

TV is barrier to respect for minorities

The Associated Press

Washington — Children's programming on commercial television is so one-sided in its depiction of white, male characters "that it can only be seen as a major barrier in the battle for recognition and respect for minorities in this country," a public-interest group study says.

In fact, children's programs have fallen behind adult shows in the frequency with which they feature minority as well as female characters "and both groups are portrayed in a more stereotyped manner in children's programming than in prime-time programming," the study found.

The research unveiled here Tuesday by Action for Children's Television, a public interest group based in Boston, was conducted by Dr. F. Earle Barcus, a professor of communications research at Boston University's School of Public Communication.

Entitled "Representations of Life on Children's Television," the study was financed by the Ford Foundation and

the Carnegie Corp. of New York and is based on a review of 38 hours of children's shows aired in the Boston area during January 1981.

The study is divided into three sections, focusing on sex roles, minority portrayals and the view of family life offered by cartoons and other children's programs. And in each case, it finds much to fault.

Of the 1,145 TV characters that appeared during the 38 hours, Barcus reported only 42 were black and 47 belonged to other minority groups. Stated another way, 3.7 percent of the characters in the sample were black; 3.1 percent were Hispanic, and 0.8 percent were Asian.

Native Americans were represented solely by the character "Tonto" from the "Tarzan-Lone Ranger Adventure Hour," the study added.

As for females, Barcus said "only 16 percent of all major dramatic characters in the program sample were female."

Although blacks were more likely to be cast as heroes than villains, the study main-

tained "these examples of respect accorded to minority characters are offset by the infrequency of minority portrayals."

"Females were portrayed as younger than males; more likely to be married; less active, and with lower self-esteem," the study added.

"What this Barcus study tells us is that the programs specifically targeted to our children present a world peopled almost exclusively by white Anglo-Saxon males; a world where people with accents are villains, where fathers work and have adventures while mothers stay home and clean house," said Kim Hayes, a spokeswoman for the group that did the study.

Peggy Charren, founder and president of the group, said she found the study upsetting because "it shows a kind of implicit racism."

"What the research shows is that there aren't very many people who aren't white on children's television," she said. "And I think that's more of a problem than explicit racism."

"Today, in this day and age, the broadcasting industry is still creating unacceptable stereotypes," Charren continued. "This is hardly a record to brag about. These aren't the children's shows that the networks spotlight in ads about winning prizes, the specials. These are the regular programs shown week in and week out."

In the early 1970's, when research was just beginning to spotlight the importance of what children watched on television, the commercial industry's performance could be characterized as "benign neglect," Charren added.

"But now; a decade later, it's no longer benign," she said. "It can only be intentional."