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Geographic and Source Biases in Network Television News 1982–1984

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Content analysis of 5,190 network evening news stories appearing between May 1982 and April 1984 reveals two sorts of biases: a "geographic" bias whereby some geographic areas receive far more news coverage than is due them than their populations would proportionately predict, while others receive far less, and a "source" bias showing that governmental agencies and major institutions particularly business and major political parties are the most frequent sources of news. Women are infrequent news sources as well. The sources of such bias are discussed, and the study confirms structural biases of television as a major reason for unrepresentativeness.

This is a study of news bias. For present purposes we mean only that news, in this case US television network weekday evening newscasts, systematically deviates from some standard of measured "reality" or accuracy.[1] That American news does systematically deviate from reality or from some standard of accuracy has been a persistent theme in studies of news (e.g., Berkowitz, 1987; Brown et al., 1987; Dominick, 1972; Epstein, 1974; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Hofstetter, 1976; Tuchman, 1978). More specifically, what we examine here is the geographic distribution of news stories (where they come from) and the structural distribution of news sources (who can make news, or at least be quoted in television network news).

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News From Somewhere and Someone

Several literatures suggest that news deviates from "reality" and that it does so for several reasons. It may do so because it reflects power and its reality more than it serves any "representative" function (Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Sigal, 1977; Tuchman, 1978). Moreover, as Tuchman's (1978) metaphor of the "news net" suggests, journalists' routines and news organizations' practices are themselves biased: journalists are stationed where news, as defined by their organizations, is presumed most likely to occur, at the expense of locations and sources not in the net (see also Fishman, 1980; Goldenberg, 1975). Thus "biasing" of this sort can be read in at least two ways: First is that in their selection and coverage of news sources, in particular, news media do no more than to reflect, not a "reality of humanity," but a reality of power, influence and publicity. Second is that such a reflection by nature reinforces and legitimates such a reality (Tuchman, 1978).

Likewise, economic and technological constraints make some sorts of news more likely than others. News is organized bureaucratically, and economic and technological constraints are most apparent in the most technologically intensive medium, television (Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1980; Berkowitz, 1987; Epstein, 1974; Hofstetter, 1976).

Epstein (1974) suggests that the "geographic" bias in television news (i.e., that a disproportionate share of US news emanates from a handful of US cities) is (or more correctly was in the early 1970s) attributable to the networks' having film crews and reporters already stationed in those cities or to their owning and operating television stations in them. In either case, news crews had access to dedicated telephone cables for transmission of stories from such places, and originating news was more convenient, cheaper and quicker than feeding news from other places. Thus the "bias" of television news will be toward metropolitan centers which are routinely, predictably part of the "news net."

In the present study, we examine two sorts of bias. A "geographic" bias suggests that US network evening news items do not "represent" the nation in that news items are not distributed proportionate to the population. This form of bias is ascertainable through comparison with extra-media data, namely, that of the US census. A second form of bias is source bias, or the characterization of the individuals, organizations and institutions quoted in news stories. Not so easily characterized by extra-media data, this bias manifests itself in the description of those sources who do, or do not, make news. Both forms of bias we examine are indices of maldistribution: who makes news, and hence how news is defined, systematically deviates from a "democratic" representation of the public.

Geographic news bias. As noted above, Epstein suggested a geographic bias to network television news. A content analysis of 360 national network newscasts between July 1973 and June 1975 by Dominick (1977) showed that two-thirds of the domestic news emanated from three places — Washington, DC, California and New York, and fully half came from Washington. In the Dominick study, moreover, when DC news was excluded, there were substantial regional variations (with the Northeast and the Pacific states over-covered and the Midwest and Southwest substantially under-covered) and an interesting "eclipse" effect, whereby overcoverage of a single state in a region generally meant under-coverage of other states in the region. The major point, however, is that the bulk of domestic news originated from very few places, primarily Washington, DC. Clearly, population density does not equate with news coverage.

The Dominick study represented a jumping-off point for the present one. Dominick, following Epstein, suggests that the geographic bias is in part economic and technological. If this is correct, then changes in the technology and economics of news transmission occasioned by satellite feeds in the past few years may have reduced or altered the geographic bias. Moreover, recent reports from the industry suggest deliberate efforts to "nationalize" the news as an audience-seeking device in a period of breakneck competition among the three networks (cf. Massing, 1986). We thus sought to replicate the Dominick findings with an analysis of a similarly constructed sample from 1982–1984 network evening newscasts.

Source news bias. Our study had another ambition as well. Several analysts have noted that who makes news (i.e., who gets quoted as a source in news stories) is likewise inequitably distributed. Gans (1979), in a content analysis of national television and newsmagazine news, divided news sources into "knowns," and "unknowns" and animals, objects and abstractions. The former accounted for 71% of 1967 television news sources and about three-quarters of a sample of 1967, 1971, and 1975 newsmagazine sources and largely comprised federal government officials (especially the President, who accounted for 20% of 1975 newsmagazine domestic news space), state and municipal officials, well-publicized "violators of the laws and mores," professionals, and business, civil rights and labor leaders. An analysis of two randomly constructed weeks of 1979 and 1980 newspaper news by Brown and her colleagues (1987), similarly finds a very high degree of reliance on governmental and institutional sources: 55% of the sources were governmental officials, and an additional 25% were "affiliated" US citizens (i.e., sources were identified with a profession, organization or institution); only 4.3% were unaffiliated US citizens (the 4.6% who were foreign citizens were not distinguished between affiliated and unaffiliated). And in a partial replication of the Brown et al. study concerning local and network television news, Berkowitz (1987), likewise finds high reliance on official and "affiliated" sources, though about a quarter of sources were not identifiable by affiliation. Thus, there are consistent findings in US news that who makes news is not "equitably"distributed in terms of location of indi-

viduals in social structures as well: those who make news are largely those in the centers of power. They tend to be official representatives. Moreover, within the official sphere, power tends to be concentrated further, so that governmental sources predominate over other large institutions, and within the governmental area, federal sources predominate over state and local ones, and within the federal government, the White House predominates over other sources, and, of course, the President predominates over other sources there. Within all of this, finally, males predominate over females as sources of news.

Moreover, when news sources *are* other than governmental or other official sources, they are so in a highly restricted set of circumstances. As Gans (1979) noted in his content analysis of newsmagazine and television news, about a fifth of the coverage went to "unknowns;" in television stories, three-quarters of these were either protestors, "rioters" and strikers, or victims of some sort. The remaining quarter were mostly taken up by "alleged and actual violators of the laws and mores" or "participants in unusual activities." He notes (p. 15):

> The unknowns who appear in the news are, by most criteria, an unrepresentative lot; and most ordinary people never come into the news, except as statistics. How ordinary people work, what they do outside working hours, in their families, churches, clubs, and other organizations, and how they relate to government and public agencies hardly ever make the news.

The present study relies heavily on the Dominick and Gans studies. The former suggests that television news is geographically biased, so that news is more likely to originate from some centers than others, and these centers are not in any way demographically balanced. The latter suggests that the sources of news are likewise biased structurally. Official, especially governmental, sources predominate, and where unofficial noninstitutional sources are used, they are not in any sense reflective of the social distribution of the general population: "unknowns" can come into the news only in a highly truncated set of circumstances. These two studies, however, were conducted some time ago: Dominick's analysis of television was 1973–75, and Gans' television analysis was in 1967; things may have changed. A central pupose of the present study was to assess the degree to which they may have changed, and a second purpose was to offer more detail on the representation of sources in 1980s television news.

Method

Our content analysis of television network news followed a procedure equivalent to that employed by Dominick (1977), who analyzed a sample of two years of network evening newscasts, Monday through Friday, from July

1973 to June 1975. Following his procedure, we analyzed a sample of Monday through Friday network evening newscasts from May 1982 through April 1984. In both cases a composite week for each month was constructed, so that first a Monday from each month was selected at random, and next a Tuesday, and so on, until five sample dates from each month were drawn, and the evening news from each date for each network was analyzed. This procedure thus yields a sample of 120 newscasts per network, or a total of 360 news programs.[2] The newscasts themselves were not analyzed. Instead, the program summaries available from the Vanderbilt *Television News Index* were analyzed. The content coders were the authors. In all, 5,190 newscast items were analyzed, using the following categories: date of newscast and network of origin; location of the item in the newscast, numbered from first to last item; total time of items, in seconds. Type of story was coded on two dimensions: First whether the item was news or commentary (commentaries were those which were explicitly identified in the Television News Index as such). Second whether the story concerned domestic or foreign news; foreign/international news was further divided into those stories in which a US interest of any sort was explicitly articulated, and those which were "purely" international, or in which no US interest was mentioned.

The study employed the content/topic coding system devised by R. L. Stevenson and colleagues (Stevenson, 1984) for an International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR)-sponsored analysis of news content from 17 nations. The coding requires assignment into one of 18 topics as a *main* topic, with provision for additional assignment into one or two additional *subsidiary* topics.

Following Dominick, each story was coded by the location about which it contained the most information, an approximation of its dateline. While the Dominick study, however, coded only national news and thus excluded all commentary and international news, every story in the current study was coded for focus; domestically, each story was coded either by state, as Washington, DC, as "locationless US-international," as a US possession, protectorate or trust territory, or as "US national — no appropriate location," the latter designation, following Dominick, being applied to news that was "essentially 'locationless' or had the whole country as a focus" (1977, p. 95). Stories from Canada, Mexico, the Soviet Union, the Falklands and the United Nations were coded for each, and for stories from other nations, each was assigned to a region (e.g., Central America and Caribbean, Africa, Indian subcontinent).

Each source, up to six per newscast,[3] was coded on three dimensions: First was according to a structural source code; second was an indication of whether sources were speaking as official representatives of organizations and institutions, and third was the source's gender. One *caveat* about the source coding needs to be noted: information available in the *Television*

News Index makes it possible only to code sources for which there are sound bites or film clips. Thus we are unable to code sources quoted only by reporters and anchors, and only those sources whose voices and/or faces appear on news programs are included. We do not believe this seriously misrepresents the presentation of human sources on network television news and in fact, probably *better* represents them than a full coding of all sources might, for what we are able to code is just those sources from which the networks themselves gathered and reported sound and film accounts; thus what we have is an analysis of a source record that documents only those sources contacted at the specific behest of the network news operations, not the total of sources available to the network through all sources, such as wire services, of which the networks might be aware as they assembled their reports.

Intercoder reliability was assessed by having the first author recode all items from one randomly selected newscast for each other coder. Intercoder reliability is computed as coder agreement on decisions divided by total number of coding decisions for each category. Overall intercoder reliability across all categories and coders was 89.5%. Reliabilities for the individual variables were: story type, 96.6%; story focus, 76.6%; content, 84.4%; source codes, 83.0%; source standing, 94.2%; source gender, 96.2%.

Results

As noted, a sample of two years' worth of ABC, CBS and NBC weekday evening newscasts were analyzed. Included were 5,190 news items which were, as expected, evenly distributed across networks (ABC – 34.7%, CBS – 33.1%, NBC – 32.1%). News stories accounted for 98.2% of all newscast items, with commentary accounting for the rest. Within news, "pure" national/domestic news accounted for about two-thirds of all items (66.4%), with international news in which a US interest was articulated (19.2%) and "pure" international news (14.4%) well behind. Newscasts averaged 15 items, with only seven newscasts having ten or fewer items and only four having as many as 20. Newscast items averaged almost exactly 90 seconds in length ($\bar{x}$ = 90.1, s.d. = 89.6). There were no significant differences between any of the networks on the foregoing variables (by chi-square or *t*-test), nor were there any in the content categories below, and networks are thus not treated separately.[4]

Content. It will be recalled that content was coded by main topic and by up to two subsidiary content categories. Some 85.1% of stories could be coded using a single category, and only 3.8% required two subsidiary categories. Table 1, below, reports main and total content classifications for network news 1982–1984.

Table 1.
Main Topic/Content Categorizations and Total Topic/Content for Network Weekday Newscasts May 1982–April 1984. (In percents; total adds to more than 100%)

	Main	Total
International politics	9.4%	17.8%
Domestic politics	15.0	19.3
Military and defense	13.5	18.4
Economic matters	20.0	25.8
International aid	0.6	1.5
Social services	3.5	6.1
Crime, judicial, legal	13.6	16.5
Culture, arts	0.9	1.6
Religion	0.8	2.4
Science, medical	4.7	5.6
Sports	2.8	3.3
Entertainment	1.3	2.0
Personalities	1.6	3.0
Human interest	3.1	4.5
Student affairs	0.3	0.6
Ecology, pollution	1.3	1.9
Accidents, disasters	6.6	7.0
Other	1.0	0.9
Total	100.0%	138.2%

As Table 1 indicates, the news is dominated by a handful of content categories, led by economic matters,[5] domestic and international politics, military and defense stories, and crime and vice. These five categories account for almost three-quarters of the main content categories for network news, and among the other categories, only accidents and disasters account for more than a twentieth of such news.

Focus. A more detailed treatment of item locations is below. For present purposes, we might note that three-quarters of network news was focused on the United States. Of the quarter that was not, the Mideast (428 stories) was the next most frequent focus, followed by Western Europe (274), Central America (136), the Soviet Union (127), and Central Europe (largely Poland, 80). During the two years, Canada accounted for only 14 of 5,190 stories, Mexico for 12, all of South America for only 33 (excluding 43 stories on the Falklands war) and all of Africa for only 37, while India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan together totaled 13 stories and Japan, China and Taiwan together totaled 42. Thus nations accounting for two-thirds of the world's population garnered just over one percent of network evening newscast stories during the sampled dates.

Sources. Again, a more extensive treatment is below. We note here that 2,200 of the 5,190 stories (42.4%) had one or more source by our definition of a source as being one in which the newscast item includes a sound or visual representation of a person. Some 31.4% had two sources, 18.9% had three, 11.3% had four, 6.0% had five, and 3.0% had six.

Findings on Geographic News Bias

As earlier noted, one initial impetus for the present study was Dominick's 1977 work noting geographic imbalances in network evening newscasts. Dominick's method was relatively straightforward: news minutes were calculated by region and state of "focus" for stories; these were then converted into percentages of domestic news coverage and compared with the percentage of US population within each state or region; an "attention index" subtracting the percentage of population from the percentage of news time was then computed. For the present study, we replicated this completely, with two revisions. First was that estimated 1982 US population replaced Dominick's use of 1970 census figures. Second, and more importantly, in addition to computing Dominick's "attention index," we also computed an "attention ratio" which indexes news time *divided by* population. This latter measure may be expressed as a percentage of over- or under-coverage and offers a less-biased estimate, since it corrects for wide variations of population by state and region; it is thus a more standardized measure. Attention ratios were also recomputed for Dominick's regional data. We now turn to findings from the present study.

For the purposes of replicating the Dominick findings, we must note that only a fraction of all data are used: The Dominick study excludes all commentary, all non-US news, and all domestic news from "no appropriate location." While some 71.6% of our news and commentary in the 1982–1984 study period had a US focus, compared with the two-thirds reported for 1973–1975, there are substantial differences between Dominick's findings and ours on where domestic news came from. Dominick, for example, found that roughly half of news time (excluding foreign news and commentary) emanated from Washington, and only five percent was from the US but with "no appropriate location." In the present study, however, we find that only 18.1% of non-foreign-focused news stories emenate from Washington, while another 36.3% are domestic "no appropriate location" stories.[6] Summing across these figures, however, introduces more directly comparable numbers: Dominick found, for domestic news, roughly 55% did not come from identifiable states and regions other than Washington, DC. The present study finds that 54.4% did not; thus both studies find *a la* Epstein, that a substantial amount of network television news is "from nowhere."

As noted, Washington, DC news accounted for 18.1% of domestic news stories, when "no appropriate location" stories are included. When we more strictly replicate the Dominick results by excluding commentary and foreign news and domesticate "no appropriate location," and change our unit of analysis from stories to minutes, we find that Washington stories account for 29.2% of domestic news. Thus the District of Columbia, with 0.3% of the US population, accounts for almost 30% of its news, an "attention ratio" of 100 times, or 10,000%. In the tables below, following Dominick, however, we exclude both District of Columbia population and DC news time.

Table 2.
Comparison of News Time with Regional Population Percentage and as Attention Index and Attention Ratio for 1973–1975 and 1982–1984 Weekday Evening Network News

Region	Percentage of 1982–1984 News Time	Percentage of 1982 Population	Attention Index[a]		Attention Ratio	
			82–84	73–75	82–84	73–75
Midwest	18.7%	23.2%	−4.5	−6.5	.81	.74
Northeast	22.8	18.1	+4.7	+3.5	1.26	1.17
Pacific	19.5	14.3	+5.2	+8.4	1.36	1.65
South	12.4	13.4	−.9	+.2	.93	1.02
Southwest	8.7	10.9	−2.2	−4.2	.80	.58
Middle Atlantic	2.3	7.2	−4.8	−2.2	.32	.69
New England	6.6	5.4	+1.2	+.5	1.22	1.08
Mountain	7.1	5.2	+1.9	−.9	1.39	.78
Plains	1.7	2.3	−.6	+1.2	.74	1.60
Total:	99.8%	100%				
Total news minutes: 2,595						

Note: States in each region are listed in Table 3. Population and news time exclude Washington, DC.
[a]Source: Dominick, 1977.

As Table 2 notes, there remain substantial deviations in time devoted to various regions of the country, and these generally follow the same patterns Dominick found for July 1973–June 1975 news. The Pacific and Northeast remain over-covered relative to the rest of the nation, the Northeast more so than in the early 1970s. Also relatively over-covered are the Mountain states and New England. Remaining under-covered are the Midwest, the proportionately least covered region in Dominick by his "attention index" measure, the Middle Atlantic states and the Southwest. One region, the Plains states, went from over-coverage in the Dominick study, to slight

Table 3.
Comparison of News Time by State Population Percentages and as Attention Index and Attention Ratio for 1982–1984 Weekday Evening Network News

	News Time	1982 Pop.	Attn. Index	Attn. Ratio		News Time	1982 Pop.	Attn. Index
Midwest					*Middle Atlantic*			
Illinois	8.02	4.96	+3.06	1.62	West Virginia	.38	.88	−.15
Iowa	1.11	1.26	−.15	.88	Virginia	1.02	2.14	−.29
Missouri	1.85	2.14	−.29	.86	South Carolina	.35	.68	−1.27
Michigan	2.67	3.94	−1.27	.68	North Carolina	.62	1.56	−1.78
Ohio	2.72	4.67	−1.95	.58	*New England*			
Minnesota	1.01	1.79	−.78	.56	Rhode Island	.91	.38	+.53
Wisconsin	.79	2.06	−1.27	.38	New Hampshire	.84	.41	+.43
Indiana	.50	2.37	−1.87	.21	Massachusetts	3.61	2.50	+1.11
Northeast					Maine	.60	.49	+.11
New York	17.96	7.65	+10.31	2.34	Vermont	.12	.22	−.10
Pennsylvania	3.30	5.14	−1.84	.64	Connecticut	.55	1.37	−.82
Maryland	.64	1.85	−1.21	.35	*Mountain*			
New Jersey	.88	3.22	−2.34	.27	Utah	2.71	.67	+2.04
Delaware	.00	.26	−.26	.00	Arizona	1.74	1.24	+.50
Pacific					Nevada	.53	.36	+.15
California	17.60	10.71	+6.89	1.64	New Mexico	.58	.59	−.01
Alaska	.21	.19	+.02	1.11	Montana	.32	.35	−.03
Hawaii	.33	.43	−.10	.77	Wyoming	.19	.22	−.03
Washington	1.34	1.84	−.50	.43	Colorado	.94	1.32	−.38
Oregon	.04	1.15	−1.11	.03	Idaho	.12	.42	−.30
South					*Plains*			
Florida	6.70	4.51	+2.19	1.49	North Dakota	.60	.29	+.31
Tennessee	2.68	2.01	+.67	1.33	South Dakota	.48	.30	+.18
Alabama	1.02	1.71	−.69	.60	Nebraska	.39	.69	−.30
Georgia	1.32	2.44	−1.12	.54	Kansas	.28	1.04	−.76
Kentucky	.42	1.59	−1.17	.26				
Mississippi	.27	1.10	−.83	.25				
Southwest								
Texas	7.07	6.62	+.45	1.08				
Louisiana	1.00	1.89	−.89	.52				
Arkansas	.41	.99	−.58	.41				
Oklahoma	.25	1.38	−1.13	.18				

Note: Washington, DC population and news, "no appropriate location" news excluded.

under-coverage in 1982–1984. As both the attention index and attention ratio data appear to indicate, deviations from the population norm, by region, are slightly less in 1982–1984 than they were in 1973–1975.

Table 3 shows state population, news time and attention indices and ratios for the 50 states for the 1982–1984 data. Several points may be made about these results. First, our findings are relatively consistent with those of Dominick: for example, New York, California and Florida are at or near the top of the list of over-coverage in 1982–1984; these three states were also among the top five in 1973–1975. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin were likewise among the five most under-covered states in both studies.

More generally, the data show that state-by-state, there is substantial over- and under-coverage. In fact, the top four states in total news time (New York, California, Illinois and Texas, all of which are over-covered by both indices) account for just over half (50.6%) of domestic evening news coverage, while they account for just 30.0% of US population. The data on over-coverage lends credence to two interpretations. The first deals with large state over-coverage: clearly, New York, California, and to a lesser extent Illinois are centers of news coverage in two senses. News occurs there because they are home to large *cities* (New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, Chicago) that are centers of political, economic and cultural power. They are also, we think not coincidentally, centers of news coverage because the networks have major newsgathering centers there, and have access to not only their own news staffs but to those of their owned-and-operated broadcast stations, as Epstein (1974) has also noted. Second, however, our attention ratio measure also notes several relatively small, by population, states that received over-coverage. Here, one or two running stories account for the bulk of coverage, and the state's small population leads to a large coverage ratio. In the study period, for example, Utah's coverage is largely accounted for by a single story — the Barney Clark heart transplant, while New Hampshire's is largely due to the 1984 Presidential primary there, and Rhode Island's stems from the Klaus von Bulow trial and the America's Cup races. We cannot account for North Dakota's over-coverage.

Under-coverage is likewise interesting. During the study period, the state of Delaware and its 602,000 inhabitants received *no* news coverage, while the 2.6 million inhabitants of Oregon received almost none. As Table 3 shows, under-coverage is more the norm than over-coverage, as 37 of the 50 states received less than their population-proportionate share. In fact, 17 states received less than *half* as much as their population-proportionate share, including all four states in the Middle Atlantic region and three of five states in the Northeast. Most of the prominent examples of under-coverage occur in the "Frost Belt" and in the Middle Atlantic, and these results are

consistent with Dominick's interpretation of an "eclipse" effect, whereby one or two states in a region are over-covered and the rest are under-covered. In the present study, we see this in the Midwest, the Northeast, the South, the Southwest, the Pacific, New England (if we look only at attention index) and the Mountain regions. The Middle Atlantic region fits this pattern as well, for it is being eclipsed by Washington, DC, which is absent from these data. We argue that the dynamic is not *states* "eclipsing" other states, but *cities*, by and large, which eclipse states: news, in other words, is made by and in cities, and states which do not have large cities (and news crews or easy airport access to them) or which stand in the shadow of states with large cities are not on the network evening news.

Sources in Network Evening Weekday Telecasts 1982–1984

Tabled below are results of our analysis of 5,483 sources from our 5,190 news stories. As noted, we coded only those sources on which there were film or sound bites in the newscast, in large part because these are the only sources for which the *Television News Index* provides sufficient information to allow source identification. Nonetheless, on 57 items (1.0%), there was insufficient information to allocate a source to our coding scheme, and these are eliminated.

In general, some of our major presuppositions were borne out among domestic sources. Official and institutional sources predominate over others: Some 72.0% of all sources were officials of government or politics or groups and institutions, and another 2.7% were former officials commenting on their areas of official status. Thus 25.7% of sources were "unaffiliated," a figure considerably larger than that found by Brown et al. (1987) for newspaper and wire service news. Additionally, male sources predominate over female ones. After removing the 7.7% of our sources which could not be classified by gender, we find 86.4% of our news sources to be male and 13.6% to be female: thus fewer than one news source of seven is female.

Also as expected, government and institutional sources predominate over others. As Table 4 shows, government officials and political candidates and others (our sample covers the 1982 general elections and the 1984 early primary season) comprise two-fifths of all news sources, and federal sources are about four times as frequent as state and local ones. The President, of course, emerges as the single most frequently appearing news source, and the President or his spokesperson constitutes about five percent of *all* news sources in the sample, a figure slightly lower than the 8.5% Gans found for 1967 television news.[7]

Among institutional and group sources, as Table 4 also demonstrates, business spokespersons predominate, accounting for about one of eleven of all sources and just under a third of all institutional sources. "Other professionals," largely lawyers and medical doctors, are also important, but perhaps most striking in the overall category is the small representation of political/social/women's/civil and human rights groups and spokespersons: even when combined with organized labor spokespersons, they account for only a sixth of all institutional sources and a twentieth of all sources.

Table 4.
Domestic News Sources for Weekday Network Evening News 1982–1984

Government Sources	
Federal officials	28.2%
State/local government	7.1
Other government	0.7
Political Sources	4.6
Group/Institutional Sources	
Business	9.2
Political and social interest groups, labor	5.2
Other (academic, professional, religious, sports)	19.3
Private Individuals	25.7

Note: Total identifiable domestic news sources equals 4,886.

We would, however, like to discuss the "unknowns" in somewhat more detail. Guided by Gans (1979), we had constructed our coding categories with the following rationale in mind: The presentation of private individuals in news, as news sources, largely involves showing individuals either as "epitomizing cases," as when an out-of-work laborer is quoted to show the hardships of unemployment, or as a criminal victim or defendant or as another form of victim, or finally, as a participant in some bizarre activity. The data show general support for this: Among "unknown" sources, 21.5% are "epitomizing examples" (farmers, protestors, consumers, voters, labor and grassroots political workers); 10.9% are crime-related; 25.9% are otherwise characterized as victims (disaster victims and witnesses, other victims); and 6.9% of private individuals are depicted as engaging in odd or unusual "newsmaking" activities. Another 8.0% are identifiable individuals in "aggregate" or crowd shots. We had, additionally, a residual category to allow for cases that did not fit the pattern suggested above; it contains all other private individual cases, and it was unexpectedly large, comprising 28.1% of all private-individual cases. People in this category are difficult to categorize; they include human-interest subjects such as those on whom Charles Kuralt has made his reputation, and any others that do not conform to the patterns we had expected. While this group is larger than we expected to find, we should recall that "ordinary people" not otherwise characterized still account for only about seven percent of all network evening news sources.

Conclusion

Presented above are data from an analysis of two years of network evening news programs 1982–1984. They show that such news is biased, which we previously have defined merely as deviation from some standard of "reality" and to which we have generally not attached any norm, and that it is biased in two ways. First is a geographic bias, which operates both globally and nationally; we have paid greater attention to the latter and generally have confirmed earlier findings by Dominick (1977). An unexpected finding, however, was a decline by more than half in news emanating from Washington and a tripling of news from no single domestic location, in "news from nowhere" or, more correctly, news from everywhere. This increase, we suspect, may be intentional and deliberate on the part of the networks, an explicit effort to broaden the definition of news and broaden its appeal to a demographically diverse audience. Second is a social structural bias: News, when operationally defined as the presence of sources on which a television network had available sound, tape or film, tends strongly to favor established institutional sources, most especially governmental, military, political, business and professional sources. Slightly more than six of seven of them are men. Let us make the additional observation that this analysis cannot speak to whether the networks systematically discriminate against women as news sources; we doubt that it works so directly. More likely, the networks are reflecting to a greater or lesser degree that news is news of "knowns" in power centers, and they are predominantly men. Where "unknowns" come into the news, they generally do so in a frame provided by the networks — as victims or examples. Without strictly comparable trend data, however, we are in no position to know whether there has been change in the recent past on distributions of power as indexed by the social locations of those quoted in the news.

However, our data do show some diversity in network-quoted sources, albeit a limited diversity. Few groups are completely shut out — though women's groups in the study account for only eight of 4,886 sources, and political party representatives *other than* Democrats and Republicans (data not tabled) total only two. What this analysis *cannot* show, however, is how and in what ways sources are treated within the air time they do receive.

Two qualifications must be made. First is that, as previously noted, available data allowed us to examine only network news sources for which film or sound bites were used. We would suspect that were we able to examine all news sources articulated on the evening news, it would look even more "official" than this analysis suggests, for the presentation of data in news (almost always from official sources) and indirect quotation, we would guess, is almost always from authoritative sources.

Second, we are not here arguing for any system that would guarantee

"representative" news in any strict head-counting sense: news, after all, if it serves any "representative" function serves to represent significance, impact and the doings of power. Demonstrating that news is democratically and demographically unrepresentative largely serves two functions. First is descriptive: analyses of this sort demonstrate the *degree* to which "reality" as characterized by extra-media representations of the public and as characterized by news diverge. Second is conceptual: such accounts inform explanations for why such divergences exist and what "news," in this case network television news, is.

Notes

[1]It will be noted that we put "reality" in quotation marks. We do so to emphasize our doubt that television news — or anything else — could constitute a veridical account of life. Full discussion of the issue of whether any account can capture "reality" clearly is beyond the scope of this paper. Equally clearly, we would argue, television news under any circumstance will be no more than a created or socially constructed reality. When we speak of bias, then, we speak of regularized, systematic deviations from some "objective" and measurable standard. In so doing, we are not implying that television news could be unbiased. This is consistent with Williams' (1975) suggestion that "(S)urely bias in any mode of communication, properly thought of as deviation from an unattainable but theoretically conceivable condition of unbias is axiomatic. . . . (T)he notion that theoretical reality cannot be perceived or interpersonally communicated without distortion is a first principle for all but a few scholars, scientists and philosophers at ordinary levels of discourse" (pp. 191–192). See also Hofstetter (1987) for a conceptual accounting of various forms of bias and especially the sort of structural biases with which this study largely is concerned.

[2]Newscasts from one sampled day in 1982 were not available, and these data were not replaced; hence this study covers 357 newscasts from 119 days. Sampled dates are available from the first author.

[3]Only three percent of all news items had as many as six, and perhaps one percent had more than six (or about two news stories per week).

[4]A parallel content analysis of Vanderbilt archive network evening newscasts (Riffe et al., 1985) found overwhelming cross-network similarities 1971–1983 in topic content, lead story topic content, "geopolitical focus" and mean time per newscast item.

[5]The rather surprisingly (to the authors) large number of business-and-economic stories is likely due to a coding decision that counted the pictoral presentation of Dow-Jones and New York Stock Exchange Composite Index data as a ten-second story for each newscast.

[6]"No appropriate location" stories are of several kinds; most prominent are "roundup" stories giving no weight to particular states, such as weather and "reaction" stories to events, or purely "national" stories such as a political poll. We also need to note that our figures here include commentary as well as news, but commentary accounts for only 1.6% of identifiable content of all kinds and rarely focused on a particular state or included sources as we define them here.

[7]The 8.5% figure is recomputed from Gans' (1979) Table 2 (p. 10) and Table 3 (p. 13).

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Gender Stereotypes in Italian Television Advertisements

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The present study attempted to replicate and extend American, Canadian and British studies on the portrayal of men and women in television commercials using advertisements broadcast in Italy. Three hundred and thirty-three daytime and evening commercials were content analyzed by classifying the attributes of their central figures into eleven categories: gender, mode, credibility, role, location, reward, product price, argument, background, humor and comment. Gender stereotyping in Italy was constant across time-of-day and more apparent than in America, but as frequent as in England. The implications of results for the development and maintenance of gender roles are discussed.

For both theoretical and practical reasons there is currently widespread interest in the origin and maintenance of gender stereotypes. Numerous studies have reached similar conclusions about the portrayals of gender in television commercials. McArthur and Resko (1975) found that overall men appeared more often than women in American advertisements, and that they differ in terms of their credibility (men are authorities, women product users), role (women are 'dependent,' men 'independent' of others), location (men are portrayed in occupational settings, women at home), persuasive arguments (men give more, particularly 'scientific' arguments than women), rewards (women obtained approval of family and opposite gender, men obtained approval of friends, social and career advancement), and product type (men were authorities on products used primarily by women). Overall, as regards both their credentials and behavior, women in American television advertisements were portrayed as less knowledgeable than men. Manstead and McCulloch's (1981) replication of the above study showed British commercials to be even more gender stereotyped than American.

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