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Headline Hawai`i:  
Racial Aloha in Kama`aina News

by

Cory J. Weaver

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Journalism & Media Studies  
College of Arts & Sciences  
University of South Florida – St. Petersburg

Major Professor: Deni Elliott, Ed.D.  
Paul (Xiaopeng) Wang, Ph.D.  
Loretha Cleveland, M.A.  
Robert Dardenne, Ph.D.

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Keywords: Hawai`i, news, race, ethnicity, media bias

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## Headline Hawai`i: Racial Aloha in Kama`aina News

Cory Weaver

### ABSTRACT

The front page of Hawai`i's largest-circulated newspaper – The Honolulu Star-Bulletin – was reviewed for a three-month period: March 1, 2008 – June 1, 2008, to examine representations of race in a media market where Caucasian individuals are the minority. Analysis of the newspaper seeks to present a greater understanding of ethnic portrayals in island news and examines ethical implications that have/can arise from adopting journalistic values typical of “white news” or mainstream reporting practices in areas where the mainstream is, in fact, the minority.

## Chapter 1

### Problem Statement – Publications in Paradise

The chain of Hawai`ian Islands is the most remote and removed group of islands in the world, further from any continental landmass than any islands on earth. As the landscape of Hawai`i is relatively pristine and untouched, so too are analyses about the media practices there. Modern press is often criticized for creating, or at least being a major contributor to, the racial divide that exists so turgidly in 3<sup>rd</sup>-Millenium America. With copious evidence supporting criticisms of the press on the mainland, a study into whether kama`aina (Hawai`ian) press is contributing to a similar racial divide or stereotyping adds to the few studies about press in the Aloha state. This study also provides a new area to consider when discussing today's press and its effects on race relations and ethnic stereotypes.

In ethics speak, a journalist's job is to find and provide information to citizens needed for self-governance, and it is their responsibility to do that job without causing unjustified harm (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001 and Elliott, 2009, p. 37). The goal of this study is to discover whether or not journalists and news gatekeepers (i.e. news managers, assignment editors, etc.) in Hawai`i are perpetuating negative stereotypes about various races and ethnicities. Also, this study seeks to discover whether favoritism is given to stories involving people of Caucasian decent and to see if journalists in Hawai`i are

remaining fair and balanced within the realm of race/ethnic issues, including the portrayal of ethnically diverse “news story characters.”

The state of Hawai`i is an important vessel for study because the populations of the Aloha state offer a unique demographic for study of ethical impact as they make up the most ethnically diverse state in the union and offer a “melting pot” of cultures that is unique only to the shores of Hawai`i Nei.

### Research Questions

Looking into the presentation of race and ethnicity in kama`aina news and analyzing the ethical implications of how race and ethnicity are presented creates a new chapter in the book of media diversity issues with its own set of ethical issues and concerns.

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

Q1: How are race and ethnicity portrayed in Hawai`i press?

Q2: What harm(s) might be predicted from any problematic or ethically questionable portrayal?

Q3: How is race/ethnicity portrayed in Hawai`i as compared to how other scholars have reported the presentation of race/ethnicity in the newspapers of mainstream media.



## A Review of the Literature

With so little existing scholarship on the reporting on people of color in Hawai`i, educated perspectives about portrayal of race in Hawai`i media are few and far between. Current review elicited three studies that specifically look at presentation of race and ethnicity in media presentations of Hawai`i populations.

Don Heider, a professor of journalism at Loyola University in Chicago, analyzes broadcast news in Hawai`i in his book, *White News: Why Local News Programs Don't Cover People of Color*, and explores the dangers of adopting mainland reporting ideals—what he calls “white news”—in a state that is not only geographically, but also culturally, far from being “white.” Heider posits that there is a tremendous problem in Hawai`i media when it comes to reporting on race and outlines that specific stereotypes that exist in the islands are perpetuated by media presentations.

For example, residents of Samoan decent, often living in the Honolulu districts of Kahuku and Laie, are typically subjects of news stories only when they involve spousal abuse (Heider, 2000, p. 41). Heider also notes that few news stories expose the “bigger picture” of issues that contribute to poverty, crime, and domestic violence like the Hawai`ian sovereignty movement, poor health conditions of Native Hawai`ians and the lack of funds for schools that are found in typically Native Hawai`ian (kanaka ma`oli) districts (Heider, 2000, p. 47). That, along with the lack of representation by Native Hawai`ians in local news media management in that 100 percent of newspaper gatekeepers—presidents, publishers and executives—in Hawai`i are white males --

supports Heider's claims that there are several ethical problems with the way kama'aina media enterprises are structured and how news is presented.

Tom Brislin, a professor of journalism ethics at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, examines typical stereotypes of Polynesian people in an essay, *Exotics, Erotics, and Coconuts: Stereotypes of Pacific Islanders*. Brislin argues that there are four presiding stereotypes of Pacific Islanders within popular modern mainland media presentations. They are:

- Pleasant, but basically ignorant natives. Even after Western contact they cling to their picturesque but primitive customs and mores.
- Savage cannibals who inevitably are overcome by superior Western firepower.
- Shapely, sexy, uninhibited women ever-willing to take a roll in the taro with a Westerner.
- Self-inflated men who preen and strut but are easily fooled by superior Western intelligence—often played comically (Brislin, 2003, p. 103)

While Brislin's examples come from entertainment rather than news media, his categories provide a starting place for news media review as well.

Stuart Hall identifies modern media ideologies of race in his piece, *The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*. Hall gives examples of typified stereotypes existing in modern media and, with regards to Pacific Islanders, says,

“One noticeable fact about all these images is their deep ambivalence—the double vision of the white eye through which they are seen. The primitive nobility of the aging tribesman or chief, and the native's rhythmic grace, always contain both a nostalgia for

innocence lost forever to the civilized, and the threat of civilization being over-run or undermined by the recurrence of savagery, which is always lurking just below the surface” (Hall, 1995, p. 22). While Heider, Hall and Brislin are distinctive in having written about the ethical implications of reporting race and ethnicity in Hawai`i, other research points to the differences between media purveyors and media consumers in Hawai`i. For example, Eileen Davis Hudson of *Media Week* created a media market profile of Honolulu, which demonstrates that media enterprises in Honolulu are owned by mainland companies, and are run by individuals from the mainland (Hudson, 2003, p. 17). At the time of Hudson’s report, the ABC affiliate in Hawai`i (KITV4) was owned by the Hearst-Argyle media superpower and had teamed up with *The Honolulu Advertiser*, one of Honolulu’s two main local newspapers. The NBC (KHNL8) and CBS (KGMB9) affiliates were owned by Raycom Media out of Alabama and the FOX affiliate (KHON2) was owned by New Vision Television, and all three were partnered with Honolulu’s other main local paper, *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, an already problematic situation considering 100% of Hawai`i’s local news was being disseminated from two main newsroom hubs.

A new paradigm for Hawai`i’s news organization ownership and partnerships has emerged recently, though, as *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin* has announced it has purchased the *Honolulu Advertiser* from Gannett and plans to consolidate the two into one newspaper (and retain the *Star-Bulletin’s* name) in the very near future. This means that Honolulu’s paper news will come from one newsroom owned by a Canadian company and also that the entirety of Honolulu’s news will be connected via pre-existing partnerships and essentially disseminate the same stories. While this ownership trend is

problematic in a number of ways, the lack of Hawai`ian-controlled news presentation is the focus here.

Scholarship at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has identified underlying problems in how racial and ethnic minorities are covered in the mainland press. A recent study by David Oh and Madeleine Katz, *Covering Asian America*, examined Asian American coverage in newspapers that service eight major U.S. cities (Oh, 2009, p. 222-241). Oh and Katz's results indicated that the quantity of Asian American coverage increased with Asian American population gains, but the quality of coverage remained the same across most newspapers and, in some cases, became worse and included harmful stereotypes. The researchers measured quantity of coverage, quality of coverage, prominence of news story characters and examined stereotypes of various Asian American populations (model minority, mystical/exotic, geeky or nerdy, sexual deviants, and economic social threats). This research is noteworthy in showing that an increase in minority coverage can be worse than no coverage at all, if the coverage is problematic and fraught with negative stereotypes.

Tara DeLouth and Cindy Woods also used a content analysis approach in their 1996 study, *Biases Against Minorities in Newspaper Reports of Crime* (DeLouth, 1996, p. 545-546). DeLouth and Woods examined four large American newspapers over the course of five months to assess possible biases in representations of minorities in crime stories. Their results demonstrated that photographs (mug shots) of nonwhite perpetrators accompanied the respective articles more often than photographs of white perpetrators. Even more, the victim's ethnicity was mentioned textually in crime reports for nonwhite perpetrators four times more often than in reports for white perpetrators. Their data

included ethnicity and race indications, the number of photographs of the suspect and the presence of emotional information (such as personal or family information) that could potentially evoke sympathy or understanding for the criminal.

In *Come Hell or High Water*, Vorhees, Vick and Perkins of Vanderbilt University's Peabody School examined broadcast news in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina for issues regarding media diversity, race and poverty (Vorhees, 2007, p. 415-429). The study's results showed that while coverage *amount* was congruent to and reflected the actual populations of New Orleans and damaged areas of the Gulf Coast, coverage *quality* was not. Researchers found that nearly 90% of authority figures in the news were shown to be white and the majority of rescue stories showed completely white groups of people helping completely nonwhite groups of people. All stories involving looting in New Orleans showed video of African Americans holding boxes, while pictures of Caucasian people holding boxes did not label them as looters. While white coverage and non-white coverage numbers reflected the correct populations of the areas, the results showed a dramatic contrast between the type of coverage white individuals received compared to nonwhite individuals in disaster and crime news stories. They used a five-point scale that graded the degree of how positive/negative a portrayal was and also recorded the race, gender and perceived ages of the news story characters.

Clint Wilson and Felix Guitterez, authors of *Minorities and Media: Diversity and the End of Mass Communication*, say that news outlets

“have responded to the call for better reporting of minority affairs with imbalanced coverage of minority problems. Minorities are more likely to pass the gatekeeper if they are involved in “hard news” events, such as those involving

police action, or in the “colorful” soft news of holiday coverage, such as Chinese New Year, Cinco de Mayo, and Native American festivals” (Wilson, 1985, p. 139).

Pieces like Shirley Biagi’s *Facing Difference* and Heider’s *Class and News*, among others, all describe ethical problems in current media coverage of those deemed “other” to dominant society. Coverage of what are typically considered “minorities” often enforces longstanding stereotypes of minority communities, but also harms those communities by creating a larger gap between the hegemonically acceptable mainstream and those that don’t fit into that mainstream (Dines, 1995, p. 17).

Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner, authors of *Whispers on the Color Line*, offer an analysis for why race and rumor still coalesce to form problematic news coverage of ethnic minorities on the mainland.

“The easy work of superficial integration has been long completed; blacks and whites have equal access to lunch counters, hotels, and elementary schools, and other social institutions are now integrated by law, open to all who can afford them. Yet the hard work remains to be completed, as full equality sometimes appears to be slipping away...In many instances, efforts to improve this situation fail because blacks and whites misunderstand each other’s past experiences and the impact those legacies have on their present lives. Many move through life with a sense of the past dominated by artifices of popular culture such as television shows, news, and movies” (Fine, 2001, p. 12).

While some areas of popular culture paint various ethnicities in a positive light, Fine and Turner’s point still resonates today as social and cultural stereotypes permeate

movies, television and even news. The goal of complete integration is not, as Fine and Turner put it, the “superficial integration” that exists on news sets today with reporters of different skin colors and different cultural backgrounds. That is arguably the first step, yet Fine and Turner point out that full integration will only be achieved once reporters and newsroom power players reflect the diversity of the communities they cover and cater to.

Three theories seem to be at play in the creation of news related to racial and ethnic minorities. The first theory, hegemonic theory, describes the process by which one group maintains power over other groups. In *Making News: A study in the construction of reality*, Tuchman wrote about how news media determine the frames through which media consumers view stories and events through gatekeeper choice of text, visuals, and packaging (Tuchman, 1978). Todd Gitlin, author of *The Whole World Is Watching*, points out that many times those creating the news don’t realize they’re enforcing the hegemony.

“Normally the dominant frames are taken for granted by media practitioners, and reproduced and defended by them for reasons, and via practices, which the practitioners do not conceive to be hegemonic. Hegemony operates effectively—it does deliver the news—yet outside consciousness; it is exercised by self-conceived professionals working with a great deal of autonomy within institutions that proclaim the neutral goal of informing the public (Gitlin, 1980, p. 257).

For researchers in these studies, hegemonic theory effectively describes the social foundation on which news guidelines and expectations exist and potentially encourage problematic coverage. Hegemonic theory offers a lens through which researchers can

decipher whether or not news disseminators took active roles to subvert the hegemonic systems and use stories that vary in both color and culture, or whether they were succumbing to the hegemonic media powers that be and strengthening the already-present cultural power structure in the world of news media.

Essid introduced the second theory, everyday racism theory, in 1991. Everyday racism theory doesn't necessarily mean that those perpetrating the act are what we would commonly define as "racist" or even that they are coherent of their actions, but that certain reactions, decisions or feelings are occur on an everyday basis from preexisting cultural norms perpetuated by varying forms of media. "A major feature of everyday racism," Essed points out, "is that it involves racist practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as 'normal' by the dominant group" (Essed, 1991, p. 288). Preserving stereotypes in news media, such as the single black mother or the West Oahu Native Hawai`ian drug addict, are examples of everyday racism, and also examples of cultural stereotypes that can/do harm the people of those communities in which they identify.

While the specific everyday racist act can be pinpointed to the stereotype or the injuring image, Essed argues that it isn't just the reporter that is at fault, but instead a web of instances that contributed to that one everyday racist action.

"The concept of "everyday" was introduced to cross boundaries between structural and interactional approaches to racism and to link the details of micro experiences to the structural and ideological context in which they are shaped. The analysis of these experiences has shown that everyday racism does not exist as single events but a complex of cumulative practices" (Essed, 1991, p. 288)



For disseminators of news stories, this “complex of cumulative practices” can be a number of things that affect the type of stories that are sent out to the public for consumption. The organization of newsrooms (i.e. management and executives), station ownership and traditional production techniques and systems combine to notice and select both subjects of news stories and the sources that inform them. Newsroom organization and structure lends itself to the third theory for discussion—gatekeeping theory.

Syracuse University professor Pamela Shoemaker describes gatekeeping as “the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day, and it is the center of the media’s role in modern public life,” essentially saying that it is the gatekeeper’s role to take all the information of events and things that happen in the world and decide what rises to the top for the day’s newscast or, in the case of newspapers, what is worthy of the front page (Shoemaker, 2009, p. 1).

Gatekeeping also involves a certain level of cultural coercion. “Gatekeepers act as they do because they feel compelled to do so,” Shoemaker says. “Here culture is understood in terms similar to hegemony—elites use the cultural tool kit to affect false consciousness as a means to achieving their own ends. Gatekeepers make choices that seem natural, right, or rational” (Shoemaker, 2009, p. 105). In terms of gatekeeping through a social or ethnic lens, Shoemaker says,

“The differences in the ways gatekeepers embrace their role lead to variation in the construction of media messages. Individuals have been socialized to do their work or see their world in certain ways. The strength of the socialization, of

course, can vary. Gatekeepers with exposure to different nationalities, for instance, may be less ethnocentric than those who have not had such exposure” (Shoemaker, 2009, p. 50).

Gatekeepers play a vital role in the news business. They decide what news makes the front page and what bits of information, events and issues don’t even make the website archives. The public places a large amount of trust on the gatekeeper to let the most important, verifiable and relevant facts and stories through the gates and to keep out others that may not matter as much. These gatekeepers include the reporters themselves and all other news managers who handle a particular story. Shoemaker argues that gatekeepers do their jobs based on what they’ve been socially programmed to believe is acceptable, expected and important.

All three of the theoretical applications integrate to become a system that defines and describes the process of story, subject, and source choice. They provide theoretical explanation for journalistic choices and also serve as a basis for analyzing data gathered from content analyses concerning minority coverage in news media.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

The method for obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data from the newspaper is content analysis, which efficiently reduces large amounts of information to easily observable data, yet still retains the efficacy of such data. The newspaper analyzed here, *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, was chosen based on circulation and reputation throughout the state of Hawai`i. While there are two major newspapers in the state at the time of this study, *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin* has acquired *the Honolulu Advertiser* and will effectively take over as the only newspaper in the state in the months to come. *The Star-Bulletin* is also distributed to the six most-populated islands in the Hawai`ian archipelago. Based on circulation data and Island demographics, it can be assumed that 24.9% of the readers are Caucasian and that 75.1% of the readers are non-Caucasian, including Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Native Hawai`ian, Samoan, Tongan, Hispanic, African American and a considerable amount of people who report being two or more races (U.S. Census, 2008).

The front pages of the newspaper were studied for the three-month period of March 1, 2008 –June 1, 2008). These dates are chosen because 2008 is the most recent year *The Star-Bulletin* had full digital files of their front page available to the public without being charged for sizable reprinting fees. Front pages from latter months in the

year are not considered as 2008 was a presidential election year and many of the front pages are filled with articles and materials about the candidates. The goal of the study is to provide results about how race and ethnicity are covered in “everyday” Hawai`ian news.

Analysis of the content consists of two separate parts: textual and photographic analysis.. Textual and graphic analysis coding techniques are based on the methods of analysis from *Covering Asian America* (Oh, 2009, p. 222-241), *Biases Against Minorities in Newspaper Reports of Crime* (DeLouth, 1996, p. 545-546) and *Come Hell or High Water* (Vorhees, 2007, p. 415-429). Methods for coding the articles were also adapted from the Media Management Center of Northwestern University’s guide to analyzing newspaper content (Lunch, & Peer, 2002) and Dr. Xiaopeng Wang’s study of Asian images on the websites of U.S. higher education institutions (Wang, 2009).

The study by Oh and Katz viewed articles one at a time and gave articles rankings based on the size of the article, operating under the assumption that the more space a newspaper devotes to an article, the more important the story and its subjects are to the newspaper. Oh and Katz also gave each article a positive or negative ranking based on whether the main subject(s) in the article were portrayed in a positive or negative light. Lastly, Oh and Katz identified some of the common Asian stereotypes in modern media and counted how many times those stereotypes were exhibited in stories.

DeLouth and Woods used a coding system similar to Oh and Katz, but focused their study of media bias in representations of minorities around crime reports. They coded articles similarly to Oh and Katz, but also looked at whether stories included emotional information, such as personal or family information, that might evoke

sympathy for the subjects. Vorhees, Vick and Perkins used an identical coding method to Oh and Katz, but coded articles containing minority subjects as authority figures as positive unless the article criticized the authority figure.

Dr. Xiaopeng Wang's study of Asian images on the websites of U.S. universities and colleges provided more extensive methods for coding photographs. Wang coded photographs based on the number of recognizable Asian subjects and which subjects were seen in "power positions...portrayed as stronger, bigger, or having more control over the whole image" (Wang, 2009). For this study, these variables are considered and furthered when analyzing news photographs.

Quantitative analysis of articles is performed on news articles only. To focus on the initial reader grab and to narrow the scope of analysis, this work focuses on what is available from articles solely on the front page of the newspapers and does not follow any "jumps" to subsequent areas of the newspaper where articles are continued.

Articles are categorized by size as it can be assumed that more size devoted to an article reflects the issue/subject's importance to the publication and its gatekeepers. Articles are given numerical ratings from 1 – 3 in regards to space allocated for the article. Articles with ratings of 1 are the one-paragraph articles in the "Morning Digest" column of the front page. A "Morning Digest" story contains 75 words or less and "teases" to the rest of the story on subsequent pages of the newspaper. Articles with ratings of 2 signify that the article (and its accompanying photo, if applicable) makes up approximately one quarter of the page's space. Articles with ratings of 3 signify that the article is the most dominant feature on the page, spans multiple column widths, includes at least one photograph and usually takes up space above and below the fold. Spanning

the page above and below the fold is not a requirement, but merely a typical quality, of a 3-rated article as some fill the entire space above or below the fold, but don't cross the fold line. This coding scheme allows for easier and more effective visual representation once results are obtained as it assigns quantifiable data to textual samples.

Subjects in the articles are given (+), (-) or (n/a) ratings based on coder-perceived portrayal of the subjects. Portrayal of a subject is considered positive if the subject is exhibiting philanthropic behavior, helping somebody or the community, achieving a goal, receiving an award, being represented as a person of authority (police officer, city/county/state official, elected position, etc.), successful or being a beneficial member to society (good neighbor, family woman/man, etc.) without any factors negating the positive position of the individual. For example, subjects in positions of authority that are being criticized for their lack of work, disobedience, lawlessness or general bad attitude would instead receive a negative rating.

Portrayal of a subject is considered negative when the subject is a criminal or criminal suspect, engaging in violent or harmful behavior, homeless, economically challenged, the victim of a crime, being harmed, or exhibiting stereotypical traits. As outlined in Oh and Katz's study, stereotypical Asian traits are when the subject is sexualized, "geeky/nerdy" or an economic social threat (Oh, 2009, p. 222-241). Outlined by Tom Brislin, stereotypical traits of Pacific Islanders are shapely or sexualized women, self-inflated or cocky men, ignorant, unintelligent or savages (Brislin, 2003, p. 103).

Neutral-rated articles contain subjects, yet don't contain any positive or negative qualifiers. For example, an article about Kilauea, the active volcano on the Big Island, might discuss somebody's trip there and quote the individual talking about what it looked

like, but won't portray the individual as an expert on the subject or somebody that exhibited any type of negative behavior. In a case like this, because the individual is not shown as either positive or negative, the article is considered neutral. Stories that do not involve humans as subjects, such as articles strictly about the weather, event guides, restaurant reviews and wildlife are not counted or coded as they have no relevance to the study.

While names do not necessarily logically imply an individual's race/ethnicity, readers can be expected to assume that some surnames correspond to certain ethnic backgrounds when there are no photographs accompanying the article to suggest otherwise. Photographs accompanying articles are used to better identify the perceived ethnic categories of story subjects. For purposes of research, subjects with names typically associated with certain ethnicities are placed in the respective ethnic category to which the name usually corresponds (white or non-white). A more extensive breakdown in minority classifications or categories cannot be completed as a large amount of Hawai'i residents report being two or more different races. To keep results reliable and to reduce chances of wrongly categorizing subjects into varying ethnic categories, a white/non-white binary is used. This is also helpful as the goal of the study is not to identify different portrayals of Asians, Polynesians or Caucasians, but to identify if there is any bias against or for white and non-white people in Hawai'i.

Much like the system for coding textual articles, photographs are categorized by size as it can be assumed that the larger a picture is presented on the front page of the newspaper, the more importance and value it holds to the publication and its gatekeepers. Thumbnail photographs, photographs accompanying the teases in the "Morning Digest"

section and photographs not spanning more than one column width receive ratings of 1. Photographs spanning multiple column widths and filling approximately one sixth of the page will receive a rating of 2. Photographs spanning at least four column widths and that fill at least one quarter of the page are given a rating of 3. Many times, *The Star-Bulletin* includes a large graphic above the newspaper's masthead on the front page that references an article later in the paper. Because of the placement above the newspaper's title and the usually large graphic, these photographs automatically receive ratings of 3 when applicable to the study.

Photographs are qualitatively coded as well. The perceived race/ethnicity of the subject(s) in the photograph or graphic are recorded in the same manner as textual coding for race/ethnicity (white or non-white). Also, subjects are graded on the (+), (-) or (n/a) scale based on the coder's perceptions of whether subjects are being portrayed positively, negatively or neutrally. Mug shots of individuals are automatically considered negative, as are photographs in which the subject is engaging in violent behavior or is pictured in the aftermath of having engaged in violent or other anti-social behavior. For photographs including more than one subject engaging in violent behavior, individuals shown as perpetrators of the violence are assigned negative ratings as are those shown as victims since the victim is being shown as submissive or weak compared to the perpetrator. Subjects that are homeless, visually unkempt, making poor lifestyle choices (smoking, binge drinking, etc.), shown to be engaging in "rowdy" or disruptive behavior, in unflattering or compromising positions and showing sad or mad facial expressions are considered negative portrayals as well. Positive examples include portrayals of subjects as well kempt, in affluent or professional environments, with happy or joyous facial



expressions, doing good deeds (picking up trash on the street, saving somebody from harm, helping an elderly woman cross the street, etc.) and as public authority figures in power (judges, police officers, etc.). Captions accompanying photographs are used to better understand the intended positive/negative view of characters present in the photograph.

Quantitative data for each ethnic category is totaled. This allows articles to reflect their dominance on the page more significantly in the results. Small articles figure less prominently. Quantitative ratings for articles and pictures are added up to obtain figures for white and non-white subjects that summarize their depictions on the newspaper's front pages over the three-month period.

Findings

Figure 1. Textual and photographic representations of Caucasian subjects in *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*

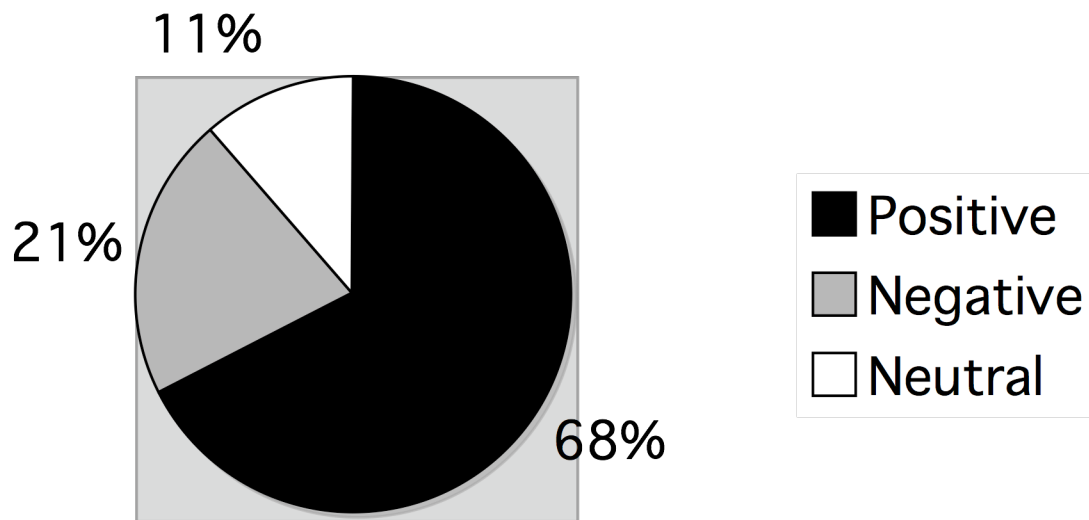


Figure 2. Textual and photographic representations of Non-Caucasian subjects in *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*

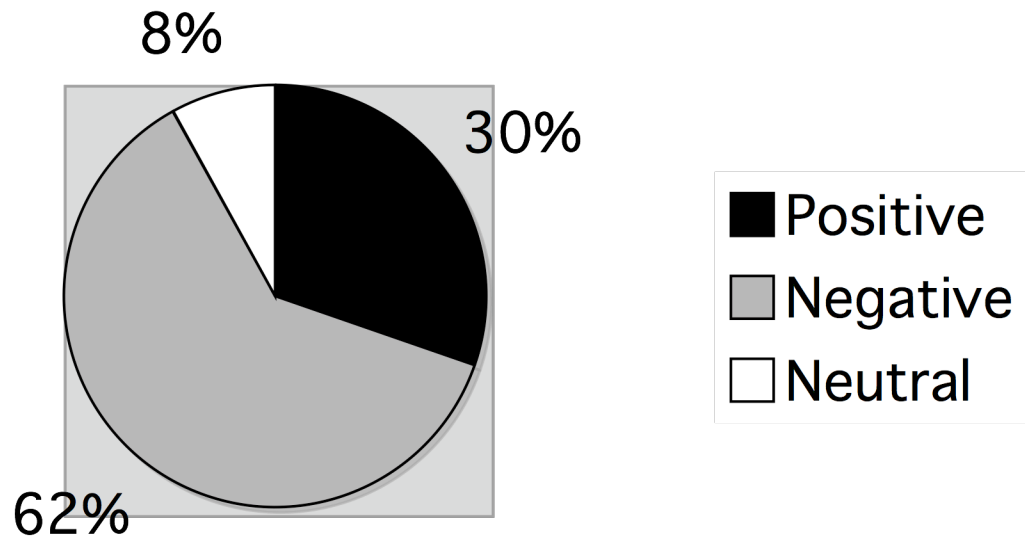
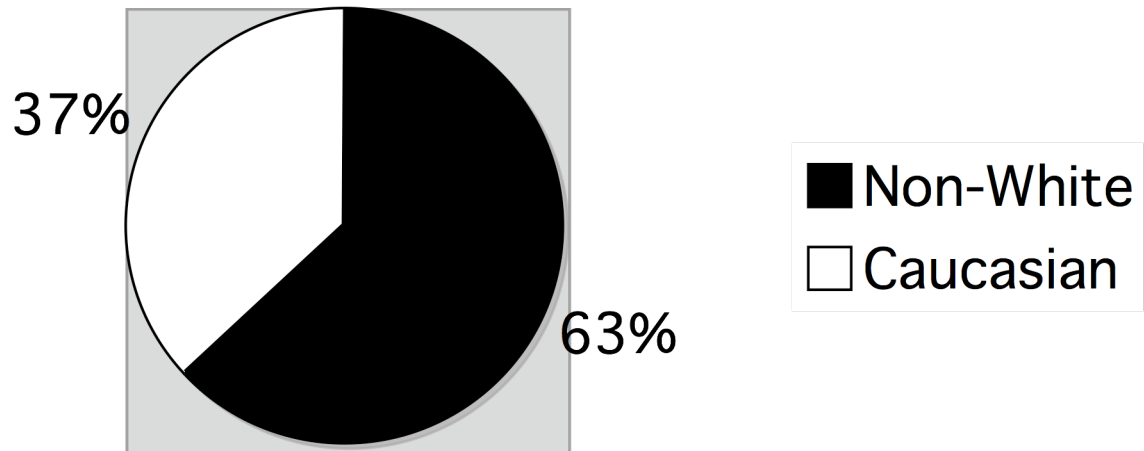


Figure 3. Front-page coverage percentages of Caucasian and Non-Caucasian subjects



Three hundred eighty-two articles and photographs were effectively coded and categorized. White subjects received 159 positive “points,” while non-white subjects received 123 points for positive representation. White subjects received 50 points for negative representation and non-white subjects received 249. Neutral articles were scarce with white subjects receiving 27 neutral points and non-white subjects receiving 33. Sixty-six photographs were not coded as they displayed abstract objects (a pitcher of lemonade, a baseball, etc.), scenic Hawai`ian views, Hawai`ian wildlife, or the unnamed subject was too far or blurry to code. White subjects received 37% of the total textual and photographic representation, with 68% of that being positive, 21% negative and 11% neutral. Non-white subjects received 63% of the total coverage with 30% being positive, 62% negative and 8% neutral.

## Chapter 3

### Discussion

Results of the study display a distinctive gap between front-page news coverage of Caucasians and Non-Caucasian individuals. While news story characters perceived to be of Caucasian decent received positive news 68% of the time, individuals perceived to be of other ethnicities received positive news coverage only 30% of the time. Caucasian individuals were the subjects of negative news 21% of the time, while Non-Caucasian individuals were portrayed in negative articles 62% of the time.

Over the course of the three-month period, Non-Caucasian individuals *did* receive more front-page coverage than Caucasian individuals—63% over the 37% of Caucasian characters. This more accurately represents statistical data of Hawai'i's ethnic demographics that shows Caucasian individuals make up approximately 25% of the state's population (U.S. Census, 2009). It can be expected that there will be times negative news will be about non-white characters, but it cannot be expected that the majority of news about white characters will be positive, as the results suggest. From the sample reviewed, it follows that most non-white individuals are murderers, drug dealers, criminals, violent, or possess other qualities typical of social deviants. Most Caucasian subjects, on the other hand, were shown as powerful, philanthropic, educated and affluent.

Some articles, headlines and photographs were fraught with overt stereotypes or negative depictions. For example, an April 1<sup>st</sup> teaser says, “Asians pick sex,” and asks the reader to continue to page A4 for the full and complete story. While this headline specifically identifies “Asians” as those doing the “choosing” of the sex, it also leaves much to the imagination as to what type of “sex” and under what circumstances Asians are doing the choosing. The headline could suggest that individuals are choosing sex over studying or work. It could even mean that Asian people are choosing their sexualities. The reader is not made privy to the fact that it meant Asian people are choosing the sex of their babies with a new type of gene therapy for the pregnant mother until after the jump, posing ethical problems by contributing to the stereotype of sexual deviance suggested in Oh and Katz’s study (Oh, 2009, p. 222-241).

A few days later, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, the dominant front-page photograph of *The Star-Bulletin* showed a young woman in hula attire, her arms stretched out toward the reader with a “come hither” look in her eyes and a beckoning smile. The photo was intended to show a hula dancer competing at the annual Merrie Monarch hula competition, but did not say so until after the jump. The headline above the picture stated, “A Siren’s Call.” Siren’s, characters in Homer’s *The Odyssey* and other stories in Greek and Roman mythology, were winged maidens that beckoned sailors to them through their enchanting songs. The sailors, once hypnotized by the song, would then shipwreck on the rocky coast of the island the Sirens inhabited. The mention of “A Siren’s Call” while referring to a suggestive photograph of a young Hawai`ian hula dancer is a near carbon copy of Brislin’s mention of the stereotype of Hawai`ian women as being, “Shapely, sexy, uninhibited women ever-willing to take a roll in the taro with a Westerner” (Brislin,

2003, p. 103). Also, labeling it as “The Siren’s Call” suggests that if a Westerner should take a “roll in the taro” with her, something bad will happen. Articles like this contribute to the overly sexualized stereotypes of Polynesian women in modern media and pop culture.

Other problematic stories include a March 14<sup>th</sup> article filling most of the front page included a large picture of an Asian man holding a gun with the headline “Shooting Up.” While the article discusses firearm regulations in the state, the headline makes a play on methamphetamine use, which is rampant in Hawai`i. Another problematic story was a series that appeared over two front pages (April 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>) about single mothers in Hawai`i. The pictures accompanying the articles showed the mothers and children in very happy and joyous embraces. Those pictured were all Non-Caucasian, probably of Native Hawai`ian descent. All of the single mothers mentioned in the article were residents of Makaha, a neighborhood populated almost completely by Native Hawai`ian families who had been pushed off of their ceded lands over recent years. The state legislature sold the lands to the Church of Scientology for a NarcAnon clinic and the resettlement of the people to areas barren of cultivatable land, stores and other forms of employment opportunities has led to a great deal of poverty. An article titled “FIGHT!” with a large picture of two young men (non-white) fighting at school was splashed across the May 18<sup>th</sup> front page. The article mentions the the young men are students at King Intermediate School in the west-island district of Kaneohe and shows pictures of five youtube.com broadcasted fights that happened on school grounds. While publishing the photos of the underage students is arguably causing harms to the children shown, the numerous stories of violence about Kaneohe add to the already strong stereotype of



Samoans and Tongans being violent people since the largest populations of Samoans and Tongans live in that area of Oahu.

The review showed a few positive portrayals of diversity on the front pages of the newspaper. A large photo of new University of Hawai`i graduates on the May 19<sup>th</sup> front page showed a group of students from many different ethnic backgrounds. An April 22<sup>nd</sup> photograph spanning three columns and half of the length of the front page showed children of multiple backgrounds planting trees at their elementary school for an environmental project. An equally large spread on March 17<sup>th</sup> commemorated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eddie Aikau's death. Aikau, a famous and revered surfer on O`ahu's North Shore, lost his life when the canoe he was paddling with friends capsized halfway between the islands of Moloka'i and Lana'i. Aikau decided to swim to Lana'i for help (approximately 12 miles), but was never found. The article included two large pictures showing people of varying ethnicities at an event celebrating Aikau. Likewise, six articles with accompanying photographs showed people of different ethnicities coming together to mourn the loss of their jobs when Aloha Airlines went bankrupt.

Positive representations of Caucasian subjects included many articles about the plans that Jim Donovan, the new athletics director of the University of Hawai`i, had for the football and basketball programs. Also, the University of Hawai`i quarterback, Colt Brennan, was mentioned many times as he graduated, entered the NFL draft and was picked by the Washington Redskins. The high number of articles about both men represents Hawai`i's lack of a professional sports team. Since there is no NBA, NFL or MLB team in Hawai`i, athletes and their coaches at the University of Hawai`i are statewide celebrities. Other positive portrayals included a University of Hawai`i student

discovering signs of water on Mars, John McCain's efforts to win over the island, soldiers completing successful missions in Iraq, Hilary Clinton's run in the primary election and an article profiling three top city officials (white) and why their salaries were being increased.

Stories involving Caucasian people as the main characters were not always positive. There were a number of stories about a white man that murdered a young Asian woman on the island of O`ahu and there were many articles about New York governor, Elliot Spitzer, and his involvement in a prostitution scandal. They are outliers in the statistical trends of the results and do not distract from the fact that negative portrayals about non-white individuals were frequent and negative portrayals about Caucasians were relatively scarce.

## Analysis

In order to better understand the results of the study, Bernard Gert's process of systematic moral analysis is done to give more succinct and verifiable means of answering the research questions (Gert, 2004).

According to Gert's process, the first step in conducting a systematic moral analysis is to articulate the ethical problem. By providing negative presentations of non-Caucasian subjects and positive presentations of Caucasian subjects, the news organization is neglecting its professional duty. A journalist's job is to collect information and present it to the public to be used for self-governance. Journalists are trusted members of society that the public relies on for accurate, unbiased and fair

reporting. The presentation of Caucasian and non-Caucasian subjects is neither fair nor accurate. According to the data, one might assume that non-white individuals engage in criminal activity more often than white individuals and white individuals are more prone to following the law and being productive members of society. Crime statistics show that this is not the case. On the contrary, the *Crime in Hawai`i* report for 2008, developed by the Hawai`i Attorney General's office, actually lists Caucasians as committing the *most* crimes in the state that year out of any ethnic group with 40% of all arrests and convictions in 2008 (Futagavi, 2009, p. 102). When journalists and gatekeepers who are in charge of the publications perpetuate false stereotypes of ethnic populations, they fall short of meeting their responsibilities.

Perpetuating these stereotypes also causes pain, disability, and lack of opportunity to members of the groups presented as well as the community as a whole. In *Facing Difference* by Shirley Biagi, she says, "The white mainstream press in the U.S. has historically perceived of minorities as outside the American system, and has tended to report on them as people who either *have* problems or *cause* problems for society" (Biagi, 1997, p. 90). This type of reporting encourages a general understanding from the public that the generalizations and stereotypes presented are true. These false assumptions by the public are the foundation of Essed's everyday racism theories (Essed, 1991, p. 288). The constant perpetuation of negative stereotypes becomes so ingrained in the collaborative mind of society that it becomes regarded as truth and members of victimized minority groups are judged by the color of their skin rather than the skills they can bring to the table. While it is illegal, that doesn't change that this affects one's employment ventures, housing opportunities and sometimes works against them before

the police officer can even ask for their license and registration. When a person is stereotyped by media, they themselves are harmed, but the lives of those in their community (ethnic and/or geographic) are also harmed by association.

While it would be easy to deem the reporters and photographers gathering the information as blameworthy, Shoemaker suggests in *Gatekeeping Theory* that journalists don't make the ultimate decisions of what information makes it into a newspaper. Gatekeepers decide what news information is printed. The editors, managers and presidents of the newsroom decide what stories get the honor of staking claim to the prime real-estate of the day's front page. The power players in the hierarchy of the *Star-Bulletin* newsroom are those ultimately responsible.

In the case of a newspaper's role in diversity coverage, it is ethically prohibited for a newspaper to give favor to a certain race or ethnicity. Favor of one race over others results in a skewed public image or stereotyping of races, and is also a blatant disobedience of the newspaper's role-related responsibilities as a disseminator of truthful information about the world that exists around the consumers of their media.

It is ethically required for news organizations to report the news, while recognizing and fighting against any personal bias against ethnic or racial populations. News organization should be "color blind." Front-page stories should be reported based on how they will aid the public's need for knowledge to help with self-governance. It is also ethically required for the power positions at newspapers to be ethnically diverse as it reflects the community they publish their paper for, allows for the convergence of different worldly perspectives in the newsroom and leads to a more racially sensitive publication.

It is ethically permissible for gatekeepers to pay attention to the amount of time and/or space devoted to specific ethnicities on the front pages of news publications. Constant negative coverage of a non-white individual is permissible if the individual committed an egregious crime. Reflectively, it is permissible for Caucasian individuals to receive the majority of positive news for the day if a white woman saved a number of children from a burning building. Depending on the news happenings for the day, there is space for ethical lenience in the coverage of varying races in the newspaper because news gatekeepers cannot control what happens on a daily basis. However, they should also be aware of the possibility of positive portrayals of non-Caucasians whenever possible.

It is ethically ideal for newspapers to consider the way readers will react to stories before they publish them and the way readers will formulate ideas about race/ethnicity based on the stories reported. It is ethically ideal for newspapers to consider the social ramifications that could be expected from portraying an ethnic community in a certain way and for reporters to seek out ethnically diverse perspectives on key issues instead of settling for whoever is closest or first to answer the phone.

Oh and Katz's study about Asian populations in major U.S. newspapers found that coverage in cities more densely populated by Asian individuals did yield higher story counts, but the coverage was much more negative than stories about their Caucasian neighbors. Very similar results were discovered in the *Star-Bulletin* as coverage of other ethnicities outnumbered coverage of white individuals, yet negative coverage was about people of color more often than not.

In his book, *White News*, Don Heider proposed that Hawai'i news furthered various stereotypes about ethnic groups. This effect is evident when stories about

homelessness often originated from the Waianae Coast of O`ahu, an area well known to Honolulu residents as housing the majority of the island's Native Hawai`ian families. Reflectively, stories about drug busts and drug use often came out of the Kalihi district, an area known for its large population of Micronesian people.

This type of supposed geographical stereotyping has heavy ethical implications. Because the island of O`ahu's districts are so closely associated with specific ethnic groups, stories originating from these geographical areas not only implicate the people in the stories, but implicate the communities as well. What grows from the seed of these types of stories isn't necessarily a better public knowledge, but rather a strengthening of stereotypes associated with the respective ethnic groups in those communities.

## Conclusion

The state/territory of Hawai`i is one of the most ethnically diverse places on the planet. It has residents from nearly every ethnic background and prides itself on cultural love and acceptance, known to its residents as "the spirit of aloha." Hawai`ian news detracts from the state's "mission statement" of spreading aloha, preserving cultural identity and appreciating difference. The ethnic make-up of Hawai`i newsrooms, the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and the choices gatekeepers make about what articles are the most newsworthy are all qualities of Hawai`ian media that are harming the residents of the Aloha State. If a reporter's job is to report the news for the public's self-governance and do it without causing unjustified harm, this study contends that reporters in Hawai`i, and even more the power players in Hawai`i newsrooms, have a lot to learn.

The findings in this study show that there is an incredible inconsistency in the Aloha State between *actual* population and *reported* population. With the examples of stereotyping and negative minority portrayal, Hawai`i news media is contributing to the cultural imperialism that has already bound Native Hawai`ians in shackles for decades. Journalists are supposed to report the truth, and while there is no question to the validity of facts presented in the articles studies, the truth about the overall perception of culture and society being disseminated through consumption of those articles is undoubtedly false.

Every day people open their newspapers trusting that the truth about the world around them will be there on the page in black and white. People form their realities from a number of different things, but media are major contributing factors to the construction of people's perceptions of the environment they live in. Journalists are an important key to the successful operation of American democracy. They have the power to affect the way people think, feel and even vote, but with false reports come false realities. If media consumers can't trust their journalists to honestly reflect the community around them, then who can they trust to do that?

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