

Content Analysis: Media Images of the South

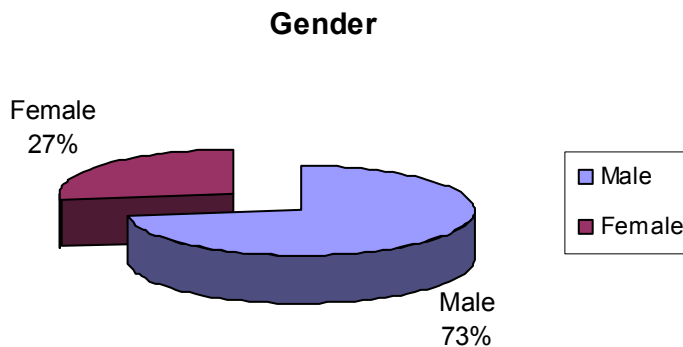
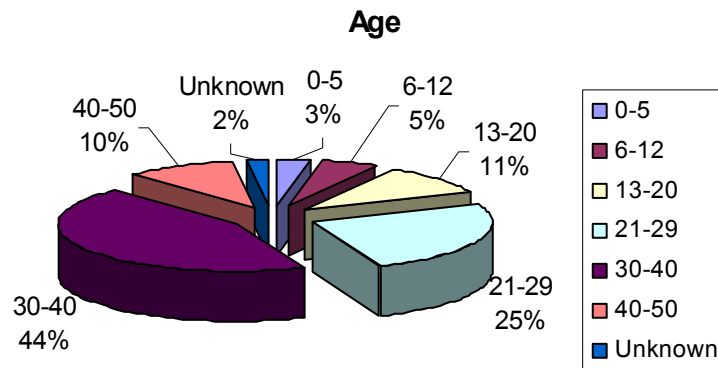
As part of our Ethical Images research project, we collected and assessed images that represent the developing, or Southern, world. The content analysis will serve to provide concrete statistics we can use to discuss how images perpetuate or discount stereotypes, and which aspects of an image contribute to the final impact.

The media is an important source of information for general public and for that matter, messages delivered in local and national newspapers are extremely important. It is necessary that images be delivered in an ethical way, while maintaining newsworthy status.

In order to understand this fine balance, we conducted a close analysis of the images, organizing aspects of the images into categories, such as region, gender and “type” of image. We collected images from the *National Post* and *The Chronicle Herald* throughout the month of August, so that we can observe not only images, but also patterns, or “news cycles,” over a period of time.

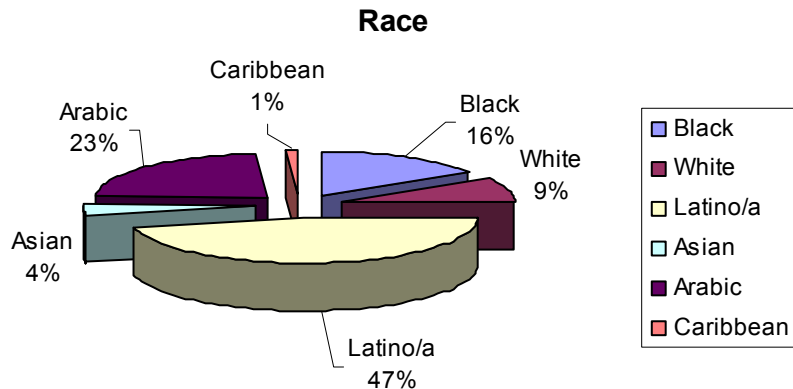
Conclusions:

- Most of the subjects were adults, 44% of these between 30-40 years of age. 25% were between 21-29 and few young babies or children were portrayed. Interestingly, the very young that were portrayed were sick or in pain.



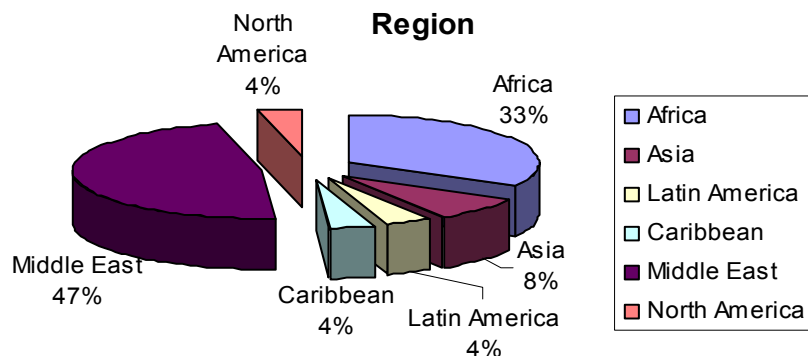
- A substantial percentage of subjects were male (73% opposed to 23% female). To put this into perspective, a content analysis of development organizations' showed an almost equal percentage of males and females.

- 47% of subjects photographed were Latin American, however, this is due to a large number of people in a few photos. 23% of subjects photographed were Arabic, with a smaller number of people throughout many photos.



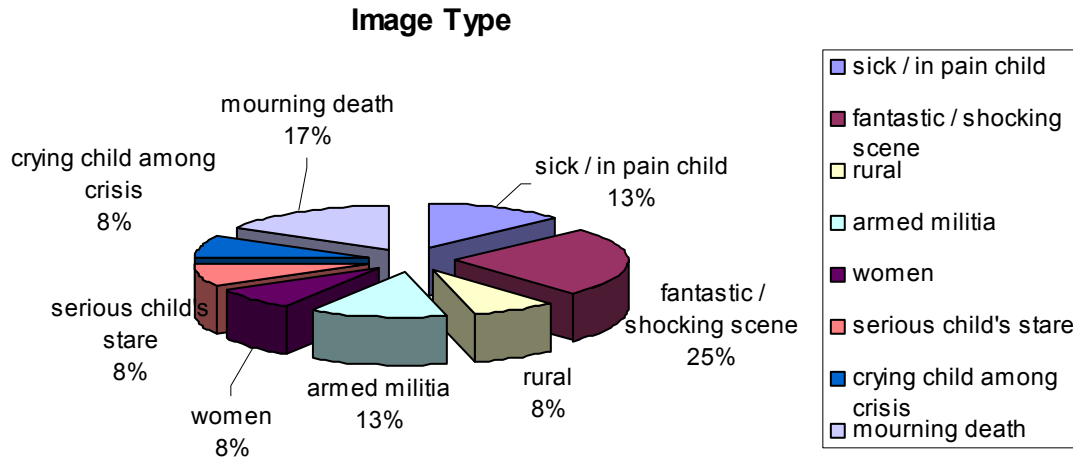
- In fact, 47% of the images were taken in the Middle East. This region had a disproportionate amount of coverage in the World News section, however this is also due to the Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip, a high-profile event that initiated a stream of images and articles.

- Africa was the second most depicted region; 33% of the images were taken in Africa. There were several pictures of crises and famine, and one picture depicting men looking for a virgin bride. Africa has also been getting a lot of media attention lately – this is perhaps a news cycle one may continue to observe in the coming months.



- Those images set in the Middle East were most likely to depict violence, although soldiers and weapons were common aspects of the World news section in general.

- Of the “image types,” named by our committee, 25% of these images were considered to be shocking or fantastic scenes. This compares with zero shocking images in the development organizations’ materials. Even the news images that were not deemed “shocking” or “fantastic” often contained poignant, discomforting images.



It appears, from our analysis, that the South is sensationalized in Canadian media. Our newspapers include images of the South related to violence, famine, and exoticism. These images represent Southern citizens as violent, helpless and hopeless. Rather than seeing these images as a portrayal of problems that demand policy change and international attention, I think they cause such discomfort in the reader that one may shun from the actual issue.

Certainly, there is a fine balance when dealing with ethics, a conundrum that is compounded when a photographer or journalist must work within the dynamic media world – one where international coverage is up against local events and a culture of celebrity mania. However, as most journalists will attest, integrity is fundamental to journalism. Perhaps, as we continue to examine images with a critical eye, there will be an emergence of ethical international coverage that is still newsworthy.