

# **Reporting Diversity**

## **Media Analysis Report**

**2009**

### **Australian Television Current Affairs**

**Gail Phillips, Murdoch University**

## **Executive Summary**

This is the third study funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship examining the way in which Australia's television news media represent people from different ethnic backgrounds. While the previous two studies in 2005 and 2007 analysed television news, the focus of this study is television current affairs.

In Australia current affairs television evolved alongside news as a way of providing a longer-form format for a more analytical examination of current news issues. The ABC and commercial channels Seven and Nine have traditionally followed their nightly news bulletins with half-hour 'current affairs' programs, while SBS has its weekly hour-long Dateline program. Channel Nine also has the weekly hour-long program, 60 Minutes. Over the past decade a combination of cost pressures and competition for mass audiences has resulted in a dilution of the original formula. For the ABC reduced resources have resulted in greater reliance on cheaper studio-based interviews. For the commercial services the focus has shifted to more entertainment-based content. The aim of this study was to use the same methodology as in two previous studies of television news to examine the representation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in television current affairs, focusing both on the amount of content and the nature of reportage

The study found that while the SBS and the ABC tended to reflect in their practice the prescriptions of their respective charters and codes relating to reporting and reflecting diversity, the commercial current affairs programs ignored their industry code and, like television news, represented ethnic minorities (EM) as villains or victims, and as in some way different from the ('Anglo') mainstream.

The current affairs programs contain fewer but longer stories than the news bulletins so the quantitative data gathered over a two-week period is based on a much smaller data base: 225 stories, compared to 1990 stories in the 2005 news study and 3121 stories in 2007. This means that quantitative data can serve only to give an indication of possible

trends. The qualitative data which analyses the way stories are told delivers richer results. The key findings are:

1. The nightly commercial programs rely much more on promotional and other assisted material than the ABC.
2. The commercial programs often opt to keep the location of stories obscure to make them more acceptable and applicable to a national audience.
3. There is slightly more EM content in proportion to Anglo content compared to news (8.7 per cent of total content, compared to 7.5 per cent of total news in 2005 and 4.6 per cent of total news in 2007).
4. While levels of negative stories are more balanced between EM and Anglo groups than in news, the commercial programs feature a greater proportion of negative EM stories.
5. The groups attracting 'Negative'/'Reinforce Stereotype' coverage comprise communities that could be considered newer to Australia (African, Asian, Indian, Indonesian, Islamic, Japanese) while more established communities such as the Greek and Italian attract more positive coverage. The representation of the Islamic community is mostly negative, that of the British uniformly positive.
6. As with television news the default position in current affairs reporting is that the talent will be predominantly Anglo – reflecting the main pool of talent for stories concerning politics, business, and public affairs in general. Of the 225 stories, 155 stories have no EM faces at all, even incidentally in the background, and on a couple of occasions EM talent is absent from an entire program.
7. EM faces appear more frequently as part of the Australian public than in news, often as silent assistants in the background to a story.
8. While the 'generic Aussie' tends to be represented mostly as Anglo, there are also 'Aussie EMs' from older minority groups (eg Asian, Italian) that have become established in Australia over time.
9. When foregrounded in the story EM talent feature as either victims or deviants, with the Muslim community particularly demonised.

This analysis of Australia's television current affairs programs shows that the genre shares some of the weaknesses of television news when it comes to representations of diversity. However clear distinctions emerge between the public broadcasters and the commercial services. Where there is evidence that both the SBS and the ABC pay heed to their codes of practice in their representation of diversity, the commercial current affairs programs fail to meet the standards of their own industry code. It is here that we are most likely to encounter reporting practices which subtly convey a sense of racial hierarchy in which the Anglo dominates.

## **Introduction**

This is the third study funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship examining the way in which Australia's television news media represent people from different ethnic backgrounds. While the previous two studies (2005 and 2007 – see Phillips and Tapsall, 2007a, 2007b; Phillips, 2008; Phillips, 2009, forthcoming) analysed television news, the focus of this study is television current affairs. Using a similar methodology the aim was to examine the amount of content featuring people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in television current affairs and the nature of reportage.

As Turner notes in his discussion of the emergence of television current affairs in Australia this genre emerged as a complement to the news services, aiming to provide more background, analysis and context than news was able to deliver in its abbreviated formats. (2001, p. 52. See Holland, 2001 for how the genre evolved in the UK) However even in 2001 he noted that this brief had fallen by the wayside in the chase for ratings, which in commercial current affairs meant an increasing focus on entertainment-based stories. Meanwhile at the ABC cost-cutting at that time also impacted on current affairs programming, with increasing reliance on cheaper talking heads formats rather than filmed stories (ibid). Cross-media deployment of reporters meant that time they could spend investigating stories had to be devoted to filing for radio and television. Revisiting the field in 2008 for this study it is clear that the further leaching away of audiences and money and the increasing pressures of delivery to multiple media formats, including online, have only made things more difficult for both the commercial and public sector broadcasters. What Turner called the 'sprint down market' (ibid, p.56) has gathered pace in the commercial arena while studio-based interviews continue to be the mainstay of the ABC's programs. In contrast to the nightly programs, SBS's hour-long weekly program Dateline specialises in longer-form reporting from correspondents filing from around the world. This provides scope for more in-depth on-the-spot coverage in the best current affairs tradition. As we shall see, these features which define current affairs reporting in commercial and public sector environments have implications for the way in which Australia's ethnic diversity is portrayed.

All the broadcast media include protocols for ethnic representation in their codes of practice. Section 4.3.10 of the commercial television code says that reports

must not portray any person or group of persons in a negative light by placing gratuitous emphasis on age, colour, gender, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, race, religion or sexual preference. Nevertheless, where it is in the public interest, licensees may report events and broadcast comments in which such matters are raised. (Free TV, 2008, p. 27)

The Editorial Policies of ABC state in section 3.2.1 (d) on national identity and cultural diversity that it ‘provides content that gives expression to Australia’s social, cultural and regional diversity.’(2008a, p.15) The message is reinforced in section 5.17.2 of the same document eschewing the labeling of groups and individuals. (ABC, 2008a, p. 40) This is further elaborated in its Code of Practice where section 2.7 on discrimination and stereotypes commits the organisation to avoiding language or images which may ‘disparage or discriminate against any person or group on grounds such as race, ethnicity, nationality...’ as well as ‘demeaning or gratuitous references’ to ‘cultural practices or religious beliefs.’ (ABC, 2008b, p.4)

The SBS’s Charter stipulates in Section 2 that the broadcaster must

- (b) increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society; and
- (c) promote understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Australian people (SBS, 2002)

Its Codes of Practice for television state that it ‘emphasises cross-cultural awareness by exposing audiences to a wide range of cultures, languages, and perspectives and by reflecting Australia’s multicultural society’ (2006, p.4) while its code for General

programming specifically stipulates in Section 1.3 Prejudice, Racism And Discrimination that:

SBS seeks to counter attitudes of prejudice against any person or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness, or marital, parental or occupational status. While remaining consistent with its mandate to portray diversity, SBS will avoid programming which clearly condones, tolerates or encourages discrimination on these grounds. (SBS, 2006, pp.5-6)

There are reasons for these codes. They exist because as far as Australian society is concerned the assumption is that the media will abide by certain standards in line with the broader public interest. Television has always been seen as having a particularly important role to play because, as Cottle observes, whatever the economic or commercial imperatives of the media business model,

Through its presentational formats, TV news literally mediates the surrounding play of social and cultural power and, potentially, plays a vital role in serving to enact, and thereby enhance and deepen, cultural citizenship. (2001, p.75)

This is particularly relevant to the genre of current affairs, which traditionally has focused on in-depth reporting that has highlighted the authority of the journalist. In this genre what Holland refers to as the “*access*” challenge’ (2001, p.85) of representing society in all its diversity is particularly acute. According to Holland ‘the authority of a journalist becomes particularly suspect when they address those who are different from themselves.’ The journalist’s authoritative right to speak ‘Although apparently knowledgeable ... may be based on a form of ignorance – ignorance of experience and of the lived reality of the situations reported on.’ (ibid)

The conventions, routines and practices of the television medium, which as we saw in the analyses of television news impact so heavily on what the public gets to see (Phillips,

forthcoming; Phillips and Tapsall, 2007a, 2007b) impact on current affairs reporting as well.

## **Methodology**

The study looked at the evening current affairs programs on all stations during a randomly selected two-week period, 16 -27 June 2008. The aim was to cover the same markets as the television study and to replicate the original methodology. There was a mix of networked and locally produced programs and the analysis covers the following programs:

### *Daily programs*

Channel Nine: A Current Affair (ACA). At the time of the study this was a nationally-networked program going to air each evening from 1830-1900.

Channel Seven: Today Tonight. This program has two versions, one for Western Australia (TT WA) and another for the rest of the country (TT ES). It goes to air each weeknight from 1830-1900. Both versions were included in the content analysis. Unless the version is specified in the analysis the same story is featured in both programs.

ABC: 730 Report (730). This program is nationally networked and goes to air from Monday to Thursday at 1930-2000. On Fridays the states prepare their own local Stateline programs. The study captured data from the national program and then from the state programs from the same states which featured in the television news study: Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

To broaden the range and to be able to include SBS as a point of comparison two weekly hour-long programs were also included:

SBS Dateline. This program airs nationally on Wednesdays from 2030.

Channel Nine 60 Minutes. This program goes to air on Sunday nights at 1930.

The study used the same methodology employed in the previous two studies. Programs were entered into a computerised database and were analysed to capture quantitative data (duration and percentages of stories from different categories compared across all programs) and qualitative data relating to the nature of the reportage. The main focus of the research, in line with the aims of the DIAC-sponsored Living in Harmony program, was to examine the representation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The programs were coded by Jo Morrison, the research assistant who has been involved in all previous studies and who compiled the coding manual which standardised the coding methodology. As in previous studies the chief researcher was required to examine both the recorded material and the coding database in order to complete the analysis, and this served as a double check for consistency.

As in the previous studies stories were identified according to origin (local, national, international) and analysed according to both the topic and the storytelling convention used. There were 20 content categories, grouped into six story types indicating the kind of news treatment they received:

**Courts, Crime and Disasters:** Emergencies/Disasters; Courts/Justice; Crime.

**Clever Country:** Education/Schools; Technology/Science.

**Fun and Games:** Arts/Culture; Leisure/Tourism; Personalities/Entertainment; Sports News.

**Money and Work:** Business/Finance; Work/Industry

**Power and Policy:** Politics; Military/Diplomatic; Media/ Communications; Transport Issues

**Social Matters:** Social Issues; Environment; Health/Medicine; Consumer Affairs; Religion/Faith.

The quantitative data compared the program content on the basis of:

- total program times, and duration and percentages of stories from different categories

- duration and percentages of stories with a potential multicultural impact

As in the news studies, qualitative analysis focused on how stories were told in terms of talent selection, the role the talent played, and the way the talent was presented. The same 9-point scale (adapted from Media Monitor's Tone Ratings system) was used to rate the tone of the story to give an idea of whether it was likely to have left a negative or positive impression with the viewer. There was also an additional rating estimating the possible impact on community harmony to the extent that stories might have a negative, neutral or positive impact, or reinforce a stereotype.

The coding identified talents from different ethnic backgrounds on the basis of what could be deduced by an average viewer from features such as appearance, dress, accent, name or title. In this way it was possible to compare reporting styles for stories featuring Anglo talent with those featuring talent drawn from ethnic minority groups. This study adopts Dunn et al's terminology of 'ethnic minorities' (EM) to distinguish the diverse range of ethnic groups from the 'dominant (Anglo-Celtic) "host" society' that defines mainstream Australia (2004, p. 411).

This does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - while data was collected this constitutes an altogether different study and the data will be analysed separately. The qualitative analysis covered:

- What sort of stories ethnic minorities appeared in;
- What types of issues these stories were associated with;
- The ways in which people from EM backgrounds were portrayed;
- The types of talent used;
- The tone adopted in the presentation;
- The role of pictures and graphics on the overall impact of the story.

## **Content Analysis - Quantitative Data**

The current affairs programs contain fewer but longer stories than the news bulletins (average length 5:08 minutes compared to 1:03 minutes) and this means the quantitative data gathered over a two-week period is based on a much smaller data set:

2005 news study: 43 hours, 1990 stories

2007 news study: 66 hours, 3121 stories

2008 current affairs study: 22 hours, 225 stories

While the data will be reported here, the story numbers are so low that the figures can serve only to give an indication of possible trends. The qualitative data which analyses the way stories are told will deliver richer results. As with the news studies, content will be discussed in terms of percentages relative to each program to overcome the disparities in program length.

Table 1 shows the proportion of story content across all programs compared to other material such as advertising and dressing. As would be expected the non-commercial ABC has the highest amount of story content in its programs (averaging 96 per cent) compared to the commercial programs where the average is 72 per cent. In SBS's Dateline program which includes commercial breaks story content constitutes just under 85 per cent of the total program.

**Table 1: Components of each program expressed as a % of total program**

Network	Advertising	Dressing	Story	Weather
60 Minutes	23.43%	5.09%	71.48%	0.00%
730 Report	0.00%	2.50%	97.50%	0.00%
A Current Affair	19.24%	4.35%	76.41%	0.00%
Dateline	8.82%	6.34%	84.84%	0.00%
Stateline NSW	0.00%	5.28%	94.72%	0.00%
Stateline QLD	0.00%	3.33%	96.67%	0.00%
Stateline Vic	0.00%	3.72%	96.28%	0.00%
Stateline WA	0.00%	5.33%	94.67%	0.00%
Today Tonight Eastern States	16.12%	6.23%	76.80%	0.85%
Today Tonight WA	21.52%	3.99%	74.49%	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.91%</b>	<b>4.62%</b>	<b>86.39%</b>	<b>0.08%</b>

When we look at content by location (Table 2) some interesting differences emerge. It appears to be a feature of the nightly commercial current affairs programs that their stories appear as ‘generic’ as possible. This means that they are tied to no specific location which makes it easier for the national programs to overcome the problem of not being tailored to any particular local audience. The two weekly programs Dateline (SBS) and A Current Affair (Nine) contain no local stories. Dateline focuses exclusively on international stories, in line with SBS’s global brief, while 60 Minutes offers a mix of national and international stories, often incorporating content from its US sister program. As for the nightly programs, the ABC’s 730 report contains a smattering of local content, but, like the ABC’s news service (Phillips and Tapsall 2007a, p.11), mostly addresses issues of national concern. The ABC Stateline programs were established in order to provide a window for local current affairs one night a week and predictably most of their stories are state-based in line with that brief. During this survey period Nine’s A Current Affair is skewed towards NSW in identifiable content, with 50 per cent of total content fitting under the ‘National’/ ‘Non-Specified’ category. Seven’s Today Tonight has more Victorian content during this survey period, while 48 per cent of the total is ‘National’/ ‘Non-Specified’. The local WA version contains 21 per cent local stories and 44 per cent ‘National’/ ‘Non-Specified’.

**Table 2: Content by location expressed as a % of total program**

Network	International	Local NSW	Local QLD	Local VIC	Local WA	National
60 Minutes	43.01%					56.99%
730 Report	12.09%	8.06%		8.71%	5.49%	65.65%
A Current Affair	9.26%	24.88%	1.73%	13.68%		50.44%
Dateline	100.00%					
Stateline NSW		100.00%				
Stateline QLD			89.04%			10.96%
Stateline Vic				82.14%		17.86%
Stateline WA					77.43%	22.57%
Today Tonight Eastern States	10.48%	7.10%	10.07%	21.65%	2.58%	48.12%
Today Tonight WA	3.52%	6.63%	6.14%	18.13%	21.00%	44.59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.84%</b>	<b>14.67%</b>	<b>10.70%</b>	<b>14.43%</b>	<b>10.65%</b>	<b>31.72%</b>

Of all content, 16.28 per cent of stories make no mention of a specific location. All these stories are on the commercial programs and Table 3 summarises the total percentage of Non-Specified content for each program. This appears to indicate that the types of stories selected for the commercial programs tend to be directed at ‘everyman’ ‘anywhere’, with an occasional attempt in the presenter introduction to customise for the state via reference to a local suburb. This makes the story appear local even when the material has been compiled elsewhere.

**Table 3: Summary per program of total Non-Specified content as % of total program content**

Network	Location	Percentage of Network Stories
60 Minutes	Not Specified	21.35%
A Current Affair	Not Specified	29.31%
Today Tonight Eastern States	Not Specified	28.74%
Today Tonight WA	Not Specified	27.15%

As with the previous analysis of television news (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007a) this study also looked at the level of content that could be considered new and original compared to

content derived from conventional news sources via rounds, press releases, etc. Content was therefore broken down into the following categories:

**New:** A unique story either as a scoop or a follow-up to a substantial story that breaks new ground.

**Happening:** A big event or breaking news that is easily identified by the network in the course of its day-to-day operations (eg crime report, fire, car crash and so on).

**Routine:** Courts, parliaments and the predictable or scheduled story or follow-up.

**Assisted:** The normal flow of information that is delivered to the newsroom, such media calls or press releases and follow-ups from newspapers

As Table 4 shows, the vast bulk of commercial television current affairs is derived from material delivered to the programs by potential clients, and in many cases this takes the form of promotions for other station programs or commercial products. This material made up over 80 per cent of the content of the Eastern States edition of Today Tonight, and over 67 per cent of the content of its Nine rival A Current Affair. This compares with 18 per cent for the ABC's 730 Report.

**Table 4: Origin of news as a % of total program content**

Network	Assisted	Happening	New	Routine
60 Minutes	60.85%	15.23%	14.61%	9.31%
730 Report	18.17%	28.76%	28.73%	24.34%
A Current Affair	67.82%	12.54%	11.18%	8.46%
Dateline		48.85%	51.15%	
Stateline NSW	20.57%	18.32%	31.38%	29.73%
Stateline QLD	55.15%	18.54%	26.31%	
Stateline Vic	9.43%	57.66%		32.92%
Stateline WA	21.67%	29.84%	48.49%	
Today Tonight Eastern States	80.54%	17.50%		1.95%
Today Tonight WA	62.98%	25.46%	10.22%	1.34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.72%</b>	<b>27.27%</b>	<b>22.21%</b>	<b>10.80%</b>

As with the news studies the stories in the current affairs programs were analysed in relation to their EM content. In the television news studies stories featuring identifiable

EM talent constituted 4.6 per cent of total news in 2007, down from 7.5 per cent in 2005. Levels in the current affairs programs are higher: 8.7 per cent of total content (Table 5).

**Table 5: Total EM content**

Network	Percentage of Total EM News Across All Services	EM News as Percentage of Each Stations News
60 Minutes	0.00%	0.00%
730 Report	18.32%	35.40%
A Current Affair	18.78%	36.80%
Dateline	21.67%	100.00%
Stateline NSW	3.81%	32.60%
Stateline QLD	2.32%	19.49%
Stateline Vic	0.00%	0.00%
Stateline WA	3.72%	31.77%
Today Tonight Eastern States	18.88%	35.73%
Today Tonight WA	12.48%	25.43%

When we look at the content categories, Crime is a less prominent category in current affairs programs compared to television news. In the 2007 news study 30 per cent of EM news and 25 per cent of Anglo news was crime-related. In the current affairs study around 8 per cent of EM news is in the Courts and Justice category, roughly comparable with 7 per cent of Anglo news in the Crime category (see Tables 6 and 7). The top categories for EM talent are Politics and Social Issues, while for Anglo talent the top categories are Politics and Health and Medicine.

**Table 6: Top 5 content categories for EM stories**

Category	Percentage of All News	Percentage of EM News
Politics	4.45%	13.07%
Social Issues	4.06%	11.92%
Personalities and Entertainment	3.28%	9.63%
Military and Diplomatic	3.10%	9.11%
Courts and Justice	2.66%	7.82%

**Table 7: Top 5 content categories for Anglo stories**

Category	Percentage of All News	Percentage of Non-EM News
Politics	11.93%	18.08%
Health and Medicine	10.75%	16.29%
Personalities and Entertainment	9.74%	14.76%
Social Issues	6.33%	9.59%
Crime	4.79%	7.26%

When we look at types of stories, Tables 8 and 9 show EM and Anglo talent concentrated in the Fun and Games, Social Issues, and Power and Policy categories. This also shows up the difference between the news and current affairs agendas. In the 2007 news study Power and Policy and Courts, Crime and Disasters dominated the bulletins, comprising 77 per cent of total EM content and 52 per cent of total Anglo content. The data therefore shows that the current affairs programs have a less intense agenda, leavened by softer social issues and entertainment stories. Also the differences between EM and Anglo content are less stark: 74 per cent of EM content is in the top 3 categories, compared to 83 per cent for Anglo content.

**Table 8: EM stories by story type**

Story Type	Percentage of All News	Percentage of EM News
Fun and Games	8.42%	24.73%
Social Issues	8.32%	24.44%
Power and Policy	8.31%	24.42%
Blood and Guts	4.26%	12.51%
Money and Work	4.03%	11.85%
Clever Country	0.70%	2.05%

**Table 9: Anglo stories by story type**

Story Type	Percentage of All News	Percentage of Anglo News
Social Issues	25.08%	38.02%
Fun and Games	16.78%	25.43%
Power and Policy	12.98%	19.68%
Blood and Guts	6.56%	9.94%
Money and Work	4.56%	6.92%

Another difference between news and current affairs emerges when we analyse story tone. In the 2007 television news study, EM content was substantially more negative in tone compared to Anglo content (53.03 per cent of EM news compared to 29.05 per cent of Anglo news, see Phillips, 2008, p. 22). In current affairs with fewer stories the figures can be no more than broadly indicative, but the proportions of positive to negative stories are much more balanced. As Tables 10 and 11 show, levels of positive stories above neutral are very close (around 58 per cent for both), and while there is a difference in levels of negative categories below neutral, the gap is much smaller (37 per cent for negative EM stories compared to 31 per cent for negative Anglo stories).

**Table 10: EM stories by tone**

Tone	Percentage of All News	Percentage of EM News
10 Extremely Positive	1.07%	3.15%
9 Highly Positive	1.54%	4.53%
8 Very Positive	3.76%	11.05%
7 Positive	6.85%	20.13%
6 Balanced to Positive	6.59%	19.35%
5 Neutral	1.60%	4.71%
4 Somewhat Negative	7.31%	21.48%
3 Negative	4.47%	13.12%
2 Very Negative	0.84%	2.48%

**Table 11: Anglo stories by tone**

Tone	Percentage of All News	Percentage of Non-EM News
10 Extremely Positive	1.09%	1.65%
9 Highly Positive	4.24%	6.42%
8 Very Positive	8.03%	12.18%
7 Positive	10.58%	16.04%
6 Balanced to Positive	14.23%	21.57%
5 Neutral	7.16%	10.85%
4 Somewhat Negative	13.36%	20.25%
3 Negative	6.39%	9.69%
2 Very Negative	0.89%	1.34%

Tables 12 and 13 below allow us to compare the different programs in relation to story tone, and here some interesting differences appear. The negative EM stories are concentrated in the nightly commercial programs, in particular Today Tonight (note that SBS's negative content derives from its international stories, many of which relate to overseas conflicts. 60 Minutes had no EM content). There are proportionately fewer negative Anglo stories: on the contrary, both A Current Affair and the Eastern States version of Today Tonight show a big skew towards positive stories. A Current Affair's comparatively high level of negative Anglo stories may be illustrative of a tendency to deal with stories in terms of black-and-white as opposed to shades of grey. The data so far appears to indicate that current affairs reporting in general is even more formulaic than news in relation to story selection and approach, no matter what talent is used. This will be analysed further in the qualitative analysis to follow.

**Table 12: EM Grouped Tone- station comparison**

Network	Positive	Balanced	Negative
730 Report	43.18%	56.82%	
A Current Affair	47.22%	38.13%	14.64%
Dateline	32.28%	46.66%	21.05%
Stateline NSW	43.82%	56.18%	
Stateline QLD	47.49%	52.51%	
Stateline WA	63.16%	36.84%	
Today Tonight Eastern States	32.91%	40.34%	26.75%
Today Tonight WA	30.00%	44.10%	25.90%

**Table 13: Anglo Grouped Tone- station comparison**

Network	Positive	Balanced	Negative
60 Minutes	31.71%	68.29%	
730 Report	20.79%	72.83%	6.39%
A Current Affair	59.54%	13.25%	27.21%
Stateline NSW	4.40%	95.60%	
Stateline QLD	28.52%	71.48%	
Stateline Vic	9.43%	90.57%	
Stateline WA		81.01%	18.99%
Today Tonight Eastern States	52.74%	34.91%	12.35%
Today Tonight WA	42.69%	44.32%	12.99%

The low story numbers makes the tally of stories according to EM group little more than a token indication of representation, from which it is difficult to note more than a hint of what might be a broad trend. However some interesting details do emerge. In the 2007 news study the most represented groups in domestic, as opposed to international, stories were: Zimbabwean, Asian, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, African, and Islamic. As Table 14 shows, the EM domestic groups in the 2008 current affairs study span both older and newer ethnic demographic communities, with Italian-Australians particularly well represented.

**Table 14: EM numbers of stories by community (domestic only)**

Community	Stories
Italian	12
Not Specified	9
British	6
Islamic	6
Asian	5
African	4
Greek	3
Eastern European	3
European	2
French	2
Indian	2
Japanese	2
Indonesian	1
Lebanese	1
New Zealander	1
Dutch	1
Saudi Arabian	1
South Africa	1
American	1
African American	1
Swedish	1
German	1

When the stories are rated against the ‘community harmony’ scale (Table 15) it is worth noting, even with such a small number of stories, the pattern in relation to the distribution of negative and positive coverage. The groups attracting ‘Negative’/ ‘Reinforce Stereotype’ coverage are highlighted in the table and comprise communities that could be considered newer (African, Asian, Indian, Indonesian, Islamic, Japanese) while more established communities such as the Greek and Italian attract more positive coverage. The representation of the Islamic community is mostly negative, that of the British uniformly positive. This is interesting given the shifting patterns of racism in the Australian community where the focus has moved in recent years towards the Asian and Islamic communities (Dunn et al, 2004). The way the communities are represented in stories will be explored in more detail in the qualitative analysis below.

**Table 15: Community Harmony Ratings for all groups**

Community	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Reinforces Stereotype	Total
African		1	2	1	4
African American			1		1
American			1		1
Asian	2		2	1	5
British			6		6
Dutch			1		1
Eastern European		1		2	3
European	1		1		2
French	2				2
German			1		1
Greek			3		3
Indian	1		1		2
Indonesian	1				1
Islamic	3	1	1	1	6
Italian	3		6	3	12
Japanese	2				2
Lebanese		1			1
New Zealander				1	1
Not Specified	2	4	1	2	9
Saudi Arabian		1			1
South Africa	1				1
Swedish			1		1

To sum up, despite the lower story numbers the quantitative data does reveal some interesting features in current affairs reporting, in particular in relation to the nightly programs. Clear differences emerge between the commercial offerings on channels Seven and Nine and the ABC. The nightly commercial programs rely much more on promotional and other assisted material than the ABC. They also often opt to keep the location of stories obscure to make them more acceptable and applicable to a national audience. There is less of a discrepancy between levels of EM and Anglo content, though the commercial programs feature a greater proportion of negative EM stories. The issue however is not one of proportionality, ensuring a tick-the-box representation of groups according to their relative size in the general population – for example according to 2007 census data people from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse categories constituted 16 per cent of the Australian population. (ABS, 2007) What concerns us is rather where and when they appear, and how they are represented when they do. As Entman and Rojecki point out, this is what ‘worsens negative stereotyping.’ (2001, p.81) The following qualitative analysis will provide the opportunity to go beyond the raw data to investigate storytelling technique.

## **Qualitative Analysis: Story treatment**

The previous content analyses of Australia's television news showed not just what was on our screens, but also the extent to which story selection and storytelling techniques were a product of the business model, formats and conventions of the medium. These constraints exacerbated a tendency for EM talent to be ignored unless stories were dramatic or tragic enough to make them worthy of public attention. (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007a, 2007b; Phillips, 2008; Phillips, forthcoming) In this study of television current affairs, the qualitative analysis focuses similarly on how stories are told in order to see whether any differences emerge in story selection, story treatment, talent selection and tone between those featuring Anglo talent and those featuring EM talent. While Dateline and 60 Minutes were included in the data capture, their content and approach is different and will be considered after the analysis of the daily programs.

### **What stories feature Ethnic Minority (EM) talent?**

As has already been noted in the quantitative data, the most striking feature of the current affairs programs is the extent to which the nightly commercial programs Today Tonight (Channel Seven) and A Current Affair (Channel Nine) feature stories that are plugs for either products or other programs on their respective stations. For example coinciding with the launch of his latest cooking series on Channel Seven Gordon Ramsay features on two TT programs in both WA and ES (20 and 26 June) – ACA covers him too as a bit of a spoiler story on 20 and 27 June. Similarly in advance of ACA airing a special documentary on Schapelle Corby on 25 June it promotes it with stories on three different days: 20, 23, and 25 June. One edition of TT (17 June) features commercial plugs in three of its four stories (Readers Digest list of Australia's most trusted brands; Cannes Ad Awards featuring brands which were the subject of winning Australian ads; a new book on friendship). Given that an average of 75 per cent of the commercial programs is devoted to story content (as opposed to advertising, dressing, etc, see Table 1 above), and given that out of that total 68 per cent of ACA, 81 per cent of TT ES and 63 per cent of

TT WA are ‘assisted’ stories (see Table 4 above) there is not a lot of scope for original storytelling in these formats. However some patterns do emerge, and there are distinct differences between the commercial and public broadcasting programs.

As with television news the default position in current affairs reporting is that the talent will be predominantly Anglo – reflecting the main pool of talent for stories concerning politics, business, and public affairs in general. Of the 225 stories, 155 stories have no EM faces at all, even incidentally in the background, and on a couple of occasions EM talent is absent from an entire program (ACA 26 June; TT 27 June). That said, as has already been noted, overall EM content levels are higher as a proportion of total content than for news (8.7 per cent compared to 4.6 per cent of total news in 2007, see Table 5 above).

Where EM talent is used people appear in a variety of roles.

1. EM as silent assistants

Here EM talent is peripheral to the story, and is just a silent presence in the background. This occurs in six stories: the lab assistant in Professor Barry Marshall’s laboratory in a story on the Nobel prize winner (TT WA 16 June); the assistant seen working in the office of former federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough in a story on the Northern territory intervention (730 19 June); the removalists emptying the offices of a failed ADHD drug company (730 16 June); the laundry workers labouring in the background in a story about layoffs in the wake of a gas explosion in WA (730, 18 June); the serving staff in restaurants where the main talent is dining (TT 20 June; ACA, 19 June; 25 June).

2. EM as ‘victim’

Commercial current affairs programs in particular feature many stories where people have fallen victim to the system in some way and in this category we find both Anglo and EM talent. Out of a total of 14 stories, nine feature Anglo victims (for example: Australian women falling victim to incompetent overseas cosmetic surgeons, TT ES

16 June; young employees being exploited by DVD store owner, TT ES 18 June; victim of asbestos disease, Stateline Queensland 20 June; angry customers of tow truck company, ACA 27 June). Five stories feature EM victims (Italian pensioner victim of greedy landlord, TT 17 June; the employee sacked for allegedly causing a fire at the supermarket where he worked, ACA 18 June; East European elderly woman being forced to move out by local council, TT 19 June; EM and Anglo victims of franchise closure, TT 20 June; EM and Anglo victims of 'Ron the Con' and his Bikini Girls massage business scam, TT Perth 25 June).

### 3. EM as 'deviant'

There are eight stories in this category (compared to two featuring deviant Anglos). In some respects this category follows on from the previous one as it relates to stories where EM talent is represented as 'bad', usually in relation to Anglo victims. Thus in the story cited above on the risks of overseas cosmetic surgery, Malaysian surgeons are represented as doing damage to the Anglo Australian clients, and are the target of criticism for the (Anglo) experts who criticize them (TT ES 16 June). EM talent features in three stories in the guise of conmen (swindler in a business deal ACA 16 June; dodgy car dealer ACA 17 June; manager of dodgy heart check clinic TT 26 June). Mick Gatto is the subject of two stories (TT 24 June; ACA 24 June) because of alleged threats he made against Melbourne talkback host Derryn Hinch. While he is an Australian of Italian background both stories represent him in terms of the Italian gangster stereotype. Two stories focus on the Muslim community and both encourage a sense of fear and distrust. The first, a Today Tonight story on 25 June, deals with the subject of polygamy based on the contention that Muslim men are taking multiple wives to rot the welfare system. The second concerns plans to build a mosque in Cairns which is creating tensions in the local community (ACA 27 June). These will be analyzed in detail later.

#### 4. 'Good' EM

There is one story that presents EM talent in a positive light. ABC Stateline WA (27 June) features a story about a young African refugee from the Congo who is building a career as a soccer star. There are pictures of the young man on the soccer pitch and he and his family are interviewed at home where they are seen around the dinner table saying grace. The story loads on the stereotypes to show refugees as good, God-fearing people and the coach is even quoted as saying 'they seem to have that natural sporting ability, not saying that isn't something the Australian race don't have.' However it does make a change from the usual representations of refugees as a threat to Australian society.

#### 5. 'Normal' EM

In television current affairs, as in news, it is the Anglo who is represented as the 'generic Aussie', in this case featuring in 30 stories – the largest of the sub-categories identified here, for example:

ACA 16 June: story about a typical family selected in an experiment to keep track of their food waste;

TT 17 June: story about childcare fees where parents and children are all Anglo;

730 Report 25 June: story about revival of cruising holidays where old and new ads feature iconic 'Aussie' imagery and travel agency clients are all Anglo;

TT 27 June: Choice-sourced story about unit pricing in supermarkets featuring all Anglo shoppers).

However there is also a category which can be called 'Aussie EM' where the talent may have a name or the remnants of an accent which may indicate EM heritage to the close observer, but where this identity is totally unproblematic and the person is very comfortably located within the Australian mainstream. This applies mostly to people from the more established migrant communities who speak with Australian accents, and it is tempting to take this as indicative of the media reflecting the trajectory of gradual acceptance over time of different waves of migrants into Australian society, with newer

groups replacing them as the focus of prejudice (see Dunn et al, 2004. Compare television news, Phillips, 2009 forthcoming). There are five stories featuring ‘Aussie EMs’:

ABC: 730, 17 June. An Italian-Australian winemaker who wins a French award;

Nine: ACA, 19 June. An Italian-Australian fruiterer who has liposuction treatment for his ‘manboobs’;

Nine: ACA, 19 June. A Middle Eastern Australian who organizes ‘swap and save’ parties;

ABC: 730, 26 June. An Asian Australian dancer who received a bionic eye;

ABC: Stateline WA, 20 June. A Swiss-Australian and a non-specified EM-Australian floorball player;

Nine: ACA, 25 June. The EM lawyer sacked from convicted drug trafficker Schapelle Corby’s team.

In addition to this there are 12 stories where EM talent is featured as an unexceptional ingredient, either with speaking parts, or as faces in the crowd. Whereas it was noted in the previous television studies that EM faces tended to appear only where the story called for it, in current affairs, especially on the local Stateline programs on the ABC, diversity appears more normalized. We see EM faces in classrooms (Stateline NSW 20 June; TT WA 24 June; ACA 24 June; TT 25 June); in shops (730 18 June; TT ES 19 June); at sporting events (Stateline WA 20 June); in hospitals (Stateline Vic 20 June; 730 25 June). A 730 Report story on petrol prices in the Torres Strait Islands (18 June) contains a range of talent representing the town in all its diversity: Islander, Aboriginal, Asian and Anglo. One story on a DNA test for breast cancer (TT ES 18 June) includes an EM angle, raising the issue of how to reach women from different ethnic backgrounds. Another story, on Opera Australia’s schools program First Act, Stateline NSW (27 June) features young singers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and interviews Anglo, EM and Aboriginal participants. A story on the WA gas crisis aftermath (Stateline WA 20 June) features an EM academic as expert commentator.

The qualitative data confirms the quantitative evidence that television current affairs reporting is distinctively different from television news. While the content is predominantly Anglo, the formulaic nature of the genre means that the type of story matters more than the actor, and all talent tends to be treated in the same way – as heroes or villains, shysters or victims, no matter what their ethnic origin. Although EM deviants outnumber the Anglo eight to two, there is less of a sense that ethnic communities are targeted and demonized to the extent that they appeared to be in television news. However, as was noted in television news, the fact that Anglos are often seen as the victims of EM criminals extends the ‘racial and ethnic typification of crime’ (Chiricos and Eschholz 2002: 416) also noted in television news. (Phillips, 2009, forthcoming) There were three particularly disturbing stories captured during the current affairs survey which merit more detailed consideration.

#### Legalizing Polygamy, TT, 25 June

This story, which leads the program, appears to have been prompted by the decision by the UK to legalize polygamy. On the basis of that decision, the story investigates whether legalization could or should happen in Australia. Two Muslim men, one a current polygamist and one seeking a second wife, are used as talent, as are two male Islamic leaders and a female (Anglo) relationships expert. The focus of the story is on whether polygamy opens the door to roting of the Australian welfare system as men claim benefits for multiple families.

The opening graphic carries the title ‘Multiple wives’ and features shots of the veiled heads of two women, one in a white chador with her eyes and forehead showing, the other in a burqa with just her eyes showing through a slit. However in both cases the eyes are carefully made up and the impression is one of veiled sexuality, a common stereotypical theme in the representation of Muslim women in the media. (see Aly and Walker 2007)

According to the presenter’s link, the UK initiative has prompted Muslim men in Australia to ‘rally’ to have Australian laws changed. However we have no way of

knowing whether the story was prompted by a local community initiative, or whether the responses from the Islamic community have been triggered by the reporters themselves as they have sought local comment on the issue. There is certainly no evidence given for a local initiative – a petition, a report given to government, a press release, etc. From the opening words, where the announcer presents the story in the context of Muslim leaders pushing to have ‘our laws’ changed there is the setting up of an oppositional relationship between the Muslim ‘them’ and the Australian ‘us’.

The schism is confirmed with the rather shocking start to the story itself, which features an obviously enraged large and bearded man attacking the much smaller blonde female reporter and her camera crew as she attempts to interview him. The reporter’s introductory words set the violence in context: ‘It’s illegal, considered morally wrong, and unjust to women, but that hasn’t stopped some Muslim men in Australia snubbing the law’. The violent and cursing man is introduced as ‘Mad Mohammad Maba’ [last name unclear] who is accused of ‘taking two wives and every taxpayers cent he could’. He is in a polygamous relationship with two women, but all three have kept their relationship concealed from the authorities. The wives are captured at a distance, paparazzi-style, in grainy and unsteady footage. While Mohammad lashes out and repeatedly protests that his personal life is ‘None of your business’, one wife, unveiled, who is with her husband at the time of the interview, attempts to present the case to the reporter, saying that under Muslim law men can have up to four wives. The story shifts to the second example where a man who is trying to find a second wife via a Muslim internet site is confronted by a male reporter on the street with the words ‘You’re attempting to break the law here...It is illegal in this country to have two wives. Can you tell me why you are trying to find a second wife?’ The man is described as being ‘on the prowl’ for a second wife while his first wife was in a park near his home – with the inference of unfaithfulness underscoring the blot against his character. The man refuses to face the camera or to answer the reporter’s questions so instead the story is illustrated with mug shots from his website and blurred shots via a hidden camera of his wife in the park.

Interspersed with the images of street chases and violence are calmer interviews with two Islamic community leaders: Sheikh Khalil Chami is interviewed in a book-lined library, and Kaysar Trad, often used as community spokesperson, is in a studio setting. They are well dressed, well spoken, and controlled – in keeping with the established conventions already noticed in television news for the representation of authority (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007b). Both try to make the case that the issue is a social rather than a religious one, with men with multiple partners - be they sequential or, in the case of polygamy, simultaneous – a fact of life. However the story continues to underscore the theme of Muslims roting taxpaying Australians with the female relationships expert giving her opinion that polygamy is not fair to women and that they go along with it because they have no choice. She underscores the roting theme asking rhetorically: ‘Is it fair for the Australian taxpayer to pay for twenty children from three different wives? I don’t think that’s really very fair.’

The reporter’s links are delivered over file shots of men in prayer at a mosque and women in the streets in robes, veils and burqas – images that tend, as the previous news studies have shown, to underscore the ‘otherness’ of Muslims in the Australian community. (Phillips and Tapsall, 2007; Phillips, 2008) The story has a little kick in the tail with Mohammad’s final words in response to the reporter’s comment that Australian men don’t have two wives: ‘Maybe they don’t have the balls.’

This story therefore brings into play several uncomfortable themes while offering no context, nor any way of resolving the apparent impasse between Muslim practices and the assumed Australian way of life. The Muslim men are portrayed as exploiters of women and adulterers. The Muslim commentators are represented as condoners of behaviour that the journalists are presenting as beyond the pale, even though multiple partners and tax-rotting of family benefits are not exactly unknown in the wider community. The images of violence, both verbal and physical, and the impression of untrustworthiness and sneakiness are disturbing. Taken together with the images of men at prayer and veiled women in the streets they contribute to an overall impression of rather threatening otherness. Muslims are pitted against ‘Australians’ even while Mohammad forcefully

declaims that he is an Australian and can do what he likes in his country. And the story ends with a slight on Australian manhood that would be bound to raise the hackles of at least some male viewers. This goading along with the opening images of a large and physically violent Muslim man threatening an archetypal blond Australian woman suggest subthemes around masculinity, territoriality and male pride that create the climate for the sort of inter-racial discord that erupted on the beaches of Cronulla. Thus an issue that is certainly newsworthy has been treated in a way that could exacerbate, and even encourage, community ill-feeling. There is no attempt to give a context, or to explain Muslim practices to us in ways that broaden our understanding. Nor is there any attempt to deal with the wider social welfare issues, of which in the end this is just one example amongst many others that could be cited involving non-Muslim Australians.

Cairns Mosque, ACA, 27 June

This story, the third in the program line-up, revisits a story originally aired in 2007 concerning plans by the Islamic community in Cairns to build a three-storey mosque in a suburban street. The proposal outraged the locals at the time and resulted in legal action which had now been resolved in favour of the construction of what is described as the 'mega mosque'. The introductory graphic features the title 'Mega Mosques' superimposed on the outline of a dome between two turrets, in front of a file picture of a large mosque next to a large suburban house. When we are later shown pictures of the actual building it is much more modest in character.

The reporter's introduction sets the story up as a clash between religions: 'Humble home today. Mighty mosque tomorrow. Residents of this quiet Cairns street have fought a holy war and lost.' The comments of the local Anglo residents suggest objections go much deeper than the appearance of the streetscape with one resident saying 'We don't want it in our city and we certainly don't want it in our street!' and later 'The two are totally opposed – their way and our way.' Another resident says he would rather have a brothel in the street than the mosque.

The clang of a gong provides a Middle Eastern-sounding segue to a computer representation of the planned building, superimposed on the modest fibro house currently occupying the block. The main building is one storey high, the same height as surrounding houses, with the tower rising above it to the full three-storey height. The robed and bearded Imam is introduced to us at prayer in the current modest premises. Footage of the rest of the street and the reporter's commentary emphasize the apparent incongruity of the appearance of the proposed building with its dome and tower. The Imam comments that the residents 'exercised their right [to protest] and they gave it their best shot and they lost'. Keysar Trad is once again sought out for comment and he describes the residents' reactions as 'hysterical and to some extent based on ignorance' showing 'no understanding of Islam, and simply repeating some of the anti-Islamic rhetoric picked up from other places'.

The reporter then provides apparently alarming statistics: 1.4 million Muslims 'call Australia home', mosques are 'mushrooming' around the country. We see file shots of other protests against Islamic encroachment – with speakers at a rally against a proposed Muslim school in the Sydney suburb of Camden saying things like 'Watch out, Australia' 'Don't let them take Camden' and 'If they want to integrate then they should go to our schools'. One Anglo man says 'it means a way of life that will vanish quickly' while an Anglo woman says 'you tell me one country where these people have gone that [sic] there's not unrest, they will not assimilate'. Another Anglo man comments: Well, they don't come up and shake your hand ...and say "g'day mate". The presenter's back announce sums up by saying that construction is due to start within a couple of months unless an appeal lodged.

The story pits 'archetypal Australians' living in their archetypal fibro houses against assumed intruders who are shown through the language of the report to be alien, unAustralian, and unholy. It doesn't attempt to hide the prejudice inherent in this portrayal and in fact features numerous examples of the blunt language of the Anglo talents who demonstrate the fear and loathing within the general public for Muslims and their religion. The tone of the story suggests our sympathy should lie with the

Australians whose way of life is being encroached upon no less than their communities and streetscapes. The story is striking because of its frank representation of anti-Islam feeling in a context which implies that such feeling is part of being a true blue Australian. This certainly gives the story impact, with apparently little concern for any potential impact on community harmony.

Gordon Ramsay program launch, TT, 20 June

The focus of this example is a segment of a story about celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay's bad language which has prompted government calls for on-screen warnings about foul language in television programs. We see examples of his behaviour from the program and are taken to the press conference welcoming Ramsay to Australia. The reporter comments that it is the kitchen staff facing the brunt of Ramsay's ire who are the ones you feel most sorry for and then decides to try out this sort of behaviour himself on one of the waiters at the reception. He picks on an Asian man carrying a tray of canapés and starts abusing him, grabbing him by the apron and shouting 'you need to lift your game' before letting him in on the 'joke.' This is shocking for a number of reasons. First, the behaviour is totally gratuitous and adds nothing to the story. Second, it uses an unsuspecting member of the public as a prop without their consent. Third, the waiter in a public function is going to be under all sorts of constraints in terms of how he can respond to abuse from a guest. And fourth, the subject selected to test the impact of abusive behaviour is an Asian man. Given how rarely non-Anglo people are selected as talent in speaking or non-speaking roles, as shown in both this study and the previous news studies (Phillips and Tapsall 2007a, 2007b, Phillips 2008), the overwhelming impression left by this exchange is one of racial bullying.

Given the paucity of material featuring people from EM backgrounds as story subjects in their own right, it is particularly significant that the two exceptions to this rule in this survey concern the Islamic community and represent them in such a way as to increase rather than decrease public fear and mistrust. The focus is less on responsible reporting than on making the most of the topic's dramatic potential even if this requires appealing to the public's basest prejudices. The stories appear to at best sympathize with and at

worst condone racist persecution of Islamic groups. They articulate explicitly and implicitly feelings that Muslims are different from 'us' and have no place in Australia unless they conform to Australian (Christian) behavioural norms. This is of concern given the role both news and current affairs play in reflecting society back to itself (see Phillips, 2009, forthcoming). The third example of racial bullying similarly stands out and gains impact because it is so much an exception to the usual practice.

### **Dateline and 60 Minutes**

The study included not just the nightly current affairs programs but also SBS's Dateline and Channel Nine's 60 Minutes. These are weekly one-hour programs with a different style, format and agenda to the nightly current affairs programs. Dateline presents longer form documentary-style features focusing on international current affairs. 60 Minutes offers a mix of celebrity interviews, stories from its US sister program, and local stories with a human interest focus. Across the two week period studied only two programs could be captured for each – giving us six stories for Dateline and seven stories for 60 Minutes. This provides no useful quantitative data. As for EM content, by its nature Dateline takes us all over the world and diversity is a defining feature of the program. 60 Minutes features all Anglo talent save for the one of the friends attending a 'tween' make-up party in a story following the controversy over Bill Henson's photographs. While the reporting style of 60 Minutes is not too different from its commercial weeknight stablemates, the reporting style of Dateline offers some interesting points of difference in technique in two areas: the use of subtitles, and the use of hidden cameras. The following analysis will compare the use of these techniques on SBS and the commercial services.

#### **Subtitles**

It was observed in the 2007 news study that subtitles have a particular role to play on SBS television. (Phillips, 2009, forthcoming) In its role of 'bringing the world back home' it was making foreign language programs accessible to its domestic multilingual audiences. However, as the Ethnic Television Review Panel pointed out in 1980, it also

had the brief to ‘foster the appreciation and development of the cultural diversity of Australian society.’ (cited in Hawkins and Ang, 2007, p. 5) This required that programs be made accessible to English-speaking viewers as well, and subtitling was deemed preferable to dubbing because it is ‘not just a technical transposition from one linguistic system to another but also...a much more delicate and empathetic engagement with how complex worlds of meaning could be communicated from one linguistic realm to another.’ (ibid) For the SBS, subtitling is ‘a matter not just of linguistic translation but also cultural translation, a process of making different worlds of meaning mutually understandable and commensurable.’ (ibid: 6)

In the previous studies of television news it has been noted that, in the commercial services especially, subtitles sent a message that was not always positive and in fact could underscore the sense of ‘difference’ between ethnic minorities and the perceived mainstream. (Phillips, 2009, forthcoming) In the current affairs survey five stories featured subtitles: two on ACA (20 June, 23 June), one on the 730 Report (19 June) and two on SBS Dateline (18.6, 25.6).

ACA, 20 June, 23 June: Schapelle Corby documentary previews

These are two preview packages for a documentary to be shown on channel Nine. The first begins with a grab of an exchange between Corby and an unidentified Indonesian man. While he speaks in English his words are subtitled – conveying the impression that his English is too strongly accented to be understood by the average viewer. In another grab the voice of an unidentified Indonesian is heard in a mobile phone call describing the money needed presumably for bribes and this conversation is also subtitled, though this is justified by poor sound quality.

In the second preview both Indonesian talents – a female friend and Corby’s lawyer – are subtitled. While they speak English with an accent both speak clearly and are easy to understand. A mobile phone excerpt from another talent is subtitled – again for sound quality reasons consistent with the preceding story.

Israel/Palestine Footy Team, 730, 19 June

This story takes us to Israel to cover a combined Israeli/Palestinian Aussie Rules football team. A Black Palestinian player is interviewed – in the first grab he is not subtitled, in the second he is. A White Israeli player who also speaks with a strong accent is not subtitled. When the players are seen in a group speaking in their own language we are given no help in understanding what is being said through subtitles.

Dateline, 18 June

This story is about a graffiti artist at work in the sewers of Rio de Janeiro. The artist speaks in Portuguese and is subtitled throughout. He is the focus of the story – the central talent rather than a minor player – and he is interviewed in his own territory on his own terms. The subtitles convey the meaning of what he says, leaving us free to observe his voice and vocal and physical mannerisms and to gain an insight into his personality.

Dateline, 25 June

In this story, which will also be discussed in the following section on hidden cameras, a reporter has gone undercover into Zimbabwe to provide a first hand account of the punishment being meted out to members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. Some of the Zimbabweans speak in accented English, but only those speaking in their own language have subtitles. Subtitles are used for translating a political song sung by mourners at the funeral of some of the party members slain by the Mugabe government. A speaker at the funeral has his words conveyed to us via subtitles as does an MDC supporter who describes the forms of torture he suffered at the hands of Mugabe loyalists. By allowing people to speak to us in their own language they retain their dignity while we are brought as close as we could hope to get to the lived experience of others.

This analysis shows that SBS is much more tolerant of accented English than are the commercial stations and the ABC. The default for SBS appears to be to let people speak using their own voices, to assume people can follow them when they speak English, and to use subtitles to allow us to follow them when they are speaking in their own languages.

On the commercial services and the ABC subtitles underscore people's weakness in English – even though this may at times appear to be a pre-emptive move by the story editors who may be more sensitive than they perhaps need to be of their viewers' capacity to understand. Thus whereas subtitles underscore alienation in the commercial services, on the SBS they help us to bridge the linguistic gulf so we can empathize and identify with people very different from ourselves.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of current affairs programming on Australian television shows that while Anglo content dominates, ethnic minority faces and voices are more in evidence than they were in news. However the qualitative analysis shows that as far as commercial current affairs is concerned similar reporting practices as observed in news subtly convey a sense of racial hierarchy in which the Anglo dominates. Ethnic minority talent often appear as incidental background to the main story – as office assistants or peripheral workers. When they move to centre stage ethnic minority talent, like Anglo talent, are the fodder for the classic commercial current affairs storylines about people who have become victims of the system in some way. The four exceptions to this rule feature ethnic minority talent as the story and just one of these - the ABC Stateline story of an up-and-coming African-Australian soccer star – is positive. Seven's Today Tonight story on Gordon Ramsay pushes an Asian-Australian waiter into the limelight as the subject on which the reporter can practice some of Ramsay's staff bullying techniques. The other two stories (legalizing polygamy on Today Tonight and the Cairns Mosque on Nine's A Current Affair) focus on the Muslim community in ways that underscore the sense of threat they appear to pose to the Anglo-Australian way of life.

In this small snapshot of television current affairs only the public broadcasters demonstrate in practice the sort of respect for difference that is at the heart of the broadcasting codes of practice that were summarized at the start of this report. The ABC's 730 Report and local Stateline programs have no negatively toned stories at all, compared to ACA's 15 per cent and TT's average of 26 per cent of stories featuring EM talent. While Dateline's international content gives it high levels of negative news (21

per cent of its EM content) the qualitative analysis shows the sensitivity with which it deals with the talent to encourage our identification and empathy with them rather than alienation from them. The role subtitles can play in helping or hindering our understanding of people from other cultures is illustrated by the different patterns of usage observed on SBS compared with the commercial channels. While the commercial channels may attend to the spirit of their code in eschewing outright racial vilification, racial profiling and racial hierarchies emerge, sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes quite overtly as alluded to in the three examples just cited above.

We can grant, as Entman and Rojecki do in relation to the media in the US, that

The racial prototypes and invidious comparisons constructed by news organizations are less the product of conscious racial distinctions and more the indirect result of economics shaping journalistic practices. (2001, p.xx)

We can acknowledge, as they do, that

At least on television, the market discourages serious, complicated reporting and promotes mayhem and fluff. This means more attention to crime without context, poverty without explanation, and less attention to the complicated histories and institutional practices that privilege Whites and burden Blacks. (ibid)

But we also cannot ignore the fact that ‘however purely commercial and nonracist the media executives may be, the images they produce embody and reinforce racial distance.’ (ibid)

While Entman and Rojecki were focusing on the portrayal of Blacks and Hispanics in the US, their observations hold just as true for the broader representation of race and cultural diversity on Australia’s television screens. This is why Jakubowicz et al’s observations in their study of race and the media in Australia in 1994 are as relevant today as they were 15 years ago:

a mass media organisation may vigorously oppose public racism, including racist language, yet in a more covert way sustain the environment in which such behaviour survives. An organisation may do this simply by applying professional and institutional values, such as its policy of employment on merit, or news values. These values may thereby create an employment milieu from which cultural minorities are either excluded, or in which they feel intimidated, and a news and current affairs output that speaks nearly always with the voice and from the perspective of ...the 'dominant race'.(1994, pp. 29-30)

This analysis of Australia's television current affairs shows that it shares some of the weaknesses of television news when it comes to representations of diversity. It also shows the extent to which commercial current affairs in particular fails to meet the standards of its own industry codes. (It is also interesting, by the way, that adherence to these sections of their codes is not part of routine monitoring by the Australian Communications and Media Authority which examines television content only to ensure appropriate levels of Australian material). The portrayals that we see on our screens, reflective of what Dunn et al call the 'new racisms of cultural intolerance' (2004, p. 409), are indicative not just of a lack of sensitivity to the broader community, but of the failure of the media organizations to live up to the standards the community has set for them. As Entman and Rojecki conclude, 'the media's failures to offer more images that support racial comity should trouble everyone in society, since racial misunderstanding imposes its enormous costs on all.' (2001, p. xx) For the sake of their viewers who represent the culturally diverse community that is modern Australia the television news media need to show through their actions that they understand, accept and aspire to attain the standards their codes set out for them.

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

## References

- Aly, A. and Walker, D. (2007). Veiled threats: recurrent cultural anxieties in Australia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 27 (2), 203-214.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2008a). *Editorial Policies*. Retrieved 15 January, 2009 from [http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/200806\\_edpols07update010708.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/200806_edpols07update010708.pdf)..
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2008b). *ABC Code of Practice*. Retrieved 29 January, 2009 from [http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/200806\\_codeofpractice-revised\\_2008.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/200806_codeofpractice-revised_2008.pdf).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2007). *Year Book Australia: Cultural Diversity*. Retrieved 5 February, 2009 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/bb8db737e2af84b8ca2571780015701e/7056F80A147D09D3CA25723600006532?opendocument#>.
- Chiricos, T. and Eschholz, S. (2002). The racial and ethnic typification of crime and the criminal typification of race and ethnicity in local television news. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. 39, 400-420.
- Cottle, S. (2001). Television news and citizenship: packaging the public sphere. In M. Bromley (Ed.), *No news is bad news: radio, television and the public* (pp. 61-79). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Dunn, K.M., Forrest, J., Burnley, I. and McDonald, A. (2004). Constructing racism in Australia. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 39 (4), 409-430.
- Entman, R.M. and Rojecki, A. (2001). *The black image in the white mind: media and race in America*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

Free TV Australia. (2008). *Code of Practice*, 2 July, 2004, amended 24 November, 2008. Retrieved 15 January, 2009 from [http://www.freetv.com.au/media/Code\\_of\\_Practice/Revised\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_\(including\\_amendment\\_for\\_freeview\\_clause\)\\_241108.pdf](http://www.freetv.com.au/media/Code_of_Practice/Revised_Code_of_Practice_(including_amendment_for_freeview_clause)_241108.pdf) .

Hawkins, G. and Ang, I.(2007). Inventing SBS: televising the foreign. *Australian Cultural History*, 26, 1-14.

Holland, P. (2001). Authority and authenticity: redefining television current affairs. In M. Bromley (Ed.), *No news is bad news: radio, television and the public* (pp.80-95). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Jakubowicz, A., Goodall, H., Martin, J., Mitchell, T., Randall, L. and Seneviratne, K. (1994). *Racism, ethnicity and the media*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. (1997). *Ethics in journalism*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Phillips, G. (2009,forthcoming). Ethnic minorities in Australia's television news: A Second Snapshot. *Australian Journalism Review*

Phillips, G. (2008). *Reporting diversity media analysis report May 2008*. Retrieved 11 November, 2008 from <http://www.reportingdiversity.org.au/>.

Phillips, G. and Tapsall, S. (2007a). Australian television news trends: First results from a longitudinal study. *Australian Journalism Monographs*, 9, August.

Phillips, G. and Tapsall, S. (2007b). Ethnic diversity in television news: an Australian case study. *Australian Journalism Review*. 29 (2), 15-33.

Richards, I. (2005). *Quagmires and quandaries. exploring journalism ethics*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Sanders, K. (2003). *Ethics & journalism*, London: Sage.

Special Broadcasting Service. (2002). *SBS Charter*. Retrieved 27 January, 2009 from <http://www20.sbs.com.au/sbscorporate/index.php?id=378#> .

Special Broadcasting Service. (2006). *Codes of practice* (incorporating consequential amendments made 1 July 2008). Retrieved 27 January, 2009 from [http://www20.sbs.com.au/sbscorporate/media/documents/8487sbs\\_codes\\_of\\_practice\\_2006.pdf](http://www20.sbs.com.au/sbscorporate/media/documents/8487sbs_codes_of_practice_2006.pdf)

Tapsall, S. and Phillips, G. (2002). Investigative journalism and ethics – a slippery slide rule. In S. Tanner (Ed.). *Journalism: investigation & research* (pp.298-311). Sydney: Pearson Education Australia.

Turner, G. (2001). Sold out: recent shifts in television news and current affairs in Australia. In M. Bromley (Ed.). *No news is bad news: radio, television and the public* (pp. 46-58). Harlow: Pearson Education.