

Analysis

RQ1: What differences are there in expectations placed on journalists of color compared with those of white journalists?

Most participants (7) responded that they experienced professional expectations differently from counterparts who were not their race or ethnicity (Snow, 2021) (Easter, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Lowery, 2021) (Monet, 2021) (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021) (Otarola, 2021). Two said the expectations were the same (Bui, 2021) (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021), and a quarter (3) said they weren't sure (Jany, 2021) (Chin, 2021) (Whitting, 2021).

Those who spoke of differences in expectations tended to highlight three different reasonings:

1. BIPOC journalists experience higher pressure to adhere to industry standards
2. Minority journalists are often given minority specific roles
3. Normative bias towards white men disadvantages BIPOC journalists

Higher pressure to adhere to industry standards

In this study, participants reported professional expectations as expressed by supervisors, audiences, and by others in the journalism industry. From supervisors, participants noted similar professional expectations in general with more common tropes of being fair and balanced, being truthful and accurate, being rigorous, and giving voice to the voiceless. Yet equally common were expectations not to express opinions in public forums or take a political stance (responses given 100% by journalists of color). This suggests that journalists of color may be more likely to have been briefed (or at least remember being briefed) about not speaking out.

That said, professional expectations weren't exclusively expressed by supervisors. Former Managing Editor of the Minnesota Daily, Tiffany Bui, noted several social gatherings in which peers and would-be hiring staff spelled out the industry's hard lines. At a networking event, "they said very clearly that you were not allowed from [sic] participating in protests, but also donating to example Planned Parenthood. They were kind of saying like, 'Well, it's one thing if you get care at Planned Parenthood, but you shouldn't donate to it because it's public record, or talk openly about supporting it'" (Bui, 2021).

Bui continued to note:

"There is even sort of a debate in my journalism classes that came up quite often about whether or not journalists should vote, whether or not journalists should call president Trump's rhetoric racist, or attribute to other people. Those are the kinds of discussions we were having not only in class, but reinforced by people who would hire us, or who were going to hire us" (Bui, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Many of the participants expressed an initial fear of saying anything controversial, especially on social media (Snow, 2021), even among friends (Bui, 2021). Two participants described difficulty in silencing one's emotions to meet professional expectations (Bui, 2021) (Otarola, 2021). One of these, Tiffany Bui, noted poignantly, "My being a journalist superseded my being a person with opinions in the world" (Bui, 2021).

The regular fear of being fired was noted among several BIPOC participants (Bui, 2021) (Easter, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Monet, 2021) and not at all by white participants (Whitting, 2021) (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021). Some BIPOC participants also expressed an impression that supervisors expected them to be grateful to have been given a/the job (Easter, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Monet, 2021). Independent journalists, Jenni Monet relates bluntly, "I think that they were just expecting me as a brown person who should be lucky enough to be in the newsroom just to keep my mouth shut" (Monet, 2021).

These findings are supported by Pamela Newkirk's assertions that journalists of color face additional pressure to prove their qualifications within mainstream media organizations (Newkirk, 2000). Jenni Monet, an Indigenous person descended from the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, agreed when she related why she won't work in newsrooms again:

It wasn't until I actually got into newsrooms where you have these competing ideas and the loudest idea was, "Oh, you don't need to go to journalism school. You just got to deliver good work and you'll be respected." I think to some extent that's true. I mean, it's the spirit of 'try hard and meritocracy will win.'

But it took a long time for me to say, "Actually no, that doesn't work for someone like me." You have to unfortunately go through elite doorways and institutions to gain the kind of credibility that I knew I wasn't receiving, even though I knew I was also working two or three times as hard as my colleagues (Monet, 2021).

Minority Specific Roles

Interviewee 11, a white female associate producer who chose to remain anonymous, noted that as a minority, both people of color and women are often assigned topical focus based on their minority status as a means of delegating more contentious stories to those "more qualified" to cover them.

There's certainly currently this thing of white men not wanting to step in it. It's like, "I'm going to put you in charge of this, so I don't step in it..."

So I think [the position of minority journalists is] similar in a way that we're like, "Oh, people of color – You can deal with this very delicate situation." There's another layer that's perhaps less cute, of like, "Oh. Well women, you deal with this now" (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021).

It's worth noting that none of the study participants of color described this specific form of pigeonholing minority members into professionally representing their respective minorities.

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Yet, Interviewee 11's assertions are supported both by anecdotal accounts from people of color expressing frustration at being expected to educate white people about racism (e.g. (Eddo-Lodge, 2017) and (Brown, 2020)), and by studies exploring burn-out among BIPOC journalists (E.g. (Murphy, 2020)). While burnout itself is not an experience limited to BIPOC journalists (Perlberg & O'Reilly, Newsrooms are facing a mental-health crisis, and burnout is driving some journalists to quit, 2021), combined with evidence that burnout affects female journalists more than men (Krings, 2015), there is evidence to support the premise that underprivileged status tends to compound the effects of burnout among journalists as minorities are asked to focus on "minority-related" topic coverage.

Normative bias against BIPOC journalists

Interviewee 11, who is a white woman, also tellingly described her response to the backlash she faced when writing about the building damage incurred in riots after the death of George Floyd, and subsequent reflections on her response:

Whoa, we're just being objective and serving the very core public safety function of journalism." Which is like, "Hey, here's where fires are burning. Don't be there. Or if you're in a community where fires are burning, you need to water down your house right now." I thought that was just a very objective approach....

Do buildings really matter when people are being shot in the streets? So what we used to think was objective was actually shaped through a white lens, I think (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021).

The "white lens" Interviewee 11 describes is similarly discussed by several participants in the context of the institutional perspective defined by mainstream news organizations historically employing and managed by white men (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Charlotte Wien presents a compelling picture of journalistic objectivity as defined by a prism resulting from the theoretical directions the American journalism industry has been pulled in since the emergence of mainstream journalism – generally agreed to be in the mid-19th century (see below). She notes that more Positivistic models of journalism (defined exclusively by what can be demonstrably observed incidentally and associated with modern definitions of mainstream journalism) began to be challenged by New Journalism proponents (characterized by relativistic acknowledgement of cultural biases typified by Critical Race Theory).

Figure 2. The Journalistic Theoretical Map



(Wien, 2006)

Wien notes, “Concepts such as truth, objectivity and reality are meaningless in themselves, but interesting to study as signs. In this way, only the signs become real: the map has become more real than the landscape” (Wien, 2006). Considering that the “map” has been largely drawn by a decidedly white, male population, it seems inevitable that conflicts of perspectives were bound to arise when alternative perspectives began to enter mainstream journalism.

When asked whether he experienced professional expectations differently from colleagues who were not black (like him), national correspondent, Wesley Lowery, responded this way:

The way I would word it is... that standards, expectations, [and] norms have all been set in the management environment that is almost exclusively white, and overwhelmingly men. Because these things are subjective, and what we're talking about is where is the line [is] between what is an opinion and what is a state-able fact, what needs to be couched and what does not, what is “racist” and what is “racially tinged” or whatever that means - you can imagine that an industry by which the people making those decisions are almost exclusively white, would draw those lines in places that are different, than an industry where the decision makers were more diverse (Lowery, 2021).

Several participants discussed incidents where these lines seemed to have been drawn in ways that favor a white, male perspective over their own. LA Times arts reporter, Makeda Easter, shared one such conflict over the word, “cruel.”

In writing this story, I wrote, “the cruel death of George Floyd;” like “this artist depicted the cruel death of George Floyd.” My direct editor didn't have a problem with it, and then when it got to the copy desk, I learned that “cruel” got taken out because it wasn't... I think “neutral” is the word they used.

I actually don't understand this at all, because last summer there were global uprisings around the stuff because it was objectively cruel, and we use cruel to describe animal

Analysis - Emeri Burks

cruelty and that kind of thing. So why couldn't we use it here? It became a whole ordeal, and the word was still taken out.

I didn't win this battle, but the conversation got elevated and I had a conversation with the masthead about it, just like a Zoom being like, "If this word isn't neutral, what does neutral mean for the paper? I'm just really a little bit disturbed and confused that describing a man with a knee on his neck for eight and a half minutes - that's not cruel? We can't say that, what implications does that have for everything else that I'm writing? My questions weren't really answered (Easter, 2021).

When asked about expectations of objectivity, participants tended to respond using different definitions of the word with striking implications. For many of this study's participants, "objective" seems to connote suppression of self and of one's values. For some, this presented no ethical conflict. Interviewee 3, a black woman who works at a progressive newspaper, noted over her reporting, "I was still 100% objective and unbiased, telling the stories of the people was not about my story. It was not about me writing any opinion pieces. I was a news reporter who told the story of the subjects that I interviewed" (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

But for others, "objective" reporting seemed to go against their personal values. Tiffany Bui once applied to an internship and recalls the interview this way: "One of the questions was, 'Why do you want to do objective political journalism?' And I was like, 'I don't actually want to do objective political journalism. I want to do truthful and fair and historically informed political journalism'" (Bui, 2021). When asked about the distinction, Bui explained, "I think objective can mean truthful and fair. But I think for the most part it's meant reporting on things as if you do not exist in them, or that you do not have skin in the game, or that you won't feel the consequences" (Bui, 2021).

Colorado Public Radio climate and environment reporter, Miguel Otarola, shared a similar set of definitions:

Well, objectivity just kind of deals more with your own personal beliefs, and your own perspectives, and sort of trying to strip that away from the work that you're doing – which is impossible...

Then fairness to me is really taking out any of your stereotypes or prejudices when you're going through the reporting phase; really meeting people where they're at, talking to them, understanding them." (Otarola, 2021).

Managing Editor of the Minnesota Women's Press, Sarah Whitting described her role as a journalist as "not objective because I'm trying to help change the world" (Whitting, 2021).

In these instances, participants seemed to view "being objective" as antithetical to reporting from a place that acknowledged their values, beliefs, and/or experiences. For BIPOC journalists who possess intimate knowledge of the unfair treatment that people of color may face from their own publications (let alone other institutions like the police force), removing oneself from the story may violate personal values in ways that white journalists are less likely to experience.

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Furthermore, several participants (all BIPOC) discussed incidents where they felt compelled to speak out against what they saw as unfair treatment of a story or policy, or against themselves. While some participants said their concerns were addressed respectfully and productively (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021), others did not (Easter, 2021) (Monet, 2021). Some like independent journalist, Jenni Monet, also noted that she saw concerns like hers that were raised by white peers were treated differently than hers were treated, implying concerns from POC were also less likely to be taken seriously (Monet, 2021).

RQ2: How do journalists of color weigh the expectations of their industry and organization against their personal values, and to what outcomes?

As with four participants, journalists often reported no conflict between professional expectations and personal values for work. More frequently (8), however, journalists noted some degree of conflict between professional expectations and personally held professional values now (7) or at previous times (1).

When journalists experience such a conflict (as 8 participants did), they report a variety of personal responses:

- Three quarters (6) said they benefited from supervisor or colleague support to give some level of guidance on how they navigate the situation (Bui, 2021) (Snow, 2021) (Easter, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Monet, 2021) (Otarola, 2021).
- Half (4) tended to stand up for their beliefs and deal with the consequences later (Easter, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Lowery, 2021) (Otarola, 2021).
- Half of participants (4) also suggest responses depend on various factors, and advised choosing battles to decide which conflicts are worth taking a stand for and which ones are not (Chin, 2021) (Mohajer, 2021) (Lowery, 2021) (Otarola, 2021).
- One journalist is still figuring out what to do in these instances and tends to go along with their supervisor's expectations (Snow, 2021).

Values that professional expectations were reported to conflict with included empathy, fairness, justice, democratic ideals of equality, democracy and/or freedom, anti-racism, accessibility, and making the world a better place (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021). The most common conflict expressed (by five participants) between professional expectations and personal values focused on the business model and pace of journalistic work which, they say, kept them from producing the fair, contextualized, thoughtful work they wanted to do. A quarter (3) of participants noted that the journalism business model inserts a barrier between journalists and the community which keep more meaningful stories from being told.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer explained:

Deadline journalism often leaves out people who are not privileged in the sense of media training, media access, and knowledge of how it works. They have no reason to trust journalists, most days. These are strangers who show up to their communities when something terrible happens, and point a camera in their face because you know

Analysis - Emeri Burks

something awful happened usually. That's their perception of journalists, and that's the work that remains to be done (Mohajer, 2021).

Miguel Otarola similarly commiserated that journalists' incentives don't encourage depth. He noted as a journalist, "You're not interested in knowing who they are. You're interested in getting a story and getting a scoop, potentially helping out your own professional career" (Otarola, 2021). Makeda Easter shared an anecdote which illustrates this conflict well:

When I worked on the Metro desk, which is a lot of breaking news, it's a bit different. It's like, "No, you go out and get the story no matter what. [At year end being at the paper] I wrote about a mass shooting, and I felt really uncomfortable going out [with supervisors] being like, "You need to talk to this person." It's like, "Well, I'm here and they're sobbing. I can't interrupt this moment." It's like, "No, try to get it." That's why I didn't want to stay in that desk because I'm like, "I just can't do this work. I wouldn't last doing it" (Easter, 2021).

A quarter of participants (3) also felt that professional expectations could conflict with personal values for honesty. Tiffany Bui related:

There are times where I feel like just being honest is not great in terms of career advancement or getting jobs. There's a lot of drama in the activist community right now in terms of calling different activists to account for their actions or harm they've caused the community. Even within these groups, there's interpersonal conflict and calls for accountability.

So I'm like, "Well, do I write about this? Where do I come down on this? Should I write about these kinds of interpersonal conflicts? I think they're important. But should I weigh in on this? And then what will these people think of me – these people who support such and such person, or don't support such and such person in the activist community? Or do I talk to this person who's been accused of these things less" (Bui, 2021)?

Jenni Monet spoke of a similar dilemma:

There's a story I'm writing right now about a very revered public figure who's indigenous, and I know things that is not publicly known which I think if the public knew [they] would have a different take altogether. I'm constantly walking those kinds of balances on how much to reveal, the tone to place on things, the timing of when to reveal something. And constantly kind of [considering] all the sides of how it's going to be received, and where the stakes are and all of that.

It's happening right now in a piece [that] happened at Standing Rock. There were times at Standing Rock where I held back on revealing I'm pursuing stories, because of the delicate nature and the potential impact that it might have had on that movement on the ground. That's a hard thing to admit, because then you get into these questions of –

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Well, had I known, had I pursued this story, I would become more aware of what the truth is, and should that truth be something that influences or alters things? Then you brace that against – well, I'm not going to go pursue the story, so then I'm kind of ignorant to the facts and therefore I have a vagary of what the truth might be. But because I'm not going after those facts, then I'm not responsible. Do you see what I mean? Like I'm absolving myself of any responsibility.

I wrestle with that all the time in certain... when I know that the story or the news could just be too bright (Monet, 2021).

In Bui's and Monet's cases the desire to support public knowledge of activist initiatives conflicted with their journalistic integrity to speak the truth. Yet, as Wesley Lowery illustrated, the desire to tell the truth can also conflict with a newspaper's ability to do its work of telling the truth on a larger scale:

If you think about historically in newspaper, in the South, that would have launched on a big investigation into whether or not black people being denied the right to vote, would have concluded they were, would have been obligated to write that down – I can imagine would have lost a lot of subscribers. It would not have been in the best interest of The Birmingham News to do a massive expose in 1963 about the access to vote, to the ballot box for black people, and to tell the truth about what it found right (Lowery, 2021).

RQ3: How are expectations on American journalists changing with regard to the expression of bias, of identity, and to the social contributions of journalists?

All (12) journalists agree that the boundaries for journalistic conduct are changing to some extent, and most (8) participants responded that the changes were wide-spread, though multiple respondents (2) emphasized that the changes were uneven and dependent on the news room in question (Jany, 2021) (Easter, 2021). The changes in expectations were speculated to be derived from changes within journalists' audiences, news organizations, and from the body of journalists themselves (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Institutional Changes

Comparing two Minnesota Daily journalists' accounts of professional expectations reveals that the paper may have changed dramatically even from the time that one was trained in in 2018 to the time the other was trained in in 2019. Compare Tiffany Bui's response:

The expectation in various places at the Minnesota Daily, for example, were very much – you don't really take any political positions, there was a very clear social media policy of don't express political opinions, don't retweet overtly political opinions without it being kind of a journalistic sort of endeavor. Don't express those opinions on social media. We weren't allowed to be involved in political campaigns or student government as student journalists. (Bui, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

To Jasmine Snow's description of starting work at the same paper:

I was given a lot of freedom initially when I was hired and so I was expected to communicate openly, but also come up with these of creative pitches, kind of curating the beat essentially based off of what reporting they had done and what I was interested in...

I will say [when I got there] The Daily was already very progressive in terms of what they expected when it came to objectivity in reporting, which played a role in me staying employed there" (Snow, 2021).

The two descriptions of work at The Minnesota Daily highlight different aspects of journalism work – social media use and public displays of bias versus general openness in self-expression and pursuing stories. Therefore, it's problematic to compare experiences directly. It's possible the two Daily reporters simply had generally different experiences in terms of whether their personal contributions, interests, and priorities were encouraged or not, for example. It's also possible that the paper, like many others in recent years, has changed to meet the shifting expectations of news organizations around the country.

The LA Times for example, notably published a series of illuminating articles detailing the ways in which their news coverage reinforced stereotypes that Black and Latinos in LA were thieves, rapists, and killers; painted the struggles of poor families in southern LA with a broad brush; unquestioningly quoted police and prosecutors; and suggested that more aggressive policing and harsher sentencing were the only effective responses to crime (Board, 2020).

LA Times reporter, Makeda Easter noted in our interview, "It really wasn't until, for me, at least until George Floyd last year that we were able to express like, 'What do you mean by neutrality? What is objectivity?'... I don't think it was until last summer that we really started outwardly questioning these things" (Easter, 2021).

One of the more notable changes several respondents mentioned was a shift in power towards journalists of color, and towards a more Anti-Racist stance (actively fighting for equity initiatives or influences, and fighting against initiatives or influences that perpetuate racism). Minnesota Daily journalist, Jasmine Snow says, "it has been pretty tectonic, pretty major shifts, and I think that's mainly come from the new – I'll say credibility, but just generally power that journalists of color, particularly black journalists, got after George Floyd's murder" (Snow, 2021).

Interviewee 3, who works at a progressive newspaper, noted of her paper:

You can tell where the paper is leaning, and that's the papers, not just the reporters. Not one person. This is the direction of our complete news organization to be more progressive, be anti-racist. We've made that clear. Our owner said it. It was in our pages. It's on our website. So there is no denying what you're getting when you unfold the [paper] (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer also observed a frantic shift in journalist mindset since the death of George Floyd. She noted:

As an educator of journalists, I've witnessed a panic in my field to shift its mindset in response to Floyd's death. Newsroom colleagues were confronted with the idea of how many times they may have published complete lies, attributed to police, and hopefully made them ponder whether they missed it because they failed to understand why there is mistrust of police in minority communities.

There were certainly significant changes to the journalism industry following the death of George Floyd, but to be honest it was a moment when I felt, in small and maybe petty part, validated. Angry, even. I hate to admit this but in a certain way these events gave me credibility and led some to revisit conversations with me on race they had dismissed, or failed to grow from (Mohajer, 2021).

Mohajer continued to note that her philosophy of journalism seems to have been accepted by more journalists since the death of George Floyd:

In the past, my concern led colleagues to snidely call me an "activist journalist" and some tried to treat me like tainted goods, like my acknowledgement of vast and harmful disparities of every kind was the thinking of a weak-willed woman who was too prone to emotion or empathy. They're only now finally learning that I was right about things they dismissed as my biases as a woman of color (Mohajer, 2021).

As Mohajer noted of other journalists, participants also described a shift in their approach to reporting towards a more social responsibility mindset since the death of George Floyd. While a third (4) of participants noted that consideration of journalists' social responsibility has always been a part of their approach to work, five sixths (10) of participants noted some degree of professional reflection prompted by the death of George Floyd and ensuing public discourse. A third (4) say Floyd's death prompted introspection, a quarter (3) said it changed the way they framed their stories, and a sixth (2) of participants said his death changed the way they interacted with communities (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Jenni Monet expressed her belief that part of the reason for these shifts has been a blurring of lines between journalism and advocacy as the status quo of victimizing narratives in the news comes increasingly under question, and the importance of community reflection in covering marginalized communities is further emphasized. She explained her understanding of common practices in reporting:

There has always been tension between where journalism ends and activism begins, and I believe those lines are blurring more than ever in the racial reckoning that ensued following the murder of George Floyd. Headlines often pander to a formula that frames a victimizing narrative on marginalized peoples as opposed to explaining or addressing systemic inequalities and solutions (Monet, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Changes in Audience Expectations

Tiffany Bui posited that a large part of shifts in industry standards are coming directly from changes in how audiences are expressing their expectations of journalists. She noted:

Since the death of George Floyd, I think lots of people have been more vocal about what they expect from journalists, and that's influenced my perception of what responsibility I have as a journalist. I think not only to just read around for a story, and then write it, and then walk away. But to continually be involved and be aware. To tell stories that aren't usually told, to seek those out, to deliver them in an accessible way. (Bui, 2021).

Miguel Otarola also emphasizes that the audience's preferences too have shifted. He says:

I think that in general people do want to know who's behind the stories that they are writing, and they want to have that personal connection... with public radio, obviously because they can actually hear your voice. But even with other reporters and journalists. they want to know who you are, they want to get a peek behind the process, they want to get behind the scenes, and they want to help you put out that information and have a discussion with you about those things (Otarola, 2021).

These observations parallels those of Sandra Banjac and Folker Hanusch whose University of Vienna study found that although audiences expect journalists to embody established normative journalistic values (e.g. objectivity et al.), audiences' expectations of content creators include transparency, engagement, and thoughtfully developed, quality content. Discussing their findings of audiences' expectations of content creators and implications on journalism discourse, Banjac and Hanusch argued that these expectations "reveal implicitly journalistic values and expectations, thus blurring normative boundary distinctions" (Banjac & Hanusch, 2020). In other words, as news content comes to resemble other forms of media content, and vice versa, expectations will bleed in both directions meaning that content creators may be criticized for being "un-journalistic," and journalists may be criticized for not being transparent, engaging, or "going deeper."

Generational Change

Several respondents expressed that the changes are being driven by a generational cultural difference. Makeda Easter notes, "I think the younger generation is pushing back, especially because we grew up on social media. It's interesting that these policies were created by people who didn't grow up with a MySpace, or Tumbler, or something like that defining how we should engage online" (Easter, 2021). Star Tribune's Richard Chin agreed when he said,

"To the extent that standards are shifting, I think it's because of the media environment. We have social media, and a typical journalist has so many other faces that he or she is exposing to the public whether it's on Twitter or Facebook, or a podcast, or whatever. We're all kind of our own publishers. We all have our own brand. I think that [with] availability of expression, you're able to just sort of let things fly, and no editor reads

Analysis - Emeri Burks

when you're going to tweet. I think that has led to some changes in how people conduct themselves" (Chin, 2021).

LA Bureau Chief, Shaya Tayefe Mohajer expressed agreement:

I work with young journalists. I work with people who were born on social media, who have been around and active for many years. They come to journalism as fully formed people who may have participated in a protest, may have explored their identity, may have shared their beliefs that something in this world needs to be better.

These are not uncommon feelings for journalists. What's different is that now there's a record, and these young journalists entering the field have a lifetime behind them where they can face criticism for many, many things that frankly I was never subject to because everything I wrote in college is sitting in a dusty old PDF, or in like yellowing paper files" (Easter, 2021).

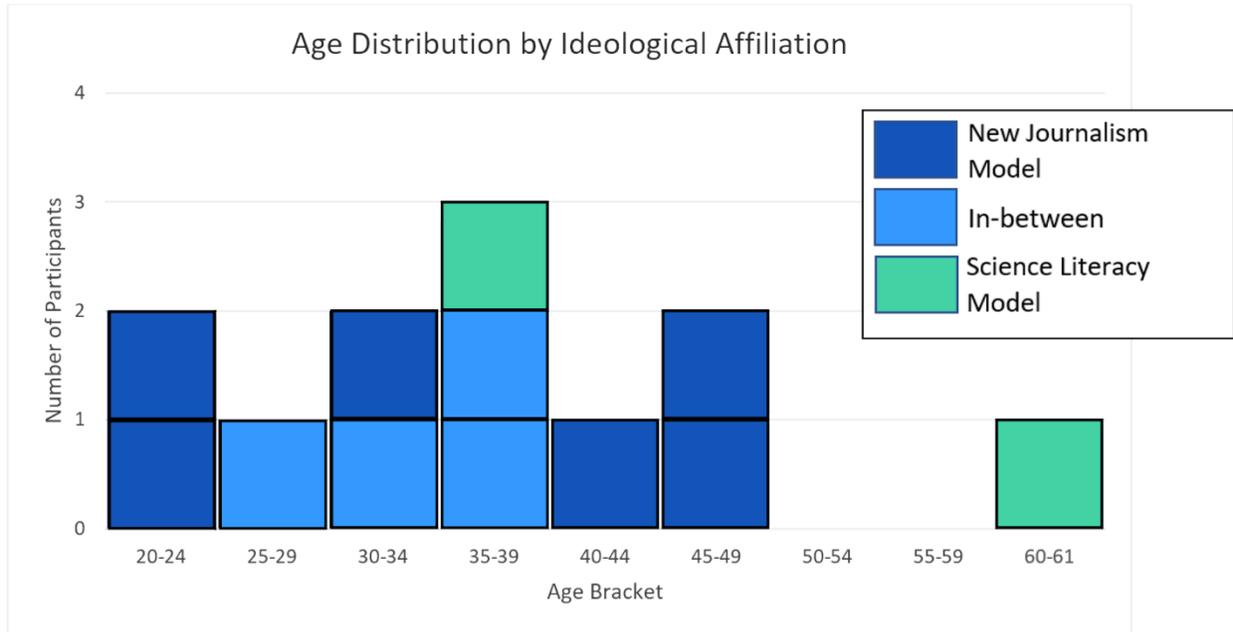
Miguel Otarola too agreed with the sentiment when he noted:

There's no way that you can be expected not to share about who you are and your own personal beliefs and opinions about things online. It's just impossible. Social media is the way we all operate these days, and things are easy to find – very, very easy to find. So I think in that sense journalism as a whole is just sort of being [more] relenting and kind of letting go a little bit (Otarola, 2021).

The age and ideology of interviewed journalists further supports a correlation between age and seniority (within the journalism industry) and a greater likelihood of supporting traditional models of "free press" journalism – defined by prioritizing journalistic objectivity in practice, emphasizing provable fact in news coverage, and valuing the fundamental mission of the news organization to report truth (average age 48). Conversely, the younger or more recently a journalist had begun working as a journalist, the more likely they were to support an "advocacy" or "social responsibility" model of journalism defined by prioritizing transparent support of the public good, emphasizing fair treatment of subjects and the story, and valuing the fundamental mission of the journalist to speak the truth (average age 34.3). However, this correlation is weak and problematic given the spread of age ranges and viewpoints observed. For example, the average age of participants who exhibited indicators of both ideological viewpoints placing them "in the middle" was 32.25 (the youngest average of the three classifications).

While anecdotal, this correlation between age and journalistic ideology seems to suggest that the American journalism industry at large is shifting (however slightly and variedly) from a more "free press" model to a more "social responsibility" model of journalism. Still, a quantitative study of newsroom and journalist ideology might better qualify the degree of change we're seeing.

Analysis - Emeri Burks



Speaking of this trend, however, Jenni Monet cautioned, “I think that generationally there's a mix of ideas, and I think that [the further removed from a pre-internet understanding of the world] the younger generation are, [the greater and more urgent the] need to redefine the boundaries of the journalism space in terms of staking claim to the highest ethical standards” (Monet, 2021).

RQ4: How can news organizations support their journalists to understand and meet these expectations in order to provide the best public service possible?

Participants were questioned on their understanding of society’s need from journalists individually and from the journalism industry, their confidence that such needs could/would be met, and their views on the obstacles preventing or resources allowing journalists to meet audience needs. The needs they identified tended to focus on categories of accountability, public education, higher quality content, public service, and institutional/business model-wide policy-based changes.

To understand participants’ views of opportunities for news organizations to support better public service, it’s valuable to briefly explore participants’ understanding of society’s needs, and obstacles to meeting those needs before exploring their ideas for industry improvement.

Journalists’ understanding of society’s needs

Accountability

Statista just placed American adults’ general trust in news media at 29% (Statista, 2021), but that’s not to say trust wasn’t low before. Wesley Lowery summed up the state of distrust in media today to say, “We exist in a hyper-polarized hyper-partisan time where there has been a decades long campaign by one political party to convince its followers not to believe anything they read in the media” (Lowery, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Lowery continues on to express his dismay at where the conversations about media trust are being held today. "...We believe that our science intern not being able to tweet how they feel about a City Council race is the thing that is going to save us, that the photography intern not going to the Women's March is the way we're going to save our credibility with the populace" (Lowery, 2021).

He conversely observed:

If I watch you firing an intern in a way that is unfair, how can I trust your journalism to be fair? If I watch you enforce social media policies in ways that are inequitable or seem unfair and arbitrary, how do I trust the language you're putting on the front page of the newspaper? Journalism is a field built on trust, and that trust can be broken in more ways than one (Lowery, 2021).

All of the participants included in their understandings of society's need genuine attempts to rebuild accountability, trust, and transparency in the industry. However, they expressed varying suggestions for how that might be accomplished (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Several spoke of LA Times' unprecedented confession of institutional and newsroom malpractice (especially affecting communities of color), and suggested that the news industry writ large had best initiate a similar large-scale reckoning. Tiffany Bui echoed Lowery's sentiments this way:

I think what the country needs at this time, based on the outpouring of discussion around different issues of equity, is just honesty from journalism – acknowledgement of harm where harm has been done, and then explaining what you're going to do to fix that. Then also being transparent in how you're going to go about fixing that. Then also seriously reconsidering the kind of narratives that we put out – not on an individual basis, not as reporters making that decision. But as a newsroom, as a newsroom-wide editorial decision (Bui, 2021).

Jenni Monet agreed.

The journalism industry needs a great truth and reconciliation. It really does. It needs an honest assessment of how it's treated its journalists of color, of how it's ignored communities of color, of how it's treated community of colors when it hasn't ignored them. Not just within the last few years or decade – we're talking since the foundation of the profession. There needs to be a great reconciling... There needs to be probably a nationwide truth and reconciliation of some kind happening within the journalism institution, and for that matter – every industry in America right now (Monet, 2021).

Facilitate Discussion

As a source of the divide between news media organizations and marginalized communities, a third (4) of study participants pointed to the distance between journalists and the communities

Analysis - Emeri Burks

themselves. Libor Jany illustrates what he feels is needed: “Less of this kind of attitude of Ivory Tower Reporting that comes from not having lived the experience, pontificating on things, and issues, and communities that you never visit – 'cause that's still kind of a problem. Some reporters are shackled to their desk and never go out into the communities that they cover” (Jany, 2021).

Interviewee 11 agreed this way:

I think this is a very journalist centric answer and white centric, but I think that we need more news literacy. We just need journalists to be in the community and show that they're not there to meet their deadline that day. We need people to see us and hear us as their neighbors, and I think we need to do a better job of explaining certain things like why we won't say somebody murdered somebody until they're convicted. We just need to have those conversations. We need to engage in our communities so they can understand why we operate the way we do, so that if there are flaws in our logic, that becomes apparent to us and we figure out how to fix that together (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021)

For several participants this improved dialogue included some degree of public education to improve media literacy, often focusing on knowledge of journalist concerns, standards, and constraints (Snow, 2021) (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021) (Chin, 2021).

Star Tribune’s Richard Chin similarly suggested, “I think if the public knew more about us, I think it might be helpful. This is this person's intentions, and this is this person's experience. This is this person’s training and the standards they try to follow. They screw up every once in a while. But it's not like they're intentionally screwing up, you know (Chin, 2021)?

For Interviewee 3, the dialogue seemed aimed at improving the public’s appreciation of journalistic work and subsequently its willingness to pay for it through one mechanism or another:

Society needs to appreciate the value of the work that reporters do. I see them sharing our work in tweets and on post without attributions, without links, without the hard work and the knowledge it takes as a journalist to know what information you can get from government officials; the lengths you got to go through [to] get that information; where to find it; and the money it takes to sue organizations when they do not give us that information. They need to realize the value of news, and how it really shapes and changes society, and that is worth paying for (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

For Jenni Monet, the necessary public discourse included questions like where advocacy ends and journalism begins. Monet also noted that the conversations were already occurring in siloed spaces among BIPOC journalists (Monet, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Context, Depth, and Nuance

Most of the participants (7) expressed an opinion that news content needed to improve what is covered and how. Rather than covering sensationalized crime stories or rushing to be the first with a scoop, these participants believed American society needed journalists to push to include relevant context, depth, and nuance.

Miguel Otarola expressed his view of social need this way:

We need to be less reactionary. We just need to be more thoughtful. We need to take more time. We need to worry less about scoops and competition, and more about making sure we have the right intentions behind a story first. I think we need less perspective stories or stories about potential outcomes and things like that, and less from talking heads. More from things that actually do happen, and how they really impact regular people (Otarola, 2021).

Libor Jany expressed similar sentiments, and offered the proof that news media hasn't been doing a good enough job in these areas – the surprise that came with the death of George Floyd. He observed, "I still think that we could stand to be a little more forward thinking, and then we would have still covered the hell out of what happened last May, but we would have been better prepared, and hopefully it wouldn't have caught people by such surprise because they would have been reading about it in the paper for years" (Jany, 2021).

Reflect the Community

Most participants (7) felt that news content could better reflect the community by meeting the public where they are and with the concerns they have, rather than centering coverage on agendas more appealing to majoritarian audiences. Makeda Easter explained her reasoning: "The people who subscribe to the LA Times, they're mostly older, and white, and wealthy – that's not the whole city though. We shouldn't cater our coverage and focus our coverage on those specific issues, because it reaches our subscribers, and we need to really reflect the place where we're at" (Easter, 2021).

To do so, several participants felt journalists should be more actively listening to members of the community. Wesley Lowery noted, "I think most importantly we have to be willing to hear the people who talk to us, and hear the people who make up our readership, and the people who don't. They're letting us know the things that they don't like, and the question is, are we gonna listen" (Lowery, 2021)?

Shaya Mohajer suggested that meaningful coverage necessitated more thoughtful treatment of journalists' sources. She affirmed, "I think that we need to take emotion a bit more seriously. Stop imagining it's women work, and really define newsrooms in a way that centers marginalized communities, and centers people, and allows them to genuinely be seen. Sometimes that means allowing them to advocate for themselves, and to say that they've been mistreated (Mohajer, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Support a functional democracy

A third (4) of participants felt that journalists were not contributing enough to serve and better American democratic society, and subsequently were threatening major social upheaval. They had different strategies to better serve the public including supporting community empowerment, deferring to the voices of experience rather than of authority, building a healthy public discourse, and promoting the understanding of truth. Shaya Mohajer shared such a concern with a personal perspective as one with a better than average understanding of how authoritarianism operates:

I think society needs journalism to serve every aspect of what it means to live in a functional democracy. We need to inform everyone on how to better empower communities. We need to cast a very discerning eye on institutions of power; and really recognize that many of these institutions that invited us to their press conferences, and sent us spellchecked press releases, and shared very clean and polished information with us; have not been honest, fair or decent, and that extends from that sham of a press release that was shared by police about George Floyd's death to many aspects of journalism.

But if we're going to democratize journalism, if we're going to allow actual diversity where people disagree in meetings, and people say, I see it differently, or people say, "My lived experience tells me something different than the conclusion you're drawing..." Until we make newsrooms a place where that can happen, they're not going to be able to sew a democracy from the fabric of society. This is something that we have to help build, and if journalists don't empower everyone, then our institution is morally bankrupt. We need to really prioritize this.

This is a fault line in our industry, and if we don't fix it I'm very worried. I'm genuinely worried that we're going to have an uninformed public who hates us, and politicians who successfully undermine our every act of journalism with lies, and authoritarian power isn't far behind.

I know that sounds insane. But that's also my background as an Iranian American, I've seen what happens in a country where media is controlled, where media is undermined. It's devastating to human rights, and I don't want that for America. My family came here for a reason. One of them is that I have a constitutionally protected job. I love my rights here, and I treasure them (Mohajer, 2021).

Sarah Whitting agreed that the journalism industry needed a way to more effectively fight lies and promote truth.

How do we effectively refute the lies - especially when there are people in "media" who are promoting those lies? How do we do that piece without increasing factions? Because we are definitely in danger of becoming even more polarized, even though that

Analysis - Emeri Burks

sounds insane. It sounds like we could possibly go further apart from one another than we are. That is the danger (Whitting, 2021).

She later added that the media industry needed more regulation crackdown ensuring there are repercussions for actively promoting lies (Whitting, 2021).

Yet taking these goals on requires becoming more comfortable being perceived as biased, as Wesley Lowery explained:

I think society needs a journalism industry that is unsparing in its commitment to the truth, to fairness, and to justice. I think too often in the face of injustice, of unfairness, we've had an industry that has been too scared to be accused of bias by malevolent, bad faith actors, that we've compromised the values that are supposed to be important to us, which are truth and fairness (Lowery, 2021).

Obstacles

Most participants (7) weren't confident that the journalism industry would be able to meet the needs of society they described, though participants were generally confident that they themselves would be able to meet society's need for individual journalists. Explaining the reason for the doubt they experienced, they expressed concerns about an industry-wide lack of resources as well as recent trends that have frustrated journalism work.

Lack of resources

Preventing journalists from better meeting the social needs they identified, participants listed a variety of social, political, economic factors. The most common theme mentioned by five sixths (10) of participants was a lack of resources within the industry – namely time, money, and reporters. (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021)

Makeda Easter expressed her frustration this way:

There's less and less journalists now because the industry is really struggling. There's so much news. We have to figure out what is the story that I can write, and I don't want to burn myself out working all the time... The challenge is that there is just a lot of stuff out there – a lot of worthy news. But you can't cover all of it. You just have to pick. So then people might feel, "Well, you're not talking about this this year. You're not writing about this thing and this thing." And it's like, "I physically can't." I'm doing what I can, but it's hard (Easter, 2021).

Richard Chin expressed a similar sentiment about the industry's frenetic pace: "Our job is kind of... we're just sort of feeding the assembly line. You're on a treadmill cranking out these stories, and they're just trying to fill the spaces" (Chin, 2021). Tiffany Bui exclaimed simply, "I think a lot of journalistic organizations that have the potential to do really good work are underfunded. On an industry level, they're just not given enough money" (Bui, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Recent Trends

Others noted more circumstantial obstacles like the pandemic and the rise of the digital age as a major obstacles to journalism work. With journalists less able to visit sources in person, increasingly journalism is conducted from home. Miguel Otarola explained this way:

You still live in your own personal bubble, and with the pandemic I think making things more virtual and cutting that human contact was really bad... Because you can't do your job from a phone, and you can't do your job from a computer. That's just not the way life works. If you want to be a journalist, that's not the way you do it at all (Otarola, 2021).

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer also highlighted the increasingly complex work of journalism as another trend preventing more qualified journalists from getting to work. She noted, "Every job ad I read for an entry level job is like a job ad for someone who's been in the field for 10 years. The jobs are getting harder on paper and in reality" (Mohajer, 2021).

Organizational support to better meet society's needs

Participants openly expressed their opinions on what news organizations could be doing to help support journalists overcome these obstacles and better meet society's needs. Responses included concerns related to improved transparency between management and staff, a reduction in expectations placed on journalists, improved support for journalists (including more equitable pay), fostering a more pluralistic newsroom culture, and finding ways to reckon with shortcomings in past coverage.

Clear goals and consistent enforcement

Two participants felt that news organizations could be much clearer on what they want from journalists, and what will happen if expectations aren't met. Wesley Lowery explained the importance of clear guidelines and how unspoken norms give way to ambiguity and confusion:

Newsrooms are governed largely by unwritten rules, by internal customs, by local and newsroom traditions. Because of that you end up having systems where different individuals are treated differently, and what crosses a line [or] what does not cross the line is up to the subjective judgment of subjective decision... Because that line is subjective, because that line moves around, because those expectations change and look different from newsroom to newsroom – it can be very difficult for folks to know exactly where and what the line is...

I don't think it's too much to ask that people running newsrooms be able to fully articulate their newsroom's values, that they would be able to fully explain their newsrooms policies with examples, that if they are going to take punitive action via HR that they give a full-throated explanation to the person" (Lowery, 2021).

Interviewee 3 agreed by opining, "I think we need to pour more into training our staff; mentorship honestly; and more candid conversations about the goals of the reporter, and how

Analysis - Emeri Burks

that aligns with what the reader needs, [plus] what the newspaper needs as well (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

Slowing down

Two participants focused more on the pace of journalism work itself suggesting that the business model needed a more comprehensive change. Tiffany Bui explained, “I think newsrooms need to slow down. I think that's what it is. I think they need to slow down. Especially if they're covering issues like race and social justice and deeply traumatic stories, I think they just need to take more time with police shootings [and] the aftermath of police shootings...” (Bui, 2021).

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer agreed that journalists’ pressures needed to be lessened and outlined a novel solution:

I think a four-day workweek is what journalism needs. I think that journalists are so mentally taxed and so worked, that obedience becomes second nature because resistance is giving yourself 90 more emails to deal with. It's too much to expect journalists to maintain sanity and work 70 hours a week on the hardest stories in the world...

I think particularly for our high-profile beats, if you're covering the White House, you should be covering the White House in a team. There should be three of you and it should be four days on three days off. It's a hard job and you're a journalist. You're going to read the Washington Post front to back every single day anyways. But the idea of just maintaining the sanity of your workforce is something that has to enter the conversation a little bit more seriously, and particularly in difficult times.

I've seen many deeply talented, gifted, educated, experienced journalists leave journalism in the past year because it's too much. It's overwhelming. They report burnout. They report impossible to manage workloads, and you're always going to lose people who are very valuable if this is the persistent trend. It's one more way that journalism frankly churns out experience and relies on young, cheap labor that can be exploited and disrespected through, “Oh yeah, work my free internship. You're going to take over three beats that I used to have reporters covering” (Mohajer, 2021).

Supporting journalists to do more impactful work

Several journalists agreed that newsrooms could be better at supporting their journalists to produce more impactful work. Libor Jany recalled a colleague who recently left for a new job.

Part of the reason that she left, and part of her frustrations was that she was promised one thing during the interview where they told her that she would be given the freedom to explore and pursue some of these deeper, more ambitious enterprise pieces. But when it came down to it, the editors [had] this quiet expectation that she had to be part of the daily churn, and helping fill the paper every single day...

Analysis - Emeri Burks

I'd say the best editors are the ones that trust their reporters, and give them the space and the room to breathe, to follow their instincts (Jany, 2021).

Others like Makeda Easter reminded that sometimes fair pay has profound impacts for BIPOC journalists. "I think that paying someone equitably, it sounds super high level. But when you're paid well or being paid what you deserve to be paid, it does make your life a lot better, and it makes you able to meet the needs of your community" (Easter, 2021).

More pluralistic newsroom culture

Almost half of study participants (5) agreed that newsrooms needed to be more diverse, though Libor Jany also emphasized the need to support people of color through promotions to higher ranking positions. He explains, "It's one thing to get them in the door, but another thing altogether to support them and make sure that their voices are heard, and make sure that they start rising through the ranks of these organizations. The ceiling isn't at middle management, [but rather people of color should be] taking roles with actual decision-making power" (Jany, 2021).

Makeda Easter agreed:

I think we need more than just lip service about these diversity issues. I think people, journalists who are diverse, need to be represented in all levels of journalism as leaders, as middle management, editors, reporters, and copy editors. That's how we're going to get these more representative stories, and change within the industry and how things are done. It's just representation (Easter, 2021).

However, to pursue a more pluralistic newsroom culture, some participants believed organization leadership needed to concede some degree of power. Interviewee 11 shared a common sentiment:

I think that the old guard needs to loosen their grip on leadership positions and news values. I think younger people are coming in with a heck of a lot of empathy and they don't really care about how the old newspaper guys used to do it back in the day. The author needs to engage in conversations with younger reporters, find common ground with them, and understand the value that they bring (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021).

Wesley Lowery agreed that a new relationship model was necessary. He described the changes he saw as necessary:

No longer will the editor be an emperor, but rather they actually will have to be more of a democratic power. People will not just do what you want them to do because you are the boss...

Analysis - Emeri Burks

I think people expect responsive leadership that actually listens to them, that hears them out and is willing to admit when it's wrong. That's a massive change from the last generation of newsroom leadership. (Lowery, 2021).

Reckoning with the past

In order to build accountability and trust within the industry, several participants raised the possibility of a comprehensive Mea Culpa, or public reckoning in which news organizations acknowledge the harm they have caused, and resolve to do better. Libor Jany held up the public reckonings facilitated by the LA Times and the Kansas City Star as a model to others follow (Jany, 2021). While we've already discussed the former case, the latter included a review of past coverage of race and the city's black community as well as a formal apology from president and editor, Mike Fannin.

Fannin apologized and introduced the paper's reckoning: "We are sorry. The Kansas City Star prides itself on holding power to account. Today we hold up the mirror to ourselves to see the historic role we have played, through both action and inaction, in shaping and misshaping Kansas City's landscape. It is time that we own our history" (Williams & Porter, 2021).

As an example of the sort of reconciliation she felt the news industry needed, Jenni Monet pointed to the Media 2070 Media Reparations project. The openly pro-democracy organization introduces its essay invitation for collaboration by stating, "Since the colonial era, media outlets have used their platforms to inflict harm on Black people through weaponized narratives that promote Black inferiority and portray Black people as threats to society" (Torres, et al., 2021). The project's website lists among its objectives, "[making] visible the ways in which the media have taken part in and supported state violence and harm against Black people" (Media 2070, 2021).

Other Findings

Censuring truth for the sake of public relations is the focus of many controversial cases in which journalists were criticized for undermining their organization's credibility by publishing apparently biased coverage (especially since the death of George Floyd), but also for publishing inconvenient truth as well (e.g. (Linkins, 2010), (Cartagena, 2020), (Sherman, 2016), and (Deese, 2021)).

That said, as this study has yielded relatively few responses illustrating definitive examples of ethical conflicts with professional expectations, I believe a more targeted study intensively exploring conflict management among newsroom teams would better reveal emerging tendencies for navigating conflicts between professional expectations and personal values.

Nevertheless, with so many journalists reporting a tendency to "go with their gut," it's worth briefly exploring the ethical standards reported with regard to aspects of journalistic conduct which received substantial coverage in the wake of George Floyd's death. In this study's structured interviews, we discussed three such topics: social media use, public disclosure of identity/bias, and involvement in protests or social action.

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Social Media Usage

Participants were asked generally about the norms that should be enforced or loosened with regard to journalist conduct on social media. They differed on views of personal best practices, and of organizational censure of offending employees. Managing editor of Minnesota Women's Press, Sarah Whitting, summed up a common perspective:

I'm having a hard time with that question because I feel like we need to be careful about our overlap of policing personally against policing professionally. That's an incredibly sticky area. I guess I don't care to police personal social media. But I'm aware that the personal messages that could go out might affect your professional standing because what you choose to report will affect how people trust what you say on camera (Whitting, 2021).

Two thirds (8) of the 12 participants expressed general support for journalists' right to self-express on social media, and one third (4) expressed their belief that employers don't have the right to regulate journalists' speech. For example, Arizona State University journalism professor, Shaya Tayefe Mohajer, insisted:

I think boundaries need to be established that protect young workers... I just think that there needs to be a real level of tolerance and realism that is developed around this for young people...

I don't want you going back and deleting a post from when you were twelve. I think that's batty. I think that's really, really disrespectful to you as a person, and I think a newsroom should be prepared to defend a young person... (Mohajer, 2021).

Wesley Lowery explained his similar position this way: "The idea of policing public expression is about lying to readers. Journalists do have biases. These policies are purely about concealing that truth from the reader [so] as to convince them of something that is not true – that the reporter does not have biases" (Lowery, 2021). Interviewee 11 also asserted that policing expression will not regain the public's trust (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021).

That said, half (6) of the total participants stressed that journalists should be clear-eyed about the consequences their actions on social media might have for their organization, their colleagues, and themselves (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021). Two participants opined that journalists should follow their organization's policies even if they disagree (Jany, 2021) (Otarola, 2021), and three others admitted that some extreme transgressions on social media (such as abusive or aggressive language, or taking an overt stand for a political candidate) may deserve punitive action and should be taken on a case by case basis (Snow, 2021) (Easter, 2021) (Whitting, 2021).

Of personal policing of social media standards, participants were decidedly more in favor. Four agreed with the industry standards to say that journalists should keep their personal and/or

Analysis - Emeri Burks

political opinions out of the public realm. Two also noted they had no desire to put their opinion “out there” anyway (Jany, 2021) (Chin, 2021).

Public Disclosure of Bias

In discussing the necessity of publicly disclosing a perspective or identity which may present a bias coloring coverage, five participants were uncertain themselves what standards should be prescribed. A third (4) believed such a disclosure to be generally unnecessary, yet a quarter (3) expressed that disclosing factors of one’s identity can enrich one’s reporting (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021). Jenni Monet, who is indigenous, spoke of the added wisdom her perspective has provided this way:

There were times when I understood so deeply the aspects on the ground, whether it was emotionally [or] whether it was historically charged, that I would insert my expert voice in to give context using words like “us.” So when we're talking about indigenous peoples, I'm not saying “they.” I’m saying “us,” “we,” “ours.” It's a very possessive term of art that I rely on.

Because otherwise it's so far removed, and it just is odd to say. It just wouldn't be my voice. So I think that that's important to include, and I think it's a strong example of how, even though I probably would consider myself a journalist first, my indigeneity is almost interconnected. I wouldn't even say [I could prioritize] first or second. They're so enmeshed together that that kind of language, that kind of reporting, that kind of approach just comes hand in hand (Monet, 2021).

This sentiment reflects many accounts from journalists of color quoted throughout this study who insisted that being black provided a more intimate knowledge of the systemic racism and circumstances faced by George Floyd. Incidentally, the sentiment is also supported by Critical Race Theory’s Voice of Color tenet which maintains that minorities possess exclusive knowledge of discrimination and bias faced by minorities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer shared such an instance where her Iranian American identity and Persian fluency helped her gain access to a better story. Yet she also cautioned that the times in which it might be necessary to so self-disclose one’s identity for a story are exceedingly rare. She tells her students to resist the temptation. Mohajer explains:

In my students, I’ve noticed an urge to insert themselves and their experiences into their stories at times. I think this reflects the social media commodification of identity where they feel like they’ve earned cache or “points” for aspects of their personhood. This lends them authority to speak or go beyond what their sources have said.

This problematically veers into opinion and too much influence on the story, especially because the reality of diversity is much more complex... I don’t think it makes sense to say “...and as an Iranian American woman I agree or disagree” with what sources of my background have told me; it wrongly centers me and presses everyone’s experience into

Analysis - Emeri Burks

my framework [and] seems self-centered. Journalism is above all, a service to others and a distillation of the truth through others (Mohajer, 2021).

Involvement in protests or social action

Participant stances on journalists becoming involved with protests or social action tended to lean towards a libertarian stance. Two thirds (8) expressed general support for journalists' right to attend protests or become involved in social action (though generally with caveats that journalists should not advocate for a topic they cover, and they should properly disclose conflicts of interest). One third (4) generally expressed that journalists shouldn't become involved in protests or social action. But by and large, participants agreed that this decision was for journalists to make, not organizations (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Miguel Otarola expressed the common sentiment this way: "I just see you kind of putting away your professional duties for your own personal way that you feel about things, and trying to make a difference. That's fine if you want to do that – you should do it. But it will make your job harder, and it will come at a cost in terms of your professional career" (Otarola, 2021).

Wesley Lowery addressed the institutional prohibition of journalist engagement in activism more directly:

I do not believe that the science intern marching [in a] Black Lives Matter march in any way calls into question the fairness of the reporting by the New York Times, or the Washington Post. I think anyone who would even entertain that argument is not someone who is serious enough about understanding how journalism works to be discussing it work...

The reality is just to be a human is to be political. I think that often these policies try to litigate minutiae, while ignoring this bigger and broader truth. But the reality is we have to hire trustworthy people who are committed to rigorous work and hold them to high professional standards. If we do all those things, it really doesn't matter what they tweeted on Tuesday night or where they marched on Saturday (Lowery, 2021).

Lowery also noted that he personally would never feel comfortable marching because he believes placing distance between advocacy and journalism to be important right now (Lowery, 2021). Otarola also agreed that "if you are covering those issues and you [publicly express some support for Black Lives Matter], then you are inserting yourself into the story. Our job as journalists is not to insert ourselves into the story" (Otarola, 2021).

Makeda Easter disagreed with organizational policing of journalist involvement in protests by noting that you could never tell an LGBTQ+ journalist not to attend Pride (Easter, 2021). Interviewee 3 agreed that she would support talking about human rights (including support for Black Lives Matter), but that she personally doesn't think journalists should be at protests protesting (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021). Interviewee 11 sums up her stance agreeing with Interviewee 3 this way:

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Black Lives Matter has just been so politicized. I personally think that no journalists in the organization should participate in a Black Lives Matter protest, because I think it's too easy for somebody to spot that and use it to say that anything this reporter says doesn't matter anymore – everything is biased. That reporter then loses all opportunity to lift up the voices that they are saying need to be lifted up (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021).

Conclusion

Since this study began, we've seen that support for Black Lives Matter and for racial reckoning initiatives has diminished quickly. Minneapolis' efforts to reform the city/state constitution after George Floyd's murder have been stymied (Barrett, 2021), and many more black people have been killed by police officers (Rahman, 2021). As has been illustrated many times before, American's attention span has proved short. Subsequently the lessons we have to gain from outspoken journalists, who previously were encouraged by public interest in understanding systemic racism, have diminished from a gush to a trickle.

Google search trends for the word "racism" illustrate the rise and fall of public interest in the concept peaking the week of May 31-June 6 (immediately following the murder of George Floyd), then quickly declining to baseline levels (Figure 1). By the most long-term measures Google Trends can offer (through 2004), the interest in understanding racism in America after George Floyd's is completely unprecedented and unlikely to return to levels seen at the end of May into early June of 2020.

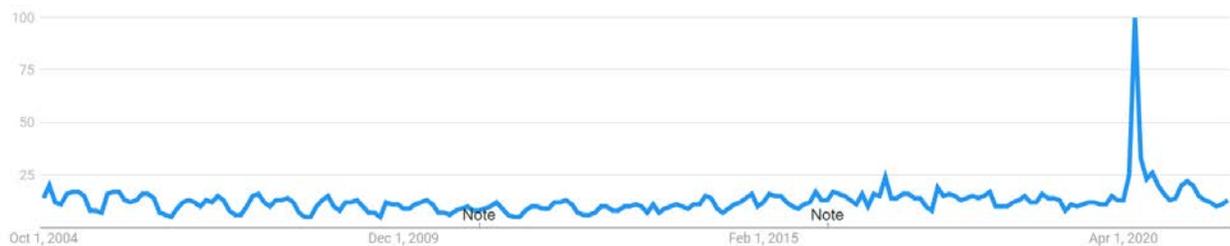


Figure 1

(Google, 2021)

Yet the expansion of social media industries (Abbas & Singh, 2014), shrinking of newsroom organization teams and budgets (Walker, 2021), diminishing of opportunity to finance content (Vorhaus, 2020), as well as worsening political and social polarization all continue on (Pew Research Center, 2014). If the journalists I interviewed are correct, there will continue to be journalists answering uncomfortable questions about Tweets from long ago, or dubious affiliations with local advocacy groups; a number more will be fired for compromising their organization's reputation as a fair and unbiased news source; but also, an increasing number of news organizations will be forced to confront these difficult conversations head-on leaning into or away from the changes that are already underway.

Analysis - Emeri Burks

What will be missing as these processes continue is the context of racial trauma in recent memory bringing audiences and journalists to the conversation on more or less the same page. In absence of such context, the perspectives of BIPOC journalists will be more important than ever to inform newsroom staff, audiences, and management of the concerns raised in this study and elsewhere.

We see evidence that BIPOC journalists face higher pressure to adhere to industry standards, that minority journalists may be arbitrarily assigned to minority specific roles, and that normative biases favoring white male perspectives disadvantage BIPOC staff even in understanding what is meant by “objective,” “fair,” or “neutral” – all of which in turn drives higher burnout and turnover rates among BIPOC staff (Newkirk, 2000) (Camacho & San Jose, 2021) (Capstone, 2021). How will this knowledge affect the way that BIPOC staff are trained in, disciplined, and encouraged in the future?

We see that ethical conflicts on the job are not uncommon for journalists, and that while many might check in with supervisors or colleagues for guidance, all things being equal (and without explicit guidelines) staff may likely be guided by their own values and deal with the consequences later. As we saw in the Other Findings section of this report, journalists following one’s own values may lead some to more liberal self-expression on social media, involvement in activism, or integrating personal identity into the story. How will this affect the expression of an organization’s values and standards, or facilitated discussion and staff interaction norms in the future?

We see strong evidence that expectations are changing for journalist conduct with regard to personal expression and civic contributions. Increasingly (and especially since the death of George Floyd), journalists report considering their social responsibility in the course of their work, organizations like the LA Times and the Kansas City Star reorient themselves towards anti-racism, and audiences increasingly desire transparency, accessibility, and thoughtfulness in news content. How will news organizations respond to growing pressures to change their standards? Should they issue a public acknowledgement of institutional harm caused to people of color? Should they adapt to changing expectations for interaction on social media? Should they change their financing structure with paywalls and ad revenue in order to support more nuanced reporting? Should they find more ways to reflect the community in their staff and their stories? Should they formally embrace an agenda such as supporting civic engagement or an informed electorate?

Furthermore, we see that journalists suggest a broad range of ways their news organizations can support them to better do their job. They offer a broad array of micro and macro-level changes to be made within the journalism industry. Which of these strategies are worth considering, and how might they be best implemented to meet the needs of the news organization, its staff, and its audience?

Analysis - Emeri Burks

These are questions that must be answered on a case by case and ongoing basis. They are questions that many news organizations have already confronted and many more will have to confront in the foreseeable future. Yet a still greater unknown is whether actors within news media outlets will address these consequential questions proactively or reactively. When the next conspicuous violation of minority rights occurs bringing attention once again to topics of systemic racism and social justice, will we be prepared for the necessary conversations in our newspapers and our digital media; or will be blindsided once again?

How prepared the journalism industry will be greatly depends on the seriousness with which we address what our journalists are telling us in this study and elsewhere. As such, I'd like to conclude with what some study participants have expressed hope that you, the reader, might learn from this study:

In a time when more people have less trust, and there are more ways to give more feedback and criticism of the work we do, it is as important as ever that we know why we do what we do, how we do it, and that we articulate it (Lowery, 2021).

I hope that [the study] deepens [the readers'] understanding of the real trauma that this industry is responsible for, for a legion of journalists. Not just from the last generation, but generations deep. It breaks my heart to think about what that might look like when you amass all of the grievances (Monet, 2021).

I hope maybe that people will learn that journalists are people too. We're error prone human beings who are doing our best. We don't always feel we can express our opinions on [some] subjects. Some of us have some very strong feelings on these things. We're striving for objectivity. But we want to make the world a better place – many of us do. And sometimes we don't know how, or feel like we're limited in ways in ways to do that" (Chin, 2021).

I do hope that [readers] learn that we need to make sure that we're giving support to journalists of color. Because oftentimes they're isolated in the news when they're one of a few or the only person, and that comes with its own set of challenges – of insecurities, of feeling like it's their sole responsibility to tell these stories. We just need to recognize it (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

Analysis - Emeri Burks

I hope people would maybe read [this study] and think about what kind of environment [we are] creating for people, for journalists... their roles are to tell stories about what's happening. What kind of environment are we creating for them? Is it a positive one, or is it one where they're being trampled on" (Easter, 2021)?

I hope [readers will] learn that there are people who are willing to make journalism different, they're working really hard to make it different, and they're imagining a future of what a different, more equitable journalism looks like. I hope that people will care enough to think about it [too]" (Bui, 2021).

References

- Abbas, S., & Singh, A. (2014). Media Industry Trends and Dynamics: The Social Media Boom. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 147-152.
- Anonymous. (2021, June 22). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Anonymous. (2021, June 23). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2020). A question of perspective:: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *New Media & Society*, 1-19.
- Barrett, J. (2021, September 15). *Judge Strikes Down Referendum on Replacing Minneapolis Police Department*. Retrieved from The Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/minnesota-judge-strikes-down-referendum-on-replacing-minneapolis-police-department-11631724193>
- (2021). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Board, T. E. (2020, September 27). *Editorial: An examination of The Times' failures on race, our apology and a path forward*. Retrieved from LA Times: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-27/los-angeles-times-apology-racism>
- Brown, D. L. (2020, June 17). *Black people are tired of trying to explain racism*. Retrieved from Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/17/black-people-are-tired-trying-explain-racism/>
- Bui, T. (2021, July 1). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 1. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Camacho, B., & San Jose, J. (2021, September 29). *At police lines, not all journalists are created equal*. Retrieved from Poynter: <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2021/at-police-lines-not-all-journalists-are-created-equal/>

Analysis - Emeri Burks

- Capstone, G. (2021, March 16). *Black Journalists Express Strain That Reporting On Black Trauma Takes On Mental Health*. Retrieved from Grady News Source: <https://gradynews.uga.edu/black-journalists-express-strain-that-reporting-on-black-trauma-takes-on-mental-health/>
- Cartagena, R. (2020, October 15). *A Local Journalist in Virginia Ran a Newspaper on Her Own. Then She Got Fired for Talking to the Press*. Retrieved from Washingtonian: <https://www.washingtonian.com/2020/10/15/ashley-spinks-virginia/>
- Chin, R. (2021, June 23). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 6. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Deese, K. (2021, June 15). *Houston reporter fired over Project Veritas sting*. Retrieved from Yahoo!: https://www.yahoo.com/now/houston-reporter-fired-over-project-010600461.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAI3pSaZ_q6zAq326wjzwx5_s_EYIHcbNisAzV6vlt45jTqdIV7hV2kwTUdgc8HoMCqoTxxpAh_en4q0ean3ZffKHs121MuQf
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York City: New York University Press.
- Easter, M. (2021, June 29). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 5. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Eddo-Lodge, R. (2017, May 30). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race>
- Google. (2021, October 26). *Racism*. Retrieved from Google Trends: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=%2Fm%2F06d4h>
- Jany, L. (2021, June 15). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 4. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Krings, M. (2015, April 9). *STUDY SHOWS JOURNALISM BURNOUT AFFECTING WOMEN MORE THAN MEN*. Retrieved from The University of Kansas: <https://news.ku.edu/2015/03/23/study-shows-journalism-burnout-affecting-women-more-men>
- Linkins, J. (2010, June 3). *Washington Times Reporter Fired For Speaking Out About Newsroom Conditions*. Retrieved from Huffington Post: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/washington-times-reporter_n_599525
- Lowery, W. (2021, May 28). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 9. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Media 2070. (2021). *About Media 2070*. Retrieved from Media 2070: <https://mediareparations.org/about/>
- Mohajer, S. T. (2021, June 17). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 7. (E. Burks, Interviewer)

Analysis - Emeri Burks

- Monet, J. (2021, June 22). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 10. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Murphy, C. (2020, March). *The 'Leavers' Survey*. Retrieved from Open News: <https://opennews.org/projects/2020-leavers-survey/#why-leave>
- Newkirk, P. (2000). *Within the Veil*. New York City: New York University Press.
- Otarola, M. (2021, July 15). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 12. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Perlberg, S., & O'Reilly, L. (2021, April 9). *Newsrooms are facing a mental-health crisis, and burnout is driving some journalists to quit*. Retrieved from Insider: <https://www.businessinsider.com/journalism-burnout-mental-health-crisis-2021-4>
- Perlberg, S., & O'Reilly, L. (2021, April 9). *Newsrooms are facing a mental-health crisis, and burnout is driving some journalists to quit*. Retrieved from Insider: <https://www.businessinsider.com/journalism-burnout-mental-health-crisis-2021-4>
- Pew Research Center. (2014, June 12). *Political Polarization in the American Public*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>
- Rahman, K. (2021, May 25). *Full List of 229 Black People Killed by Police Since George Floyd's Murder*. Retrieved from Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/full-list-229-black-people-killed-police-since-george-floyds-murder-1594477>
- Sherman, G. (2016, July 23). *How Fox News Fired and Silenced a Female Reporter Who Alleged Sexual Harassment*. Retrieved from Intelligencer: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/07/how-fox-news-fired-and-silenced-an-ailles-accuser.html>
- Snow, J. (2021, June 5). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 2. (E. Burks, Interviewer)
- Statista. (2021, February). *Share of adults who trust news media most of the time in selected countries worldwide as of February 2021*. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/308468/importance-brand-journalist-creating-trust-news/>
- Torres, J., Bell, A., Watson, Collette, Chappel, T., Hardiman, D., & Pierce, C. (2021). *Essay*. Retrieved from Media 2070: <https://mediareparations.org/essay/>
- Vorhaus, M. (2020, July 27). *Advertising Revenues Projected To Decline In 2020 Worldwide*. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikevorhaus/2020/07/27/advertising-revenues-projected-to-decline-in-2020-worldwide/?sh=1fecba8a2fcf>

Analysis - Emeri Burks

Walker, M. (2021, July 13). *U.S. newsroom employment has fallen 26% since 2008*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/13/u-s-newsroom-employment-has-fallen-26-since-2008/>

Whitting, S. (2021, July 20). BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 8. (E. Burks, Interviewer)

Wien, C. (2006, January). Defining Objectivity within Journalism An Overview. *Nordicom Review*, pp. 3-16.

Williams, M. R., & Porter, T. (2021, January 27). *Racial reckoning at The Star: 'The truth in Black and white'*. Retrieved from Kansas City Star: <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article248663285.html>