crucial national stories, and instead covered issues related to minorities’ or women’s interests (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “Women and Minorities,” 1977).

Heider (2000) studied how racial minorities are treated both in the business and in the on-air product. Through interviews with employees at a station in Honolulu and in Albuquerque and with community leaders from both those cities, he found that there is widespread agreement that discrimination exists. He attributes it to the support of the “status quo” by those with decision-making power. Heider also found that when people of color were given

a voice in the media, they were often stereotyped or portrayed as outside the norm.

### **Leveling the Playing Field**

To avoid these mistakes in media coverage and the repercussions they might have on the viewers' perceptions of the world, and to level the playing field for minorities in media, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) imposed hiring regulations (Brand & Greenberg, 1998). But the FCC did not originate this concept. Affirmative action found its roots in post-New Deal liberalism. From the 1940s, civil rights discourse began to shape government decisions. This resulted in state-level fair employment practice laws in the 1950s. However, those laws seldom made an impact and were often ignored. The failure of these laws fueled the fire of black activists, calling for more change. Finally, in the mid-1960s the federal government began to demand racial preference in the workplace. Since then, the result has not been the leveling out of the playing field that the law makers were trying to achieve, but rather an impasse (Sugrue, 1998).

This political stalemate, so to speak, has sparked much research into society's view of affirmative action. Many of these studies of public opinion have focused mainly on the views of white Americans and have found that the

policies generally do not fare well for two reasons. Some research pointed to anti-black racism while other accounts reflected high-minded value commitments and little if any anti-black animus (Bobo, 1998). But most of the research has focused strictly on public opinion of the affirmative action policies themselves. Questions about the possible benefits and costs of affirmative action are basically ignored. Bobo suggested that shifting the focus to those aspects and demonstrating the benefits might more easily change the views of much of white America than would trying to reshape fundamental values and ideological identities.

Affirmative action policies in the workplace have been accused of shortcomings, including hiring of less qualified minority applicants and lower minority job performance. Holzer and Neumark (1999) set out to find out if those perceptions of affirmative action in the workplace were indeed valid. They studied job sites in four major metropolitan areas across the United States. To measure qualification, they considered the worker's educational level and job performance evaluations. They did find evidence that minorities with lower educational qualifications were hired under affirmative action, but once on the job, they did not find any evidence of weaker job performance among minority groups.



The FCC tried to regulate diversity in TV news so that it better matched society by giving all races equal employment opportunity. In 1968, the Kerner Commission made recommendations regarding the number of minorities in mass media. They called for more minority reporters, editors, and managers in the nation's newsrooms (Brand & Greenberg, 1998). The FCC's Federal Affirmative Action rules of 1969 and 1970 made it clear that news organizations had to diversify or lose their broadcasting licenses. Then in 1995 the FCC significantly scaled back their requirements, giving individual broadcasting organizations more freedom in their hiring practices (Brand & Greenberg, 1998).

In 1990, minorities made up 17.8 percent of all news staff, by 1993 they rose to 18.5 percent then dropped to 18 percent in 1994 (Stone, 1996). In Stone's Updates and Projections for 2000, he estimated that the 18 percent share of broadcasting jobs held by minorities through the first half of the 1990s would most likely change little by 2000 (Stone, 1996).

Looking specifically at the different racial groups, blacks saw the most gains in jobs between 1990 and 1994. There was little change in the number of Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans working in the news. In 1995 Asian American journalists made up 0.5 percent of newsroom staff in comparison to 2.9 percent of the US. population.

Media employment data from the South and far West show that those regions have the best record of hiring minorities, while the Midwest and Northeast lag behind. A 1979 study of television stations in the midwestern states of the Dakotas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin found that nearly 62 percent of them had no minority journalists at all (Gutierrez & Wilson, 1985). In Omaha, all four of the local affiliates have at least one minority on-air news employee, but minorities make up an average of only 10 percent of the on-air talent (Shelton, 2000). "There is some diversity within metropolitan areas, but in the vast heartland of America, diversity is not even a factor" (Chang, 1995, p. 2).

Minority workers are not evenly dispersed through the broadcasting industry. There are twice as many minorities working at Fox and independent stations as there are at the ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates. There are also more minorities working in the larger Nielsen markets. That means that the bigger the city and the larger the viewership potential, the more likely it is that a station will have a greater percentage of minority employees. Those numbers show that one in four news people in the 25 largest markets are minorities. In the 60 smallest markets that number drops to one in ten (Stone, 1996).

This trend holds true for minority news directors, whose ranks were made up by an even smaller share of minorities than the overall industry. The

minority share of news directorships hovered around 8 percent in the 1984-94 period, Stone (1996) asserted, and he suggested that signs point to status quo for 2000, which would keep the white ceiling in place. Most of the minority news directors work in the larger markets and other management positions are not often held by minorities (Stone, 1996). When the Corporation for Public Broadcasting appointed a Latino as chairman of the board in October of 1999, it was noted as an important step toward diversity (Michaelson, 1999). This appointment was believed to be the first held by a Latino or an ethnic minority in the 32-year history of the corporation.

The vast majority of broadcast properties are also held by white owners. In 1979, the FCC reported that racial minorities owned less than one percent of 9,600 broadcast properties in the United States (Leonhirth, 1997). By the mid 1990s, those numbers had made only a slight change. In 1996, the National Telecommunication and Information Administration reported that of the 11,000 broadcast properties in the United States, minorities owned 2.9 percent while they constituted 27 percent of the population (Leonhirth, 1997).

### **Racial Discrimination on the Job**

The goal of the FCC's affirmative action requirements was to stamp out inequality created by a disproportionate number of employees of one race.

Racial discrimination as a concept can be measured in ways other than the number of minorities employed at a company. Some researchers have looked at the amount of money blacks earn as compared to whites as a measure of discrimination. Analyzing data from the Current Population Survey, Mason (1998) found that in the late 1960s, blacks earned about 67 percent less than whites. Those numbers improved little over the next twenty years. Mason argued that the extent of racial discrimination based on salary continues unabated into the 1990s (1998).

As another method of analyzing racial discrimination, researchers have studied job retention. Fairlie and Kletzer (1998) compared job displacement statistics between black and white men. They used data from the Displaced Worker Surveys from 1984-1992 and found that black men were much more likely to lose their jobs than were white men. And once they have been displaced, the chance of re-employment is substantially lower for black men. In fact, the rate of job displacement for black men was 30 percent higher than white men, and re-employment rates were 30 percent lower for black men compared to the corresponding rates for white men. The researchers suggested several variables, including a higher concentration of black men in less skilled jobs and a lower educational background among black men in the sample as compared to white men. But they pointed out that those variables

only account for part of the difference in job loss and hiring. There are still some large gaps in explaining the inequality and the authors called for more research.

While the numbers for minority job displacement are high, so is the settlement for one former producer who claimed she lost her job because of her race. Cheryl Dickson was fired from WEWS in Cleveland in 1992. Her lawyers argued that her firing was the result of a pattern of racial bias. Dickson had worked for the Scripps Howard station for three-and-a-half years as the station's first black producer and had helped win four local Emmy awards. A jury awarded her \$1.25 million plus attorney fees ("Former Cleveland," 1999).

Other researchers focused less on quantitative measures such as wage or job displacement, and instead concentrated on qualitative features to uncover blatant and subtle racism in the workplace. One study proposed that blatant racism is rarely observed in corporate America, but that a more subtle form of racism has emerged (Brief, Buttram, Reizenstein, Pugh, Callahan, McCline, & Vaslow, 1997). More than 52,000 allegations of racial discrimination were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1992-93 against private sector employers. Other studies found that blacks do not hold a proportional number of positions above the very bottom level of organizational hierarchies, that they make up less than five percent of

management ranks yet make up 12 percent of the United States population, and they hold less than one percent of senior executive positions (Brief et al., 1997).

There seems to be a difference in belief and action when it comes to equal opportunity. Many whites say they support the principles of integration and equal opportunity, and yet employment numbers show that there is still discrimination against minorities. According to Brief et al. (1997), the answer lies in the chasm between belief and action. While the majority of whites support equal access, they condemn policies such as affirmative action, forced busing and government payments to welfare recipients (Brief et al., 1997).

The Freedom Forum tested minority perceptions of inequality in the news. They surveyed 1,565 white, 123 black, and 62 Hispanic TV news employees. They found that, overall, black journalists see their race as a barrier. When asked if race hurt their careers, 37 percent of black employees said yes while 14 percent of Hispanics agreed. In addition, 27 percent of black journalists and 13 percent of Hispanics said the racial discrimination they feel may drive them out of the field. Black journalists are also less likely to be managers, supervisors, or have much input into program content than white or Hispanic journalists (Stone, 1996).

In the workplace, overall, there is evidence of racism. A recent study of 1,500 minority women from 17 Fortune 1000 companies found that 42 percent did not feel they had the same opportunity to be promoted as others with similar qualifications. Nearly half said they felt they had to play down their race or ethnicity to succeed. And more than 50 percent reported hearing racial and ethnic jokes in the workplace (Mincer, 1999). Once minorities do break into the workplace, they may feel so frustrated that they leave.

### **Media Watchers on Diversity**

Not only do media insiders report a problem with inequality, so do those outside the industry. In a survey of 396 black state legislators about the performance of white-owned media in their communities, most were dissatisfied (Brand & Greenberg, 1998). Of the respondents, 89 percent said more black reporters should be hired. Another 74 percent said that the understanding of minority concerns and perspectives would increase if the white-owned press would hire a black editor. Hispanic leaders felt the same way. They said that if more Hispanics were involved in administrative or decision-making media jobs, they would be able to identify with the issues relevant to the Hispanic community.

Many minorities agree that the mainstream press does a poor job covering their communities. They also say that media do not understand issues important to their culture, or even try to understand. In a survey of Puerto Rican leaders, they responded that non-Hispanic reporters were arrogant, demanding, and only interested in getting superficial facts while Hispanic reporters were knowledgeable and positive and asked the right questions (Brand & Greenberg, 1998). The survey, overall, found that minority leaders believe their communities receive too much negative coverage, that the press should hire more minorities, and that they should focus more energy on covering issues important to their culture.

### **Setting the Stage**

Mass media have been accused of racial bias for various reasons, and in response have tried to diversify the workforce and coverage. But the population in the United States is shifting as minority groups grow, and the shift in the workforce is not catching up (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). Eliminating that disparity has become a goal of journalistic associations across the country, as well as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

On January 20, 2000, the FCC adopted new Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) rules for broadcasters. These new rules require



broadcasters and cable entities to widely disseminate information about job openings. The goal is to ensure that all qualified applicants, including minorities and women have the opportunity to compete for jobs. The latest requirements give broadcasters more flexibility in choosing an EEO program, but they must have at least two supplemental recruitment measures in place (FCC, 2000). By implementing affirmative action hiring policies, companies are not only complying with federal mandates, but are also attempting to eliminate the inequity in representation produced by an organization dominated by one racial group, specifically Caucasians (Brand & Greenberg, 1998).

Despite these efforts, studies within the field and with the general public have found that there is little support for the image that the press portrays of minorities. Research indicates that minorities report being discriminated against, not only in real life, but also in their racial group's portrayal in news media, and that discrimination in mass media results in an exaggerated separation between races. Blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans are all under-represented according to statistics (Stone, 1996). And many minorities report feeling misrepresented by mass media ("NAACP Threatens," 1999). According to the FCC, in order for that to change, affirmative action policies must be implemented (FCC, 1979). Those who support affirmative action hiring process are those people who see inequality

as a problem and hiring regulations as one of the ways to solve that problem (Swim & Miller, 1999).

There are many reasons why racial diversity on television news is important, and potentially there are many solutions that would help to increase diversity. Consequently, this thesis addressed the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Does race impact the hiring and promotion practices of on-air talent in Omaha, Nebraska TV newsrooms? To help answer that, the following questions will be posed: Should race play a role in hiring and promoting? Have employees experienced racial discrimination on the job? When minorities are looking for a job in the business, what experiences do they have that are attributable to their status as the marginalized Other? Does race impact the hiring and promoting decisions of news directors?

**RQ2:** Is enough being done to eliminate racial mythology and promote racial diversity on-air in the Omaha market? To help answer that, the following questions will be posed: What kind of comments do news directors receive about the diversity of their news teams? How do news employees view Omaha's diversity?

**RQ3:** Should the racial makeup of the news team reflect the diversity of the audience? To help answer that, the following questions will be posed: What are the advantages of a racially diverse news team? Is there value placed on unsilencing the silent Other?

**RQ4:** How can greater racial diversity be achieved?

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

This study is an analysis of in-depth interviews with 16 members of the broadcast news industry in Omaha in order to explore the role of race in local television news employment. In this study, racial job discrimination is defined as any career opportunities that were not offered based on race and will encompass hiring and promotion. For purposes of availability, and in an effort to concentrate the inquiry on local news, the research is limited to on-air TV news talent and news directors in the Omaha market.

All four local affiliates KETV, KMTV, KPTM, and WOWT were included in the study. The ABC (KETV), CBS (KMTV), and NBC (WOWT) affiliates all have a long history of local news presence in Omaha. KPTM, the Fox affiliate, is a relative new-comer to the market. Fox launched local news programming in the early 1990s. KPTM was included in this study despite the difference in longevity because it represents a trend in broadcasting across the country. Fox and, in some markets, Warner Brothers (WB) stations are changing the job market for television news. These changes are opening more jobs in markets where they once were limited, and so are an interesting case for examining diversity in hiring practices.

## **Sample**

For the purpose of this study, a list of on-air talent as of March 1, 2000 was obtained from people working in the newsrooms at each of the stations. The eight on-air racial minorities were then identified. Because the number of minorities was relatively small, an effort was made to contact each and request participation. In-depth interviews were conducted with the six willing minority employees. There was an effort made to get minority participants from a broad range of racial backgrounds. There was also an effort made to ensure that each station is represented in the study. Six Caucasians also were selected and interviewed about their perceptions of diversity in local TV news. In selecting Caucasian participants, attention was paid to number of years spent in the business. In order to cover a broader range of experience, participants were selected who had either been in the business less than five years or over ten years. That allowed for a diverse perspective from those who had been in broadcasting for at least a decade and those who were relative new-comers to the industry. Both males and females were included in each sample to give a variety of perspectives from both genders. The news directors of the four local affiliates (KETV, KMTV, KPTM, and WOWT) in the area

were also interviewed in order to compare perceptions and opinions of employees to those of management.

### **Question Structure**

According to communication theorist Denis McQuail (1994) there are four kinds of communication theory that are relevant to mass communication: social scientific, normative, operational and everyday. This study explored racial diversity on the social scientific level by collecting data from participants about the normative, the operational, and the everyday levels. In order to do this, questions were structured on three levels based on how media ought to operate (normative), how media practitioners actually operate (operational), and the knowledge about media gained from everyday experiences. These questions probed how on-air talent and news directors thought racial diversity should be dealt with in the industry, how they see it being dealt with, and how they deal with it themselves.

#### **Interview Questions for On-Air Talent:**

##### **I. Preliminary:**

1. Gender?
2. Official title?
3. Educational level and college major?

4. How many years have you worked on-air?
5. What stations in which markets?
6. What is your racial heritage?
7. How many years have you worked at this station?

## II. Normative:

1. Do you think race should impact hiring and promoting decisions? Why/Why not?
2. Do you think it is important for the diversity of a news team to reflect the diversity of the audience? Why/Why not?
3. Has the TV news industry made strides to diversify?
4. What do you see in the future for the industry?

## III. Operational:

1. Do you believe your company tries to meet racial hiring quotas?
2. Have you seen others at work get hired or promoted based on their race? Explain.

## IV. Everyday:

1. Why do you think you were hired?

2. Do you feel your race has played a part in getting a job or a promotion?

3. Have you ever experienced racial discrimination at work?

V. Is there anything else that I haven't asked that you'd like to talk about?

#### Interview Questions for news directors:

##### I. Preliminary:

1. Gender?

2. Official title?

3. Education level and college major?

4. Do you record the number of minority applicants you receive?

5. How many years have you worked in the business/at this station?

6. How many of those years have you been a news director or been in charge of making hiring and promoting decisions?

##### II. Normative



1. Do you think race should impact hiring and promoting decisions?
2. Do you think it is important for the diversity of a news team to reflect the diversity of the audience? Why/Why not?
3. Has the TV news industry made strides to diversify?
4. What do you see in the future for the industry?

### III. Operational:

1. Does your station support racial hiring quotas?
2. Does your station encourage racial diversity in hiring and promoting?
3. What are your hiring criteria?

### IV. Everyday:

1. How important is race in making hiring or promoting decisions?
2. What kinds of comments do you hear from the public about diversity as it relates to your news team?

V. Is there anything else that I haven't asked that you would like to talk about?

## **Evaluation**

The interviews were tape recorded and then the responses were compared based on Creswell's (1994) qualitative coding procedures designed for interview analysis. Specific attention was paid to the overall themes that tie together the answers based on racial group in an effort to identify similarities within groups based on race and themes among the overall sample. The development of these themes was done by reducing the content of the interviews into general ideas and then interpreting that data to get a clearer picture of diversity in television news. To do this, the data was first transcribed and then coded on a preliminary read-through into general theme categories based on under-lying meaning. These general themes were then broken down into topics and were assigned a code. Those codes were then applied to each of the transcribed interviews. Finally the similarly coded responses were compared and analyzed.

## Chapter Four

### Results

All television stations are required by the FCC to file a broadcast station annual employment report. That report tracks the number of minorities hired and in which positions they work. The most recent filings were obtained from each station. For KMTV, KPTM, and WOWT their most recent reports on record were from the fall of 1998. KETV had a spring of 1999 report on file. The forms they are required to fill out do not break down employees of the news department separately. Instead, there are a few categories that apply to news employees. These include the "Officials & Managers" and "Professionals" categories. These classifications may also include workers in other departments. With these reports, there is no way to specifically pinpoint the racial break down for the news department, but the numbers give an overall look at the hiring practices of each television station. Here's what four stations have in their FCC files in the affirmative action policy compliance section for full-time employees.

### Number of Non-White Employees out of Total

	<u>Managers</u>		<u>Professionals</u>	
<b>KETV</b>	0/12	(0%)	7/56	(12.5%)
<b>KMTV</b>	1/9	(11%)	4/32	(12.5%)
<b>KPTM</b>	1/10	(10%)	1/20	(5%)
<b>WOWT</b>	0/17	(0%)	9/56	(16%)

While these numbers do not specifically reflect the diversity of the news departments at each of these stations, they do give an overall view of the managers and professionals of each company. These are often the individuals with the decision-making power. Two of the stations have no management positions filled by minorities, and the other two have one minority each. There was greater variation in the professional category, which includes on-air talent as well as professionals in other departments. Those numbers ranged from one to nine employees.

When the percentage of minority employees at each station are compared with the viewing population within the Omaha city limits, it becomes apparent that the stations are not reflecting the diversity of the viewership. Omaha had about a 17 percent minority population in 1990. None of the stations match that ten years later. WOWT comes close with employees in the

professionals category where 16 percent are minorities. KETV and KMTV both report 12.5 percent minorities in the professionals category, compared to the 17 percent in the population. And KPTM has only 5 percent minority employees in the professional category. That's far below the minority population percentage for the viewing area. When it comes to managers, KMTV and KPTM both have one minority, and KETV and WOWT have none. That puts the minority make-up of the managers category at all the stations below the minority make-up of the population.

In an effort to find out what the employees at the stations thought about these employment numbers, twelve on-air talent from the four different stations in Omaha were interviewed, including six Caucasians and six minorities. The minority group included an Hispanic, an Asian, and four African Americans. Those interviewed had a total combined experience of 108 years in the business in 18 different television markets including Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, Scottsbluff, Hastings, and Kearney, Nebraska; Columbia, Missouri; El Paso, Texas; Springfield, Virginia; Flagstaff, Arizona; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Traverse City, Lansing and Grand Rapids Michigan; Grand Junction and Fort Collins, Colorado; Duluth, Minnesota; and the Quad Cities and Des Moines, Iowa. As of March 1st, they all worked in the newsrooms of either the ABC, NBC, CBS, or Fox affiliates in Omaha.

Each of the four news directors were also interviewed. All four were Caucasian and three of them were male. They had a total combined experience of 95 years in the business, with 46 of those years spent in the Omaha market.

### **Race and Hiring (RQ-1)**

In response to the first research question, “Does race impact the hiring and promoting practices of on-air talent in Omaha TV newsrooms?” several sub-questions were explored. On-air talent and news directors were asked if race should play a role in hiring and promoting. Their answers were mixed.

### **Competence Theme**

The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of hiring based on talent and ability, rather than race. The overall argument was that newsrooms should be racially diverse, but the most talented people can do the best job. A female African American anchor/reporter said she didn’t think people should be hired solely because of their race. But where there is a lack of minorities in a market, race should come into play. “I believe that when people turn on the television, they should be able to see faces that reflect them,” said the female African American respondent. “In a racially diverse community such

as Omaha, I would expect there to be an African American in many of the time slots.”

While most said race needed to be a consideration, two respondents said that it should not matter. Instead, they suggested news directors should hire the most qualified applicant without bringing race into the picture. “You can’t just hire somebody because of the way they look,” a female Asian reporter said. “That is reverse discrimination. It’s unfair, but it happens.”

The news directors all spoke of the importance of having a racially diverse staff, but said the best candidates must be sought out and hired. They said that it did the station no good to hire a minority simply because of their race if they were not qualified for the job. One Caucasian male news director said he thought that hiring and promotion should be based on ability, and the best person should get the job but within that parameter, he said he would very much like to see people of all colors and ethnic heritages get hired for appropriate jobs.

### **Negative Impact Theme**

Four of the minorities, but none of the Caucasians, pointed out that making hiring decisions based on race rather than ability can actually have a negative impact. One male African American anchor explained that hiring

someone based on their skin color, instead of their qualifications, can hurt all the other members of their racial group. That is because the other members of their group will be held to the same expectations. Others will think they only got their job because of their race and they really aren't qualified. All three of the minorities say when they first start jobs they feel they are fighting that stereotype. Overall, the respondents differed on what role race should play, but almost all of them said it is a factor that should be considered at some point in the hiring process.

### **Personal Experiences**

While news directors talked of finding the balance between hiring diversity and hiring based on ability, the on-air talent shared personal experiences of racial discrimination. When the question, "Have employees experienced racial discrimination on the job?" was posed, the answers were many. And as it turns out, racial minorities aren't the only employees with stories of racial discrimination.

Minorities on-air reported the same number (12) of examples of racially-based job discrimination as Caucasians. Although the reports were equal in number, the content of the examples were quite different. Minorities talked about pressure from others in the newsroom and from their news directors. A



female African American reporter said, “There are always people who are going to think you got something for nothing. It’s something you have to overcome with your work. You let your work speak for you.” A female African American anchor said she would have been promoted, had it not been for the color of her skin. “If everything were the same, my ratings, my popularity, the research on me, I would’ve been promoted by now, no doubt in my mind, if I were white.” Others told of news directors suggesting they change their names to something that sounded more ethnic.

The Caucasians also experienced discrimination they attributed to their race but their examples differed from those of the minorities in one distinct area. Their complaints were often indirect. One female Caucasian reporter talked of having to go to the “ends of the earth” (Scottsbluff, NE) to get her start in the business. She said if she had been a minority, she could have started in a bigger market. Another female Caucasian reporter talked about a minority reporter who was coddled by the news director and helped along while other white reporters did not get that extra attention.

Four of the six on-air minorities interviewed said they had experienced some sort of racial discrimination on the job. Experiences ranged from racial comments from news directors to unfair expectations on the job. A female Asian reporter and a female Hispanic reporter both had stories of news

directors suggesting or forcing them to change their last names to something that sounded less “white” and more “ethnic.”

Other respondents talked about the pressures put on them once they started working. A female African-American reporter explained that there’s a common misconception that because she’s black, she will represent the black community:

I don’t want the weight of the world on my shoulders. I don’t represent the whole black community. I represent (myself), a black woman in the news business that may think this way or that way about an issue. And when it gets down to doing my job, what I think isn’t really important.

Respondents explained they felt they’d been hired to connect with the Hispanic community or the African-American community. That was a expectation they saw as impossible to fill.

### **Race Matters Theme**

These personal accounts of discrimination contrast the responses of the news directors who said that ability, rather than race guides their decisions. This seeming contradiction in what the news directors said and what the on-air talent experienced, leads to the third sub-question, “Does race impact the hiring and promoting decisions of news directors?”

All four news directors said that racial diversity was important in the news business, but that race should not and could not be the basis for hiring or promoting someone. They pointed to the same reasons for diversity that were mentioned by the on-air staff including the ability of a diverse staff to better cover the community, to better relate to the audience, and to better represent the public. But they all said that the individual's work should be the first factor in determining if they were going to hire someone.

One Caucasian male news director said that he remembered a time when stations in Omaha were actively seeking out and hiring minority reporters because there were not many qualified minority reporters available. He said now opportunities have increased and more minorities have been attracted to the business so news directors don't have to search as hard.

From the employees perspective, things looked a little different. All six minorities interviewed said their race may have or did play a role in helping them get a job. They stressed that other reasons were certainly involved in their selection for employment, but all admitted that their race may have given them an extra edge over the competition. A female African American anchor was hired at a local affiliate 20 years ago, at a time when there were no other African American females on the air in Omaha. She said, "My race probably helped me get the job, but I think it hurt me as far as getting a promotion. My

past news director made it pretty clear I was not moving up.” So while race may open some doors, respondents pointed out that it could close some, too.

So, the response to the overall question, “Does race impact the hiring and promoting practices of on-air talent in Omaha TV newsrooms?” seems to be yes. Although news directors say it should not be the number one priority, they say racial diversity is something they seek. The experiences of the on-air talent with preference being given to racial minorities seem to indicate that race does impact hiring and promoting decisions.

### **Diversity in Omaha (RQ-2)**

In response to the second research question, “Is enough being done to eliminate racial mythology and promote racial diversity on-air in the Omaha market?” several sub-questions were explored.

### **Unresponsive Audience Theme**

The first asked about comments news directors heard from the audience about the racial diversity of their news teams. It ended up being a difficult questions to answer because they reported getting little feedback. For the most part, the news directors said they did not hear many comments from the audience about their on-air diversity. A male Caucasian news director said

at one time they received calls from the African American community complaining about the lack of blacks on air. In recent years, thanks to a push for diversity, he said he hasn't heard any more from that group. Another male Caucasian news director said his station hardly ever gets complaints. Instead, they mainly get compliments on their female African American anchor. He did mention that he'd heard from others that Omaha city council member and former reporter Frank Brown and Nebraska state senator and cable access program host Ernie Chambers often commented about the lack of African Americans on air. Another male Caucasian news director said he had heard from both Brown and Chambers, who refused to do interviews with reporters at his station because they had no African American reporters or anchors. A female Caucasian news director would only say that they don't hear a great deal of comments.

Overall, the news directors did not report a great amount of feedback from the audience and when they did hear something, it seemed to come from leaders of the African American community. None reported hearing comments from the Asian or the Hispanic community about on-air diversity even though both of those groups are under-represented by on-air talent in the market.

### **Omaha is Diverse Theme**

When the respondents were asked “How do news teams view Omaha’s diversity?” the answers were mixed. Interestingly, half of the minorities interviewed thought Omaha was doing pretty well in hiring racial minorities, while all but one Caucasian responded that Omaha needed a lot of improvement.

An African American female anchor/reporter said that Channels 6 and 7 were doing a good job but that Channel 3 had never been very diverse. She said she thought she was the first black female who had ever worked at KMTV. A female Asian reporter commented that she was surprised at the number of minorities on air, indicating there were more than she would expect for an area like Omaha. A female African American reporter said she was really surprised that Omaha had so many of people of color on air. She said that when she moved to the midwest, she expected less racial diversity. The only Caucasian to agree that Omaha is doing well in the matter of diversity was a male reporter. He said he thought Omaha’s on-air talent diversity probably reflects the Nebraska population and that everyone was represented.

### **Long Way to Go Theme**

All the other Caucasian respondents and two minority respondents thought that Omaha television stations need to add more diversity. Some of

their comments criticized the applicant pool. They said that there might not be enough minorities applying for the jobs so the news directors had trouble hiring diversity. Some of the respondents criticized the news directors. They said that news directors needed to be more aggressive in seeking out qualified minorities to recruit. Others pointed to better job opportunities for minorities as a reason for the lack of diversity. A female Caucasian anchor said that if minorities do a good job, they could easily move to a bigger market, and usually did very quickly.

One other common theme was the reoccurrence of Channel 6 in the responses to this question. While some of the respondents thought that overall, Omaha was doing poorly, they often sighted Channel 6 as the exception. A female Caucasian reporter commented that she wished her station were more like Channel 6, which she considered to be leading the way in diversity in local news.

### **News Team Reflects Audience (RQ-3)**

There were two sub-questions asked in order to help determine the response to research question 3, "Should the racial makeup of the news team reflect the diversity of the audience?"

### **Varied Perspectives Theme**

The responses to the first sub-question, “What are the advantages of a racially diverse news team?” can be divided into two themes. First, the respondents said a diverse news team offered different perspectives and, therefore, was something to strive for and to be achieved. Ten of the twelve on-air talent respondents and two of the four news directors said that people brought their life experiences to the newsroom, and if the entire team shared the same experiences, the viewpoint would be rather like tunnel vision. In order to better serve the community, the station needed to have people representing different backgrounds who could bring their culture and perspective into the decision-making process. The end result would be a better product that would better serve the community. One female Caucasian anchor/reporter explained this was important, yet, sometimes hard to accomplish. She said she thought news directors should pick the best person for the job, but sometimes the best person for the job may have a background that is more racially diverse or an ethnic background that might make them more sympathetic and empathetic to a certain audience group that they’re trying to reach.



### **Connect with Audience Theme**

The above response ties the first theme to the second. She pointed out that different perspectives are important, but an ability to connect with the audience is also a motivating factor in striving for diversity. The second reason the respondents gave for bringing diversity to the newsroom was to form a connection with the audience. All twelve of the on-air talent and every news director pointed to the advantage of being able to relate to different members of the audience. A male African American anchor pointed out that it wasn't just a good idea to give people equal opportunities, it also made good business sense from a marketing standpoint. People want to watch people who look like them because there is a sense that they can relate to their lives.

A female Caucasian anchor/reporter said this is true when she's reporting in the field as well. She said that some people feel more comfortable talking to reporters of their same racial heritage. She gave examples of covering news stories in North Omaha where she felt African American reporters like Pam Jones and Trina Creighton had a clear advantage because of their skin color. They argued that not only will more people watch those like them, but they're more likely to do interviews with people like them. That gives the station that gets those interviews a clear advantage in covering the story.

## **Silent Other Theme**

In response to the second sub-question, “Is there value placed on unsilencing the silent Other?” respondents clearly answered that there was value but there needs to be more action. All four news directors responded that they considered racial diversity when making hiring decisions, although their ultimate decisions were based on ability first. A female Caucasian news director said her staff was not as representative of all races as she would like. She said in hiring, if all things were equal in two candidates, she would search for the minority. The other three also said that they would like to have a more diverse staff and it was something to work toward. A male Caucasian news director said it was just as important to him that the content of the news casts, as well as the news staff, were reflective of the community. All of them could see value in giving a voice to the silent Other.

All of the on-air respondents also said that paying attention to diversity and the needs of the community were important. They said that more needed to be done to promote diversity at television stations in Omaha. The theme of giving a voice to those who might not otherwise have one did come up in some of the interviews. They gave different reasons for giving the racial minority in the audience a voice. One reason was that they would gain more viewers if minorities felt they were representing them. A female Caucasian reporter said

that she thought people wanted to watch stations that represented them and added, "I think the perception is that the community feels if they are watching someone of their own race or ethnic background, maybe they understand them a little better." Another female Caucasian reporter said that having a diverse news team sends the audience a message that you are representative and you do listen to everyone's views. She said that not only would you have the advantage of connecting with the audience, the station would be less likely to miss stories.

#### **More Diversity (RQ-4)**

Although not everyone had suggestions, there were many different answers to the question "How can greater racial diversity be achieved?" The solutions to diversifying the newsroom ranged from a top-down approach to changing how society functions overall.

#### **Diversity Makes Cents Theme**

The first solution takes into account the motivating factor behind many business decisions, the bottom line. As the population shifts and the minority population grows to become the majority, some thought that hiring practices would have to change. A male Caucasian reporter said that other news

directors needed to look at the team at Channel 6 and consider the fact that they were number one and the most diverse station in town. He said that eventually they would see that it would help the bottom line to hire more minorities.

A female Caucasian news director said that there were other financial motivations involved. Not only would the stations benefit financially from diversity, but the employees needed to benefit too. She suggested that an increase in salary might help attract more minorities to the business. "A factor may be that the starting salaries are not high enough in TV news to attract a lot of people."

### **Active Recruiting Theme**

News directors suggested that there needed to be more active recruitment of minorities in order to make more minority hires. All four said they didn't receive many applications from qualified minorities, and when they did, they often missed out because the candidate was hired by a station in a bigger market. They said there needed to be a better system set up at their stations to recruit minorities. Channel 6 had a corporate system that brought in minorities as interns and then offered them jobs. The other three stations did not have those kinds of programs.

One male Caucasian news director said that he wished it were easier to hire minorities, but that there just weren't enough applicants. He said, "Part of me hopes that we don't need special programs or special efforts to get a good mix of ethnic backgrounds, but realistically I think we're going to need them."

Another solution that would ease the pressure on stations to recruit came from a female Caucasian news director. She said she thought that universities needed to do a better job recruiting minorities. "I don't think there's intentional discrimination at the schools, but I think that universities are not proactive enough." Then, she said, there would be more qualified minority applicants to choose from when it came to hiring.

Another point made was that recruitment of minorities must be broadly focused at all levels. A male Caucasian news director said that he was troubled by the attention paid to recruiting minorities for on-air broadcasting positions. "I think maybe the industry and the public focuses too much on who you see and maybe not enough emphasis on the staff as a whole." He said stations needed to focus more attention on making sure that people of color are not just on-air, but that they're in the control room, they're directors, they're technical people, and certainly they're in the management team.

## **Changing Management Theme**

Another suggestion was that when the racial make-up changed at the management level, the rest of the newsroom would see changes. One female Caucasian reporter said that her station had all white managers. She said they didn't have enough diversity in the management team to see the problem. A female African American reporter said that people of color were needed in management, not just to promote diversity in hiring practices, but to add new perspectives to all of the decisions made in the newsroom. She said, " When you have a diverse newsroom at all levels, and people are bringing in different ideas and different points of view, it adds to the whole process." She expected to see more changes at stations when the color of the decision makers began to change, but added that she wasn't interested in management herself.

A male Caucasian news director said that he thought management would simply evolve as time goes by. According to him, some of the older managers who are now in their sixties just don't understand the need for diversity because they weren't active in the Civil Rights movement. "Some of them in senior management positions spent most of the early part of their career working in a lily-white, almost exclusively male business." He said as those people approach the end of their careers, they will be replaced by younger managers who are more interested in promoting diversity.

**Role Model Theme**

Another suggestion was that the balance of diversity would work itself out in future because the barriers that prevented diversity were already in the process of being broken down. A female Caucasian reporter said that she thought the industry would become more diverse because people who never considered that they could get into television would see somebody else who already has made it as a role model. The minorities who are in the business today would serve as role models for the next generation, encouraging them to follow in their footsteps and demonstrating that it was possible.

**Integrating Life Theme**

One of the most unique responses to the question of solutions actually may be one of the most common-sense answers. A male African-American anchor said that change did not need to be forced in the newsroom. He said instead, that change had to happen at a societal level:

We've got to be more diverse, not only in how we work, but how we live, and it's going to take generations. Once our society stops being segregated, so will our workplaces. When you live next door to someone who is different from you and get to know them. That's how things change, not at work.

He added that he believed society was making strides toward integration and that it was just a matter of time before race was no longer an issue. He added that we would know when diversity had been achieved when four people sit on the anchor desk and only one of them is white and nobody thinks twice about it. "I do think that eventually we won't have to worry about it," he said. "Papers like yours will be relegated to the history books."



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

While this study mainly took into account the words of local on-air talent and news directors, the evaluation of the minority employment records of the local affiliates gives a good benchmark for the hiring practices at those stations. 1990 census numbers put Omaha's minority population at 17 percent. Not one of the local affiliates can match that when it comes to the percentage of minorities employed in the "professional" category of the FCC reports. WOWT came closest at 16 percent, KETV and KMTV both employ 12.5 percent minorities, and KPTM was the furthest behind with 5 percent. These numbers reveal actual practices at the stations. The interviews help interpret the numbers and give insight into the truth behind what some might say is a priority.

The first research question and sub-questions explored the news directors' and on-air talents' version of hiring practices at their stations. According to many of the respondents, race should be a factor in making hiring decisions, but it should not be the primary factor. Some respondents pointed out that if hiring decisions were made strictly on race, while ability was ignored, the principles motivating the decisions would actually be hurting the desired

outcome of integration instead of helping it. The biggest theme was that new hires had to be competent, first and foremost.

Not surprisingly, many of the respondents had personal accounts of racial discrimination to share. But surprisingly, Caucasians had just as many reports of discrimination as minorities. The Caucasians attributed their experiences of discrimination to a misplaced sense of equal opportunity. Many said they had lost out to minorities, while admitting that there was a need for more minorities in the business. The reports of discrimination from minorities were of a different nature. Many minorities said their race actually helped them get a job, but hurt them once they were in the workplace.

According to the news directors, race is not a primary factor in making hiring decisions. They all said they look for talented individuals who are effective communicators with adequate job experience. At the same time, they said more needs to be done to encourage the hiring of minorities because there are not enough in the applicant pool. All of the news directors were Caucasian. Three were males and one was a female.

In summary of the first research question about the impact of race on hiring and promoting practices in Omaha newsrooms, it seems that race does play a role. Although the managers deny that it is an over-riding factor, the experiences of the on-air talent seem to indicate that race is one of the most

important factors in deciding who is hired. Still, the number of minorities on-air in Omaha indicate that the reality is probably somewhere in the middle. If race were the number one priority, stations wouldn't be lagging behind the general population.

The second research question and sub-questions explored the reality of racial diversity and perception in Omaha. News directors claimed that they receive very few comments about the diversity of their news teams or the diversity of their content and coverage. Some indicated that they had received complaints in the past about the lack of diversity from the African American community, but recently there had been little feedback. They chalked this up to an overall satisfaction of the viewing audience with the racial diversity they see on air.

In opposition, all but one Caucasian and half of the minorities on-air responded that they thought Omaha's stations had a long way to go in the arena of diversity. While the news directors claimed the audience didn't have much to say, the talent certainly did. Many said more needed to be done to promote diversity and mentioned that each time a new hire was made, they hoped it would be someone of color, because that community was underrepresented in their newsrooms.

In summary of the second research questions, news directors seemed to think that as far as the viewership was concerned, enough was being done to promote racial diversity on-air. They individually shared goals of greater diversity, but those goals did not seem to be fueled by public outcry. On the other hand, the majority of on-air talent thought that too little was being done to eliminate racial mythology and promote racial diversity on-air in the Omaha market. They said more needed to be done, but that it was difficult to balance the pursuit of diversity, without putting the majority at a disadvantage when it came to hiring and promoting.

The third research question and sub-questions explored the utility of a racially diverse news team. There were a number of advantages to diversity identified by the on-air talent and news directors. Having a diverse news team helped in creating a diverse product. That's because diversity brought together people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Those different perspectives gave a broader understanding to the newsroom and led to more varied perspectives in the final product.

There were also practical reasons given for diversity. Reporters pointed out that they had better luck in the field gaining the confidence of people with whom they shared common ethnicity. Managers and talent also suspected that the audience was able to connect with people on-air who shared their racial

background. From a marketing perspective, it made sense to have a diverse news team so they were able to broaden their connection with as many viewers as possible.

All seemed to believe there was value in giving everyone a voice and thought it was easier to do that when a variety of racial groups were represented in the newsroom. In summary, the respondents thought that it was important that the racial makeup of the news team reflect the diversity of the audience, but they thought more needed to be done to achieve that goal.

The fourth research question explored the options available for achieving greater diversity. Some of those interviewed seemed stumped by this question. They saw a problem, but did not see an equitable solution. Caucasians often explained that it was important to hire more minorities, but expressed frustration at being passed over in favor of a minority hire.

Others were able to come up with a variety of solutions that might help diversify the industry without discriminating against minorities or Caucasians. One suggestion was that the bottom line could be used to motivate change. The most diverse station in the market was also the most profitable and when managers made that connection, they would change their hiring practices. Others suggested that there needed to be more active recruiting of minorities and that anything that would encourage minorities to enter the applicant pool

would help. Still others said the first change that needed to be made was at the management level. They said that once the decision makers of a company were more racially diverse, the decisions they made would naturally be more equitable for people of all races.

Others suggested that integration was a larger scale issue and that it was already in motion. Some said that the minorities already in the industry would serve as role models to minority kids. Their achievements would help open doors to children by setting an example of the success they might accomplish. On an even broader scale, others suggested that once society was integrated on a social level, the business world would follow suit. This view helped to expand the narrow focus of this research into a much broader perspective of American society. One respondent said once all races are living together without thought to race, integration will be achieved on all levels, and diversity won't even be an issue. The feedback ranged from economical to practical, and from the very basic level of what one person can do, to the largest scale of what we all can do. And these are only some of the possible solutions to achieving greater racial diversity in television news and in life.

The themes developed from the responses help to build on the theories discussed in the Review of Literature. The theme of the unresponsive audience adds to the Muted Group theory. That theory suggested that some racial

groups lack a voice in society. Based on the low number of minorities on-air and the lack of response from the audience, there is indication that the audience has not found its voice on this issue.

The varied perspectives theme also helps build on Muted Group theory. This theme was one of the reasons respondents gave for promoting racial diversity in their newsrooms. Varied backgrounds led to a better news product. By supporting hiring from varied backgrounds, respondents recognized that some groups were muted, and that something should be done about it.

The connect with audience theme also adds to perspective to the Muted Group theory. Respondents said they would broaden their appeal to minority viewers and connect with the audience if they had minority talent on-air. This theme suggests that respondents are aware that racial minorities in their audience are not being heard because they have no one on-air with whom they can identify.

The race matters theme helps to build on the Silent Other theory. Similar to Muted Group theory, this theory suggests that racial minorities are kept silent in the community. The race matters theme indicated that race does play a part in hiring decisions made by news directors. If they place value on race-based hiring, they acknowledge that certain races have been discriminated against or silenced in the past.

The Silent Other theory is also supported by the long way to go theme. Most Caucasians respondents and some minority respondents suggested that there was more that needed to be done to promote diversity in their newsrooms. In supporting diversity, they recognized that racial minorities had not had the same opportunities that Caucasians had enjoyed. A similar theory developed called the silent other theory clearly makes this same point. Respondents thought more needed to be done to unsilence the Silent Other.

And the diversity makes cents theme also helps to support the Silent Other theory. This theme was developed as a reason to support diversity in the newsroom. Respondents thought that if there was greater racial diversity, their product would appeal to a wider audience, making their news more profitable. Clearly here, they're recognizing that some of their audience is not being served by the current product.

The concept of television news putting a Blackface on societal problems is added to in the varied perspectives theme. Respondents emphasized the importance of diversity in the newsroom to add a broader range of experience to their news coverage. They thought this was important in order to avoid stereotyping, which leads to the Blackface issue. This theme also helps to build on the concept of Racial Profiling. Respondents thought the way to avoid racial profiling in their product was to bring varied perspectives into their newsrooms.



The Cultivation Hypothesis is a theory that describes how a viewer interprets what they see on television as how the world really is. Several themes help to build on this hypothesis. While respondents supported racial diversity, some also mentioned the importance of hiring qualified people. Those responses led to the development of the competence theme. Respondents thought if hiring decisions were made solely on race and ignored ability, then some minorities who were not competent might be hired. That would set a standard of expectation for the audience. Then through the Cultivation Hypothesis, the audience might see that race as defined by the one person on the news. This also came up in the negative impact theme. Here respondents worried that the same might happen in the newsroom. If hiring decisions ignored competence, then some unqualified hires might set a negative impact on everyone of that race.

An unexpected theme developed by half of the minority respondents was the Omaha is diverse theme. This may also help build on the cultivation hypothesis. They may think that there is enough diversity on-air in Omaha, because they are not accustomed to seeing more diversity. The research showed that even in larger markets, diversity on-air does not reflect the diversity of the audience. Perhaps the cultivation hypothesis is having an impact on these respondents.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

The FCC continues the effort to regulate diversity at broadcast stations. At the same time though, diversity becomes harder and harder to regulate. That's because the face of Americans continues to change. The minority population across the country is growing so quickly that Caucasians may be in the minority in the near future. Things are changing in Omaha as well. The 2000 census was just concluded, and as soon as the latest statistics are available, it will be more evident just how closely the Omaha population is paralleling the changes that are taking place in other parts of the country.

Despite these radical changes in the racial make-up of the country, some things are not changing so rapidly. One thing that remains the same is the white face of local news in Omaha. At the onset of this study, KETV and KMTV had only one on-air African American at each station. KPTM had one Asian and one Hispanic working on-air. And WOWT had three African Americans and one other minority. Since then, WOWT has lost one African American and KPTM lost the only Hispanic on-air in Omaha. Neither have been replaced by minorities. On the management level, there were four Caucasians, one female and three males, running the newsrooms. Since this study was conducted, one of the male news

directors left the market. He was replaced by another Caucasian male. In the months that have elapsed since the data were collected, Omaha's television stations have actually taken steps backward, losing minorities and not hiring more.

Although Omaha seems to be losing ground when it comes to diversity, everyone interviewed said that diversity was important. They emphasized though, that diversity without discrimination against minorities or Caucasians was hard to balance. Both minorities and Caucasians reported experiences of discrimination. Interestingly, it was the Caucasian respondents who felt their race had worked against them. Many said they felt that if they were a minority, they would find new jobs more easily. The reports of minority discrimination were not tied to job opportunity. Instead they pointed to challenges in advancing once they were at a station, or to experiences in the field.

All sides, including Caucasian and minority talent and the news directors, acknowledged that race was an issue when it came to hiring. It took some explaining from the news directors to better understand why an issue that was so clearly on the minds of those involved, was not manifested into reality when it came to hiring practices. News directors blamed the lack of diversity in Omaha to the shortage of qualified minority applicants. Some also blamed

previous managers who may not have seen the advantages of having a diversified staff.

It is fairly easy to understand why minorities supported equality in the workplace. It is because they want an equal chance to succeed. It is a little harder to interpret why so many Caucasians felt so strongly about equal opportunity. It may be that the level of racial consciousness has been raised in this country. Perhaps the Civil Rights movement really changed the way we think about race. But that does not explain why there is still discrimination based on race.

Researchers Swim and Miller (1999) suggested that Caucasians support affirmative action hiring practices because they feel guilty. White guilt is associated with whites' evaluations of whites and translates into feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment about being white. They say that some whites feel guilty about the discriminatory behavior of other whites or of whites in the past and so those whites associate those embarrassing behaviors with their race. Through a series of four studies, Swim and Miller found that the presence of white guilt is a good indicator of support for affirmative action policies.

In this study there was great support for equal opportunity, but not specifically support for affirmative action. In fact, most people said that they

did not support hiring based solely on race. They instead wanted ability to come into play, and to have competence somehow be balanced with race when it came to making a hiring decision. None of the Caucasian respondents indicated that they were sensitive to the issue of race because they felt guilty. Instead, they cited reasons like a fair representation of the community and good economic sense for the company. None of them explained though, why they felt so compelled to support equal opportunity. Perhaps Swim and Miller's (1999) theory of white guilt does come into play, or maybe things have simply changed in this country enough so that all of the respondents just felt that equality was the right thing.

Whatever the motivation, racial diversity is certainly a hot-button issue in news. All of those interviewed felt strongly that race could help someone get a job or get a promotion. They said they didn't always see race coming into play, but sometimes it did. And if it did, the desired positive outcome of diversifying the staff could be overshadowed by the negative implications of race-based hiring. Although they didn't all agree, the participants all had opinions on the role of diversity in news and many had experienced racial discrimination to some degree.

According to the subjects, it certainly is a topic worthy of exploration, and one for which they hoped to find solutions. But they all admitted, there

were no easy solutions to be found. A female Caucasian news director suggested more attention be paid to minority recruitment at the university level. She said if more minorities were coming out of college and into TV news, then the industry would be more diversified. Many of the respondents gave the suggestion that more diversity needed to happen at the management level. When minorities were put in decision-making roles, they said diversity would naturally happen. A male African American anchor said that it is not just a TV problem, but a societal problem. He said that before real change can be expected from the industry, change must occur at home. He predicted that when society truly diversified and de facto segregation came to an end, then the same would be reflected in newsrooms, both on air and behind the scenes.

As Brief et al. (1997) suggested, de facto segregation is still a reality and the solution is still unclear. Although many Caucasians support the principles of integration and equal opportunity, employment numbers show that there is still discrimination against minorities. The solution lies in the chasm between belief and action (Brief et al., 1997). The diversity of Omaha's newsrooms does not match the diversity of Omaha's population. Much is left to be done to integrate the industry, and as some suggested, society as a whole.

## **Limitations**

There are a number of factors that limit the generalizability of this study. First, the makeup of the sample limited the scope of the study. There were only eight minorities working on-air in Omaha and only six of them agreed to participate. The sample was also limited by the minority groups represented. Four African Americans, one Hispanic, and one Asian made up the minority sample. The validity of this research is limited geographically to Omaha since only stations in the Omaha market were studied. The results were also limited by the review of only one researcher. The design of the study did not provide for peer review of the data to insure validation.

The research was limited by the personal relationships between the respondents and the researcher. As part of the on-air talent category, the researcher knew many of the respondents on a personal level. This may have resulted in more honest answers to the questions, or it may have restricted the respondents from answering as freely. Three of the news employees and two of the news directors were also interviewed at their respective stations. This may have made them feel inhibited in responding to the questions. And finally, although names were not used in this thesis, some of the respondents may have felt that their answers would be easily linked to them.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This study opens the door of opportunity to further expand existing theories including Muted Group theory, the theory of the Silent Other, the concepts of a Blackface on societal problems and the concept of racial profiling, as well as the Cultivation Hypothesis. The themes that emerged from the analysis of responses add to these theories and concepts, but also leave much room for future study.

This inquiry sought observation from media insiders about their everyday experiences, their first-hand knowledge of the business as it related to diversity. It also asked them to make predictions for the direction of the business. Almost all of the respondents had a college education, but their responses were based on real-world experience, not on theories they about which they had read in school. Interestingly enough, many of their responses supported the existing theories produced by communication scholars. The themes developed from their responses then, seem to validate the work of earlier scholars, as well as add to the theoretical pool of communication knowledge.

The unresponsive audience theme, the varied perspectives theme, and the connect with the audience theme all helped to expand Muted Group theory into the realm of on-air diversity in local news. The race matters theme, the



long way to go theme, the silent other theme, and the diversity makes cents theme all help to build on the Silent Other theory. These themes help to demonstrate how the Silent Other theory impacts the audience and the on-air talent of television news. The varied perspectives theme helps to explain how the concept of the Blackface on societal problems and the concept of racial profiling can be avoided in the local news product. The theme of competence and the negative impact theme helped to apply the implications of the Cultivation Hypothesis to diversity hiring practices of news directors. And the Cultivation Hypothesis was demonstrated in the Omaha is diverse theme, where minorities reported that diversity in local television newsrooms accurately reflected diversity in the community.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

For future research it would be interesting to interview news photographers using a similar research approach. African American photographer Ben Gray's name was mentioned by several of his colleagues. Photographers have direct contact with the public and also make decisions about what the viewer sees on the news. One reporter who worked with Gray said that in many cases, his connections to the community helped her get

crucial interviews. Getting the photographers' perspective would add depth to this inquiry.

It would also be interesting to talk with Frank Brown and Ernie Chambers. News directors and on-air talent said that both Brown and Chambers have made diversifying Omaha's TV news stations into personal crusades. They have both refused to do interviews with any station that does not have an African American on-air. Their perspectives on the state of diversity at the local affiliates might help render more solutions for the future of the industry. They have both also been around the area for a long time so they might lend a broader perspective to the changes in minority staffing at stations over the years.

Another issue that was raised in some of the interviews was the lack of male applicants of any racial background. Some of the females interviewed said they felt that they were at an extreme disadvantage being neither male nor a minority. A study could also explore why there are fewer men in the business than women. Asking why there aren't more men attracted to the business might help reveal some underlying reasons why minorities don't seem to be as interested. This could be done by surveying the graduates of some of the bigger journalism schools around the country to see exactly how many men and women are graduating with degrees, and what fields they are entering

after graduation. It would also be interesting to interview anyone who did not enter broadcasting and to ask them why they chose another field over news.

While this study focused on the on-air talent and the news directors, there are many other areas in television stations that suffer the same lack of diversity. The viewers at home see the reporters and anchors, but a much larger team helps get that product on the air. A similar study could be done exploring diversity with producers, directors, technicians, engineers, and many other jobs at TV stations.

In conclusion, this study, while uncovering some disturbing qualitative data, could benefit from follow-up research that examines trends at all levels of the broadcast industry.

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