

BIPOC JOURNALISTS AFTER GEORGE FLOYD AND NEWS MEDIA'S RACIAL RECKONING:

Meeting the News Industry's Expectations and Needs

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Abstract

Since the death of George Floyd, journalists of color have driven dramatic changes to mainstream ethical norms within the journalism industry by speaking out on social media and on other platforms. Though politicized discussions on applications of Critical Race Theory (CRT) raise questions about the conversations on systemic racism our society is able to address, the Voice of Color tenet (of CRT) asserts the value of minority voices in understanding the nature of the racial reckoning our society and media industry are currently undergoing. This study seeks to explore the range of perspectives presented by a diverse group of journalists to understand 1) the expectations placed on minority journalists in an historically white institution, 2) the scope and nature of industry-wide changes currently underway, and 3) the ways that news organizations can better support their journalists in meeting the changing needs of the public. The study's findings support common criticisms of systemic discrimination within and propagated by the journalism industry, along with a growing prioritization among journalists of social responsibility over more traditional norms of detachment and journalistic objectivity.

Key Words: Critical Race Theory, Voice of Color, BIPOC Journalists, Racial Reckoning, Intersectionality, Anti-Racism, Journalism Reparations, Ethical Guidelines, Objectivity, Social Responsibility

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Chapter One: Introduction

Influenced by popular awareness of social injustice, mainstream American stances on Journalism Ethics have recently undergone dramatic change. In the months following the conspicuous murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020, the video depicting Officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on the unarmed black¹ man's neck (Xiong, 2021) has been watched more than 1.4 billion times (Blake, 2020). In the wake of George Floyd's death, between 15 million and 26 million Americans have marched to protest police violence and to support the activist group, Black Lives Matter (BLM), in opposing police violence and systemic racial injustice (Tesler, 2020). In June of 2020, 67% of Americans expressed some level of support for BLM including an unprecedented 60% of white Americans (Thomase & Horowitz, 2020). University of Michigan professor, Michael Steinberg, notes pointedly, "[The video] shocked many white people into realizing that this is not an aberration, this is part of a systemic problem" (Washington, 2020).

Emboldened and moved by the news coverage, a surge of journalists have defied traditional journalistic norms which demand detachment and objectivity, to speak out on systemic racism. Journalists came forward to comment on the unfair policies of their organizations ((Mock, 2020), (Carroll, 2020)), to openly support BLM rallies themselves ((Thompson, 2020), (Lee & Smith, 2020)), or to decry the conditions of being Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC) reporting on Race in an industry dominated by white culture ((Peck, 2020), (Gonzalez, 2020), (Justin, 2020), (Ingram, 2020)). When asked whether

¹ This study uses the Associated Press convention of capitalizing words like "Black" as they apply to a race or culture group, and uses lowercase when the word is used as an adjective. Unlike AP's 2020 standard to capitalize "Black" but not "white," this study applies the capitalization standard to all terms that refer to ethnic or cultural groups (Bauder, 2020).

journalists should publicly speak out as they had been doing, Co-Founder of Study Hall, P.E. Moskowitz, appraised this historical moment bluntly, “I think, more and more, people are making [the] decision that hiding their politics and not fighting for what they believe in isn’t worth the increasingly shitty journalism jobs that are available” (Thompson, 2020).

Ethical conflicts on journalistic conduct have been especially prominent with journalists of color asked to walk a precarious line “fairly reporting” on race and institutionalized racism. Reported grievances notably raise concerns over organizational stances on journalist involvement in society and with social movements. Should journalists engage the public on social media? As individuals? As professionals? Should they remove all evidence of their perspectives, agendas, and biases from their work and online presence? Should they support community and social movements or avoid the risk of being seen as biased or partisan? Should they embrace self-disclosure and speak from their perspectives, then have faith their audiences will both respect their decisions *and* continue to read their content?

These questions have been debated with intensity since the murder of George Floyd, continuing on through to today. These are ethical, legal, commercial, and integral questions which have far-reaching consequences regarding public trust in news media; the ability of the journalism industry to meet the needs of a healthy, informed democracy; and the ability of well-meaning journalists everywhere to get and keep a job. These questions force us to redefine “objectivity” as an intangible idea endlessly promised media audiences, not always substantiated (Froomkin, 2020), and often filtered through a legacy of social injustice (Mattar, 2020). They compel us to weigh public image against public service; and to prioritize short,

middle, and long-term audiences. They are impossible questions with answers both applauded and censured across the internet as we speak.

The “appropriate answers” vary depending on the section of society you are asking, the interests of respective audiences, and the priorities demanded by current events. Washington Post columnist, Margaret Sullivan makes the distinction of “hard news” journalists like White House correspondents to the New York Times (Sullivan, 2013), which have an interest in maintaining a brand of absolute political neutrality. The New York Times Social Media Guidelines reflects this mindset by noting, “If our journalists are perceived as biased or if they engage in editorializing on social media, that can undercut the credibility of the entire newsroom” (New York Times, 2020).

Other news sources may have an incentive to blur the lines of objectivity in order to maintain a public image more personable, accessible, and genuine. Jay Rosen explains, “The grounds of trust are slowly shifting. The ‘view from nowhere’ is slowly getting harder to trust, and ‘here’s where I’m coming from,’ is more likely to be trusted” (Sullivan, 2013). New York Times journalist, Nicole Jones, further notes that our definition of objectivity itself has historically been false. She says many white Americans have viewed the less diverse news of the past as a simple rundown of the facts. On the other hand, she says, “Black Americans never had that luxury because ‘simply the facts’ excluded us, demeaned us, and degraded us” (Throughline, 2021).

For BIPOC journalists caught in the middle of these debates, emotional, psychological, and professional challenges are rife. New York Times’ Patrice Peck explains, “On top of the anxiety and exhaustion of freelancing in a shrinking industry, for those of us who focus on black

communities, every pitch is a precarious shooting of one's shot if the gatekeeper is a white editor unfamiliar with your work. We wonder if rejections are about the story idea or the fact that it focused on a black person or issue specific to black people. Or both?" (Peck, 2020). Yet, these journalists are often not given the chance to speak from their experience. MPR host Angela Davis, contends, "I'm trained to keep my opinion out of the interviews I do, but I have 52 years of experience being Black... We're witnessing the pain and trauma that Black folks have had to endure for generations. I can't separate myself from that because it's my story, as well" (Justin, 2020).

While Journalism ethics may be in transition, we must remember that this is not the first-time academics have optimistically claimed the current level of social awareness to be exceptional. Law professor at the University of Chicago once declared, "In my lifetime, I haven't experienced a moment like this... I'm usually more of a cynic and a skeptic, but this feels different." He said this shortly after the killing of Ferguson's Michael Brown in 2014 (Lowery, 2015). Moreover, support for and interest in addressing systemic injustice has waned even since June of 2020 (Thomas & Horowitz, 2020). In this moment journalists of color present a vital resource for understanding the unique pressures and opportunities the Journalism industry faces in taking inventory of *this* tragic moment – perhaps even in preventing the next one. We would do well to investigate what we're asking of these journalists, how they navigate these demands, and how the industry can support them to be the journalists we need them to be.

Seeking to harness the interest and energy of current discussions on journalistic conduct, to give voice to an invaluable and underrepresented population, as well as to provide

guidance for the modern news media-person navigating difficult conversations on journalism ethics under our novel and tragically similar circumstances, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

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

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

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

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

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Method

Literature Review

Late September of 2020, President Trump issued a series of memos denouncing trainings on Critical Race Theory, white privilege, or “any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggests either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil” (Harris, 2020). A few days later, he issued an executive order ending “efforts to indoctrinate government employees with divisive and harmful sex- and race-based ideologies” (Cineas, 2020). Loyola Law School Professor, Priscilla Ocen, disparaged Trump’s actions this way:

Critical [R]ace [T]heory ultimately is calling for a society that is egalitarian, a society that is just, and a society that is inclusive, and in order to get there, we have to name the barriers to achieving a society that is inclusive... Our government at the moment is essentially afraid of addressing our history of inequality and if we can’t address it, then we can’t change it” (Lang, 2020).

Sally Lehrman and Venise Wagner address our history of inequality themselves with their insightful exploration of structural and systemic racism, implicit bias, and their effects on American journalism – *Reporting Inequality* (Lehrman & Wagner, 2019). In it they emphasize, “What society fails to explore are the implicit and structural acts behind a particular event, the ones that are embedded in language, patterned action, and policy” (Lehrman & Wagner, 2019, p. 4). Therefore, to ground our discussion of the elements BIPOC journalists face today warrants an examination of Critical Race Theory itself.

Delgado and Stefancic’s seminal introduction to Critical Race Theory (CRT) characterized the intellectual and activist movement of the 1970s, and provide the theoretical background of this study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Based on the activist and scholarly discourse of key figures like Derrick Bell (credited as the theory’s intellectual father) and Alan Freeman, along

with many others, the theory drew heavily from the movements of critical legal studies and radical feminism. While the theory has evolved and splintered into sub-focuses related to a number of racial, gender, and sexual minorities, proponents of the theory generally agree on the following tenets:

- Racism is ordinary, ubiquitous, and pervasive (Ordinariness).
- Our system of white-over-color dominance has material and psychic implications which may not be addressed by formal or legal conceptions of equality – due to the shared interests in perpetuation of the system (Interest Convergence).
- Conceptions of race are dynamic products of thought and relations (Social Construction); which shift in response to social, economic, and political trends (Differential Racialization); and overlap with diverse identity sets held simultaneously (Intersectionality)
- Due to their unique histories and experiences with oppression, minorities possess valuable and unique perspectives social majority members are unlikely to know or fully comprehend (Voice of Color) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The fact that we have a 17% minority workforce in our newsrooms (Abbady, 2017) or the fact that we have now had a black president, may be used as signs of progress to separate our apartheid past from our supposedly “post-racial” present (Hoffman, Granger, Jr., Vallejos, & Moats, 2016). These facts might be held as evidence that no further self-reflection is necessary (or desirable). Yet as Alana Lentin’s examination of post-racial rhetoric argues well, “The lines that join the past to the present, multiple and complex as they are, become obscured through the separation of racism then from now” (Lentin, 2015). Journalists of color have long

faced material and psychic barriers in the course of serving the American public, and their path to mainstream news organizations vividly reflect the tenets of Critical Race Theory, as well as the precarious situation journalists of color occupy in mainstream media today.

Entry of BIPOC Journalists into Mainstream News Media

Nell Painter's exploration of the first hundred years of Black Press (referred to as Black Journalism in Painter's literature) (Painter, 1971), undertakes the development of People of Color within the traditions of American Journalism. Painter illustrates how between 1827 and 1927, the Black Press (characterized by newspapers and journalistic publications staffed predominantly by people of color) maintained a racial orientation (rather than a partisan one) and embodied a sense of supranational racial identity (Painter, 1971).

The comparison between the Black Press from this period (1827-1927) and the modern "Objective" journalism which followed, is stark. Consider that the Boston Guardian was established in the early 20th century as "a thoroughgoing protest paper based on uncompromising opposition to segregation and racial discrimination" (Painter, 1971, p. 41), and it becomes apparent how much has changed since mainstream White journalism began to co-opt elements of the Black Press towards journalism's modern-day institutional norms. It would be helpful to understand the degree to which BIPOC journalists subverted the advocacy and transparent agendas visible in the Black Press in order to be accepted into mainstream White Press during this time. But no such studies have been found to definitively answer this question to date.

In 1947, the same year the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association and individual journalists of color were accredited to the Congressional Press Galleries and the State

Department (Newkirk, 2000), the Hutchins Commission issued the first major indictment by a mainstream panel of the depiction of racial minorities in the press. The panel noted the disproportionate representation of minority “vice” compared to the values, aspirations and humanity of communities of color, emphasizing the distorted image that resulted. Sadly, the report was largely dismissed by white Journalists (Newkirk, 2000, pp. 55-56).

Two decades later in 1968 (the same year Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated), the Kerner Report manifestly rebuked news media hiring, training, and promoting practices noting, “Along with the community as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men’s eyes and a white perspective. That is no longer good enough. The painful process of readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now” (Newkirk, 2000, p. 70). The report was foundational, leading to an unprecedented hiring of black journalists through policies such as Affirmative Action (the application of time, money, or other resources to ensuring people aren’t discriminated against (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006)). At the same time, the Federal Communications Commission threatened to withhold broadcast operating licenses from stations which practiced employment discrimination, progressively interpreting the Communications Act’s mandate to protect the public interest (Newkirk, 2000, p. 73).

Becker, Lauf, and Lowrey’s exploration of employment rates in Journalism and Media across Gender, Race, and Ethnicity give an excellent assessment of Affirmative Action’s impact on the industry (Becker, Lauf, & Lowrey, 1999). Minorities in Journalism have made notable employment gains since the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act of 1972 promoted Affirmative Action to combat discrimination. Yet 57% of Journalistic hires rely on weak social

ties. As Becker et al explain, “Historically, blacks have been at a disadvantage because they have been underrepresented in the occupational structure itself and therefore have been less privy to informal channels of opportunity” [characterized by these weak social ties] (Becker, Lauf, & Lowrey, 1999, p. 634). In short, Affirmative Action hasn’t changed the fact that “like hires like” (Becker, Lauf, & Lowrey, 1999).

In 1984, John De Mott and Samuel Adams conducted a survey of Journalism curriculum and discovered a notable lack of racism-focused curriculum in journalism education. When asked whether respondents would like more non-white members of faculty, Mott and Adams noted that many defensively emphasized the need for more “qualified” minority applicants (Mott & Adams, 1984, pp. 55-56). Indeed, their findings indicated a great apathy and even disdain towards education on racism as well as towards Affirmative Action programs (Mott & Adams, 1984).

Celebrating the spirit of the Kerner Report and the EEO Act, in 1978 the American Society of Newspaper Editors optimistically resolved to bring racial newsroom staff demographics to national demographic levels by the year 2000. But by 1998, they abandoned the goal as unrealistic noting that racial minorities made up 11% of newsroom jobs and 30% of the national population. Bryan Gumbel noted of this time, “Our country is as racist as it has been—arguably more racist than before 1980” (Newkirk, 2000, pp. 35-36).

Although journalists of color were entering mainstream newsrooms in numbers greater than ever, they faced dismissal from white colleagues who viewed them as unqualified staff hired simply because of Affirmative Action, at the expense of more qualified white journalists.

Pamela Newkirk, author of the quintessential exploration of Black Journalists in White Media, *Within the Veil*, brings us near to the present day with this sobering assessment:

A wide and deep racial and cultural chasm still divides the industry. African Americans and their minority counterparts are still woefully underrepresented in the industry and are far from integrated into the newsroom culture. They are resented by many of their white colleagues who believe the increased diversity, particularly of blacks and Latinos, is due to unfair affirmative action policies that have compromised the industry's standards (Newkirk, 2000, p. 194).

Faced with such prejudice the moment they entered the newsroom, journalists of color have needed to be seen as professional and objective to succeed (and survive professionally). The effort to be seen as such, even at the expense of suppressing personal understanding of events and social trends, has greatly impacted BIPOC Journalists' contributions to the industry through to today.

Expectations of Objectivity

In the wake of BLM protests following the death of George Floyd, many discussions have erupted around the defense or rejection of the journalistic notions of objectivity. Thomas Kent, former International Standards Editor at Associated Press and current Journalism Ethics Consultant, describes the term this way: "At heart objective journalism sets out to establish the facts about a situation, report fairly the range of opinion around it, and take a first cut at what arguments are the most reasonable... To show their commitment to balance, journalists should keep their personal opinions to themselves." (Ethical Journalism Network, 2013). Increasingly, however, objectivity as a journalistic norm has come under fire with opponents considering it unattainable (Weinberger, 2009), or misguided and inherently unfair in its expectations (Mattar, 2020). Some point out that Implicit Bias (the unconscious associations that impact the

way we relate to people and ideas as documented by the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT [Jost, Rudman, Blair, & Glaser, 2009]) unconsciously and inevitably shape the “habits of the eyes” beyond any possible objectivity (Lehrman & Wagner, 2019). Others maintain objectivity is a guiding principle that can and must continue to guide the *process* of reporting (Sullivan, 2013). Senja Post has written a detailed and worthwhile examination of these arguments as posed by 134 German journalists, which effectively plot the field of arguments for and against the normative embracing of journalistic objectivity (Post, 2014).

For journalists of color, the journalistic value of objectivity has brought notably harsh implications. Journalist and professor, Pamela Newkirk, paints a vivid picture of what objectivity meant to journalists of color in her book, *Within the Veil*. She points out that major news organizations such as the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Detroit Free Press, and others prevented black journalists from covering Africa as they were deemed unable to be objective while doing so (Newkirk, 2000, p. 158). In 1980, it had even been suggested that hiring staff should double check the resumes of all black reporters because of an apparent risk of dishonest representation of qualifications (Newkirk, 2000, p. 170).

It’s worth mentioning that Renita Colman’s *Color Blind* study investigating the effects of story subject’s race on journalism students’ ethical reasoning effectively debunked previous notions of black journalists’ reporting biases (Coleman, 2011). In a study of 104 journalism students, she found that black journalism students showed no preference for black story subjects. Interestingly, the same could not be said of white journalism students who displayed prejudicial treatment in favor of white story subjects (Coleman, 2011, pp. 344-345). Still, these findings have little to do with the expectations faced by BIPOC journalists. As we’ve discussed

earlier, many journalism professionals saw BIPOC journalists as recipients of unfair selection and as inferior to white journalists who were hired for their qualifications (Mott & Adams, 1984). As a result, there has long been a critical need for journalists of color to *prove* their objectivity – a need their white counterparts escaped.

Newkirk explains of black journalists, “Those who write compassionately about members of their race risk the mistrust of their white superiors, who deem them unable to be objective. Many black reporters say they feel their credibility is at stake in the newsroom unless they write negatively about black people.” On the other hand, “The black journalist who is party to negative portrayals [of black subjects] is seen as the ultimate turncoat by members of their demographic, even in those instances when the negative coverage is warranted (Newkirk, 2000, pp. 139-145). The dilemma, Newkirk concludes, presses BIPOC Journalists between a rock and hard place driving turnover at double the rates of White Journalists (Newkirk, 2000, p. 160). This “compressed” experience is highly relevant to the position BIPOC Journalists find themselves in today as they question the best way to serve their communities and their readers.

Crisis of Conscience for BIPOC Journalists

The killing of George Floyd along with the multitude of other people of color slain by police have been likened to modern-day lynchings (Dreyer et al, 2020). The Pediatrics essay collaboratively produced by Dreyer, Mendozze, Fuentes-Afflick, and Montoya-Williams, provides an excellent contextualization of Floyd’s death among the historical precedent of police violence against People of Color, and includes a list of policy recommendations to address the unchecked police brutality. The authors note that Derek Chauvin’s attack came after 17

misconduct complaints (including brutality), and two letters of reprimand (Dreyer, Mendoza, Fuentes-Afflick, & Montoya-Williams, 2020). This is unsurprising given the famous difficulty our legal system has found in holding police officers accountable (Dewan & Kovaleski, 2020). George Floyd's death too was not remarkable considering the large number of black men, women, and children killed by police officers (598 between 2009 and 2012 (DeGue, Fowler, & Calkins, 2016)). Moreover, fatality rates of black victims at the hands of police are 2.8 times higher than white victims, even though black victims are 14.8% more likely to be unarmed (DeGue, Fowler, & Calkins, 2016) as Floyd was. However, Dreyer et al point out a key difference between this tragedy and others:

As we watched that video, many in White society finally felt a combination of shame, guilt, and anger and decided not to 'go along' with the status quo any more. Diverse members of society appear to have awakened from passivity and have been moved to act together, not just in Minneapolis, but in cities around the United States and across the world. (Dreyer et al, 2020)

In the months following Floyd's death, a noteworthy number of BIPOC journalists publicly aired accumulated grievances against an industry which had repeatedly discounted past concerns (Lowery, 2020). These concerns are not new (many were raised as early as the Hutchins Commission in 1947 and earlier (Newkirk, 2000)). But they have informed BIPOC journalists' lack of faith in mainstream Journalism and have motivated many to speak out. Therefore, the major indictments are worth reviewing.

Journalistic practice commonly relies on anecdotal storytelling, which as Lehrman and Wagner point out, "Rarely illuminates the societal structures that play a role in shaping inequity." This can give audiences the impression that individual events are disconnected and unrelated in any systemic way (Lehrman & Wagner, 2019, p. 2). As the Hutchins Commission

and Kerner Report both addressed, the Black community has faced historic biases in the news due to underreporting of social injustice and overreporting of crime (Haynes, 2019). It seems unsurprising then that today half of Black people and a third of Hispanic people believe local crime coverage unfairly portrays their communities (Newkirk, 2000, p. 141).

Regarding protest movements decrying social injustice, protestors by nature tend to be “outgroup” members disadvantaged by an “ingroup” domination of primarily white Media (Haynes, 2019). Alexandria Haynes’ analysis of reporting styles on the Black Lives Matter movement does much to identify how the nature of reporting has fueled acceptance or rejection of the protests. She has also identified several tendencies in reporting which have biased the public against BLM’s causes. She observes that Racial Grammar (e.g., the default assumption of whiteness in descriptions [Banks, 2018], [Bonilla-Silva, 2012]), or Racial Indexing (using racially disparaging codewords like “thugs” or “looters” [Hoffman, Granger, Jr., Vallejos, & Moats, 2016]) in reporting can influence public opinion in negative ways subsequently sharing a negative assessment of the movement, delegitimizing its mission, and minimizing the effectiveness of its calls to action (Haynes, 2019).

In her piece on Locating Whiteness in Journalism Pedagogy, Sonya Alemén catalogues the domination of white culture within mainstream American Journalism as propagated by several rhetorical strategies. These include asserting individualism over subjectivity, distorting racism to exclusively mean prejudicial attitudes, negation of endemic aspects of racism, and normalization of white culture and identity (Aleman, 2013). She indicts mainstream journalism with her primary finding that, “Current journalism pedagogy can be read as impeding racial

justice because of [sic] the pervasiveness of whiteness in media training leaves a racialized social structure unchallenged” (Aleman, 2013, p. 72).

Given that traditional instance-based reporting was unlikely to fully address the underlying causes of systemic injustice ((Lehrman & Wagner, 2019), (Haynes, 2019), (Newkirk, 2000)) and explorations of racial inequity were likely to be slanted in their depictions by majoritarian language use and perspective ((Haynes, 2019), (Banks, 2018), (Hoffman, Granger, Jr., Vallejos, & Moats, 2016), (Aleman, 2013)), speaking out against shortcomings of mainstream reporting may seem attractive to BIPOC journalists. Still, doing so is not without risk.

Jane Hill’s *Everyday Language of White Racism* (Hill, 2008) and Robin Diangelo’s *White Fragility* (Diangelo, 2018) both highlight the resistance one may face in asking social majority members to consider their own privilege and ignorance. BLM members and those who raise the racial issues involved in the police killing of an unarmed black person, have been titled “race hustlers” (Banks, 2018) and “race baiters” (Benash, 2014) undermining the validity of the points they raise. In light of post-racial rhetoric, even talking directly about race has been deemed racist (Banks, 2018) including by former President Donald Trump (Lang, 2020). Therefore, it’s not unreasonable to suggest that BIPOC journalists were generally aware both of what would happen if they publicly spoke out against systemic injustice, joined in BLM protests, or decried the white dominated News Media; as well as what would happen if they didn’t. How BIPOC journalists came to choose their course of action in the face of such knowledge is unknown, and this study intends to investigate the question directly. In place of more definitive results,

however, we do have the accounts of a number of journalists of color explaining why they chose to voice their concerns.

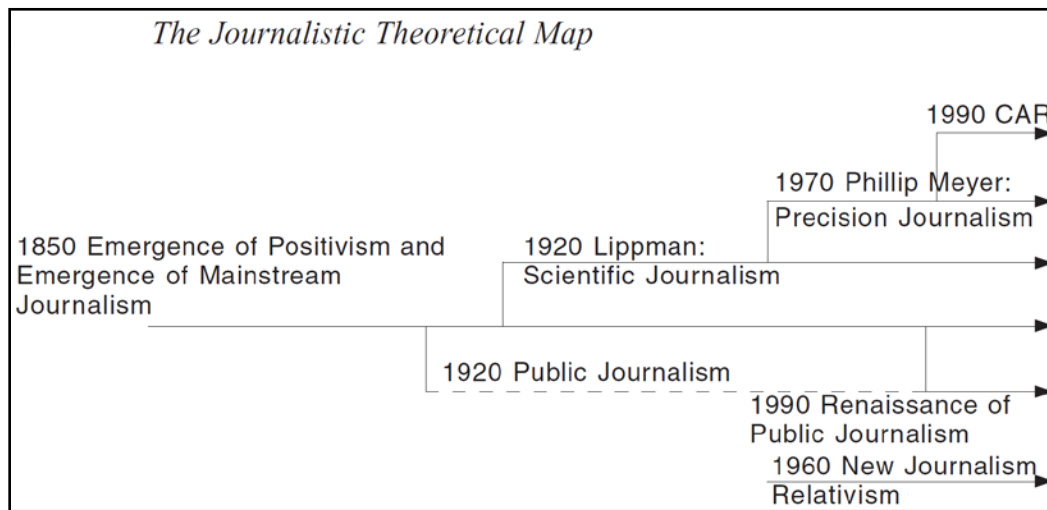
In a Hollywood Reporter piece exploring how Black journalists have struggled covering George Floyd, CNN Anchor, Victor Blackwell explained, “I have been a Black man long before I was an anchor at CNN. And there would be no reason to hire people with diverse life experiences or backgrounds if they don’t bring that to the table or to the conversation. And I think it is my duty, it’s my responsibility, to bring that to the conversation” (Barr, 2020). Pamela Newkirk explains in *Within the Veil* that there are “things that I understand that other people will not just because we live in very separate societies” (Newkirk, 2000, p. 141). Etheleen Renee Shipp also explains of her decision to leave the New York Times, “I wanted to be treated the way they’d have treated a white person who came there, as I did, with advanced degrees in journalism and law... There was no compelling reason for this self-respecting black woman to stay” (Newkirk, 2000, p. 195). Such sentiments underline concerns about honesty, comparative advantage, and fairness.

Nevertheless, despite the passion and public support statements like these have prompted, we are far from agreement on whether the traditionally “un-objective” (in freely offering personal connections to news coverage) actions and words shared by these journalists were ethical or in alignment with the needs of the public. At the heart of these questions, we find crucial differences in conceptions of journalistic responsibility.

Journalistic Responsibility

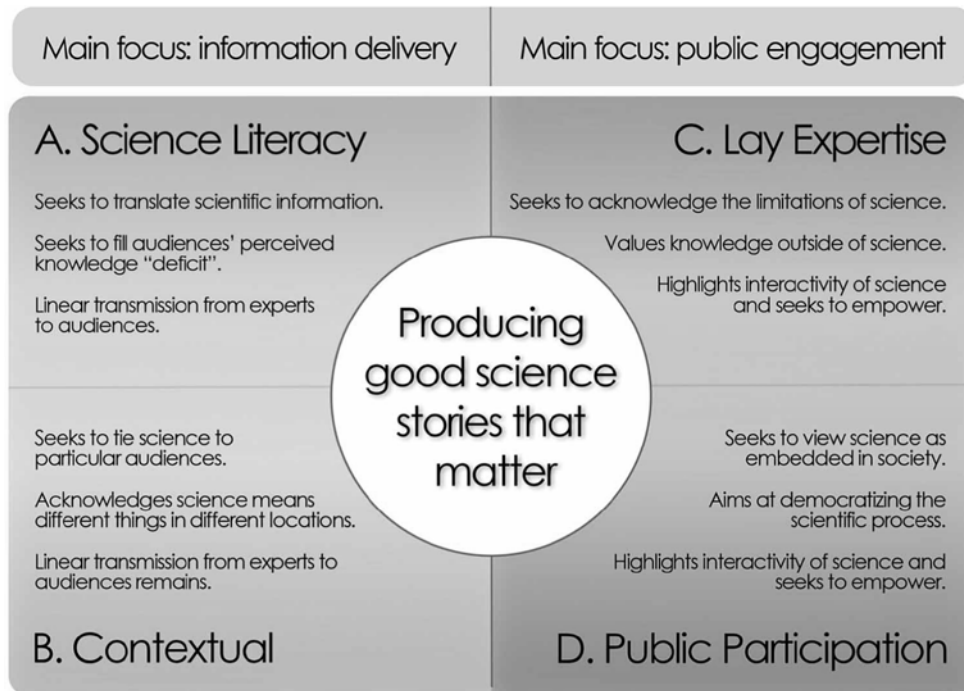
Charlotte Wien characterizes the presiding models of journalism as defined by the theoretical directions the American journalism industry has been pulled since the emergence of

mainstream journalism (see below). She notes that more Positivistic models of journalism (defined exclusively by what can be demonstrably and incidentally observed) began to be challenged by New Journalism proponents (characterized by relativistic acknowledgement of cultural biases typified by CRT). This separation provides a key conflict at the center of contemporary debates about journalistic objectivity.



(Wien, 2006)

David Secko, Elyse Amend, and Terrine Friday have produced one of the more canonical delineations of contemporary models of journalism. They draw lines of distinction between four models (Science Literacy, Contextual, Lay-Expertise, and Public Participation) by dividing models into those that prioritize information delivery (Science Literacy and Contextual), and those that prioritize public engagement (Lay-Expertise and Public Participation) (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013). As they explain, the former models disproportionately value the perspectives of scientific or official experts along with verifiable incident-based reporting. The latter conversely value perspectives outside of the scientific or official spheres comparably to those within (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013).



(Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013, p. 67)

In their international survey of Ethical Guidelines in Media and Journalism institutions, Itai Himelboim and Yehiel Limor approached journalistic ideology with an invaluable overview of how media organizations prioritize Journalists' roles. They found that most differences in perceived roles pertained to principles of Involvement – "The extent to which the media institution, organizations, and personnel expect to play an active role in promoting the values, agendas, and opinions they perceive as important to society at large, or to sub-groups therein" (Himelboim & Limor, 2011). This goal orientation echoes Secko et al's separation of those seeking to neutrally report the facts of the day from those more transparently pursuing the common good. Himelboim and Limor note that the concept of Social Responsibility – arising from discourse around the Hutchins Commission (Nordenstreng, 2006, p. 37) – obliges

journalists to show commitment towards the good of society and “restrain themselves accordingly.”

Social Responsibility has historically been criticized for its vagueness and similarity in justification of the heavy-handed media usage in authoritarian societies (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 2002, p. 134), contrasted with more libertarian press conceptions relating to a free and independent press (Yusuf, et al., 2017). Yet in recent literature, journalism organizations have been critiqued for their profit orientation reducing the number of perspectives presented and thereby neglecting the media’s role of promoting democratic participation” (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011, pp. 73-74). Himmelboim and Limor’s discussions note the conceptual conflicts between “Gatekeepers” and “Advocates;” or “Watchdogs” and “Educators – the key distinction again lying between whether Journalists should observe and report with neutrality (Gatekeepers and Watchdogs), or interpret and build understanding in accordance with need (Advocates and Educators).

Richard van der Wurff and Klaus Schoenbach, in their survey of audience expectations on the Journalism Industry, found considerable alignment in priorities with expert and journalist conceptions in emphasizing the industry’s critical function – namely serving Democracy (Wurff & Schoenback, 2014). They also mirror the dichotomy of Himmelboim and Limor’s findings in that “audience members are [commonly] perceived either as consumers, primarily interested in infotainment and horse-race reporting about politics; or as knowledgeable and discerning citizens, appreciating high-quality journalism” (Wurff & Schoenback, 2014, pp. 433-434). This dichotomy too is reflected in Secko, Amend, and Friday’s findings which separate audience members who passively absorb the knowledge of experts

from those that actively provide feedback and direction (if not their own content) for journalists in terms of coverage (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013). We cannot deny that news consumers today possess a combination of these orientations. Meeting the seemingly conflicting demands of our diverse news audiences, therefore, can become problematic and contentious.

If a news organization's primary role is to "give the audience what they want" without judgement or agenda, then perception and branding becomes critical in convincing audiences that one's news organization exhibits the journalistic detachment their audiences want. The New York Times exemplifies this strategy in their Ethical Guidelines, "If our journalists are perceived as biased or if they engage in editorializing on social media, that can undercut the credibility of the entire newsroom" (New York Times, 2020). Minnesota Public Radio echoes this sentiment in their Ethical Guidelines: "We want to avoid situations that could present real or perceived conflicts of interest that harm the credibility of MPR News Journalists or content" (MPR News, 2016). The Society of Professional Journalists demands their journalists simply, "Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

If, however, a news organization's primary role is to give our democratic society what it *needs*, Perception then takes a back seat to truth and fairness. Consider the Ethics Guidelines of Vox which include no use of the words "perceived" or "perception" at all (Vox Staff, 2020), or of Poynter which uses the word "perception" only once to note, "We recognize that funding sources may appear to affect a journalism organization's independence, particularly in situations where support raises the possibility of perception of a conflict of interest," (Poynter, 2021) (and here note, there is no statement saying that these situations should be avoided). Conversely, Poynter asserts in their Transparency section, "We shine a light on our own

journalistic processes, explaining how and why we make decisions” (Poynter, 2021). Vox insists, “Vox Media’s newsrooms have complete editorial independence,” and emphasizes Vox staff discretion in “reflecting” on the impact of their actions (Vox Staff, 2020).

Since George Floyd’s murder, BIPOC journalists have done much to shine a light on mainstream journalistic processes, educate audiences and colleagues, and in some cases advocate for social justice; all in ways that shift conceptions of the role of journalists and in particular, the role of journalists of color (E.g., [LA Times, 2021], [Barr, 2020], [Carroll, 2020], [Flynn, 2020], [Gonzalez, 2020], [Ingram, 2020], [Lowery, 2020], [All Things Considered, 2020], [Peck, 2020], [Quibi, 2020], and [Wicker, 2020]). This study cannot fairly represent the scope, quality, and quantity of these arguments, but we can make several observations about the types of concerns raised.

Many of these discussions raise concerns about reconciling one’s identity as a journalist and as a person of color (POC), emphasizing an intersectional responsibility for fairness and truth (e.g., [LA Times, 2021], [Barr, 2020]). The LA Times led a particularly deep dive into this uncomfortable marriage of roles (LA Times, 2021). In the conversation, participants all noted their reassessment of journalistic roles being directly driven by the death of George Floyd in 2020 (LA Times, 2021). One participant noted, “This was a year for many black journalists where we took the journalist’s hat and reexamined it in a different way. We’ve always been taught about neutrality and being unbiased, but then we started thinking of things through the lens of truth and fairness” (LA Times, 2021). Another agreed when he noted, “In 2020, it was not a time to hide my blackness.” He continued to add, “It’s this kind of weird world where I

have to step outside myself in order to ask questions and get answers, and then step back in in order to write what I think is an honest story” (LA Times, 2021).

In a Glamour piece interviewing eight journalists on reporting while black, Editor-at-large for the nonprofit newsroom The 19th, Errin Haines, urgently prioritized pointed truth-telling this way:

Purposeful forgetting and blissful ignorance is very real. People need to know. And there are too many people in America who cannot countenance the truth about our country’s history.

I think that’s one of the reasons we are seeing Black journalists in particular treating racism as a matter of fact. This is not just about our feelings. This is about telling the most transparent truth that we can about America (Kahn, 2020).

The emphasis on truth and utilizing the journalist’s position to address social injustice is a common trope in numerous other conversations quoted throughout this research paper. Yet, the journalist’s role as agent of direct social change isn’t taken for granted in popular conceptions. Minnesota Public Radio’s Ethical Guidelines observe, “One of our principles is that we not become involved personally in the news we cover... We believe that a democratic society depends on an informed public, and that an informed public depends on a free and independent press. We do participate in our democracy, in our way. This is how we do it” (MPR News, 2016). Here we see one of the critical conflicts that many BIPOC Journalists are raising – whether being an emotionally detached reporter of facts is doing enough to serve the public. Yet without a clear agreement on the current reporting needs of society, this is another difficult question to answer.

In absence of consensus on the state of racial equality in America, we can be confident about which voices are likely being more and less represented. While explaining the tenets of CRT, Delgado and Stefancic explained the critical relevance of voices of color:

The voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, [B]lack, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their [W]hite counterparts matters that the [W]hites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Possessing a specialized and first-hand knowledge of the ways mainstream Journalism has historically minimized, dismissed, or acted contrary to the interests of communities of color; BIPOC journalists are in a unique position to assess this question.

Summary

The tragic death of George Floyd and the unusual public support for racial justice movements like Black Lives Matter have impelled a body of journalists, led by journalists of color, to redress the mainstream journalism industry's white cultural dominance as well as the institutional norms that inhibit journalists from effectively reporting on systemic injustice. History has placed BIPOC journalists at the center of these discussions from the early days of Black Journalism through to today (Painter, 1971). Yet institutional norms of objectivity (Newkirk, 2000), biased reporting standards (Lehrman & Wagner, 2019), and majoritarian media gate-keepers possessing interests that converge with those of white supremacists (Aleman, 2013), have enforced complicity in distorting and underrepresenting these issues. Now when more Americans than ever support deep introspection on racial justice (Thomase & Horowitz, 2020) and are simultaneously calling for more transparency in reporting (Sullivan, 2013), BIPOC Journalists are responding to a perceived need at great professional risk ([All

Things Considered, 2020], [Barr, 2020], [Carroll, 2020], [Flynn, 2020], [Ingram, 2020], [LA Times, 2021], [Lowery, 2020], [Mohajer, 2017], [Peck, 2020], [Quibi, 2020], [Smith, 2020], and [Wicker, 2020]). They possess singular knowledge of the unique expectations placed on journalists of color, on the effects of institutionalized racism supported by a journalism industry dominated by White egocentrism, and of the ethical conflicts journalists must resolve in pursuit of public service (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). What's more, BIPOC Journalists are sharing this knowledge. The lessons that we learn during this transient period of racial awareness will inform the way American Journalists support our Democracy, and we ignore them at our peril.

Method

The nature of expectations, perspectives, and ethical reasoning are not empirical. We can't fairly extrapolate from CRT Literature or surveys on cross-sectional journalist role conceptions. More specificity is necessary to highlight the peculiarities of this time and BIPOC journalists' position within them. Furthermore, more scope is necessary to contextualize recent trends within a greater history of the journalism industry. It must be acknowledged however, that this is not the first exploration of the perspective of journalists of color even after George Floyd. This study has cited many of them already. Yet this study's research questions remain unique and valuable.

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

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

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

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

To answer these research questions, this study engages BIPOC and white journalists directly, then interprets the meaning behind their responses. As such, qualitative research methods are necessary. John Pauly notes of qualitative researchers, “Their goal is simply to render plausible the terms by which groups explain themselves to the world and to clarify the role that mass communication plays in such explanations (Pauly, 1991, p. 7)” – a concise paraphrasing of this study’s goal.

This study utilizes semi-structured interviews conducted online through Zoom (an online web-conferencing platform). Admittedly, the literature on the use of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) mediated technologies (such as Zoom) in qualitative research is still nascent. But in 2019, a study involving 16 Australian medical professionals reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing Zoom for qualitative research concluded the benefits far outweigh the costs (Archibald, Ambagsteer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). Of the participants, 69% identified Zoom as a preferred method for conducting qualitative interviews over other videoconferencing platforms, telephone calls, and even in-person interviews – citing rapport, convenience, and user-friendliness as key reasons (Archibald, Ambagsteer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019, p. 3).

Study Subjects

Though this study seeks to elevate and thematically analyze the experiences and ethical reasoning of BIPOC journalists, we cannot provide a representative picture thereof. The term BIPOC itself is used here as opposed to other more common categorical names for racial minorities because every boundary one might draw excludes the voices of countless others. Indeed, what is exceptional about BIPOC perspectives is that they are not racially majoritarian. Yet even here, this study has navigated difficult decisions about including the voices of gender-based minorities, disabled communities, religious minorities, and many, many more. Ultimately, because the key public emphasis of George Floyd's murder, the criticisms offered by Black Lives Matter proponents, and the discourse of journalists speaking out against traditional journalistic norms all focus on the treatment many receive as a result of how one's race is perceived; this study has designated BIPOC populations as its central focus for its broad inclusion of racial minorities. That said, this study explores (where possible) the perspectives of non-racial minorities as well (especially women given the notable lack of studies focusing on women of color in the newsroom (Meyers & Gayle, 2015)).

It's also impossible to evaluate the perceived expectations and ethical reasoning of BIPOC journalists without context. Therefore, this study also collected and compared the data of white journalists with journalists of color (using the same interview questions – See Appendix A) in order to delineate what thematic similarities BIPOC journalists uniquely present in their responses. It's essential to emphasize that the inclusion of white journalists within the sample body is not meant to deemphasize the centrality of BIPOC journalist perspectives in this study. Rather, this study maintains adherence to the Voice-of-Color principle within CRT in recognition

of the value BIPOC perspectives offer the journalism industry in light of racial injustice; and seeks a rounded view of how perceived race affects the way journalists understand and perform their professional roles.

This study weighted its search for journalists who identify as a person of color or a racial minority member (unexclusively), and restricted participation (exclusively) to journalists that meet the following criteria:

- A. Professional journalists (must have worked professionally in a journalism role, since the death of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020)
- B. Have lived in the United States since the death of George Floyd
- C. Are 18 years old or older
- D. Are not prisoners of a Federal or State Institution

The study required participants to possess professional experience as a journalist because other journalism outlets (like high-school or volunteer newspapers) do not possess the same institutional biases, business pressures, or fraught history of racial demographics this study sought to evaluate and explore. Subjects also needed to have been professional journalists residing in the United States through this period of so-called “Racial Reckoning.” Therefore, professional journalists who began their work or moved to the United States after the death of George Floyd were not considered. Lastly, the study dictated that participants not be minors or prisoners because either demographic presents unnecessary bias to the sample population due to relatively impaired familiarity with current newsroom norms.

Recruiting Interviewees

Participants were mostly recruited through email or social media contacts and one participant was recruited via Snowball Sampling (inviting individuals to participate in the study, then asking interested parties to help recruit other participants from among their

acquaintances). In order to build interest for participation, candidates were sent a link to a blog post transparently discussing the focus and aims of the study (Burks, Announcing a New University of Missouri Research Study, 2021).

To fit interviews around participants' busy schedule, most interview sessions included discussion of admin, liability, and study overviews in a single sitting. Two participants required an additional interview session to complete portions unreached in the initial structured interview. In limited cases, follow-up emails were required to confirm specific details pertaining to responses given during the interview process. Interview sessions ranged from one to two hours in length with most sessions lasting less than 90 minutes (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

The final sample body included twelve individuals from ages 20-61 with an average age of 35.9 and a median age of 35.5. Of these, five participants were Black, two White, two Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), one Latino, one Middle Eastern (Self-identified as Iranian American), and one Indigenous (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021). While this group is scarcely representative of American journalists as a whole, it does meet the criteria of including at least one participant from the five largest racial groups present in the US (AAPI, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native American or Indigenous, and White (United States Census Bureau, 2021)). It's also worth noting that by U.S. census standards, one Iranian American participant is classified as white, but in this study is considered a person of color. Shaya Tayefe Mohajer explained why such a distinction was appropriate for her case in her interview:

I think there's been a notable shift in how Middle Eastern people have been perceived in my lifetime. Sociologists have studied this specific concept of “browning” among Middle Eastern people, where legally and on paper we enjoy some privileges of whiteness – for example, on a real estate application or mortgage form, if I don't have an option then I would be directed to tick white. But in terms of lived experience and everything from when a person encounters an Iranian for the first time, I've often been the first Iranian people have encountered, and I've also dealt with very specific racisms and disrespect based on my ethnic background (Mohajer, 2017).

Participants represented print, TV, radio, newsletter, and freelance/independent news mediums. Most participants were at least once considered print media journalists writing for a variety of publications. One is (at the time of the study's publication) a TV journalist appearing on CBS News and 60 Minutes, one a radio journalist – being a radio producer for a local radio station. Several considered themselves currently or previously freelance journalists. Half of the participants were based in Minnesota, and most of the participants had worked in multiple cities across the country (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Half of the participants exhibited relatively more evidence of prioritizing Social Responsibility over traditional norms of journalistic Objectivity, therefore aligning them more with the New Journalism (Wien, 2006), Public Participation, or Lay-Expert models of journalism (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013). These participants typically prioritized transparent support of the public good, emphasizing fair and nuanced treatment of subjects and the story (over, say, official statements), and valuing the fundamental mission of the journalist to speak the truth (even if unprovable). Examples of such evidence considered include opinions that news organizations don't have the right to restrict their journalists' speech on social media, support for journalists' personal involvement in activism, or valuing author identity-based contributions to a news story.

Two participants displayed relatively more evidence of prioritizing traditional norms of journalistic Objectivity over Social Responsibility, therefore aligning them more with Science Journalism (Wien, 2006), Science Literacy, or Contextual (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013) models of journalism. These participants typically emphasized provable fact in news coverage, valued the fundamental mission of the news organization to *report* truth, and therefore strongly opposed actions that might present the appearance of bias. Examples of such evidence considered include opinions that journalists' personal viewpoints should be restricted from being shared on social media, that journalists should refrain from protesting in general, or that the introduction of unobservable elements (such as personal identity) undermines the legitimacy of a news story.

Four participants showed prioritization of both Social Responsibility and traditional norms of journalistic Objectivity, and were not classified at either end of the polarity discussed above (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

Data Collection and Coding

During interview sessions, the principle investigator facilitated semi-structured conversations discussing the open-ended questions overviewed in Appendix A of this study. Where helpful, follow-up questions were asked to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses. While discussing ethical reasoning of journalistic conduct, specific examples of contentious behavior (i.e. joining a BLM protest, sharing a partisan social media post, etc.) from news articles were referenced if participant responses did not bring them up directly.

After all interview sessions were completed, video recordings were transcribed removing only Filler Language (e.g., "um," "you know," or "well.") taking care to leave the

fundamental meaning of all responses unchanged. In order to minimize the influence of the principle investigator's biased perspectives and beliefs, interview transcriptions were coded using the Grounded Theory methodology (the systematic, inductive approach to categorizing, comparing, and analyzing data in order to develop theoretical analyses [Charmaz, 2008]). Of using the Grounded Theory approach to carefully induce from data, Glaser and Strauss assert, "Only in this way will the theory be closely related to the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas, and so be highly applicable to dealing with them" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 238-239). In practice this meant generalizing participant responses and sentiments until similarities and differences could be noted along unified parameters.

Risks and Provisions

Given the sensitive nature of some of the conversations possible during interview sessions, it was conceivable that participants might feel uncomfortable or even offended. Yet the risk for emotional upset during the interview was not beyond what participants would face in the course of their professional lives exploring such issues, and was therefore considered a minimal risk. Yet to further minimize such risks, the principle investigator took care to clarify their role in driving discussions; resisted opportunities to editorialize; endeavored to remain neutral, measured, and uniformly engaging to all participants. After early interview sessions, the principle investigator sought feedback from multiple participants to ensure they felt comfortable, respected, and encouraged throughout the interview process, in order to verify interviews were being conducted with sensitivity.

The topics of conversation during the interview also included ethical conflicts navigated in the course of everyday work. Given the potential for such information to prove detrimental

to participants' professional standing should such anecdotes reach their employers, participants were offered anonymity during interviews. Participants who chose anonymity have been referred throughout this article by their interview number (not chronological) and certain references to their place of work have been generalized to remove references that might allow the reader to identify them. Participants were also given a chance to review quoted responses in order to ensure the meaning and spirit of the comments are maintained.

During the span of the research project, interview recordings and coded participant data were kept on an offline external hard drive in order to minimize the unlikely risk of data being hacked. After the study is completed and multimedia summaries are produced, all personal data and sensitive information will be archived offline.

Chapter Three: Findings

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], and [Otarola, 2021]). Two said the expectations were the same (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021) though one of the two qualified that her perception had much to do with her experience having worked under several managers of color (Bui, 2021). A quarter (3) said they weren't sure (Jany, 2021) (Chin, 2021) (Whiting, 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.

Professional expectations weren't exclusively expressed by supervisors, and included other sources in the industry as well. 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 [for] 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).

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) (Otarola, 2021), and not at all by white participants (Whiting, 2021) (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 11, 2021). Multiple participants noted some incidence of disparate intensity of expectations with journalists of color reported

to have higher performance expectations than white journalists (including one white participant) (Monet, 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 related 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. 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 predominantly white men (BIPOC Journalist Experience Interviews, 2021).

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. Former LA Times arts reporter², 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

² Since interviewing for this study Makeda Easter left LA Times and is now an arts journalist and journalism instructor.

objectively cruel, and we use cruel to describe animal 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 of 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 Whiting described her role as a journalist as “not objective because I'm trying to help change the world” (Whiting, 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.

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 reported 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], and [Otarola, 2021]). Half (4) tended to stand up for their beliefs and deal with the consequences later ([Easter, 2021], [Mohajer, 2021], [Lowery, 2021], and [Otarola, 2021]). Half of participants (4) also suggested 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], and [Otarola, 2021]). One journalist said she was still figuring out what to do in these instances and tended 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 said, kept them from producing the fair, contextualized, thoughtful work they

wanted to do. A quarter (3) of the 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 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.

Bui discussed an instance where she felt conflicted over whether to report on progressive criticisms of a progressive activist:

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 – 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] and [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).

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 stated, “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. 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).

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).

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 emphasized that the audience's preferences too have shifted. He stated:

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 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" (Mohajer, 2017).

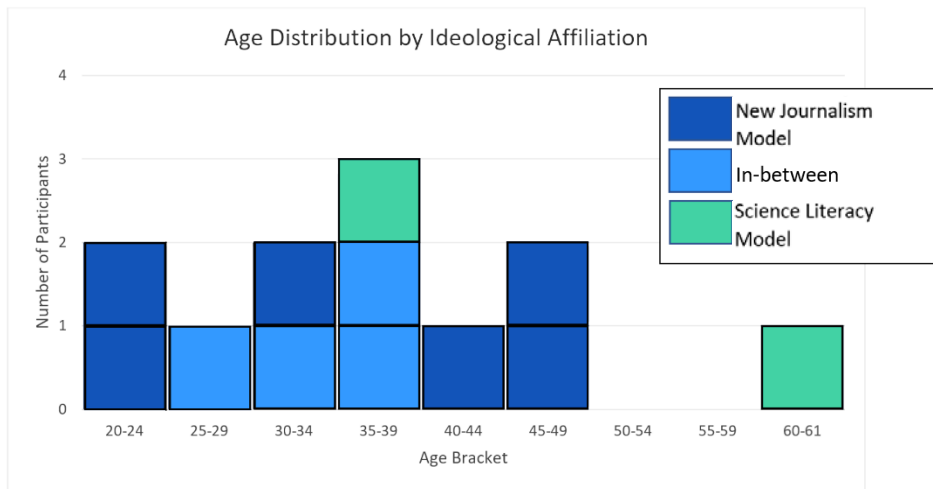
Miguel Otarola too agreed with the sentiment when he noted:

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 Science Literacy, Contextual (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013), or Science Journalism (Wien, 2006) models – 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 Lay-Expert, Public Participation (Secko, Amend, & Friday, 2013), or New Journalism (Wien, 2006) models 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 polarities 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 Science Literacy model to a New Journalism model of journalism. Still, a long-term study focusing on newsroom and journalist ideology would better qualify the degree of change we’re seeing.



Speaking of such shifting journalism norms, 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).

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 confessional 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 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], and [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).

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, if 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).

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

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

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.

Reponses 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. This is consistent with Himelboim and Limor's findings that barely half (52.3%) of journalistic organizations surveyed worldwide use their code of ethics to declare an understanding of and commitment to their role in society (Himelboim & Limor, 2011, p. 82). 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 that aligns with what the reader needs, [plus] what the newspaper needs as well (Anonymous, BIPOC Journalist Experience Interview 3, 2021).

In his piece espousing the virtues of mission statements, Poynter's Thomas Kent offers a keen suggestion for why so few news organizations transparently state their values and aims in society: "A mission sounds like a pre-determined point of view, an ideology that could color reporting" (Kent, 2019). In other words – a style of journalism that is *not objective*. It's vital to remember, however, that the scientific principles of objectivity are in no way contrary to the

traditional public service aims of journalism. News Guild Publisher A. G. Sulzberger illustrates the subtle distinction well: “We’re not retreating from the principles of independence and objectivity. [But] [w]e don’t pretend to be objective about things like human rights and racism” (Smith, 2020).

In this period of social change, there is an opportunity for news organizations to clarify their core values and stances on the nuanced discussions of the day – one which can help to simultaneously emphasize an objective treatment of the facts, and a critical evaluation of what stories the public most needs and deserves.

The expectations placed on journalists are shifting inconsistently in some spheres with some displaying more Libertarian role conceptions, and others emphasizing more their own Social Responsibility. What principles become canonized in the process, however, remains to be seen. To reiterate, this study does not seek to prescribe a set of policies for news organizations, and indeed there is no such standard that all news organizations can or should be guided by. The value of emotionally detached reporting compared with that of personalized input will vary from circumstance to circumstance, and it is the responsibility of news organizations and journalists everywhere to evaluate when and where the benefits of each outweigh the costs.

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...

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 old guard 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...

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.

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 Whiting, 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 (Whiting, 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". He later called into question whether such policing was an effective way to regain the public's trust (Lowery, 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], and [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], and [Whiting, 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 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 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).

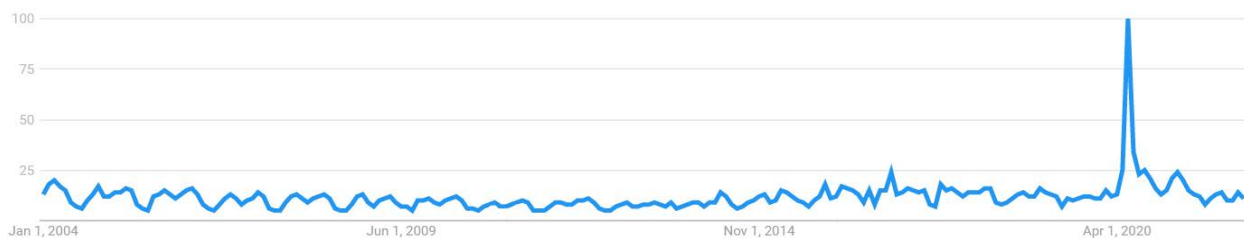
Makeda Easter disagreed with organizational policing of journalist involvement in protests by noting that you could never tell an LGBTQ+ journalist not to attend Pride (Easter, 2021). Interviewee 3 agreed that she would support talking about human rights (including support for Black Lives Matter), but 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:

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.



(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.

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 this in turn drives higher burnout and turnover rates among BIPOC staff ([Newkirk, 2000], [Camacho & San Jose, 2021], and [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?

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).

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).

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Appendix

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Outline

Introductions and Set-up

- What's your name and what is your position(s) in the journalism industry?
- What race or ethnicity do you identify with/as?

Setting of Professional Expectations

- Can you briefly describe your background in Journalism?
- What expectations of you were set by your superiors, and how were they expressed?
- What expectations of you have been set by your audience, and how were they expressed?
- Were these expectations for you the same as for your colleagues? How do you know?

Personal Response to George Floyd and pursuant racial awareness

- What was your reaction to learning about George Floyd's death? To former Officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?
- How have you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic Injustice?
- Has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent BLM protests affected your work in any ways? If so, how?

Ethical Reasoning Regarding Journalistic Role

- How would you describe your role as a Journalist?
- What values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?
- Do these values ever conflict with your professional expectations? If so how?
- How do you choose the best course of action in those cases?
- How do you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and/or perspectives in public forums? In your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised? For example:
 - Journalist usage of social media (professional and private)
 - Public disclosure of bias
 - Involvement in community programs or activism
- What do you see happening within mainstream ethical norms for the journalism industry?

Understanding of Need

- Has your understanding of Social Responsibility influenced your work as a journalist? If so how? Has this changed since George Floyd's death?
- Based on your understanding, what does society need from the Journalism Industry at this time? How do you know?
- Based on your understanding, what does society need from Journalists like you? How do you know?

Meeting the Need

- Do you feel confident you will generally be able to meet these needs? Why or why not?
- What obstacles (if any) prevent you from meeting the needs of the public?
- What support from your organization might help you better meet these needs?
- Do you feel confident the Journalism Industry will be able to meet society's needs at this time? Why or why not?
- Based on your experience and understanding as a Journalist, what might help the Journalism Industry better meet those needs?

Closing

- As a/an [ethnic/racial identity] Journalist, what do you feel others may have to learn from your unique perspective?
- What do you hope others might learn from this study?
- Is there anyone else you'd like to share on these subjects?
- Thank you and good-bye

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

Interview 1 – Tiffany Bui – July 1, 2021

Emeri Burks

All right. So we've already discussed the consent form a little bit, and you're going to wait until after the interview to tell me what preferences you have about the information you're going to be releasing. But could I start by asking your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, my name's Tiffany Bui, and I use she/they pronouns. I was formally the managing editor of the Minnesota Daily, which is the University of Minnesota Twin Cities college paper. I'm currently a freelance journalist and I'm about to enter my final semester of college.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thank you. And could I ask your age please?

Tiffany Bui

Yep. I am 22.

Emeri Burks

All right. And you said she, her pronouns, is that correct.

Tiffany Bui

She, they

Emeri Burks

She, they. Okay, thanks for that.

Could I also ask what race or ethnicity you identify with or as?

Tiffany Bui

I am Vietnamese American.

Emeri Burks

Sure thing. All right. So, I'd like to get a little background on your professional experience so far. Could you tell me how you started as a journalist and what's led to where you are now, and what you're doing today?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I became interested in journalism in my final year of high school, in which my economics teacher was formally a reporter/editor at the Star Tribune. He encouraged me to join the Minnesota Daily. Once I got to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Once I got to college, I took a journalism class. Upon my beginning journalism teacher's advice, I just sort of jumped

into it and declared my major. And then I started working at the Minnesota Daily, and that experience in the newsroom with other student journalists really encouraged me to just stay in the field.

So it was mostly my time at the student newsroom that got me to continue doing the work in journalism.

Emeri Burks

Nice. And can I confirm that you've been working as a professional journalist in the year since the death of George Floyd?

Tiffany Bui

I have

Emeri Burks

Great. Thank you.

So speaking about the different positions that you've started from, I wanted to have you think a little bit about the expectations that your supervisors and superiors have expressed to you as you were onboarding and becoming a journalist at their organizations. When you think about this, what comes to mind as far as what they told you, your job as a journalist is about?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, I think it's evolved since I started. When I initially was beginning as a journalist, 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. So don't express those opinions on social media. We weren't allowed to be involved in political campaigns or student government as student journalists.

I remember when I first applied to the Daily, it was between being an intern at the Daily or being intern for Ilhan Omar's campaign, and they told me that I couldn't do both. So I chose the Daily. So there's that expectation. I also remember going to a networking night with some journalists and editors from the different newsrooms around Minneapolis, and they said very clearly that you were not discouraged, or not allowed from 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.

So, in terms of expectations of how you conduct yourself as a person with opinions or political beliefs, it was very much staunch that we were taught in class that it was frowned upon to have political stickers on your window or bumper stickers on your car. 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. So, 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.

I think that's changed over time, and I think I didn't question that in the beginning. But I would describe it as very stringent, surprising to somebody who hadn't been socially involved with social justice issues since high school, stifling, and kind of scary, but something I learned to adapt to until I started questioning it.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Now you described some of your expectations as stifling and scary. Could you tell me a little bit more about this experience for you?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. Initially I was afraid to say anything controversial, especially on social media. I was afraid to express any kind of political opinion, even among my friends because I was worried that it would jeopardize my credibility as a journalist. And there's this kind of weird psychological thing that happened very early on in which my responsibilities as a journalist were not only... my being a journalist superseded, my being just a person with opinions in the world.

I carried being a journalist with me everywhere in every single social interaction, and that's kind of how... that mindset was praised, because that makes you a better journalist if you're always thinking about how you can... like what stories to write and stuff like that. But that in correlation with being told that you shouldn't express your political opinions in certain spaces just meant that I was all the time on guard about what I was telling people about what I believed.

The question I was most afraid of sources asking me was what do you think about this? Because it was like a, "Oh, I'm not supposed to talk about that," or I had to say something like, "Oh, it's interesting," or something like that. It wasn't very honest. I don't think it was very... it wasn't an honest portrayal of who I was, which is a very opinionated person.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Thanks for that. Could I ask about expectations from your supervisors and superiors regarding journalistic objectivity? Have you heard any conversations about this or if people talk to you about how they expect you to be objective and what that means?

Tiffany Bui

I think... Yeah, it's hard because there was never a time where people said objectivity means that you shouldn't necessarily participate in protests or believe that black lives matters say that black lives matter. It was a very roundabout sort of... It's, I don't know. It's hard to really explain, but it's something you picked up on as just not expressing political opinions, and not saying anything one way or the other, and getting both sides of the story. As a process of

journalism, as a process of doing journalism objectively, it meant you bring Democrats and Republicans, and you're doing one side of the issue and the other side of the issue.

For example, Minneapolis banned conversion therapy, and my editor didn't push it, but she kind of was like, "Well, you could interview the people who are against banning conversion therapy." I was like, "Okay. Yeah." So it was very much described as a balancing project. It was all about what kind of terms you use and how you use them. For example, "peaceful protestor" versus just "protestor." It was very much a, it was framed as a, "you need to tell both sides of the story."

But the concern that I had later on was that there aren't both sides of the story, and they're not necessarily equal. So I think that's kind of how it was described to me.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Thanks for the clarification. Can I ask about the expectations your audience has expressed to you? Do you think that your audience has expressed similar expectations to your supervisors? Different ones? How so?

Tiffany Bui

I think it depends who my audience is at certain times. Having worked mostly in local publications in Minnesota, I would say the audience that newsrooms most recognize are older white folks, usually more liberal. Minnesota's a pretty blue state – but liberal versus left.

So these are probably folks who have been reading the newspaper for a long time, have been subscribers, probably consider themselves very well-educated and informed, likely college educated. So these people have a certain set of political views informed by their standings in life, and their race, on the money that they have, and being liberal. That is to say that there's perhaps a desire to lean left, but also moderate, moderate-left. And there's the weird Minnesota nice thing going on.

So that audience has different expectations than an audience of older black folks or younger BIPOC who are more active in college activism. It's really depends, but I think that white audience holds the biggest sway in managers' minds that I have seen probably.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So being moderate liberal, as you say, largely white, describing themselves as progressive sometimes, but sometimes also wealthier, Minnesota-Nice. What does this mean to you as far as what you understood, they expected from you as a journalist?

Tiffany Bui

I think they expected some kind of both sides-ism. I never really paid attention to it, but what I thought was it was a lot of stories not about systems, and the way that systems uphold oppression. But the way that – I don't know – little feel good stories about being Minnesotan, or not really talking about race and the way that racism works as a system. But rather as maybe

disparate incidents, a bit of colorblindness, just an avoidance to deal with the really difficult topics about what it means to live in America, or what it means to live in a northern state that was culpable in slavery, even if it wasn't the south.

So a real unwillingness to deal with what racism and white supremacy has looked like historically.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Thinking now about your colleagues and other journalists that you know, do you think that the expectations of newsroom supervisors and your audiences have affected you the same or differently compared to people who are not Vietnamese American, or not people of color, BIPOC.

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. So if expectations of managers have impacted me differently because I'm a person of color then... I don't think so.³ I don't know if, because I... the biggest experience learning experience I had being the journalist that I wanted to be was in a student newsroom, and the leadership was much more horizontal, even though we had the editor-in-chief and a managing editor, we were all the same age. We were all friends. We were all open to discussing what it meant to be a journalist or different things we should try.

I don't know if I say this as a point of pride or just as a fact, but I'm very stubborn, and I don't like to listen to authority. I kind of stick to my beliefs in that I will kind of just not listen if the manager is telling me something that I don't believe is the right option for a story. And I'm really lucky to have lots of friends who have challenged notions of objectivity and challenged status quo journalism, and have affirmed that with me.

So we've learned a lot more from each other than I would say necessarily from any one manager about what it means for a more equitable future of journalism. not to say that I haven't had mentors that have helped me professionally, or helped me think about stories in different ways. They definitely have. But the bulk of my learning experience has been working in the field, and also talking with my peers, and just making lots of mistakes together.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So it sounds like you don't think that the professional expectations and expectations from your audience have affected you very differently as a Vietnamese American or as a person of color compared to other colleagues who are not.

³ Bui later clarified of this response: "I've had the privilege of working under several managers of color, so I believe that's why I haven't felt the burden of these expectations as much."

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I don't think I ever really felt that pressure, myself.

Emeri Burks

Sure.

So I'd like to get some context now, looking at some current events. Could I ask about how you have reacted or related to learning about George Floyd's death?

Tiffany Bui

I think it's been just a really heavy few years to two years... it's been a year, it's been a heavy year. I think I was more reacting to the reaction all around me, specifically of the black community, and different opinions, and just different grief that people were expressing, and friends that I had that were expressing.

I obviously lived through Ferguson. But I was a different age, and I think we were all at a different stage of understanding systems of racism, and what it means to support social justice, and the politics were much different when I was in high school.

I think being older and adult, and more responsible – not only more responsible, more capable of interacting with what this all means; it just like hit differently, I think. By that I meant, I was not only thinking about it as a POC issue, because the truth was that George Floyd was a black man. He was not an Asian man or an Asian woman. Issues of police brutality in the criminal justice system are very different for the black community than it is for the Asian community.

So that was a big thing of confronting what it meant to be a non-black person in this situation, and how to be an ally, but how to be... as a journalist, what that meant for my storytelling, what stories was I telling, and what was I perpetuating. Interpersonally in my community, it meant having to confront the anti-blackness of my family members, and other Asian community members.

And social media is just very loud about what is the right and correct thing to feel. So trying to navigate that, on top of the exhaustion of trying to just cover all the responses, which have been very beautiful and also very terrible in different ways.

It was more of like, how do I react to the reaction, and how do I capture the reaction in a way that is fair to the people who are actually out expressing their grief, and expressing a need for change, I think.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Can I ask similarly how you reacted or responded to a former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I was really surprised that he was guilty on all three counts, and I think we were all worried that the city would burn again, if he didn't. So I was kind of glad about that, just cause it was a very stressful incident.

If people had chosen to burn things down, that's not really my business anyways. But I felt like that was good verdict. But also I heard people say that him being guilty didn't really change anything. It was a historic moment, for sure. But I don't really believe in justice to the criminal justice system as it is. So it didn't mean anything - the guilty verdicts itself didn't really mean a whole lot to me. But I think the sort of corollary... it wasn't more traumatizing or it didn't cause more grief to people I think was helpful.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Can I ask how you personally related to George Floyd's death, sorry – have you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice since the death of George Floyd?

Tiffany Bui

I don't think so because the discussions have been primarily about the way that state violence is used against black people and indigenous people too. That's not something I've experienced, and it's not something my family has experienced. So those discussions primarily, no...

Discussions around defunding the police in Minneapolis. I didn't live in Minneapolis at the time. I didn't really think it was my business to say whether or not the police should be defunded.

But I think conversations about what it means to live in a future without police or a future without prisons was very inspiring to me, in that there were people who are able to gain mainstream traction to simply ask, "Can you imagine what it would be like to live in this kind of world that's maybe more, like kinder, and more gentle, and has a different way of approaching justice.

So that was really inspiring, even if I didn't relate to it.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. And has your experience related to George flood's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests affected your work in any ways? And if so, how?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I think, it's most of what I cover now. I think it might've been most of what I would cover anyways. I work at a project called The Racial Reckoning Project: The Arc of Justice as a contractor. It's a collaboration between KMOJ, which is the local hip hop and culture station, and Ambers, which is a collective of independent radio across Minnesota. Racial reckoning specifically emerged after the murder of George Floyd to cover the Derek Chauvin trial. We

exclusively focused on race in Minnesota, specifically... are on lots of issues, including criminal justice.

So that's like a literal and direct response to what happened. I joined that because I figured that's what I would be covering anyways, even if I wasn't there. So yeah.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Thank you.

So I'd like to go a little bit more theoretical for a little bit. Could I ask how you would describe your role as a journalist?

Tiffany Bui

Well... Yeah, I don't really know. I talk to people and then I write things, and then I just read a bunch of things, and then I like feel and think things, and then they become stuff. I try not to take it... I used to take it really seriously. I do take it seriously as like a profession, and obligation, and responsibility to have to other people and an ethical code.

But I try not to take myself too seriously, in that I need to be this detached... like I am a journalist. But I, myself, am not the fourth estate. I know that journalism as a concept is the fourth estate. But I am not a government official. I'm just a person. So I'm try not to take it too seriously, and be like this stiff human being.

But I think fundamentally my role is to be for the people as vague as that is. Just meaning that I don't feel an obligation to government or businesses. I feel an obligation to regular people who are trying their best, and just deserve to know what's going on, and make informed decisions.

So, yeah, I don't know.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Well, can I ask what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, I think being empathetic, and being fair, being understanding... I don't like the buzzword of anti-racism has become. But understanding the way that white supremacy and different forces have shaped people's lives in that historical and sociological perspective. But also understanding that people have their own truths, and how they interpret that as a person in this world.

Yeah, and I think I would say just those.

Emeri Burks

Sure, that sounds great.

Can I ask these values that you've expressed? Do you ever feel that they are in conflict with the expectations that your supervisors or your audiences have placed upon you?

Tiffany Bui

They can be. I think it kind of depends where I'm working. I applied for an internship at the Minnesota Reformer. It was funded through a grant, so not through the company itself, which meant the application was to the grant foundation or whatever it was.

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." I probably didn't say it that elegantly.

There could have been many reasons why I didn't get the internship. Maybe that question wasn't the make or break. But I like to think that I'm very qualified. I don't know. Actually, maybe that's not true. But, yeah.

So there are times where I feel like just being honest is not great in terms of career advancement or getting jobs. I feel really uneasy every single day, no matter where I work. I never know if I'm doing the right thing or approaching it the right way.

So whether it's real or perceived about what I think my managers or the audience wants from me, whatever that audience is. Even if that audience is a bunch of leftists who believe similar things that I do. Some of those people... like 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. Like even within these groups, there's interpersonal conflict, right? And like calls for accountability.

So I'm like, "Well, do I write about this? Like 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?"

So I'm just uneasy constantly – I think is the answer for sure.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure.

Well, that was an interesting distinction you made earlier. You said that in your interview you don't want do objective political journalism, you want to do truthful and fair journalism. What would you say is the distinction between those two sides?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I think like objective as the definition of the word – I don't actually have a problem with that. 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 to...

Like I can't objectively report on anti-Asian hate legislation. I have a lot of issues with it. I also see the real consequences that anti-Asian hate, whatever that means, can have on the people that I love. But also, I have skin in the game. However it shakes out, I have skin in the game. So I can't just report on it objectively, or take myself out of the equation, which I think is what "objective journalism" asks us to do, is to take ourselves out of the situation, and take our opinions out of the situation. I think if we're being honest, you know, in journalism you can do that. Politicians aren't asked to do that. I don't know why I should be asked to do that.

I think people need to understand news judgment is such a subjective thing, and I think we all just need to be honest that it's subjective.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well said.

So you said that it can, that's your values can conflict with the expectations that your supervisor or your audience has put on you. How do you choose the best course of action in these times where you see a conflict?

Tiffany Bui

I don't know if there's like any way that I approach anything. For example, a prominent activist has been accused of working with law enforcement, or having close ties to the city council. And so I brought that up and I was like, "Hey, we quote her a lot. There's these accusations against her. I think we should reconsider giving her this platform all the time."

I got some pushback saying, "Well, they're just a few tweets. Lots of reporters, lots of activists work with law enforcement or with the city council. That's not really any of our business. She still is out here leading the movement and doing the work, and she's going to continue to be somebody that we cover if she continues holding these events."

And I kind of was like, "Well, that's fair. I'm not trying to put her down. She's a black woman. She's out here doing the work. I'm not even saying that this diminishes her credibility. But I do hope that we will reconsider covering her all the time, maybe covering other people who imagine police reform differently."

That conversation was with another black female journalist that I respect a lot. She has years more experience than I do. I respect her experience and her work far more than many other white male journalists. That aside, she in her own right is a great journalist and there's a lot I want to learn from her. But I think I... I don't know where I stand with that conversation. We're all remote. So we've never met really in person. I felt like I got off on the wrong foot with her with that, and maybe I brought it up in a way that was not correct, or brought it up in a way

that was insensitive, or... I don't know what she thought of that conversation, even though she's not my manager.

So that was a source of conflict in that I felt like I brought up something, and I felt that it was... it wasn't being disregarded, but it was like, "Uhhh no. Maybe not. Like that's not really productive." So there's no real way for me to resolve that except to the next time it comes up, go through the whole decision making process again.

So yeah, I don't know. There's never a good answer for me. Most of the time it's not clear anymore. It's not as easy as, "My editors don't want me to report on racism and I want to report on racism. What do I do?" It's these weird gray lines in which I don't really know what to do.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Do you talk to colleagues or to your editor when this sort of conflict happens?

Tiffany Bui

I talk to my friends a lot who also journalize. I talk to my partner, they're also a journalist. I spend a lot of time on Twitter, which I think I need to stop doing. Yeah, I don't know. I feel like I spend more time thinking about what I should do instead of just actually doing it, and it'd be easier if I just did it.

But I have a lot of unaddressed conflicts that I think at some point I will need to... there will come a point where I'll have to do a story about it, and I'll just have to do something.

So, yeah. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

It sounds like you've got a story in your mind that you're working on there.

Tiffany Bui

I think it's more of like, if this person who is-- there's a couple of activists being accused of different things. But if it comes to a point where we have to address it, if enough people... I don't know if there's, there's not a magic number of people to come out and say this person did me harm. But at some point we cannot ignore it, and we're going to have to make a decision about how to cover it.

Yeah, I don't know. We'll have to do something.

Emeri Burks

Alright. Sure, for sure.

Well, I wanted to get a little bit specific talking about some journalists that conduct. So how do you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and or

perspectives in public forums? In your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised?

Tiffany Bui

Can you repeat the question? Sorry.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, no worries. So how do you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and or perspectives in public forums? What boundaries should be enforced or revised and why?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. I think reporters should be allowed to attend protests on their off time. I think when I was managing editor, I had an editor I was overseeing tell me, "Hey, I am involved with this group, and I'm going to edit a story involving this group. Or, "Hey, I'm going to attend this protest. Just so you know, cause I'm going to be editing the story about this protest." Or, "I'm going to be attending this protest, but I won't be editing a story about it.

She was always very clear about that. Then myself, an editor-in-chief can say, "Yeah, that's fine." Or, "No. Maybe you shouldn't edit the story." But I don't think we should ever be able to stop her from doing that if she wants to, or stop her from tweeting different things, I guess.

I don't have a really good answer in that I don't want to be... I don't ever want uphold a newsroom or work in a newsroom that stops people from expressing their freedom of speech, or speaking up for the things they believe in. I kind of just want to trust reporters that they're not going to say something completely off the rails.

I think there's a difference between saying "You should vote for Bernie" on your Twitter, and saying like, "I believe everyone should have healthcare." And I want to work in a newsroom that helps people understand that difference, if they do not come in already knowing that difference.

Like if you're going to be like a Bernie Stand on social media, maybe I'm going to be a little worried. Not because you're expressing political opinions. But because you have the confidence to just tell people what's right, when as a journalist maybe you think about things in more nuanced ways than standing a politician, or vouching for a politician.

You can express those same things without saying you should vote for Bernie or like, "I support Bernie," just as an example. But I don't think lots of newsrooms are ready to move past just letting people have and express those opinions in different ways. I don't even know if we're there yet, but that's what I would change, I think.

Emeri Burks

For sure. So for you, do you think that there is a professional social media that's separate from private social media for journalists? Do you think there should be? Do you think that there are any norms that should be enforced for how journalists interact on social media?

Tiffany Bui

At the Daily, we used to say if you wanted to express political opinions you would need to have a private Twitter, and it couldn't be affiliated with the Daily. That's where you could express political opinions. I think it's really silly to segment yourself off that way. It's like having a fake Instagram for your political beliefs. That's just super-duper silly. I mean, if you want to, you sure can. I don't think it's necessary.

Yeah, I would be really embarrassed of myself and for the reporter, if I ever had to sit them down and tell them that they were using social media inappropriately. Because they are probably an adult, and they should just know that. But I don't want it to be because I made some adversary rules about you expressed a political opinion on your main, instead of on your burner account. I don't think that's necessary.

Emeri Burks

Sure. One more on journalistic conduct. Do you think that there are some times that a journalist should or should not express, or disclose their own personal bias related to their identity, either in a story or in a public forum?

Tiffany Bui

I think the only time you would need to disclose bias wouldn't be around your identity, but if you were involved with an organization. Like if you were writing a story and you quoted a member of an organization at the end, you said, "I am a member of this organization. I volunteer for this organization. I've worked for this organization in some capacity," I think that's fine.

I think organizational and financial ties are always something you need to disclose. But not necessarily like, "Because my family has been prosecuted by the government, I need to disclose this anytime I write a story about the government."

Emeri Burks

Well, you mentioned for example, that since George Floyd you've come to reflect a lot on your status as a non-black person and how there's certain issues that affect you differently and affect your perspective differently. Would you ever feel the need to disclose the fact that you are not a black person covering a story about social justice or discrimination against black people?

Tiffany Bui

I don't think so. I think there are some stories I just wouldn't tell, cause I'm not the person to tell that story. I think people can tell. They don't have to search too far to figure that out, and I think my sources can probably help also.

So yeah, I don't think I'd ever... Unless someone really wanted me to, I would have to figure out why, but probably not. I'm not really trying to hide it, but like they can figure that out.

Emeri Burks

Well, cool. Thanks. Can I ask, do you think these boundaries in general are shifting as far as the ways that journalists should and shouldn't behave in public forums?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, I think so. I think younger journalists, and black, younger journalists, especially, and a lot of younger journalists of color are driving that change. But I also think just lots of smaller institutions are trying to internally change. And if not, both small and big institutions, long standing and new ones, if they don't feel that personally, there's definitely an audience out there who's going to push them to do so because their expectations of how news is delivered to them and who is writing the news that is delivered to them is changing.

Emeri Burks

Sure. All right, I'd like to change gears a little bit, and kind of go big-scale again thinking about societal need. So based on your understanding, what do you think society needs from the journalism industry at this time? And how do you know that?

Tiffany Bui

I think what America needs in order to just continue to exist as a country... I think what the country needs at this time based on sort of the outpouring of discussion around different issues of equity, is just honesty from journalism – like 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.

I think a lot of institutions are hung up on the transparency part, or the acknowledgement of harm part. So we can't even move past that. Lots of people live in a society, obviously, and they all want different things. So it's kind of presumptuous of me to say, this is what society wants or needs. But I probably am going to continue living in America, and the country that I want to see looks like one that is aided by just more honest and transparent journalism.

I also think that it's fine to kind of want to opt out of changing or fixing those newsrooms that have been around for a long time and have caused harm. I would really love to see more black press – not even press. It can be press, specifically for black communities. But like led by black

journalists, and editors, and editors-in-chief. 'Cause it's not even a diversity or representation thing. It's like a who has power thing?

Like, I don't know. Just hand it over, I guess. It's kind of my, "just hand it over. It's fine."

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, based on your understanding, what does society need from journalists individually? Maybe you, maybe any individual journalists?

Tiffany Bui

I think individually, also honesty. Just level honesty and a frank and open discussion. Like people always talk about how we need to have a discussion on this, and we need to do research on this, or we need to put together a task force on this. And they never really go beyond that. I think that's really frustrating.

But I think as a individual journalists, and as for myself, I try to be transparent with people about the story that I'm going to write and the things that I believe. And then carry that out. So go beyond the saying, "We're going to have a task force." But like, You found out all of these things. Now what are you going to do about it? It's very much a "what are you going to do about it?" for individual journalists.

Which is not to say that I'm doing anything amazing. Mostly what I'm going to do about it is to worry, and try to be involved in lots of newsroom conversations, not shaping how we do the next story. Because that will definitely influence what story is written and what story isn't. Yeah. I don't know. It's a lot of talking. Kind of tired of talking. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, do you feel confident that you will generally be able to meet these needs?

Tiffany Bui

I hope so. I don't know. I'm just trying to figure out my lane, and see if I can meet the needs of that lane. And I don't know what that lane is yet. I don't know how much longer I want to just write about race generally as a big thing. Because I don't really feel qualified.

It's also really exhausting in lots of different ways, which is kind of silly, but also very real. I'm kind of at the end of my rope with journalism for lots of different reasons. Like it's not just because of the industry and its flaws. But also personally, the way that I've approached it has made me very tired.

So, yeah, I don't know is the answer to that question.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Are there some specific obstacles you think that might prevent you from better needing the, the needs of the public?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, I think a lot of journalistic organizations that have the potential to do really good work are underfunded. So on an industry level, they're just not giving enough money. I also think people just don't have time to consume lengthy articles. Like, I want to write these really long, important articles. But if we're being honest, the information that people really need to get, we're not going to find it in a lengthy article.

So I kind of worry about the format in which things are presented. Yeah. So there's not enough resources. I think we need to change the way that we reach audiences. Personally, I'm like very tired and cynical. I think I need to get off Twitter. So I think the feeling of exhaustion that I carry with me everywhere is incredibly unfair and unprofessional to the people who trust me with their stories, and trust that I'm going to tell it well.

I think they deserve a reporter that's going to come to them with more hope and a little bit more motivation. So I don't know if I personally need a break or what. But, yeah.

Emeri Burks

All right. Well, do you think that there's some support that your organization might be able to offer that would help you better meet these needs?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah, I'm a contractor right now, so I don't really work in one newsroom and I don't expect any of them to provide anything more than what they have. But I don't know. 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, the aftermath of police shootings...

I think things just need to slow down and I think newsrooms seem to stop trying to be first, especially in situations where a police has shot and killed somebody, or has just shot somebody. Like they just need to slow down, because otherwise we get what happened to Winston Smith in Minneapolis, in which the Star Tribune called him a murder suspect, and he was not a murder suspect. And that has caused a lot of harm that they have not apologized for really. So...

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well, do you feel confident that the journalism industry at large will be able to meet society's needs at this moment?

Tiffany Bui

Oh... no. But I think different organizations are trying, and I think those organizations that are trying are on the right path, or are willing to experiment and change, need more resources.

Emeri Burks

What might help a journalism industry, better meet these needs, then, on a general level?

Tiffany Bui

I think like... I don't know. I don't really know.

Emeri Burks

That's fair. Yeah. Okay, last question on social need. So do you think that your understanding of social responsibility has influenced your work as a journalist? If so, how? And especially has this changed since the death of George Floyd – social need and social responsibility?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. Yeah, I would say so. I think 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.

Yeah, like to tell stories that aren't usually told, to seek those out, to deliver them in an accessible way. And also as a person navigating those situations, to be empathetic, and kind, and understanding, and patient. So I would say, yeah. I would say it's changed.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thanks.

So, gonna kind of wrap this up, bring this to a close. I want to ask, as a Vietnamese American, as a person of color, what do you feel that others might learn from your unique perspective? What might you offer as a journalist that a white journalist or a person of color journalist who is not Vietnamese American might not offer.

Tiffany Bui

I don't know if I have much different else to offer. Just based on who I am, I think... Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if it's that much... I might have different opinions on the way that racism or white supremacy works on people who are not black or people who are not white. My family has an immigrant background. But I don't...

Yeah. I may think about things differently. But I think substantially there's not anything about the way that I approach like fact-checking or storytelling that I think is different than a lot of people in general. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So what do you hope that others might learn from this study based on the questions that we've been discussing and the fact that we're talking to a diverse range of journalists for the study?

Tiffany Bui

Yeah. What I hope people will learn from this study? I hope they'll learn that there are people who are willing to make journalism different, and they're working really hard to make it

different, and they're imagining a future of what a different, more equitable journalism looks like, and I hope that people will care enough to think about it.

Like not even care enough to be like, "Subscribe to local journalism." But care enough to think about how the media can better serve you, and serve your needs, and keep you informed; and engage with that rather than just writing it off as either a giant force of just "the media," or something that's inherently wrong, or something that's not fixable. Because there are people who are trying to change it, and it's really unfair to those people who are trying to change it, to just write it off like that.

Emeri Burks

Alright, sure.

Now that was the last scripted question I had. But I did want to take a moment to see if there is an area that you felt could be filled in more, an area that we didn't touch on as much as you wanted to.

So just as a reminder, we've talked about professional expectations set by your supervisors, superiors, and your audience; differences in how these expectations might affect people of color versus white people, and individual racial and ethnic minorities. We talked about your reaction and relation to George Floyd, to Derek Chauvin, and conversations of racism, racial violence, Black Lives Matter protests; talked about your ideas about what it means to be a journalist, so your values that guide you, and how you handle conflicts between values and expectations. Also talked a bit about some specific journalistic conduct points that have especially been in the news lately. Then we went on to talk about your understanding of social need, what society needs from you, from journalism, and what can help both better meet those needs.

So is there anything that we've talked about that you'd like to go back to, or touch on a little bit more?

Tiffany Bui

I don't think so. I think we covered, I think, everything.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Awesome.

Well, that's my last question then. So I very much have appreciated this interview. I thank you for making the time to speak with me. Now I'm going to turn off the recording while we just discuss a few wrap up points.

Interview 2 – Jasmine Snow – June 5, 2021

Emeri Burks

Hey there Jasmine. Hi Jasmine, this is Emeri. How you?

Jasmine Snow

Hi Emery, I'm good. How are you?

Emeri Burks

I'm doing good. Just checking. Do you have access to a camera right now?

Jasmine Snow

I do not currently.

Emeri Burks

You do not. OK, OK gotcha. So that's fine. I will take what I get, what I can get.

So how are you doing?

Jasmine Snow

I'm good, how are you?

Emeri Burks

I'm doing alright. I'm really glad that you decided to participate in the study.

I did get to the form that you sent over and I think that will be fine. I'll print out a copy and sign it and send it back to you so you have that as soon as I can as well.

I did want to start by asking if you had any questions about it. Anything about the process or perhaps even about me that you wanted to get to know before we started our interview?

Jasmine Snow

Nothing major. I guess the only other question is just, I suppose what drew you to this area to want to do this area to want to do sort of thing.

Emeri Burks

Sure. This last year has been eventful and I was personally particularly moved by the reporting that was coming out around, especially June of 2020 of last year, but July as well. But really in the few months immediately after the death of George Floyd, I did see what I perceived to be a shift in especially BIPOC reporting. But reporting at large. And it seems to hint at some greater tectonic shifts... I don't want to put words in your mouth by getting too much, too many ideas in there, but for me it seemed like there were a lot of eventful things going on that it was really worth focus.

I really wish I could tell you a bit more right now, but I would love to get your, uh, your perspective on this a little bit more.

But is there a more specific question you have about how I got started on this that I could answer?

Jasmine Snow

Uh, no, I don't think so. I actually just got to where I am, so I'm setting up the camera now

Emeri Burks

Oh really? OK.

Jasmine Snow

Yeah. Sorry, I told you I was traveling, and I was, but...

Emeri Burks

No, I'd love to have you on video if that's OK. I did see that you opted into sharing identifiable information as well as like footage from this interview. Is that right?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, definitely whatever you need. Whatever works.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. But that's really helpful honestly. While I'll be taking a lot of the data that I collect from these interviews and forming it... Oh, hi there. Great to see you. Yes.

And there before me... I had that exact lava lamp for years, that's a good lava lamp.

Jasmine Snow

Oh my... wonderful...

Emeri Burks

Yeah, but while I'll be gathering a lot of different data and doing a thematic analyses of what different things participants are saying, I think that some of the most powerful material that this study can really yield is journalists speaking from their own personal perspectives, and especially in the spirit of a BIPOC journalists really needing to be heard and seen more now I wanted to be a part of that if I could. so I appreciate you being on video and being a part of this. Any other questions before we get started then?

Jasmine Snow

No, no, I don't think so. Feel free.

Emeri Burks

Alright, awesome. Let me check audio levels really quick. Would you mind just saying something really quick for me just so I can hear how loud you are.

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, definitely. I have a set of headphones also I can grab if we need better audio.

Emeri Burks

Oh, this sounds good. No need. I think I got you right now. So awesome. I am recording. We've already discussed the waiver and, and, uh, I expect this interviews should take around an hour or so.

So I'm going to, uh, mute myself and just use Spacebar one sec.

OK, so to get started would you mind telling me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Jasmine Snow

Well my name is Jasmine Snow. I was a former reporter with the Minnesota Daily and did freelance work. I currently I'm on a bit of a reporting hiatus, but I do do a lot of diversity and inclusivity work on their diversity content board at The Daily, and still doing freelance work.

Emeri Burks

Awesome and you mentioned your pronouns, were she/they? Is that correct?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, yes.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, can I ask what race or identity or ethnicity you identify with or as?

Jasmine Snow

Sure, I primarily identify as black. I am biracial – black and white.

Emeri Burks

Sure, and um, can I ask also your age.

Jasmine Snow

Yes. I am... I'm 20. I'm 20 years old.

Emeri Burks

You're twenty. Oh my goodness, you're making me look bad over here. OK, that's great. I did want to check - you're currently on reporting hiatus, but have you been serving as a reporter in the year since George Floyd died? Yes, yes.

Jasmine Snow

Yes, yes.

Emeri Burks

Great great. That was a requirement for this study. So happy to tick that one off.

Alright, can I ask you to briefly describe your background in journalism?

Jasmine Snow

Sure, I suppose I started doing the journalism... started getting interested in the end of my years in high school. I'm currently, I... well, I'm going to be junior in college. I am majoring in journalism. I started at the daily which is the college paper at the University of Minnesota my freshman year – just before I started my freshman year, so it's been about a year, almost two years of being employed there.

So there's that background. Like I said, freelance work with the primarily the Minnesota Spokesman Recorder, which is the Black Press in the Twin Cities. Other freelance work... and then I work on the Content Diversity Board at the Minnesota Daily, which is just a kind of educational tool that deals with diversity.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. Sure. So you have been in a few different places despite like starting really young in here. I'm wondering when you were trained into these different positions and your expectations were made clear by your supervisors or superiors, employers, what expectations did they make to you about your professional role as a journalist?

Jasmine Snow

Uh, could you? I'm sorry, could you repeat that? Or let's clarify a little bit.

Emeri Burks

For sure, for sure. So I'm interested in knowing the expectations that were set for you as you understood them by those who trained you in, those who hired you in. What comes to mind is fine for this, but how did you understand their expectations of you when you were hired on as a professional journalist.

Jasmine Snow

Sure, OK, uhm.

Yeah, so when I worked, when I started at The Daily, I was in a position that was actually new. It was called the National Headlines Beat on City Desk. So that was an entirely new beat, so 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 kind of kind of creative pitches, kind of curating the beat essentially based off of what reporting they had done and what I was interested in.

I was primarily interested in a lot of community reporting when it came to national issues and things like that so... I suppose the expectations were pretty loose. General professionalism. I will say The Daily was already when I got there very progressive in terms of what they expected when it came to objectivity in reporting, which played a role in need me staying employed there. But also really enjoying the work environment.

Other kind of freelance gigs, at the time, I suppose the expectation was also open communication. Working at a black press especially, I started freelancing after George Floyd

had been murdered and so... kind of just being honest with that and doing some of that more central reporting or commentary, I suppose was the expectation there. But yeah, those were some of the first things that come to mind.

Emeri Burks

Great and you mentioned professionalism and objectivity. Would you mind speaking a little bit more to your understanding of these words as you're as you were expected to perform?

Jasmine Snow

Sure, I think being young (as if I was young a year ago), being younger and initially getting into journalism, I think that there was that traditional understanding of objectivity of being, you know, as removed as you could be from really anything considered political or personal getting involved into your job – So you know, abstaining from publicly admitting to having any opinions, or favorability of any candidates, that kind of thing.

But really, what I felt going into it was, it was very much set by white men, right? As the industry standards often are, and so I never really was a fan of that anyway. But then kind of getting to The Daily, the people at The Daily, the editors really had no expectation of that. They said, you know, be professional in terms of, you know, don't I suppose you know, go on these big rants about subjects or people that you may report on. But you can be honest about your thoughts and feelings as long as you do what we decided to term “fair and accurate reporting” rather than what is traditionally known as like “balanced reporting” or “both sides reporting.”

So that was kind of my... I switched up at the time, which was very nice. I think the J School, the journalism school at the University of Minnesota is also really good about it as well, of just not pushing this belief, that objectivity in the traditional sense of you know remoteness exists – which it doesn't, and I think they do a good job of teaching that.

Emeri Burks

Alright, well said. Along similar lines I'm also interested in the expectations that have been placed on you by your audience as you understood them. Do you think that these are very similar or different to the expectations your employers have set up on you?

Jasmine Snow

You know, it's tricky I think. When you think of an audience, there's often a bit of a gap, I've noticed anyway, with who engages with the content – like who comments on the websites, who sends emails, versus who may be actually reading, enjoying, and learning from the stories that we're getting.

I noticed this more when I started posting and interacting with my own content, my own stories on social media, which I kind of lagged a bit in the beginning.

I think they have a very different idea of what journalism is and what journalism is supposed to do. And I think that that's a fault on the industry itself of kind of educating and being transparent with the public and what we're meant to do.

I don't know a great way to put this, but essentially they expected us to do something that was not our job, or they expected me to be doing something that wasn't necessarily my job. They would point out faults with the campus or faults with an administration when I would be doing administrative reporting, or make generalizations about college students.

And it's like, well, that this isn't what I personally think – the commenters that I would think to the commenters on the website. You know, these aren't things that I think these are just what I'm telling you people are saying. So there seems to be some kind of gap in that knowledge anyway.

Emeri Burks

OK, so administrative issues it sounds like your audience was bringing up in critiques or comments. How are you finding out what their expectations were? Social media emails, direct contact?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, so there is a... I don't know if there still is, but there was comment sections at the end of articles. So you could often find... and it tended to be more conservative individuals commenting or extremist individuals commenting.

So we'd see those interaction on social media. I got a few pretty colorful emails in my time at The Daily, phone calls every now and again. Sometimes it would happen during the recording process – I would call someone to tell them who I was, what organization I'm with. And they'd be like, 'Oh, The Daily. Here are my thoughts on that.' So I have some lovely audio sound bites of that. But yeah it was pretty direct contact.

Emeri Burks

OK, OK. Now on the topic of expectations, also, do you think that these expectations placed on you by your employers as well as the audience have been the same for you and your colleagues? Or have they been different in anyways?

Jasmine Snow

I think some... For the most part, they've been the same. Like I said, I think, at least in terms of the audience. Again, it's that lack of understanding what journalism or what my job actually is. And what I'm doing that tends to be the issue. I do have my own like fears and sometimes run into this when I get emails of people assuming because I am a woman, or female identifying person, or because I am black – You know we have like a little profile box on The Daily website, and I obviously have social media – just assuming that I may be more left leaning or that I am

more left leaning, more biased and unable to report certain things because I am black, and I am a woman, and I am a queer person.

So when I report on issues like George Floyd, that was like a concern that I had immediately, was... Oh my God, my reporting is going to be completely discounted because they're going to say I'm too involved – Whatever that means exactly.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha, gotcha. Have you seen anything to suggest that people have had different expectations because you were a woman, or a person of color, or a queer person?

Jasmine Snow

Do you mean generally or just since I've been reporting.

Emeri Burks

Well, have you seen evidence from your employers or from your audience that did target the fact that you are a woman, or a person of color, or a queer person? You mentioned that you were afraid of this of being perceived in a certain way, and that you might not be able to be as objective. But have you seen evidence to suggest people have had these expectations of you?

Jasmine Snow

Sure, for my employers, definitely not. My employers are wonderful. They've done wonderfully. For my intended audience, no. From like the university campus, no. I'm from... I'm currently, am from here in South Dakota. So sometimes when I send articles back home, like I do get some of those kind of comments are kind of leanings, kind of dog whistle comments in that direction of like, "Oh well, that makes sense but you'd think that. You know so, but that's something that I've grown up with, and obviously why I had that fear. So it's not surprising, I suppose.

Emeri Burks

Sure, would you mind sharing an anecdote on that topic? Someone who said it's not surprising that you think or would speak in a certain way – something you remember?

Jasmine Snow

The best that I have, I guess available, was I think an old teacher... I was very outspoken in high school, and very intense and my beliefs, and so this could be just belief based. But the literal term was, "oh, it makes sense that like you..." I can't remember word for word. But it was essentially like, "Oh, of course, your writing on this." Or "I could definitely see where you would be interested in this."

So no. It wasn't as bad as what I had feared. If that's... to summarize, sorry.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well you mentioned some fears, but you haven't mentioned specific times where people said "I expect this and this and this because you are a black or a woman." Tell me where do you think these fears came from?

Jasmine Snow

I think it's definitely... Well, I think I was holding that original traditional sense of objectivity, which I mentioned before, and just knowing, like I personally couldn't fit that mold, and that I didn't have any intention to. And again, like I said, kind of how and where I was raised – very like majority white, conservative area. And being more outspoken as I was I was often discounted or assumed to believe different things growing up outside of journalism. You know, opinions that I would have because like "Oh well, of course you're going to believe this about this group or other things because you know you are..." or like yeah.

Sorry, my mind just went blank.

Emeri Burks

Not at all. Not at all. You're doing great. So it sounds like you do have some experience of people expressing their expectations of you growing up, not specifically about journalism, but about other areas.

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I think that kind of just bled over into journalism where I went into it being like, oh, they're going to expect this with me. I got here and it turns out that they don't. But I think I just carry that as a self-issue sometimes.

Emeri Burks

All right, cool.

I wanted to move on from expectations into a little bit more timely matters. I was hoping you could tell me about your personal reaction to learning about George Floyd's death.

Jasmine Snow

Sure, you mean generally, or like timeline wise.

Emeri Burks

Generally, personally... I want to set some context to how this struck you. I know that some journalists, for example, were very removed and their relationship to events were very professional and only in the matter of reporting. Others knew people in the family, others knew people to whom similar events had happened to family or friends. Was this a personal instance for you in any way?

Jasmine Snow

Sure, I suppose I think living in the city at the time, or I had been living in the city, so I was a freshman in college when it happened May. I've been home because of COVID. I came back to South Dakota, but I had got the news alert that it happened. I was working in The Daily when it happened and it was a city in which I had been trying to call home and learn.

And you know, after growing up hearing about all these different instances of, you know those "police involved killings" and whatnot, it was very striking in that way for it to happen somewhere in which I was, had been actually living. So it was personal in that way, but I didn't know anybody at the time. I don't personally know people who have been... who had that injustice. I have my own fears of the police and concern where the police are involved and skepticism in that way. But it wasn't personal in the ways that you have described.

It wasn't particularly shocking. Again, because growing up hear all those you know instances of it happening before. I think I was just so surprised that it happened where it did. I had a very different vision of what Minneapolis was because I wasn't from there initially. It was odd in that way. And then to be in a position of power, kind of, to... I don't know...

I think anytime that I had heard that narrative of the unarmed black men killed by police before, being younger I had always just felt so angry and so helpless, because you know, who was I? Just some teenager living where I did. But now I was a reporter. I am a person who can write stories, and I... the path is the reason why I got into this, was to make change and to do some good. And now I had a position to do that, so I felt like I had to do everything all at once.

So that was kind of my personal reaction, I suppose at the time

At the time.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, well can you tell me did you have a personal reaction to former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah I yeah. I did. Yes. I was... So when that when the verdict came out I was in the city, and I was living there. I live kind of centrally on campus and that day actually we've noticed an increased military presence right where I was living. It's called Stadium Village.

It's so complicated. I didn't even know. On one hand, you know you kind of just expect injustice at that point, and so I didn't even know what I was expecting. I thought it would be lunacy if you know nothing was going to happen. But at the same time, how do you expect better?

I didn't have Internet at the time, so I actually... We've been anticipating the verdict that day, and so we were... I was walking with my roommate to go get tea, and this lady was in her car on the road and she started clapping and cheering, and I was like – The verdict can't be out

already. Lo and behold we get to the tea shop later, and I finally get Internet and I checked in – Yep, that's the verdicts. That's... He's guilty. And I, I don't know.

It was odd to me that we had spent so long doing as much work as we did, to do as much change as we did, to just get the verdict on this random day, you know. And it wasn't random. There was obviously a lot of buildup to it. But it was just a weird time I think, so...

Emeri Burks

Right, it does seem like you had a personal reaction to this, perhaps more so than to George Floyd's death is, would you say that's accurate?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, I think so I think... I don't think I knew what was going to happen when George Floyd happened when the murder happened, I don't think I knew that it was going to be quite what it was. 'cause that I'd never... I mean... not that it had never happened before – the uprisings and the change and...

I think I had just done so much work, and we had all done so much work in that year, After that, Following that to then, finally, then, to be like, “yes, he is guilty.” The murder that we all saw on tape actually happened.

You know, and the community is that you've reported on for a year, they are finally getting something that they've asked for. Yeah, I suppose it was more personal 'cause it was... I had invested work in that way.

Emeri Burks

Right, all right. Similarly, what sort of personal response or relationship have you had to the recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice since George Floyd's death last year.

Jasmine Snow

Oh, good Lord. It's been a time hasn't? It's been very exhausting, personally. I've been very involved, I think, relative to not being involved anyway. But like I said, my work on the content board means that we do a lot of work with reporters both in our newsroom and outside of our newsroom. We come up with recording guides. We field a lot of questions every day. Since then, I've also... we had a reporting class at the J School that I served as Editor-in-Chief of, where we put out a publication called Access New Black on Campus. So we reported on black students for a semester, so fielded a lot of questions, did a lot of work that way, and talks about violence and systemic injustice.

For a while there I didn't realize quite how, I don't know, exhausting I suppose it is, how much it demands of you. Because I've never partaken in so many before, to be actually heard. And then I think after you're doing it, it was just so draining and tiring.

Some are good. Then they work and some people learn things and earnestly wanted, you know, learn, I suppose. But there is this kind of, you know, time when you... I described it as essentially just talking to white people about race and answering questions from white people about racism, of... You know they're learning very basic things that I've dealt with, and nuances and everything my entire life, and I have to sum it up in a 10 minute conversation. And you know, things land, things don't land. It's been tough, I think, but good in a lot of other ways too.

Emeri Burks

Sure, it sounds like you're already answering this next question a little bit. I was going to ask, has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests affected your work in any ways? Could you speak to how that might have affected your work? How it's changed, the quality, quantity of your work?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, it was, it definitely changed my work. I guess it adds another layer of understanding how little a lot of white people understand breaks and racism in the United States. And so that way when I write about these issues, I'm both trying to meet where a lot of people might be as an audience, particularly as a white audience, or just a non-black audience, I guess. Depends on the situation.

So meeting them there while also paying heed to the actual authentic experience that my sources or that the story kind of requires. And then also, I don't know, just kind of being... I don't know the way to phrase this, but essentially the things that are happening aren't necessarily new. There was one instance that was very new, but the conversations we're having, they're not new. The issues aren't new. White consciousness is just becoming aware of them. So somehow getting that across in a you know 12-inch article and then, yeah, it's just kind of all the nuance that comes with it.

Essentially, it's just been a year of learning how to communicate nuance, which is what journalism is anyway. But it's especially hard at this time when everybody is really viewing a lot of things, sometimes through how they can better themselves and how they can learn the most out of very little.

Emeri Burks

Right, all right. Well, that kind of brings us a little bit more into your role as a journalist itself. Would you mind first just describing how you conceive your role as a journalist?

Jasmine Snow

Sure. Yeah, well, that's actually a big part of what I'm trying to figure out now. But this last year I guess what I found is – I really want to make lasting change both to the world but also to the industry and how things are, and how we do things. Trying to be as thoughtful as possible, really understanding my intentions with whatever I report. I really enjoy community reporting – things that do actual good to actual people. And just being, I suppose, honest and transparent

as you can be, and this is very general, but just thinking of the communities that I report in the issues that I report on. And that's important.

One thing that I found in the last year is that I am not really a chaos reporter. Uhm, I don't really enjoy.

Emeri Burks

Tell me more on that. What does that mean?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, definitely. So I'm not a big the like the fiery protests and the riots. That isn't something that holds my interest when it comes to reporting on racial justice, the shootings, the violence war correspondents. You know, I'm not a chaos reporter.

I like the periphery. I've noticed and I think this is very true that industries and institutions will take advantage of times like George Floyd to, you know, use his name or use black, or use any of the other kind of buzzwords that get floated around to hide during times when people are so fired up, and so pushed to extremes to just not do anything at all. So I really like that periphery reporting where I can do it.

Emeri Burks

Also, you mentioned transparency and honesty. What sort of values would you identify for yourself that are important for your work as a journalist?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, I think empathy. Yeah just really, I don't know ,understanding of human elements is really important, and that's something that I really hope that I can do pretty well, I'm... not as a bragging thing, but my editors tell me this, like I'm really good at sourcing. I always feel weird saying that, but it's so exciting.

Emeri Burks

It's a great skill to have.

Jasmine Snow

Right? I hope so. But no sourcing and just getting to know people, and really sitting down, and being more conversational than transactional I think is another key thing that I think I'm good at, and work with sources that helps you get to other sources when you're not like, give me these things, and like I really want to know what you're going through – your story here. Who else could I maybe talk to about that and keeping up with them is something that, I hope...

Emeri Burks

Sure. Just to reiterate, it sounds like you're saying that personal relationships with your sources and the people that you're talking to on the ground, that this is a particularly valuable value for you.

Jasmine Snow

100% that is, in fact, that's the only way that I was able to report during the early work of post-George Floyd life. I was in South Dakota for that summer, and I was still reporting on the ground, but away from the craft, I guess. Because I had had such a really large and involved source base the year prior.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Well, these values that you've identified. Do you find that they ever conflict with your professional expectations as you understand them, and if so, how?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, definitely they do. In a lot of different ways. Sometimes, you know, really seeing the human elements and really empathizing means that I don't quite root for sources, but really just get involved in that way. And really... I guess sometimes forgetting the people that I talked to or the people whose stories I tell, they can also be harmful to individuals, or they can also be sources or institutions of power, or belong to them anyway, in their own right. So it kind of helps sometimes will... It doesn't make me forget, but it can be easy to or tempting to forget that, "Oh, I actually still have to hold this person who I've invested so much time and personal accountability with, I also have to hold them to the mark essentially.

And I guess passion, you know. I will get really passionate in an area and be like this is so important, this is the thing that we all have to pay attention to because it means a lot, and it does to me and to this person, and to you know their social bubble. But like in the grand scheme, there's still so much more when it comes to reporting and proof and veracity that you need for reporting, and just to move on with your life. So sometimes that can happen too.

Emeri Burks

Sure, so in these instances, how do you choose the best course of action? Your values are saying one thing your expectations are saying another. What do you do? What does it look like for you?

Jasmine Snow

Well, thankfully, in my time I've had brilliant, amazing just the best editors that you could really ask for, who also hold similar values. But it's their job to really push me along so I don't always have to do it myself.

And honestly, I just often get dragged along by time, and commitment. I have some lunch. I have so many other things to do. We have quota. So I gotta get to it, so I can't always undo that I suppose.

I don't know. That's something that I'm still working on to be quite honest with you. But I think taking a level-headed approach where I can... and just sitting myself down and being like, "All

right, well this is all very true and very nice. But here's a person who doesn't know what the hell you're talking about when it comes to anything. So let's do it for this person." You know?

Emeri Burks

Sure. Alright, well I wanted to ask then how you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and/or perspectives in public forums.

How do you view these? In your opinion, are there boundaries that should be enforced? Are there boundaries that should be revised?

Jasmine Snow

Sure. I don't know, I think especially living in the world where we do where it's that kind of constant exposure by means of, you know, social media... Not to be 80. I don't really hate social media that much and don't think it's like the root of all problems. But I think just understanding the difference between the personal-private space in the public, and also it being public.

I don't know. Personally, I just evaluate a journalist's work. I evaluate what they put out, and sure I take into account their personal history and opinions and thoughts that have been made available to me. I think... a strength in that is understanding what can really be hidden, I suppose, or what a person can often hide even without those. Which I think I have like taken to learn from my time, my time as a person of color, in my life of being black, of just really understanding that, "Oh yes, this person is very nice and sweet, and they do really effective work. However, I know they may treat me very nicely and very well because of their connection to me. However, the way they view the world in the way that they would go about things for others in a more like conservative or discriminatory manner."

I don't like that, I guess. That's very big. I'm sorry, but...

Emeri Burks

Not at all. Not at all. Well, for example, you're talking about social media. Do you feel there should be a professional side that is separate from the private? Do you feel that there should be no private for the professional journalists? Something in between? Or something different altogether?

Jasmine Snow

Oh gotcha, no. I definitely don't. I think people are entitled to their private selves. They should have that like, I think that there are people who are like, "Journalists shouldn't vote." I think that's ridiculous. You know journalists are people. They should not be farmed like animals. They should have their time in their life, I think.

I don't know anything outside of literally the moment in which you are doing your job. You should not be beholden to that industry. I think you should be prepared and understand the consequences that come with that, like. I don't know if a journalist is running an OnlyFans

account, like I think that's fine if they're doing that. I think there are certain consequences to be expected with that.

But like I personally, I don't know. Oh my goodness. I'm so sorry.

Emeri Burks

Do you need to take a call?

Jasmine Snow

I do not, no. I just didn't know that was coming through. Sorry about that.

Emeri Burks

Not at all. Not at all.

Jasmine Snow

But yeah. Essentially, I think people should be entitled to their private lives. Yeah, I suppose. I don't know. I don't... I think of the two extremes, right? I think of like the provocative which we see sometimes and like Nazis... But.

I don't know. I think that's it's something that gets determined on a case by case basis, I suppose.

Emeri Burks

Well, let me ask you a little bit more of a specific instance that does come from the news. If a journalist were to post something on social media which revealed perhaps their own personal bias on their own personal social platforms, and it ends up affecting the audiences' impressions of the publication at large, is this journalist themselves responsible for that loss of faith? That loss of readership, perhaps?

Jasmine Snow

Before I answer. Is this the AP incident? Is this what happened with AP?

Emeri Burks

Among others, yeah.

Jasmine Snow

Gothca. OK. I like I said I'm kind of 80 secretly so...

Emeri Burks

Yeah.

Jasmine Snow

unclear ... Twitter. So, got you. OK.

I don't... I think people should use much more critical thinking skills than they do sometimes. I will say. But, I don't know. I don't think it should necessarily like impact the credibility of the

institution entirely, nor should the institution literally fire reporters for doing certain things in that light. Again, I think that comes from an audience issue in a dissonance between what the audience thinks journalism is and what journalists should do, versus what we actually do. I come back to that gap quite a lot. Which I think is an industry failing quite honestly, but...

Emeri Burks

Would you mind speaking a little bit more to that? What that gap is, and what implications there are for it.

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, I think it... it's like a lot... Obviously, it's like pretty complicated of just expecting media literacy I guess. I think it involves a lot more transparency than we have, and a lot more guides and education when it comes to how like reporters should come into certain spaces or act with certain people, made available to an audience. I think The Daily has literally a reporter's guide on their website.

Like here's what reporters ask you. Here's what you can expect, and ask from reporters, whatever. And that should be made more available education wise to audiences. I don't know. I think "the media," journalists... I hate the media... Journalism should do a better job somehow. These are lofty goals, but somehow getting that communication both to reporters and to their audience.

I know it's a whole mess.

Emeri Burks

Well I I do have more questions on that a little bit later on and would love to get into that. But I did have a just a couple more on specific instances of journalistic conduct. Say for example, public disclosure of bias. How do you feel about this as a journalist?

Jasmine Snow

I'm very pro public disclosure bias as a journalist. I have... it depends on what you classify as bias, though. Obviously. Some people classify certain things as bias, some people not. I don't think it should be forced. I think that should be an entirely voluntary, like venture, though I'm not so disillusioned as to think that if some journalists do it, that's not going to then add this extra pressure of like, "Well if you don't say anything, you're basically saying yes."

I don't want that to be a pressure. I'm pro it. I personally would do it more or I do do it, I guess. I'm very open on my public accounts.

I think it's good and again it just calls into question what do you consider bias? Like I'm open about my race, my sexuality, my gender. But I wouldn't consider those biases necessarily. They're just basic facts of my human condition and how I see the world.

Emeri Burks

Sure, awesome. One more. You mentioned journalist voting and not voting. But what about journalists being involved in community programs or in activism, say for example, joining a Black Lives Matter protest. Do you think this should or does impact the organization the publication in any adverse ways?

Jasmine Snow

I think it does. I don't think it should. I think journalists should be able to interact and engage with their community in any which way that they want to. I think that that will obviously lead to... or can, I shouldn't say, "well, obviously." Again, I'm thinking at very opposite ends of the spectrum. I think about Black Lives Matter protests and then, I think of Nazis. So because we have those again, or still.

So I think of both ends of the spectrum of like, well, you know if there's a Nazi going to a Nazi parade like I'd want to know, and then I wouldn't trust that journalist. However, I don't think the same applies to a Black Lives Matter protest and a person who goes to that.

But regardless, I think journalists should be able to interact with their community and with their beliefs in any which way that they see fit, and then we should all be able to make informed decisions after that, I suppose.

Emeri Burks

Sure, well one more just on journalistic conduct. Then do you think that these boundaries that we're discussing are shifting right now in the wake of George Floyd's death? If so, how?

Jasmine Snow

Definitely, I think that they're shifting. I think one of the major things that like leads to the... it has been pretty like tectonic, pretty major shifts, and I think that's mainly come from the new like, I'll say credibility, but just generally like power that journalists of color, particularly black journalists got after George Floyd's murder. Like I think a lot of newsrooms found themselves with their pants down when it came to how they were treating their journalists of color, and how they were conducting themselves.

And so I think... or at least I've heard definitely, like a lot of journalists of color really got a lot of power and really got a lot of say in how they cleaned that up. So I think that led to a lot of the shifting there.

And yeah, I think it's always been a pretty hazy boundary and I think it will continue to be. But yeah, I'd say it's shifting.

Emeri Burks

Sure.

Now, you've studied a lot of journalism and I know that, we oftentimes think in terms of different camps of thought in journalism. I wonder if you're familiar with the Free Press School of thought versus the Social Responsibility school of thought in professional journalism.

Jasmine Snow

My journalism 10 oh 1 professor would not be very impressed with me right now. I have studied them. Currently I remember nothing about either.

Emeri Burks

All right, so if I was to ask if your understanding of social responsibility has influenced your work as a journalist, maybe your answer would be no.

Jasmine Snow

Maybe...? I'm so sorry I don't.

Emeri Burks

That's completely fair, yes.

Jasmine Snow

I'm so sorry.

Emeri Burks

Not at all. It is what it is.

Jasmine Snow

Completely.

Emeri Burks

Alright, well let me ask in a different way then based on your understanding, what does society need from the journalism industry at this time and how do you know that?

Jasmine Snow

Sure. Oh God... Yeah, I think chiefly transparency, which I know SPJ Code of Ethics, it's like up there. But it needs more of, I think, all the work that it does of what it's going through. I think it needs much more transparency than it has to let its audience and the rest of the industry kind of know where it's at and what it's doing, and source of accountability. I think more media reporters would be wonderful if people who, like reporters who are specifically dedicated to reporting on the industry would be great.

Again better media literacy materials and resources made available. I understand like SPJ and a lot of other organizations and even like organization-organization newsrooms try to do this. But they need to do it better because it's obviously not working.

But I shouldn't say it's not working. Obviously, like we've recovered from like the lows of, I think 2016 and 2018 when it came to like trust. But trust is one thing, and literacy is another. So, I think those are the chief things that it needs right now.

Just to understand, just to like have some kind of an even way of like, "Hey audience. This is what we do. Right? You get that?" "Yeah, great. Here's what we expect of you, journalists." You know that conversation needs to be on a much more even playing field than it is. 'Cause the conversations that I'm seeing right now oftentimes are just way out of left field. That would be lovely, I think.

Emeri Burks

All right. Along the same lines, what do you think that that society needs from individual journalists? Perhaps you or any other journalist?

Jasmine Snow

Sure. That's again, that's what I'm trying to figure out now. Like I said, I got in this to do good things and make change and I don't even know what that is anymore. I think again, just that empathetic approach – not forgetting the human element. You know, doing your best not to sensationalize things when these things happen, and more context. You know, not letting... society is very good... well, "society." I'm not 80. I think it's very easy, kind of in reporting sensationalizing through way of making it seem like, right now, this is news because it's happening right now and it's only happening now and it's only ever happened now. You know, not everybody wants to read a history lesson, when you read an article. That's why you read articles. However, sometimes you need one, even a little one, even just for some context. I think that's fair to the public. I think doing anything else is kind of a disservice.

But it's certainly easier to do so. I've done, you know, a bad job at that in my own time.

Emeri Burks

Well, sure. Well do you feel confident generally that you will be able to meet these needs? Why are we not?

Jasmine Snow

I hope so. I certainly want to. I go into reporting with the intention to do so. I think the culture of reporting, of the quick and immediate deadlines, and the immediacy you know, as soon as the story happens it starts dying – like that kind of school of thought – makes it a very hard principle and a very hard thing to hold onto. So it's a shaky hope. Not where confidence maybe should be. It's a shaky hope.

Emeri Burks

All right, well you started to speak on this. What obstacles, if any, do you think prevent you from meeting the needs of the public then?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah definitely. Again, the big one of just understanding meeting my understanding and yeah, the time constraints. Things are just so immediate and happening all the time. For example like I had a story earlier this year about partying happening on campus, and you know we have photographic evidence or social media so like it's all over Twitter, it's all over the news, and you know people are coming out with these half reports of you know what's required? What's not, and I wanted to get a full body story of like well, whose responsibility is it? Is it the university, you know, all that sort of thing.

This was in the height of COVID, obviously. This was back in September, and I had a professor at the university emailing me being like what are you waiting for? The Daily is failing its service to the public. Are you waiting for the University's approval. And it's like, "No dude. I'm waiting to like do my job. What are you talking about?"

So that, like immediacy expectation both from editors and from the industry of... you know, you have quotas and whatever, and also from the audience of... well, I saw this thing happening on Twitter. What's the? What's the scoop?

Can be very damaging to that.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So what sort of support from your organization, from Minnesota Daily or other organizations you work with would help you better meet these needs?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, I think The Daily does a pretty good job of that understanding of like you know, it's a story. It's news. We're either going to get it, or we're not. We can always put up a brief or something. I think the breaking news breeds kind of, not excuse, but like way of getting a story out there is always like nice. Not always what you want but is good. The Daily does really good at supporting you through those times. We are technically like a student outlet, so I think that learning curve expectation is nice.

I don't know. I think other outlets and everyone, if everyone could just slow down a little bit that would be nice.

Yeah, I don't know. I think that more so comes from, you know, what the audience expects. I think it's... we're being driven by demand here, so there's that.

Emeri Burks

Sure, well then larger scale. Do you feel confident that the journalism industry at large will be able to meet society's needs at this time? Why or why not?

Jasmine Snow

I don't know. You know, I think the very nature of the interaction of the industry and the public is that both constantly change, and respond to each other based off of how they've changed. So by the time we've met a need, it's already changed, advanced, or regressed in some cases.

I think, based off of the nature of the industry, no. But I don't think that that's necessarily a bad thing.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Based on your experience and understanding as a journalist, what might help the industry better meet these needs?

Jasmine Snow

I think a greater understanding. Again, slowing the hell down would be great. However, like that's probably not going to happen. I think just a better understanding and giving better credit to maybe audiences of... in communities – audiences and communities, very chiefly. Listening to the people who we're reporting on, and reporting for, and about, would probably do us a world of good.

For as much as I've been saying about audience understanding, I don't mean to... or think that they're you know, children incapable of understanding the news. But I've, you know, heard people talk about them like that. Or when it comes to how you're reporting, like again, during the George Floyd uprisings and during the protests, you know seeing reporters is being like, "This is ridiculous that the community would ask us not to take pictures of their faces or whatever... kind of some of the traditionalism and arrogance coming out, and you know understanding you have to respond to people and what they're asking them. You not always immediately agreeing, or you know whatever. But you know what the hell else are you doing this job for if not to listen to the people that you are reporting about or for.

So, a bit more of that might be nice.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. All right. Well, we are bringing this to a closing. I do still have a few more questions, but I wanted to ask in the ways that you've identified – you've identified as a black person, as a woman, as a queer person – so as journalists with these identities, what do you feel others have to learn from your unique perspective?

Jasmine Snow

Oh God. I don't know. I hope, if there's anything that I can provide, I suppose it's just an extra layer of thoughtfulness. Less assumptions going into any community or any reporting situations... or situation. Just a willingness to learn. I know it sounds very elementary or very basic, but I don't think you'd be surprised, but I think some reporters would be surprised at how

stuck in their way, stuck in their assumptions they are. And what blank spots that leads to in reporting?

You know, and just being where you're reporting in, you know. Like meeting people on a certain level, like you cannot report on the black community or black issues if you are talking to the same five black sources.

And if they're all you know, light skinned, or all dark skinned like you have to, you have to you know really, get in there. You cannot or you should not be reporting on George Floyd Square if you have not been there. That's absolutely ridiculous.

There are certain pitfalls that you have, or certain things that you quite can't help reporting on – people you don't meet in person. Things like that.

I don't know, just kind of know really get to know what you're doing. Why else would you be doing this job?

Emeri Burks

Sure. Do you think that your perspective gives you any insight that others might not have on certain particular issues, and if so, what kind?

Jasmine Snow

I think it gives me a fair bit of initial awareness. Like I am initially aware of some of the issues within the black community. With black people, I'm initially aware of... you know, because I identify and I can very easily say, well, I identify this way. These are things I believe, but here's someone who looks like me or, you know, looks a bit differently from me.

I guess I have a standard comparison, whereas I think some reporters may not be able to go into communities like that. Just as well I go into communities sometimes though, where I don't have that standard of comparison and I'm at a loss sometimes.

I'm sorry I forgot the question.

Emeri Burks

You've answered it pretty well. I was asking about the differences in terms of perspectives. You mentioned that someone who hasn't been to George Floyd Square shouldn't be reporting on George Floyd Square. For example, do you think that people who are not black are better or worse, or in any ways different, from reporting on racial issues and systemic injustice that affects black people.

Jasmine Snow

Oh gosh. Right gotcha.

In the end, no, I don't think that. I think like there is that school of thought or kind of debate happening of like, well, if you're not, you know person color. You shouldn't be reporting on

these issues. I don't think that that's true. I think it's again, it's your openness, your willingness to learn and how true you are to that, and how true you are to that experience, which just comes to how you report.

I think you or some people might have a harder time doing it again. Just because you may not have that initial awareness. But again, you may not. You may be a white person raised in more in the black community than others like I personally have been raised in predominantly white spaces most of my life. So there's a lot that I miss out on too.

So it just depends how you go about your job.

Emeri Burks

Sure, alright, well given the questions that I've been asking – the write up of the report, of the study, I think you have a decent idea of what we're trying to get at with the study. What do you hope that others might learn from this study?

Jasmine Snow

God, anything quite honestly. I think anything. I, really, honestly... Just you know you talk to people sometimes even in the industry and even veterans too, like veteran journalists who have been in the industry and saw what happened over this last year and are just so flabbergasted, I don't think it's a lot, but I've just run into a few, and just so flabbergasted what's happened, or the discourse that's happened. Or, you know this, that, and the other thing.

It's insane to me for one thing, but for two, I think having kind of any idea what's gone down or what journalists at this moment have any kind of like myopic sense of what's going on is nice. So something that's grounded in a bit more reality and a bit less of, you know, front page summary of Star Tribune or like a Time magazine summary of what this year has been. Maybe it would be nice.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Well on these subjects. Is there anything else that you would like to share? We've discussed a lot – your the expectations that you understand have been placed on you, your reactions to current events, journalistic roles, understanding society need – any of those topics that you'd like to speak any more on.

Jasmine Snow

I don't think majorly no. I think it's just important to know what you're doing and why you're doing it. Which is like my main thing that I say to anybody who talks to me is just, really, it's just a deep understanding of where you are at, what you're doing, what community is... why you're here, what the hell are you doing and why are you doing it? I think for a while, especially after the protests calmed down, and after we started to move away from it, I was lost and I didn't know. And that's kind of why I'm on this hiatus is to figure that out.

If there's anything I've taken away from this year, it's that important kind of grounding work. But no, I think you did wonderfully, so thank you for talking to me.

Emeri Burks

Absolutely. No, I've really enjoyed this. I appreciate your time. I appreciate you being here. That was the last question I had for the interview itself.

Now, that said, I'm happy to talk with you off camera for just a moment, but just on camera, thank you so much. I really, really did appreciate you being here. You have a lot of really, really awesome perspectives to contribute.

Jasmine Snow

Oh, you're on mute.

Emeri Burks

That's right, yes, thank you. So I'm going to take myself off mute. I'm going to stop recording...

***From Session 2 Interview October 15, 2021**

Emeri Burks

Hey, how you doing? Nice new hair.

Right, so previously you discussed a lot of expectations that your supervisor and your audience kind of placed upon you as a journalist; you mentioned things like being balanced, accurate, fair, being honest and truthful, not expressing opinions publicly, not taking political stances, kind of depersonalizing yourself from your work. You also said that you were encouraged to communicate openly, be creative, be professional, and not use the position as a soapbox.

These are some of the things that you discussed in the interview earlier. I'm wondering, based on your understanding, do colleagues who are not black like yourselves seem to experience these expectations differently than you do?

Jasmine Snow

Yeah, yeah. I definitely think it is different. That being said, I think they definitely have those expectations, right? And some of them are good, right? Like to have professionalism, and to be fair and accurate. I think those are very important and those I think... there is that like equal level, and then I think – at least in my experience, but also I think writ large journalists of color – there's a step above it where there is this gray area where I feel like mainstream kind of white administrative folks in journalism perhaps have determined it to be a gray area. You know what is personal, what is political, and how does that work in this sphere?

I was in a lecture the other day where that was part of what we were discussing with some professionals who are determining social media policy, which I think is where it's most prevalent. Determining what you can and can't put on your social media. One of my questions for them was, "Well, you know my profile, like the profile picture of me on media for some is taken to be a political statement. A black woman, or that I... one of the questions I asked was, "Well, if I post on there, 'Hey I would like to not be shot by the police.'" Being black woman obviously has different connotations. But it is also true and part of my personal experience which is supported by data in this country also outside of empiricals.

Things like that I think are different, or at least are different for me in expectations that I have, or at least things that I have to negotiate with when I'm talking to employers – employers that I had at the Daily while I was working this last summer and the summer before that were kind of things that were a little bit better negotiated and open for I would say exploration. But yeah, I definitely think that it is different between me and my white colleagues.

Emeri Burks

Sure, do you think that some of these differences extend between you and other people of color who are not black, Latino, indigenous, for example, AAPI?

Jasmine Snow

Definitely yeah. I can imagine, especially as different issues and inequities and inequalities are discussed. I'm sure that they have their own thing with those kind of cultural issues that come up or current events. I think back to when the... the Atlanta Salon was shot. Sorry, there was a shooting in the I believe it was Atlanta Massage Parlor, and that kind of conversation sparked and went throughout.

I was friends with a lot of my colleagues, of course – some in several Asian American AAPI journalists at the time and that was this very similar conversation to what we were having when and after George Floyd was murdered.

I think even within an identified community of color where colorism is concerned, I as a light skinned black woman, have a very vastly different experience than my darker skinned counterparts. I think that is a discussion in and of itself as well so.

Emeri Burks

Sure, do you have an anecdote that you'd like to share that kind of demonstrates how the professional expectations you face influence and affect you differently than people who are not your skin tone or your race or ethnicity.

Jasmine Snow

I don't... Nothing too specific, I don't think. One of my mentors is a darker skinned woman and we talked a little bit about that experience. But nothing drawing on exactly a situation I've been in. Just kind of stuff that's been shared with me and it's not necessarily mine to re-share in that way.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha, alright. That was pretty much the question. Was there anything about that that you feel was unclear or something that I can go over and kind of approach in a different way?

Jasmine Snow

I don't think so.

Emeri Burks

All right, sure. Well, I'll stop recording...

Interview 3 – Anonymous – June 23, 2021

Emeri Burks

...To be for my reference without the audio video being released.

Anonymous

Got it. OK.

Emeri Burks

So awesome, so let me make sure we got our views set up right here. OK, so thank you [Anonymous] for joining me. We've already discussed the consent form a little bit and you're going to be filling that out and sending that in after this interview. Could you start by telling me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Anonymous

My name is [Anonymous] and I'm the Assistant Managing Editor of Culture and Talent at [a progressive newspaper].

Emeri Burks

Great thank you and could I have your preferred pronouns and your age please?

Anonymous

I'm she her and I am 36.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, thank you. And uh, what race or ethnicity do you identify with or as?

Anonymous

Black

Emeri Burks

Alright, got it.

So could you give me a little bit of a background into your background in journalism? How did you get started? Where did it lead to and what's led you to this point in relative brief?

Anonymous

Yeah, so I started journalism as a high school student. I was in a journalism program in my high school to help resurrect our school newspaper. We worked in partnership with our local paper to get that up and running. I will participate in the summer times and weekends and work journals and workshops, and it just snowballed into majoring into journalism summer internships.

Then after I graduated, which was in 2008, there was very little jobs available. but I found a job in the Washington DC Bureau of the Wall Street Journal as a news assistant. Pretty much the assistant to the Washington Bureau chief, which is not a writing position at all. It's more like administrative support/HR. So I did that for three years as I try to figure out what to do and wait for the market to rebound in some ways I can find a writing position.

I applied for a training program at [a progressive newspaper]. I was accepted. The program at the time was six months. After the six months I was hired on to be a general assignment reporter and quickly my focus became covering black communities in South Los Angeles. And I've been at the paper now for 10 years. Last year was promoted to the masthead, which is like a big leap from writing to just jumping up to like being on top of all, like newsroom management style, and dealing with the culture of the place. After we had our own reckoning, followed by the George Floyd Uprising that resulted in us really examining how we had pathways and lack thereof in representation in our newsroom. So I applied and went through lengthy interview process, and I got the job and I've been in this role now for almost nine months.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you. And because you do focus on black communities in particular, could you tell me a little bit about how long you've been doing that?

Anonymous

So I did that previously before taking this job, so I got in this role like in mid-September of 2020. Yes, there you go. Mid-September 2020. But before then up until that point I covered black communities and that includes neighborhoods that are very popularized in culture and like Compton, Englewood, Watts, South Central, talking about the changes that were happening in the community, most of the time the lack thereof, on why they were happening, what does you

know? Different policies in the city meant to the community, how it impacted them directly, where were the concerns?

There were some of the joys of the people of this place and just putting it into context with what was happening in California so often. Communities of colors are left out of these conversations, and it was bringing them back into the fold without the poverty porn that we're so used to seeing in in paper about communities that have to do with violence and crime and sadness. It was like also talking about the everyday struggles and joys of being black in Los Angeles.

Emeri Burks

Thank you and just for eligibility, can I confirm also that you've been working continuously as a journalist since the death of George Floyd last year?

Anonymous

Yes

Emeri Burks

Fantastic. Thank you. So thinking of these different positions that you've had from the beginning through to now, I wanted to bring up the expectations that your employers, your supervisors have brought up and set on you. When you think of these expectations, what comes to mind? What words or phrases?

What did they tell you Your job was going to be?

Anonymous

As a writing role, we hadn't had a person covering the black community in a more nuanced way in many years. Again, we've had crime reporters who had covered the crime aspect of it. We had City Hall reporters who covered the policies, but not really like the the breadth of the people. So I came in was just told like, "Find interesting stories." I was not given like clear direction. But that was freedom in that. I was able to make this beat my own, and I see this this... I work with this editor, I'm more closely now as a manager 'cause I still work in the same place, and he does that with other reporters as well. Like stories are good when a reporter and the stories come from the reporters, because they're typically writing about something that excites them.

And so, he was really about finding stories, having the reporter find stories that excite them, so then they can go down that rabbit hole of reporting and learning and that will be reflected in the words because you don't have someone from the top telling you what to do, and feel like you have to meet their expectation.

So there was a lot of freedom in my role – Like, what I covered, who I covered, what took precedent. And then, I was often rewarded with that by getting on the front page or I'm getting

a lot of space for photos. So I actually in retrospect, now I see how it works and I actually like that approach.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. So it sounds as if you were not necessarily expected to abide by more traditional norms of objectivity, at least with regards to staying away from your personal story. Is that right?

Anonymous

No, I was I was 100% was not doing anything that was first person. All this was about the people. So like I was still 100% objective and unbiased, like 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.

Emeri Burks

Thanks for clarifying that. Would you mind telling me a little bit more about the expectations of journalism, of objectivity that were expressed to you as you understood them.

Anonymous

I mean, we all abide by basic tenets of objectivity, and I'm biased. But I never when I was at the paper, never had someone sit down to me and say, like, "This is what being objective and unbiased is. Some of those things might come up in conversation as we're thinking about word choice. But as far as... that stuff was kind of like learned in journalism school. And I mean I didn't run into those issues at all. Because the thing about [a progressive newspaper] is that like we have people of color covering the communities that they're from in some cases, and they recognize that they bring a different perspective that enhances the story.

So a word that a white editor might use might not be the same word that a black editor where you... like "poor" is one of those words that I would often push back on. It's really easy to write the word "poor," because by definition, these communities are poor. Or they're you know, since the average median income is significantly lower below the poverty line. I thought it was more helpful to just say that – to say like, "This is a community. The median income is \$30,000. Like instead of saying "poor" like tell, describe the conditions that they're in, because that's not how a community would describe themselves. And so, like we ran into issues of that, but it was never something where like someone like, "We are going to put 'poor' in any way." They were open to listening to me, and I think it's a word like that is [subjective]⁴.

⁴ The participant later clarified they meant to say subjective instead of objective, as had been originally said. It has been corrected accordingly here.

For some people it's just it's black and white. But it's not. And I always kind of felt respected and like coming to the table with my perspective on things, and there was a dialogue that would be had over these things. And I will challenge them like, "Why would you say this word?"

Emeri Burks

Yeah, yeah.

Anonymous

I felt was more collaborative. I don't think I was ever told... when I go on social media and see some of the battles that other reporters have, I'm grateful that I didn't have those experiences.

Emeri Burks

Yeah yeah. Thank you for that. Can I ask Are the expectations that were expressed to you by your employers and supervisors very different from the expectations that your audiences have expressed to you?

Anonymous

Yeah, your audience... Because, again, I'm covering a community that is not media literate. A lot of times. Actually we don't realize it's such a luxury to be able to pay for news, and to actually have the time to consume it. Because if you are worrying about food on the table and getting to work, and where's your next meal going to come, Or your car? That's time that you don't have – like it's a luxury.

And oftentimes, like the readers in the audience, as I'll go out, they wanted someone to be able to pick a side. And we have columnists for that. And I was like, "Hey, these are the three columns that you can follow and read who would give you an opinion on a topic like this." But for me I'm a news journalist that's going to present both sides of the issues and put them in the story.

But they're definitely people who are have their opinion. So I think it's about a lot of what I did. It was also educating the communities that I cover about exactly what I did, and they understood it once you think about it. But sometimes people like that, "You're wrong." I'm like, "OK. Again, that's your opinion. I don't have an opinion on this."

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, I wanted to ask the expectations that you've had – Do you think that they impact people who are black differently than they affect people who are not black?

Anonymous

He's not gonna... Say that question one more time?

Emeri Burks

The professional expectations that you were discussing that your employer set for you, that your audiences might set for you. Do you feel that they affect journalists who are black differently than they affect journalists who are not black?

Anonymous

No, because I ran into other community reporters on my paper who were of different races and they also... like, some people in the community just want someone to take the side. And when you're writing a story where you're presenting both, any space you give to the opposite thought, they felt like you were giving too much space to the wrong cause and vice versa.

It's just part of being a journalist of presenting both sides. Again, we have columnists at our papers that do that work. I didn't personally see it impacting black people versus white people or non-black people differently, personally. But I could be seeing things wrong. Maybe people could say like, "Oh, were there more white reporters that cover white, wealthier communities, and so they have more... And because they are more organized, they know how to get the columnists to write about them, and get the reports right on that. That's one thing I didn't know. There were more coverage of white, wealthier communities because there was an organization around how to pitch to reporters, and to be relentless in getting the coverage. And also resources were put into those areas 'cause they we have a large readership based there. But as far as like the impact of the daily news, I don't think I saw that with reader expectations and such.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Well, I wanted to set some context for the rest of the conversation by talking about some current events. So could I ask for your reaction or relation to the death of George Floyd?

Anonymous

OK. I mean, it was devastating. I mean I haven't watched the video, I've scrolled past it in social media. But it also wasn't surprising because that happened in Minneapolis. But we have our own George Floyd's happening in LA all the time, and I've covered them over the years. I just think it's just like a pile up of it so frequently. It hit a point where it was just overwhelming that you didn't even want to connect to the news, for me. I didn't want to connect to the news at that point. And just kind of do more readings, that was outside that space.

But as a black person it's something that I lived. I have a husband who's black. There's always a concern when he leaves the home. So it's felt vastly more differently than if I am a non-white person who's for the kind of first time forced to sit at home because we're in a pandemic and really have to fully watch and feel the weight of this event. But I've been living and dealing with you know those kind of videos my whole life, and tales of such violence my whole life. So it hits differently as a black person and a black journalist.

But yeah, that's mostly it. It did carry a different weight.

Emeri Burks

Got it, thank you. Could I also ask about your reaction or relation to finding out former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Anonymous

I was surprised. Wanna be surprised... I'm gonna be honest it was very, it was almost anticlimactic at the end. Were like, "What?" At this point I was not a writer during the... I was actually in a management role and like I cleared my schedule once I knew the verdict was coming in. I was getting calls from old sources telling me like, police were ready, that you know they were calling peacemakers in the community to make sure that we stand up... to like urge you know peace if the verdict does not go our way there. I think everyone was anticipating the worst. And then when it didn't happen it was... we were very surprised, and that's a good surprise. We don't see justice carried out in that way often.

But I was just surprised. There was no celebration or nothing like that. Like I'm still a journalist. But it was again, it was just a shock to see that for the first time, justice was, you know... maybe not the first time – but maybe in my lifetime of seeing all these killings of unarmed black men, that justice seemed to have prevailed in this case.

But the trials is over, but he's still making appeals and stuff. So things could change.

Emeri Burks

Yep, yep.

Anonymous

I still think there's a period of people kind of holding their breath and like, "Huh. Is this going to stick?"

Emeri Burks

Right, right. All right, can I ask how you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice since the death of George Floyd?

Anonymous

It's been in the newsroom. Like after... so I think I wrote one story about the impact of the protests in LA after George Floyd died. And then I started the application process for my current job. So I stopped writing around July, and it was a lengthy process that required also performing tasks... And so those conversations actually carried into the newsroom when we're talking about hiring, when we're talking about training sessions, when we're talking about sensitivity and the stories that we published. So that's my contribution.

Like how we frame stories and having to have reporters rewrite stories when we're given too much space to... Extremists, I think those are some hiccups we had so many years ago that we're still falling into those mistakes. So I do think like part of my contribution is making sure

that the values of our owner, which pledge that our paper would be anti-racist, is reflected within the pages and the stories and the lens of each story.

Emeri Burks

Right, right? Now, that actually kind of answers my next question – was about how George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests have affected your work, so is there a distinction you'd make as far as how these elements...?

Anonymous

Yeah, I think we've had a new directive, definitely. Like our owners say, "We're an anti-racist paper." So as we're doing this work, we're having to think about how systemic racism has created some of the problems that we actually write about so often.

And that has changed how we are covering crimes. We're having more people on the ground for longer periods of time. Oftentimes, you know, with a protest you have people on the ready to go when things go crazy. But we're actually now like staffing people for all of the protests, because it's important to see that what's happening, to be able to actually describe if things go awry – why and how?

We're talking about like how we name suspects, how we're doing our reporting. This changed so much about what we're doing. But it's a slow process. Even though we have rules and stuff in place, it's still a slow process 'cause they're still making mistakes because we're humans. And their humans writing the story, and some people don't bring the same perspectives to the stories.

Emeri Burks

One the technical detail I wanted to confirm with you. So you preferred and anonymity... to be anonymous in this study. However, [a progressive newspaper] has been quite progressive compared to a lot of different news organizations in tackling these issues. I'm wondering, would it put you in an uncomfortable place if we discussed that you were connected to [a progressive newspaper] in any?

Anonymous

They'll know, it's me. I'm the only person who talks to media, and in fact so much so that like the editors actually like, "Oh, go talk to [Anonymous]." It's not something that I want to do. It's like if I don't then everyone is trying to do the daily, daily grind of working that then the [a progressive newspaper] perspective is not often shared. So that's why. I mean, you can just say "a progressive paper."

Emeri Burks

Sure. That works. Thanks for the clarification, yeah.

OK. So I wanted to get a little bit more into some theoretical stuff and your opinions in here. Can you tell me how you would describe your role as a journalist?

Anonymous

Uh, my my my role is a journalist to bear witness and write what I see. And write what I hear. And to be a reporter.

Emeri Burks

Fair enough straightforward. Are there any specific values that guide you and how you do your work?

Anonymous

I think it's the basic tenants of journalism which is to give voice to the voiceless, to comfort the uncomfortable, and to afflict the unafflicted. It's really to make sure that things that are not seen and known come to light. Because that's where the changes are made – the disruption of the status quo. Just enlighten us to be a better nation that think about our values and implement them, and what we want to be as a country and city.

Emeri Burks

For sure. for sure.

Well, these values that you've expressed and the expectations that you were talking about earlier – Do you feel that they are ever in conflict in your work?

Anonymous

I don't. I think everyone is on the same page, which is very comforting when we are having discussions. It's just like when you don't tell those stories, who are you trying to protect? That's always what we say. You know we were having discussions of language of what we're using, who are we trying to protect? Like, we're a family paper. Like how many families are reading the paper, like policymakers you know, movers and shakers, are reading it? We have to make sure that they get the truth. And if there's a cuss word in it, we can clean it up a little bit. But we shouldn't have to clean it up that much that we don't know what the word is.

Emeri Burks

Right. Now, thanks for that. OK. so I want to ask about some specific pieces of contentious journalistic conduct that's been in the news a bit lately. So can I ask how you would evaluate journalists expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and or perspectives in the public forum? In your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised?

Anonymous

We are having these conversations very deeply within the news organization, and I am more conservative because I'm just still very much steeped in the values that I learned in the J school, and in all of those things. I don't personally think that journalists should be at protests protesting. I do think journalists should be at protests bearing witness and reporting. Personal opinions – I would support people talking about human rights, and that goes from immigration

to Black Lives Matter. But you gotta keep in mind you don't know what you're going to end up as a reporter, and how that might impact your sourcing the stories you tell, and the trust people have in what you're writing.

So like all that stuff, is... I mean I think it's personal for everybody. But as journalists it impacts our colleagues when we say certain things, who then our colleagues are like, "Hey, I thought you guys were news reporters and you have your colleague.... I know you worked and shared bylines with feel this way about this topic. I don't know if I'm going to work with you or talk with you." We hear that all the time with our City Hall reporters and such.

So I am in the mind frame of like, we're journalists and some of having the trust of our reader is to like, not necessarily have everything... I absolutely do not believe in someone supporting a candidate or speaking highly of a candidate, a politician. That's a "no" in my opinion. As I said, I'm more conservative, than not. So I'm more of the realm of you should check your personal opinions in the public realm.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. Can I ask about social media? You specifically... do you feel that journalists should have a professional account separate from the private? Is there such a thing?

Anonymous

No, I don't believe in separating. I think you should be who you are 100%. But whatever you do personally is gonna come back privately. Like there's just no way to separate the two lives. I just think people have to be conscious that if you want to be... you gotta decide 1) what you want to do, 2) Where you want to work and abide by the guidelines there because... I deal with a lot of young reporters and it seems like some of our advocates versus journalists.

There's no fine line in that in my opinion. Like journalists are a different breed. And if people want to be activist, I completely support them doing that. But I don't think they should do that at the paper I work for.

Emeri Burks

Right, all right. Specific one on disclosure of personal bias. Do you feel that there are instances in which someone should disclose their identity or their race or ethnicity with regard to an article that they are writing? Are there times no, there's no time where it would be called for?

Anonymous

No, I don't think if I'm writing a story about black people. I mean like, "By the way, I'm black." Or if I'm writing story about white people, "By the way, I'm a black reporter. That might impact the way I wrote this story. No. people know my byline. They can look me up if they think that my race impacts how I write a story. That's what they think. But like I do know, I have to adhere to journalism standards and practices. I tell stories and I put in information that's fact based.

But you cannot deny that as... anybody, You also choose those facts. Like you choose to interview this person versus this person. That is a bias. The bias is that that is without a doubt like, "Well, why did you choose this hyper liberal professor to quote and not this ultra conservative one?" But in a story I write, I would do both, and quote them both because you gotta have balance.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Do you think that these boundaries are shifting at this time?

Anonymous

I do. I do think there's... like I think with issues again of civil rights and human rights, there is no both siding it anymore. It's very clear that at this point, people have a right to live. People have a right to... kids shouldn't be put in cages. Things like that. There's more affirm... 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. We've made that clear. Our owner said it. It was in our papers. It's on our website. So there is no denying what you're getting when you unfold the [a progressive newspaper].

Emeri Burks

For sure. Alright. So I'd like to take things a little bit to larger scale if I could. So could I ask based on your understanding, what do you think society needs from the journalism industry at this time and how do you know that?

Anonymous

What society needs?

Emeri Burks

Yeah, Yeh.

Anonymous

Can I say the news industry need people to read the paper?

Emeri Burks

Well, sure.

Anonymous

Society needs to appreciate the value of the work that reporters do. You know 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 and get that information, where to find it. 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.

I think so much of why we got to this point in our country, it's because of the work of journalism and how we've empowered people through the use of iPhones to be journalists in a certain way. But we also like dig deeper. We're able to uncover police history and stuff like that. So I think the society just needs to value the work of journalists, and respect the information, and be willing to pay for it.

Emeri Burks

For sure. For sure. Now you say that this is something that society needs with regard to the journalism industry. Are there certain things that society needs from the journalism industry at this time?

Anonymous

Society needs from the... I don't know if I can answer that question. That seems a very meta question. I don't think I can. I don't have any thoughts on that currently.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Can I ask that on a smaller scale? What do you think that society needs from individual journalists? You and other journalists?

Anonymous

I think society need... I don't know. I think the information is there. Yeah, I don't know that's even a tough question from me. I don't know what society means. It's just so massive of a question.

Emeri Burks

Ok. That's fair.

Perhaps we can talk a little bit about giving society what it means. Do you feel confident that the journalism industry is able to meet society's needs at this time?

Anonymous

I would first have to know what society needs of the industry to work. I don't... I think the society, they don't need journalism. I think their timelines will be very dry without it – it would just be opinions. So I don't... Like seriously – I mean 'cause... If they thought they needed, we would have an increase in subscribers at a time where news is life or death. Like it literally is life or death. It can tell you what areas is going to flood during the storm. It's going to tell you the latest science on coronavirus. It's going to tell you what rules each state has that might put you in danger, and why that's not healthy for democracy, and impeding on your rights. It might tell you when the voting polls close unexpectedly in your neighborhood, and why that is wrong and illegal.

It's so vital to a healthy person really, in an informed... to be informed is so vital to just living that society... I wish it would it realized that value. And I do think that the news industry in some ways is giving readers so much information, it's almost like information overload. I wish

there was a way that... I don't know... That people can figure out what they need for their lives and then is able to subscribe to that. That's why we like doing the newsletters thing now – they have, like more pinpoint nailed down...

But yeah... we're at a point... I don't think society thinks it needs journalism.

Emeri Burks

Right. Alright, fair point.

Anonymous

They keep saying we can get our news from social media. Where does social media get that news from?

Emeri Burks

Fair fair. Well, let me ask what obstacles are there then to journalism at least better serving the public at this time.

Anonymous

I think there's a digital divide. I do also think there is a sense of potentiality to the news stories that we write that makes it almost hard for people to understand. Like since I've started, you know, I've actually talked about this is one of the things I mentioned when I was hiring – was like us to complete like a guide that lives online about how in the city of LA, how you know a referendum or an initiative becomes a policy. 'Cause we write these stories about this is in this committee, and it's going here, and then it goes to the... if people know every time what this process looks like, they can go to a website on our page that literally diagrams somebody proposes a bill. It goes to this committee in City Hall, then it has to get this kind of vote, it has to have two sessions about this. It has to be a notice. Then they can figure out where they are in the process and how they can insert themselves. Like we have to teach media literacy to people, and I think that's a missing element of that.

I'm pretty sure I have more thoughts. Where was the question again? I wanted to make sure I'm answering it fully.

Emeri Burks

For sure. I was asking about the obstacles that you see currently keeping journalism...

Anonymous

So media literacy, not meeting people where they are or creating a structure to meet them. I think we're almost needing to grow readers and make them dependent on us, and show them why they need us. So I think those are some of the barriers.

And then also cost. Like some of these newspapers subscriptions are like \$15 a month, and some of them are like \$4, and we don't realize \$4 is a lot of money with someone who has a mean household income of \$40,000. So like maybe we need to subsidize that for people living

in different zip codes. Maybe we need to give some newspaper subscriptions away to people, and tie that to people who make more, can pay more, to subsidize.

It has to be a way to make the news more accessible.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Last question on this topic, what do you think that newsrooms and news organizations can do to help journalists better serve their audience?

Anonymous

What can newsrooms do? I'm in charge of the training, so I offer... we offer training programs. I think we need to pour more into training our staff, and mentorship honestly, and more candid, very candid conversations about the goals of the reporter and how that aligns with what the reader needs, and what the newspaper needs as well.

Emeri Burks

Thanks for that. Alright, this is bringing the interview almost to a close and I wanted to ask a more direct question here. So as a black journalist, what do you feel that others may not understand as well? May be able to learn from your perspective or perspectives like yours? What makes your perspective as a black journalist unique and valuable to your audiences?

Anonymous

I think some of the stories that we tell would go untold if we did not have people with diverse backgrounds in a newsroom, particularly black people. How can you talk about being pulled over by police and the fear that instills without having people who have that fear every day? That makes a difference when you're editing the story in word choice and what comes first, who's amplified and maybe like.... For so many years, there was a level of skepticism to those stories before we had video. But for black journalists and black people there was never that skepticism. It was always like... 'cause we've lived that experience, we've been pulled over before. We know the fear that comes along with it.

I think people don't understand that that only makes society better by uncovering how other people are vulnerable, 'cause any infringement on one person's rights is an infringement on everybody, 'cause it could be you.

Like, yes. Like in LA, Latino people feel the weight of this too, as well as white people. I've seen car crashes and police chase where police shot people at the end and they were white.

Any checks on any systems really is for the betterment of all of society. It's not... some of these are not black and white issues. But if they disproportionately impact black people, that means it also impacting some white people and non-black people as well. So I think as a society we just need to realize that we're not trying to make things better for one group, we're making it better for all – everybody.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. So that was the last scripted question, and I did want to give an opportunity to go back and touch on anything that you felt deserved a little bit more weight, more time to sink your teeth in to. So just a just a reminder – We talked about professional expectations, about your connection to George Floyd, and Derek Chauvin, conversations of systemic injustice, about your concept of your role of a journalist, understanding society's needs, understanding the boundaries of journalistic conduct and how to meet these needs better, how to better serve the public. So anything like there.

Anonymous

I can't think of anything off those topics, but I think so much needs to be said about how the newsroom nurtures the next generation of diverse leaders. Journalism is such a hard profession. You come up in it not making a ton of money and the support oftentimes is not there for journalists to stay in it longer. And we see hungry journals come in at the beginning. But as we're looking for mid-career and senior level reporters and editors – that is where we're missing black journalists.

And it boils down to having a newsroom in society that supports black journalists. I hope that we're in a time now where people realize how vital they are to the stories we tell, and things will shift. But yeah, that's the only final thought I had to share.

Emeri Burks

I actually did forget what, uh, excuse me. I'm sorry. What do you hope others might learn from this study? You've already said a lot, but is there anything...?

Anonymous

Yeah. That was the thing. I do hope that they 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. We just need more black people in the newsroom, more Latinos in the newsroom. Just more people of color. Because that's how our society looks and we're missing vital stories by not having them in positions where they can tell them, edit them, and help shape them.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Anything else you wanted to share before we finish this interview then?

Anonymous

Nope. That's it.

Emeri Burks

Alright. Thank you so much. Now, I was going to ask you off camera if you knew anyone who might be interested in also participating in this study. You don't have to say this on camera. You

could email it to me or think about it. And I will need that to consent form at your convenience. But otherwise at this point I'll be continuing to do interviews with journalists for another 2-3 weeks or so. I'll be transcribing, coding, and analyzing for probably a month or two after that.

Anonymous

Oh my goodness.

Emeri Burks

Yep. And it's likely that this final project is going to be released in spring of 2022, partially for my masters, but also looking at the shopping it around some academic journals here and there.

Anonymous

OK. Oh wow.

Emeri Burks

For the participants who have released audio/video content, I was also going to be producing a summary video that's talks about a lot of these things in journalists own words.

There will be another opportunity before this goes out to confirm any contentious things you might have said in this interview, give you a last chance to say yes or no to whatever. But any last question about the study or about the interview that you want to clarify before we finish?

Anonymous

No. I think it's pretty clear and I'll get you this consent form today or tomorrow.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, thank you so much for talking with me, [Anonymous]. It's been great speaking with you.

Anonymous

Thank you.

Emeri Burks

Thank you. Thank you. Alright, I'll talk to you later. Bye bye.

Interview 4 – Libor Jany – June 15, 2021

Emeri Burks

OK. If I might start from the beginning. Sorry, I'll be quick on this. Could you tell me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Libor Jany

No worries. So it's Libor Jany. And I'm a public safety reporter for the starch viewing in Minneapolis, MN.

Emeri Burks

Awesome and can you tell me your pronouns and your race slash ethnicity as you identify with or as?

Libor Jany

He and him, and I generally identifies black. I'm, you know, mixed race – I'm half Czech and have Gabonese.

Emeri Burks

Awesome and could you tell me a little bit about your background in journalism where you came from and how you've led to where you are now?

Libor Jany

So my first like job in the newsroom was during college when I worked for my hometown paper. The Pioneer Press in St. Paul, MN, and I worked in the sports department as an agate clerk.

Later on when I moved down to Mississippi for school, I worked as like sort of intern at a small daily there in town. My first internship after graduation was at the Santa Cruz Sentinel in South Bay area in California.

And then I moved across the country to uh, Trenton, NJ, where I worked for the Trentonian, which is a a tabloid paper out there. And then my first full time reporting gig was for small daily in Danbury, CT, which is where I worked for about 2 1/2 years before I got this gig in Minneapolis.

Emeri Burks

And you said you've been reporting on public safety for around six years, but it seems like from what I've seen in your reporting, it's a little bit more on social justice. Is this a change for you? Is this pretty common? Based on your experience so far?

Libor Jany

Yeah, I'd say it's been somewhat of a recent development in the sense that a lot of these conversations have kind of seeped into the national consciousness after you know, arguably... if you wanted to date it back to any point, it might be, you know Mike Brown in Ferguson. But Minneapolis itself has had a string of fairly high profile police killings in in recent years. And what we found has always happened in the wake of these incidents is that people start to ask some very hard and pointed questions about the future of law enforcement and whether... what sort of changes should be made or whether... Some people are also advocating for just like completely dismantling this system of policing as we know it and starting from scratch basically.

Emeri Burks

All right, I'd like to get into a little bit about professional expectations then. So thinking back to when you were trained in as a journalist in some of your earlier times, as well as some of your later ones, the expectations that your supervisors expressed to you that would be placed on you as a journalist. What comes to mind as the primary expectations that were told to you?

Libor Jany

Sorry as as it relates to what exactly?

Emeri Burks

As a as it relates to being a professional journalist, so as it was explained to you as a new journalist or as a journalist at our organization, we expect X from you.

Libor Jany

I mean, I'd say just like the basic tenets of journalism, just you know, accuracy, fairness, you know objectivity. Although I think that you know industry wide our understanding of that has certainly evolved in recent years.

I'd say, just like the basic like pillars of journalism as we've known it over the years about giving people voice, giving you a chance to respond to criticism, or certain points that that might affect their lives, being fair, honest, not misconstruing what they have to say.

I think that was... I wouldn't... I don't know it was so much conveyed to me in in like a formal setting like there was an orientation where they kind of laid out all these expectations. I think that's just something that your editor, your direct editor may convey in some shape or form.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So you mentioned. Accuracy, fairness and objectivity is of course a big one these days. What were your understanding of these terms as they were expressed to you? However, they were expressed to you early on.

Libor Jany

Well, for instance, I'd say the STrib... and I don't even know if the paper is necessarily an outlier in this respect, as it relates to like legacy outlets, but this idea of objectivity, it meant one thing in theory and one thing in practice.

So in practice it typically meant like more or less giving equal inch space to quote unquote both sides on any particular issue. Even in a case where a police officer had just killed someone in in the line of duty, I think under the old way of thinking it, it meant given the Police Department or whatever agency like equal amount of space to defend the officer's actions or justify or explain the extenuating circumstances behind what happened.

You know, I think that our we've sort of... our thinking on that as sort of evolved where objectivity is more so seen as... You know we, we just start to question this idea of A) whether

true objectivity exists and B) whether it is in fact something that we should be striving for or, you know, whether we should start to think of journalism as advocacy on some levels and kind of get more comfortable with that notion.

Emeri Burks

Sure. I'll definitely be getting into some of that a little bit later, but I wanted to 1st on expectations... Similarly, what about from your audience. What sort of expectations have your audience made clear to you?

Libor Jany

In this day and age, you know you're far more accessible than before, whether it's through social media or people blowing up your phone, or emailing you. So I think there's there is far more like accountability or immediate accountability from the audience.

So you know, there have been instances where... again and I kind of bring it back to these police shootings just as an example. But there have been cases where we're writing about breaking news and a police shooting and you get this sort of like immediate feedback from people saying like, "Hey, the way you're framing this story is way off," or "you should wait to publish before you actually get... You know you can independently verify some of these details, like don't be so reliant on the official accounts of what happened."

Yeah, there's a lot more of that sort of like I said, an immediate accountability or things that you sort of have.

Emeri Burks

Sorry, Libor, are you there? You froze just now. Hello Libor?

Libor Jany

OK.

Emeri Burks

Alright, now we were discussing the expectations that were made clear to you by your audience and how some of this has changed. Sometimes they've gotten you about accountability, but I think that you were saying something about the nature of their sentiments, and the things that they've been catching you on.

Libor Jany

Yeah, so there's certain, I'd say probably long held general assumptions like newsroom assumptions that that are starting to be challenged, and not just in as it relates to journalism. But I think, just universally.

Probably the main one being this idea that you can't... You have to do your due diligence when reporting on these sort of controversial killings or extrajudicial killings. I'd say slight pushback would be that good reporters quote unquote, have always been kind of naturally skeptical of

people in power and have always tried to do their best to verify some of the facts that they're being given by law enforcement.

But you know, it's not always... You know, no one perfect, I guess. But now there's that again – that sort of instant accountability that comes as soon as the story hits the web.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, all right. So these expectations both from your employers as well as your audience. Do you think that they've been the same for you as for your colleagues, especially colleagues who are not black like yourself?

Libor Jany

I guess? I suppose.

Emeri Burks

Sure, could you tell me what makes you say that?

Libor Jany

Oh well, I guess I haven't given that question too much thought or I guess, and as it relates to that you know, obviously any... most reporters of color will tell you about the various you know any number of obstacles that they might have faced in the course of doing their jobs both internally and externally.

So yeah, I don't want to suggest at all that the experience of a young black woman in the newsroom is by any means the same as an older white man. That's absurd to think that way, but I don't know if necessarily as it relates to this particular question. I guess I just haven't had enough conversations with colleagues to see whether they've been like confronted with sort of similar issues.

Emeri Burks

OK, so to your knowledge you don't have experience or evidence to say that expectations placed on you have been unique to say your colleagues.

Libor Jany

I have... I don't you know discount that that it. It might be that way, but I just I haven't I guess asked those questions.

Emeri Burks

Completely fair.

Libor Jany

Like yeah.

Emeri Burks

All right, so I'd love to transition a little bit into current events. Would you mind giving me some context by telling me your personal reaction/personal connection to George Floyd's death?

Libor Jany

Just, you know, on a on a human level, I mean your, their reaction is sort of... Yeah, I just think on a human level like anytime you see a killing, and especially one that that happens in such like in such an agonizingly slow way, that kind of unfolds in front of you, like it's always gonna, you know like pinch something inside of you.

You know, I've also felt that way when it comes to reporting on other killings. You know both those by police and those that you cover like homicides that occurs in the community. I will say though, you know part of the being a reporter, I think on some level like you have to... especially if you're writing about these sort of issues like you have to learn to compartmentalize somewhat. You know you don't wanna become completely removed or sort of like cold blooded. But if you have any hope of like doing your job, you have to learn to just, kinda gotta set those feelings aside for a while and try to report the story as best as you can or else you would just you know, kind of like paralysis with that and you would never write a single word.

Yeah, so I mean with you know with George Floyd it's... everything that happened and in the wake of that I don't know if I had many opportunities to kind of like take a step back and assess everything that had happened and come to terms with my own personal thoughts and feelings on the matter. Like I was just I was constantly racing in terms of keeping up with the news.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, same question then about former officer Chauvin's guilty verdicts. Did you have any personal connection or relation to that?

Libor Jany

I mean it. Yeah again, I'm covering it in a professional sense. And also even then, like even covering it as as a reporter you can still have these sort of conflicting thoughts where on the one hand you recognize sort of the historic nature of something like this. In Minnesota, first time that a white police officer has been found guilty of murder in in the case of the killing of a black man, even though there have been, you know, numerous other incidents where you know you had that same sort of scenario.

You kind of like could take a step back and for a second there like consider the enormity of the moment. But at the same time like they're.... Maybe this is part of like being a reporter where you're kind of like just naturally skeptical of things, and dubious of whenever people talk about that, this is a watershed moment.

I think there was also this kind of reminder like, hey, we should consider whether this actually leads to the sort of seismic change that people may be anticipated or promised? Or is this

gonna be just another like high profile police killing? Because you know you gotta ask yourself the question, like how much has the department changed in the years since it happened? The pledge is made by some council members to work towards dismantling the police force or investing in other types of public safety programs like. Have they fulfilled these pledges, or have they kind of gone back on their word?

We're basically like taking stock of where those efforts are right now.

Emeri Burks

Absolutely. Last personal response question. How have you personally responded to the recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice in the year since the death of George Floyd?

Libor Jany

How have I personally responded to it?

Emeri Burks

How have you perceived it or how has it affected you personally, if at all?

Libor Jany

Well, you know, I'd say I've had a number of conversations about it. Maybe this is part of like helping me process it. So I just have like close friends that that I talked to about issues at work or just things that I'm kind of confronting in my own life. I've had numerous conversations about it, one that definitely sticks out to me is... this wasn't a friend, but this was somebody that... a source at the time and older gentleman, older black dude that's kind of been around for a while and also had this kind of healthy dose of skepticism just about everything.

So I remember him telling me that he'd advised all his black male friends to do what they could right now to go apply for personal loans and buy a house if they could and just kind of... his point was like seize the moment because for now, the world gaze... and people give a shit about you. But that that may not always be the case. And that you know some of these, like strong feelings and these discussions about like equity and racial reckoning – like over time they're gonna dissipate.

He was basically making the argument that you know months from now you may go back to like kind of your second class status in a lot of people's eyes.

So that that kind of stuck with me. So that wasn't necessarily an idea or thought that I'd arrived at on my own. But it definitely stuck with me that... like there's a segment of the population that that again kind of questions whether this current moment is truly something new. Whether this is the start of like transformative change, or is this another kind of like... you know, is it gonna end up being just another sort of footnote in history?

Yeah. exactly yeah.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, thanks last question on this area then. So has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests affected your work in any particular ways? If so, how?

Libor Jany

Maybe it's forced me to... I don't know force to the right term, but you know hopefully as a reporter or just as a human being, you continue to learn and grow and evolve in your thinking. So... It's kind of made me think a little more broadly about some of the issues that I cover and just how interconnected they are. And you know, hopefully that's gonna like strengthen my reporting and prevent me from writing stories in in the future that you know suggests that like incidents like this happen in a vacuum. Because they're so... They're complex and there's this overlay of all these different social forces at play that come to bear on things.

I just, I think that it's if anything it's maybe just given me a more like nuanced view on policing police community relations on police violence, police reform on this idea... what we used to take for granted that you know, maybe it's time to kind of reevaluate it.

Emeri Burks

So shifting gears then, how would you describe your role as a journalist?

Libor Jany

Gone are the days when reporters were, you know, the gatekeepers of knowledge and you know, news whatever. So it's... everybody has cell phones nowadays, which not only let them like, give him a glimpse into an incident like this, I don't know...

You talk about like... or you use the example of Palestine and some of the violence that's happened there, and how you get you a unique glimpse into it from first person accounts from reading... like I just I find myself following some accounts on IG as opposed to waiting on the AP wire story about what happened the night before.

And that that's not to say... I still believe in the mission of journalism. And I think that it obviously it has to evolve and adapt with the times. But it will be critical moving forward because we are in this day and age we're flooded and confronted with so much information, and misinformation that's out there. So you're still going to need somebody to hopefully sift through all of it, all this data and help just the average reader make sense of it all, and help provide some context.

But yeah. We just gotta have like a dose of humility that and an understanding that you may not, as a reporter kind of set the agenda anymore. Not the agenda but like, shape the conversation around the dinner table.

Yeah, just kind of being self-aware enough to recognize that. And this is an area that I still kind of struggle with. But I've got a couple of colleagues that are just like far more digital savvy than I am and far more forward thinking. And they're constantly talking about like the need to just be more attuned with your audience, like. Stop writing these stories that that nobody really cares about, but you just feel an obligation to write them because they've been written for years and years and by your predecessors. Like start to figure out. OK, this is what the community is interested in and talking about and try to pursue those sorts of stories.

Emeri Burks

Alright, yeah.

Can I ask what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Libor Jany

Definitely the self-awareness and humility piece. You know, no one likes being yelled at or criticized, especially by random Twitter accounts or whatever. But you know it's easy to get defensive, but sometimes you just gotta like take a step back and be like, "OK. Is there something that can be gained from this? Like can I learn and hopefully grow as a reporter by taking in some of this criticism?" And maybe I'll incorporate it into my next story? Or just it'll help me think about things somewhat differently. So that that sort of self-awareness and then the humility being like even though you've been on a beat for X amount of years like you're not a subject matter expert. No one can be, especially with something as complex and expansive as this particular beat. And so just constantly trying to learn. And I'm reading reporting from other papers or crime reporters, public safety reporters that I follow in other cities, and trying to do my best to keep up on recent research and check social from time to time and just get a sense of like, what the communities is doing. And then some of it is just like basic journalism 101 like showing up to meetings, go to crime scenes, be present.

Emeri Burks

So these values and the expectations that you've seen or observed that are placed on you. You ever find that there's a conflict between them? Your values and your expectations? Yes or no?

Libor Jany

Maybe not, I don't know about conflict. But you know, I don't always live up to them like you know, that's that there's the ideal and I have my shortcomings in places where I just, yeah don't live up to 'em.

But I yeah, I don't think that there's necessarily a conflict there between being self-aware and having that kind of level of humility. And I do think that it kind of makes you a better reporter because there's colleagues and there's former colleagues of mine who I've respected immensely as writers, and you know, even as reporters. But I could recognize this sort of like how stagnant they'd become because they were just kind of, you know, full of themselves. Like

they just kind of became convinced that, “Hey, I know my shit. I've been on this beat for this number of years? And who is this Like random activist to tell me about something having to do with public safety or policing.

So yeah, I don't think that they're in conflict at all.

Emeri Burks

Alright. So then, in the past year we've seen a lot of conversations about journalistic conduct, expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and or perspectives and public forums. I wanted to ask about your opinion, your views on these boundaries as far as what should be enforced, what boundaries might be up for revision. Where do you stand on a lot of these conversations?

Libor Jany

I think about these things in the abstract because I don't know if it's a generational thing with me, or if it's not part of my DNA. But I just I don't feel like the overwhelming urge to get my opinion out there. I don't personally do it.

But I do understand it kind of goes back to the whole point of objectivity and bias, like we do have to get past this idea that reporters are expected to be, or are expected to maintain this illusion of pure objectivity. Like recognize that people bring different experiences with them to the job. And in fact, I mean those are strengths because that's one of the arguments for having newsrooms that kind of reflect the communities that they report on because if you're from a certain place, maybe you have fewer blind spots as it relates to that community, and you might seek out stories that would never occur to some of your colleagues.

I don't know what the what the fine line is. I mean that that seems to be like sort of a question for newsroom managers. But yeah, we get... You know we get regular updates around election time or after George Floyd about keeping our opinions off of social media. Again, I don't really have an issue with that. But I also don't necessarily... I don't agree with it for the reasons that I kind of just discussed. That objectivity is sort of a farce.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So to be clear, you yourself don't have any problem with the boundaries your employer set about not getting on social media around politically contentious times. But you do have some issue with the policy itself – is that the case? Can you help me clarify?

Libor Jany

Yep, yeah. That's that's pretty much pretty much it. Because I think that the policy is sort of rooted in this largely outdated way of thinking about things.

Emeri Burks

Right. Do you have a similar or different answer as far as journalists becoming involved in community programs, joining Black Lives Matter protests for example. Other social action sort of involvement.

Libor Jany

No, I mean do I?... No, I don't. One of my mentors has just been like a staunch like union supporter, ride or die dude who's a regular presence at meetings, who's like traveled across the country and in caravans advocating on behalf of various unions – not just like newspaper unions, but just unions in general. Like he believes in this very strongly. And yet I think he's just a hell of a reporter. When it comes down to writing a story he's able to kind of set that aside, and do his job as a professional.

So yeah, I don't buy that notion at all that you can't get involved in a cause, and still be a good reporter.

Emeri Burks

All right. Do you have any feelings about whether people should or should not, or should be allowed to, should not be allowed to disclose personal bias? Something you think that people should or shouldn't do?... Journalists that is.

Libor Jany

And disclose it like, uh?

Emeri Burks

Sure, like on social media for one, but also for example in an article. If you were to write about a population that you were not yourself a part of, do you feel that it would be called for to disclose your personal bias related to the issue or not?

Libor Jany

That's an interesting question. I've considered it from the standpoint of this reporter that I mentioned that was a big union guy. So maybe in a story about a union he might disclose that.

I don't know... I'd have to think about it more. I mean, you know transparency is sort of the name of the game and we should strive to be as transparent as possible. But I think that there's like more like obvious examples where failing to disclose that you made some political contributions to some candidate. Like that's one thing. That's kind of a glaring example. Maybe they're like more nuanced, less obvious cases where you would hope that a reporter would be more transparent. But yeah, I guess I just haven't considered that enough to really have an opinion.

Emeri Burks

Fair. One more on these boundaries. Do these boundaries on journalistic conduct seem to be shifting now? If so, how?

Libor Jany

Depends where you go. There is, you know like the Washington Post is, is arguably far more progressive and like forward thinking legacy news outlet than most newspapers. And yet they've had their issues with reporters being kind of chastised and reprimanded for social media postings so...

But you know, at least there are those conversations being had now. And hopefully some of that is seeping into the newsrooms, and their management.

I know that the STrib, the Star Tribune, still takes a very like conservative approach, and old school approach to it.

Yeah, maybe there's change in some places.

Emeri Burks

Alright, so moving on now to social need. So you mentioned earlier some of the old schools of thought as far as journalistic objectivity. Are you familiar with the Social Responsibility as opposed to like the Free Press model of journalism?

Libor Jany

What's the distinction?

Emeri Burks

A Free Press being a little bit more aligned with traditional norms of objectivity and Social Responsibility, being more aligned with what you mentioned advocacy, for example.

So wanted to ask about Social Responsibility in particular and these sorts of norms and ideals for journalism. I wanted to know if they've affected your work as a journalist. If that's changed, perhaps since George Floyd's death? If so, how?

Libor Jany

It may have changed in like on a macro level. It may have changed in the sense of what stories you target. On a micro level, it may have changed maybe in like the framing of certain issues and stories, certain journalistic nuances, like who you quote on what, or who's quote ends up higher in the story, what numbers you may... you know what data you choose to include.

So yeah, it. I'd say it has forced me to just like reevaluate my whole beat coverage plan and what targets, or what stories I'd choose to prioritize over others.

And not to like condemn or bash like some of my predecessors. But when I do look through our archives I find the work of many great and gifted journalists. But their focus is much narrower and you know they would. They would just write about... the way that they would cover a police shooting back then is just very different than we would do so nowadays. And not to say that we've arrived and this is like the perfect approach or perfect model. It's still a work in progress. But you would just read some of these stories and it would be like the police account,

and then like three quarters of the way through the story, you might have a line from some random neighbor that says, "Hey, I saw the cops. You know, I saw the guy, like he didn't have a gun. And then you have another line in there, 'graph in there from the families disputing the police account. But for the most part, just the way that it was framed, it's like, "Here's the truth, and here are these random outliers who question the facts."

I'd like to think that we just evolved since then so.

Emeri Burks

Alright. So based on your understanding, what does society need from the journalism industry or from journalists individually right now? How do you know that?

Libor Jany

Ooo. That's a hell of a question. Dang. OK, uhm.

Emeri Burks

Take your time. We can break it down. How about what do people need of the industry?

Libor Jany

Greater transparency to your earlier point, earlier question... Less of this kind of attitude of, less of this like Ivory Tower Reporting that just comes from not having lived the experience. But just like 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, so. Just being more tuned... And also like understanding the complexities of some of these areas and people and issues, and not being so kind of reductive in one's reporting. Or making these broad sweeping generalizations...

Again, I still kind of struggle with that because it's... just even from like a reporter's standpoint, our perspective, like it's a lot prettier or your writing is a lot smoother when you can like use a broad brush on an issue. But then when you you're forced to like explain it, it gets very clunky, right? So I think just on that basic level, reporters are sometimes reluctant to introduce nuance and texture into their reporting because they just don't want to like muddy up this beautiful prose that they produce.

...Having more diverse newsrooms and not just you know, ethnic diversity, but diversity of thought, classes, gender... I guess that's where I would begin. I'd like to point something out.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, yeah, go ahead.

Libor Jany

I just... so easy in this job to like just get consumed in like the day-to-day minutia that I don't think that I give enough thought to some of these like grander, these bigger questions, or ideas.

So I apologize if I'm kind of like working out some of the responses in my head as I'm talking here.

Emeri Burks

No, not at all. I'm not asking for an academic essay at all. Yeah, this is your perspective on, you know questions, and the questions definitely sometimes are a bit big and a little intimidating sometimes. But no, you're giving me exactly what I'm looking for. Yeah

Can I ask about what you think society needs from journalists individually? Maybe from you specifically? But from other journalists individually as well.

Libor Jany

To be a little more forward thinking. One of the... So the STrib just recently... we won a Pulitzer for like breaking news coverage. And you know while there were internally you know there's a lot of back slapping that goes on and adulation, and everybody is like very complimentary of it. But I definitely heard from a lot of folks in the... in mostly in activist circles that were just like you know, saying that it wasn't deserved, and that part of the issue is that... And this is part of my own professional failures was the fact that it shouldn't have taken a seismic event, or a transformative event like George Floyd's death and the subsequent unrest for the paper to start writing about some of these issues. Like it shouldn't always take a flash point to get at this idea that you know certain communities of color have been over policed for decades and also at the same time like under-policed, where they haven't gotten the right response from police departments. And that we were too slow to start covering some of these, like what we think about is alternative crime prevention measures that we didn't write enough about. Like the promise of Cure Violence, and some other models, and how it had been used with some success in other places. And that we were too quick to frame... you know in years past, whenever there was a, uh, a spike in crime, like the stories that we tended to write was like, "Oh no, there aren't enough cops on the streets and we need more money for to hire more police officers." And just like thinking about it in such binary terms or close-minded terms. So I'm trying to. I'm working on the story right now basically about how the city is like every summer it's confronted with this spike in crime. And so I'm trying to get into the story like write it in a way that doesn't suggest that the only appropriate response is hiring more police.

In fact, there's you know there's a lot of people that just think that it's even more reason to kind of double down and invest in some of these other programs, or like invest in more housing, and better health care, and education, and jobs training, and in some communities.

Yeah, that's what I think I sort of expect of myself or some of the feedback that I've gotten.

Emeri Burks

Right. It sounds like you expect, or you think it would be better if journalists were a little bit more proactive and thinking about the context or the nuances of the situation which might not be normally considered, is that what you're saying?

Libor Jany

Yeah, I'd I'd say so. And you know, sometimes you're... and this kind of happens outside of the public eye, but sometimes you're kind of saddled with and confronted with the realities of working for a daily newspaper, which means that you got limited amount of reporters, lot of news out there. Sometimes you just gotta, you gotta cover these... You gotta chase these fires more or less right? And you don't always have the time or the luxury of an understanding editor to be able to chase some of these more ambitious stories.

But yeah, I. I still think that we could stand to be a little more forward thinking, and then we would have written stories... we would have still covered the hell out of what happened last May, but we would have been better prepared, and we would have already built up... hopefully it wouldn't have caught people by such surprise because they would have been reading about it in the paper for years. That, "Hey, this is how things are, and so maybe you can better understand people's rage at an event like this so."

Emeri Burks

Nice segue. Do you feel confident you will generally be able to meet these needs that the audience has for you. Why or why not?

Libor Jany

I feel cautiously confident. It starts with just like again kind of self-awareness or understanding that there's even an issue to begin with, and I think I've gotten there. But it's just, you know, things are constantly evolving and so keeping up with the times can be can be tough. 'Cause again, there's like so many aspects of this, and there's new research coming out every week. And then there's... You know you still have to... It's not... My beat, isn't police reform or discovering new systems of public safety. My beat is public safety and policing. And so I can't neglect the fact that the city is still kind of dealing with an opioid crisis, and overdoses are kind of spiking in communities that had largely been spared in the past. And I still have to write about, you know this surge in gun violence, and how places are sort of reacting to that so.

Yeah, there's a lot to cover. So even if the popular topic, or the general public's attention is largely focused on this issue, and understandably so, I still have other kind of responsibilities as a reporter on this beat so.

Emeri Burks

Sure, so as far as obstacles that might prevent you or individual journalists from meeting the needs. Sounds like just having a full plate is a major issue. Are there any other obstacles you think?

Libor Jany

Well, I mean the obstacles... yeah there are. There's obstacles internally from editors who don't see the wisdom in pursuing a certain sort of story, or internally because you're just saddled with so many other things on your plate that you just can't get around to it. There's obstacles

externally, you know the Star Tribune as I'd imagine most like... I wouldn't even say newspapers, but just like institutions. People have long memories and they... yeah, they just remember some of the coverage in the past. And I don't mean to just kind of like shit on my predecessors. 'Cause I kind of recognize that I've also contributed to some harm in my reporting, especially early on in my in my career.

So you have to contend with that and try to... I can't even say restore trust, but maybe just like build trust. In certain communities and you know that sometimes that involves like showing up to a meeting and just getting yelled at for half an hour, and then you know people eventually calm down and you can have a conversation, and they can explain to you what they... why they didn't like the way that their community was portrayed in past coverage and what you can do to improve on it.

So yeah, there are obstacles, yeah again, both internally and externally so.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, is there any support you can think of that news organizations might be able to offer that would help individual journalists meet these needs?

Libor Jany

Just from a like a reporter, editor, relationship standpoint, just having like greater support. Like there was one colleague in particular who recently left to take a job elsewhere, and she's someone who I admire very much because not only was she like a changemaker just internally like kind of pushing us to reevaluate, and reconsider the way that we've been doing things for years and years. But she was also just a kind of big thinker.

Part of the reason that she left, and part of her frustrations was that she felt like she didn't... 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 kind of like... there was this quiet expectation that she had to be part of the daily churn, and helping fill the paper every single day.

So she just grew generally frustrated by that. 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.

So yeah, that's something that just comes immediately to mind.

Emeri Burks

A little bit bigger scale, wider scale on this. Do you feel confident that the journalism industry will be able to meet society's need for this moment? Why are we not?

Libor Jany

I do. Every time you read one of those think pieces about... that are all like doom and gloom about journalism industry, whether it's like from an economic standpoint, about how many

newsrooms are losing jobs and papers are bleeding numbers or getting bought up by like the Aldens of the world or you hear some piece about this disconnect between Journalists and the communities that they cover. You know, for every one of those pieces then you can point to signs of hope. A number of things being like, for one, like the journalism that the New York Times and the Washington Post did in the twilight of the Trump administration, or really throughout it, like leading up to the... or throughout the Mueller investigation, like some of the pieces that they've done, Pro Publica has always been incredible. Like this this piece that they did on the on the super wealthy and how they've been exploiting these tax loopholes for years and years. Like it's still impactful journalism.

And then I also think to... some of the things that papers like the LATimes and Kansas City Star have done, just this sort of like internal reckoning, and they went back and they basically audited a lot of their their past coverage of communities of color and police in general, and came back with this understanding that, "Hey, we messed up and there were plenty of failures along the way. And then they published all of this in this like front page basically mea culpa, made caught by this apology, and pledged to do better.

Both of those papers, like especially like the LATimes, like it's clear that they still have their own internal issues. But I think that was a pretty significant step forward in terms of regaining people's trust so.

But just like even having the... the fact that they had those conversations in general, and that level of awareness was dope on its own right or in its own right. But then they took the additional step of publishing it, and owning up to their past mistakes.

There's hope. There's things that people can do. Another thing that kind of jumps in mind is like the Cleveland Plain Dealer and their... I think they call it The Right to be Forgotten Project where basically people have had stories about you know... crime stories written about them. Let's say the charges are dropped later and there was no follow-up story.

They can appeal to the paper and have those stories like permanently scrubbed from the Internet, because as we gaining a better understanding of how... What a criminal history or past does to people and how it like saddles them, and shackles them for their entire lives. Like we should be more aware of that, and what role we play in perpetuating that.

Yeah. There's hope.

Emeri Burks

Sounds like having these conversations would help the journalism industry meet these needs. Are there other things that would help the industry fill the need that it that we have for it right now?

Libor Jany

Probably just all steps that you like considered. I think diversifying newsrooms, I mean, that seems like a pretty like baseline and obvious step. Supporting reporters of color. So not... You know, 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 so that they're not just like... the ceiling isn't at middle management. But that they're taking roles with, you know, actual decision making power.

So yeah, that's a pretty vital first step.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. So moving into the final section then. As a black journalist, what do you feel others have to learn from your unique perspective?

Libor Jany

Sometimes... something that's like discouraging sometimes is what I think of as the lack of intellectual curiosity about some of these stories, issues, where colleagues... And it's not just confined to reporters, it could be could be activists, could be lawmakers, police officials that, this unwillingness to look beyond their own noses and consider other points of view or perspectives.

And so, yeah. I guess not using myself as an example, but again my colleague, the one I told you was sort of a change maker, I just wish that there'd been some more support for her inside the newsroom and that editors, leadership trusted her, and trusted her instincts. And when I say trust, like trust the fact that just because you don't understand what she's talking about as it relates to matters of race, ethnicity and some of these historically marginalized communities, doesn't mean that it's not worth pursuing. So don't poo poo her project or, give her the support that she needs. So yeah, kind of a lack of imagination and intellectual curiosity. Just because they don't have the lived experience. Like you, you'd hope that they would be... How to put it?

I mean so the baseline example is that you would hope that a white editor, even one who grew up in the suburbs and doesn't understand what it's like to have grown up in an ethnically diverse inner city would still be curious enough about that to want to find out more, to write stories about those areas.

Yeah, that's kind of how I think about it. I don't think that necessarily answers your question, but I'm at this point. I'm kind of just *unclear* here.

Emeri Burks

That's a lot.

For sure. We're almost done, I promise. Is there anything that you hope people would learn from this study just as a whole?

Libor Jany

Yeah, I mean a lot. I've kind of learned a lot in the sense that these are aren't necessarily questions that that I've I found myself thinking about on a daily basis. But they seem pretty vital. Like they seem.. All of these questions... I mean hopefully people that read your read the study and like the findings are both folks that are inside the newsroom, that will gain some valuable insight from it. But also outside that that will understand that maybe reporters are thinking about some of these issues.

Well, yeah. This is this dope. God. Yeah, I appreciate the questions.

Emeri Burks

Well, is there anything else that you wanted to share on any of the subjects we talked about? We talked about professional expectations, relationships to current events, understanding and meeting societal needs. Any of those topics you wanted to touch on just a little bit more.

Libor Jany

Not that I... like nothing really comes to mind. But I what I was gonna say is, if you think of anything else or you need me to clarify anything down the road, you can either email me or call me so yeah.

Emeri Burks

I appreciate that a lot, yeah.

All right, well, that's about it. Off camera I was going to ask if you knew anyone who might be interested in participating. Don't need to record that, but otherwise this is this, is it? So thank you so much. I they really do appreciate your time and making this fit in even in your car driving around – however. I really appreciate it. And you know the lack of polish is specifically what I'm trying to find. You know, it's not about having you know everything in AP format and proper citations behind everything, but people have their own perspectives, and their perspectives are inherently valuable. And so that's what this is about. So thanks very much for that.

I'm going to turn off recording then.

Libor Jany

OK.

***Amendment from email sent June 22nd, 2021**

Hey Emeri,

That's kind of you to ask, but you have a very empathetic approach. Didn't feel judged at all.

As for the question (**Compared to your colleagues who are not [self-identified race or ethnicity, e.g. "black"], do these expectations seem to affect/impact you differently? If so how?**): There's a greater expectation from the audience for any reporter of color to be attuned to the nuances of race and class. And rightfully so, I'd say. But that also opens us up to more criticism, too.

There's less pressure from editors/the higher ups, who tend to be white and male.

Hope that helps. I still have to sign and send you that release form.

Interview 5 – Makeda Easter – June 29, 2021

Emeri Burks

Okay. So starting the recording now. So we have discussed the consent form already. But I'm going to jump into the questions.

Makeda Easter

Okay.

Emeri Burks

So, hi. Can you tell me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Makeda Easter

Sure. My name is Makeda Easter. I'm an arts reporter at the Los Angeles Times⁵.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thank you. And can you tell me your pronouns and your age please?

Makeda Easter

Yeah, I'm 30 years old and my pronouns are she, her.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. And what race or ethnicity do you identify with or as?

Makeda Easter

I'm black.

Emeri Burks

⁵ Since interviewing for this study Makeda Easter has left LA Times, and is now working as an arts journalist and journalism instructor.

Great, thank you. Could you describe your background in journalism briefly? How did you get started? How did you lead to where you are now and what you're doing today?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I don't have a traditional journalism background. I didn't study it in college. I actually studied international affairs and my first job out of college was grant writing. Then my second job was a science writer at a university. One of the good things about that was that I could take free classes after a certain amount of time working for the university.

I took a master's journalism class out of curiosity, and so that led to me working full-time, and then I was freelancing. I decided briefly to enroll in the master's journalism program full-time at the University of Texas. But then I got accepted to a fellowship program with LA Times and left to pursue that.

So I moved to LA to be in this program called Metro Fellowship for... it's like kind of geared towards diverse emerging journalists. I started that in 2016 and it was a full-time fellowship where we rotated through different sections of the paper. But I did that for two and a half years and then was hired as... I was working full-time then I was hired as staff officially at that two and a half year mark. That's my story of how I got into it.

Emeri Burks

Wow, okay. Could I also confirm that you've been working as a journalist since the death of George Floyd last year?

Makeda Easter

Yes, I have.

Emeri Burks

Great, thank you. So I wanted to talk a little bit about the expectations that your supervisors and superiors have expressed to you as you joined these different positions you were talking about earlier.

So when you think about how you learned what your job was to be, what do you remember your supervisors and superiors expressing to you of their expectations?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. So my first full-time journalism job was through this fellowship program. The way the fellowship program was set up was that we rotated through different sections of the paper. Basically we were trying to prove ourselves that we were worthy of being hired on staff. The expectation was that you... This was said and unsaid at the same time, that you do whatever's necessary, work over time, make your best impression to editors that you work with so that they, like you and think of you as indispensable, and hireable, and all that kind of stuff.

This was expressed by the program director at the time, and there's just kind of a sense of like anxiety that you, as a fellow, we have to make the best impression for these editors and for people who are at the paper. So, I don't know if that answers your question, but that was kind of the beginning of that for sure.

Emeri Burks

For sure. No, it does. Can I ask, as far as presenting a good impression of yourself, what do you think were the main things your employers and supervisors were looking for from you? What values might they say?

Makeda Easter

Yeah, I would say, having good story ideas. So back then, I think the program has changed a little bit now, but in 2016 it was like not saying no to an assignment. So always being available, and being this team player, which caused kind of some weird feelings because we weren't paid over time, where we weren't supposed to get overtime. But there was like a lot of expectation of that in order to get good reviews. We were evaluated at, I think the six month mark and the year mark, and that determined if you would stay through the rest of the fellowship. So it really was like getting as many by-lines as possible, also like saying yes to all these assignments, but then also working on your own assignments that would make you stand out from other fellows or other people in the newsroom. So yeah, just do as much as you can to impress everyone.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Thank you. Could I ask specifically about, the notions of journalistic objectivity that your supervisors expressed to you? What did they say about this topic and what did they say they expected of you regarding it?

Makeda Easter

For me, it wasn't expressly mentioned that way, especially when I first came to the paper, because I was kind of coming from a different position where I didn't study journalism. A lot of people that I came in with who were in this program, they already kind of learned what objectivity was, and what it meant to be at a newspaper, and what neutrality was and that kind of thing. Whereas I feel like for me, it wasn't said, but it was kind of things that I noticed. Like the way we framed stories, and I would kind of wonder to myself, "Why did we say it that way?" or, especially with issues like around police brutality, that was kind of like, it wasn't said to me, but it was just me noticing like, "This is kind of weird." These are the things that I may have critiqued when I wasn't at a newspaper. So I think it was just like learning by seeing what is objectivity.

It really wasn't until, for me, at least until by George Floyd last year that we were able to express like, "What do you mean by neutrality? What is objectivity? This might not be what... the papers that idea of objectivity is may not be what a lot of other people's are.

So I don't think it was until last summer that we really started outwardly questioning these things.

Emeri Burks

Sure. No. You said that you learned largely by doing. So could you give me an example, maybe an anecdote about how you learned what objectivity meant and what your supervisors wanted from you about it?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. The one that I can think of right now is something that happened actually earlier this year. It was actually the first time where I had conversations with our masthead about neutrality and objectivity. I worked on a story about a billboard series that an artist painted, kind of the moment that George Floyd died on these billboards, and they were put up around the country.

It wasn't protest. It was just bringing awareness to what happened. So in writing this story, I wrote, I think it was like in the first couple of sentences, like "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 don't remember the exact words, but it wasn't objective is what they were saying. It wasn't neutral. I think "neutral" is the word they used. It wasn't neutral. And I was like, "Wait, what? Like, I don't understand.

I actually don't understand this at all, because last summer the whole world, there were global uprisings around the stuff because it was objectively cruel, and we use cruel to describe like animal cruelty and that kind of thing. So why couldn't we use it here? And it became like a whole ordeal and the word was still taken out.

I didn't win this battle, but the conversation got like elevated and I had a conversation with the masthead about it, just like a zoom being like, "If this word is it 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 like 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, even if it's less like, I don't know, less confrontational? So my questions weren't really answered.

We had a meeting and they're like, "Oh, you brought up some great points." But I think I was just curious, "But what is neutral at this paper? Is it from the perspective of an older white man? Is that what neutral is and that is the stance the paper's taken?" And that's kind of like caused me internally to question these things a lot more. So that was my incident that happened like a couple months ago, I guess, or earlier this year.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Today, have you received an explanation of neutrality or objectivity that that satisfies you?

Makeda Easter

No. I didn't really expect to either. After that meeting, it was just kind of like, "Oh, we'll look into it," and then I didn't hear anything else. I was like, I don't really want to push this anymore because it's kind of exhausting to be doing that all the time.

So it just was something that I've kept in my mind, and something that I've just been thinking a lot more about especially as journalists have been having these conversations more about the idea of objectivity and that kind of thing.

Emeri Burks

Sure. That's a great example. Thanks for that story.

I wanted to ask about the expectations that you've learned from your audience. Do you think that your audience has the same sorts of expectations for you as your supervisors do? Are they different?

Makeda Easter

It's kind of interesting. I write about art, so I don't get a ton of readers all the time. I may work on a story for a couple of weeks and then get like a thousand or 1200 readers. But the paper had a policy where, in the past our names, our emails were like tagged at the end of the story that we wrote. So whenever a story that I wrote touched on issues of race or social justice or LGBTQ issues or something like that, it was pretty common that I'd get emails from readers who were upset about it, or like, writing back like, "the liberal fake news media, blah, blah, blah, blah." Now they actually took the policy out because I think a lot of reporters were getting that hate mail.

So now that our emails are in the physical paper, we don't get that as much. I do still have things sometimes... it's kind of hard because I don't quite know our full demographics of who reads the art section or the paper. I assume it's like skews older and whiter. but I also feel like the work that I've done may have attracted some younger and more diverse people because of the nature of the stories that I'm drawn to and write. So I can't really say... It's hard because I think a lot of our readers are older and they want to know more about the established art institutions in the city. Whereas what I found is like younger, more diverse groups that haven't felt welcome in those spaces, find their arts and culture through other ways. They may not even like look to the LA times to find that stuff because it historically wasn't really for them. So it's kind of hard because I don't fully know what the expectations are from audience. But I do think there are some, like the older crowd, who've been reading the paper forever – they expect their arts coverage to be a certain way. And I don't want it to be that way. So I've been pushing back against that in my own way, I guess.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Could you tell me a little bit more what you mean, "they want your art coverage a certain way that's maybe different from yours." How do they want their arts coverage from you as you understand it?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. So I write about a lot of dance and I think historically the papers covered dance from the perspective of dance companies, like modern dance companies performing on stage at like... there's a place called the music center, which is a really big institution here, and other like big arts centers.

The way that I've been covering dance is more of like... I do that stuff as well, but I've been doing dance culturally, like dance on Tik Tok, or dance and music videos, because we live in LA and a lot of the dance people see on their TV, like someone who may not go to a ballet show,

they're probably watching like the Grammys and they're seeing dancers, dance influencers, that kind of thing. So just kind of been looking at dance more as... I don't know to describe it. But kind of more how the regular person encounters dance who may not have access to the arts in this traditional sense. Like a lot of people haven't grown up going to see ballet and modern dance shows. So they don't see it as adults either. But they do encounter this art in a different way. So I've been trying to approach it like that.

Emeri Burks

Sure. It sounds like you're looking at how to report on dance as a democratic sort of what people experience with dance, how they relate to it, but it's...

Makeda Easter

Yeah, yeah.

Emeri Burks

It seems like your audience has a different definition of dance, which is perhaps a little more traditional than your perspective, is that right?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. Yeah. I don't know who the full audience is and I think there are people who may have been attracted to my work because I've been covering it in different ways. But I think when I think of the traditional LA times arts audience, I think... and maybe I don't think I'm that great. But maybe I've expanded people's minds a little bit like who've gone to the paper to say like, "Oh, this is a really interesting way to look at dance." But I do think historically, the audience has been like, "What's the review on the dance company that's coming into town and performing?"

So hopefully that kind of answers your question.

Emeri Burks

Oh, for sure. Yeah, that does. Thank you. So these expectations that you've experienced and you understand from your superiors or supervisors and from your audience – do you feel that compared to your colleagues who are not black, that they impact or affect you differently?

Makeda Easter

It's kind of hard to say. I feel like when I came in as this fellow, when I was in the fellowship program – yes. Because most of us were people of color and we were in this position where we were fighting to be seen and fighting to be deemed worthy of being at the paper. And we were underpaid, which is like, I don't feel uncomfortable saying that because it's been written about publicly.

So it was a really weird position to be in. And I do think black reporters and black journalists have had a tougher time with the paper. Just in our organizing last year around George Floyd, and having these meetings with black journalists who have been at the paper from the nineties, and even the eighties, and just hearing like, things haven't really changed the way they should, and just hearing some of the issues that I faced, people faced that in the eighties.

So I do think, yeah, there are different expectations for black journalists. I think I felt it more when I was in this fellowship program, because we were mistreated in a way. Like I was saying, just like forced to go above and beyond. We felt very judged, like if you made a mistake in a story that it might start this gossip train of, “they’re a bad reporter,” and then you’d not know what people are talking about you, then you internalize it. So it’s a very tough environment. So yeah, I would say that black journalists have historically had different expectations for sure.

Emeri Burks

Can I ask how this has impacted you personally?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. So I talk a lot about the fellowship, but it was a really tough time and it was two and a half years. So that makes up a bit more than half of my time with the paper was through this program, and through the lens of the program. And it just was very hard for me. I think that, yeah, I felt a lot of like anxiety about my work, just because there’s the feeling like I said, of being judged, wondering am I really worthy of being here? Like the questions I said before, and I think when you internalize it, it really does affect you.

Am I actually good journalists? I think I mentioned through the program, you’re supposed to do three rotations, but I did like eight or nine. I was just put all over the place, and didn’t really have a home. I wasn’t really able to make roots in a section and have a fighting chance, I felt, to get hired at the time.

So that was really rough, mentally, and I think there are some lingering effects of that, of like every time I write a story even though I’ve been working with my editor now for like two years, it’s just like, I turn it in to him and I will have an internal freak out, like, “Oh my God, am I the worst writer ever?” But like for every single story and it’s like, “Will that feeling ever go away?” Like, I don’t know if that’s something that came from this fellowship environment. I don’t know. Also hearing from people it wasn’t just me, like other people had really bad experiences as black reporters.

So I think, yeah, I’ve internalized some of that anxiety a bit. Things are better for me now – I should say that. Now that I’m not in the program, and I really love my editor, like he’s been really great and supportive. But yeah, I think there are lingering like doubts and stuff about... I think a lot of the fellowship was kind of pushing you, like you should be grateful to be here. You shouldn’t raise issues that you’re experiencing, ‘cause you just need to be grateful.

I think now, even when I experience things or things don’t seem right, it’s like, “Well, you should just be grateful. You’re here.” It’s kind of in the back of the back of my mind. So yeah.

I hope that answers that a little.

Emeri Burks

These feelings and experiences that you’re expressing, especially that you were hearing from other black journalists who work beside you, did you hear anything like this from journalists who were not black?

Makeda Easter

Yeah, I think, pretty much a lot of journalists of color who've worked at the paper – Latino, Asian... Yeah, I don't know of any native reporters personally. But last year we performed a black caucus to push for some change, and then soon after the Latino Caucus formed. They had their issues of LA is like almost half Latino, and the representation in the newsroom is maybe like 12% or something like that. So Latino issues are not really represented well, given the demographics of the city. I've heard similar issues from Asian reporters.

I think the other thing is a lot of reporters of color, or journalists color come in, came in historically through this program that I mentioned. So a lot of them are coming in at a lower stature. Then when they're hired, their salary is lower than someone who came in later than them, who didn't come in through this program. So it just kind of set up a caste system that I think a lot of us have experienced. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Got it. Thanks. That's really helpful to clarify there.

I'd like to move on a little bit to context setting with some current events.

Makeda Easter

Sure

Emeri Burks

Could I ask for a your reaction and relationship to learning about George Floyd's death?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. It was really hard. I am personally... and I said this in the chat we did, I think that you saw. I haven't ever been able to watch the video, even when it was first happening and it was just all over Twitter. I would start scrolling, and I'd see like a couple, like 20 seconds of it. And then I would just feel physically sick, like my stomach would like clinch up and I'd have to keep scrolling. Also, I've experienced the same kind of wave of news with other deaths of black men and women at the hands of the police. So it is a bit triggering.

But this time... before I was not working as a journalist full time. This time it's like I *am* in in news. So I felt like...

Oh, sorry...

Like a sense of responsibility that I *should* be watching the video. But there was like, I really just can't watch this video. And then feeling like, I don't know, it's like, you couldn't really fully express what you felt on social media because our social medias are tied to LA Times and there's very strict policies. So it's like having these emotions, not really being able to express them the way I would have in the past when I wasn't working in news. But then also having to cover it. I feel grateful that I wasn't on the front lines of going out to Minneapolis, because I don't know if I would have been able to do that.

But then through the arts, it was something that we covered all the time. It was really fascinating how with George Floyd, it spread to like every single section of every beat of the paper. In the arts, I was quickly working on... like one of the first stories I did was how artists were creating viral graphic illustrations to spread the movement. So I felt like that was somewhat helpful because I did want to do something when he first was killed. I wanted to do something, but I didn't know what. So doing little stories like that made me feel like I was contributing in a way.

But it was really, really hard. It was on the news. I work in the news. I was just like inundated with George Floyd and this really horrific and cruel death, and seeing that was really hard. Then seeing our coverage was hard too, because it was enraging seeing some of the stuff that the paper put out at that time.

I think it was early June or really, really late May. That's kind of what kicked off this whole "reckoning" within the paper. I put it in quotation marks now because it's like, "What's really changed?" I don't know. But it was a lot, I think, emotionally to handle.

Emeri Burks

Could I ask similarly for your reaction or relationship to learning about former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts.

Makeda Easter

Yeah. That one, I think by that time, because it was a couple of months ago now, I had just been so emotionally worn out by everything that I didn't have a strong reaction. It was just kind of like, "Okay. He was found guilty." But this is what it took. It took someone recording the whole thing. It took people protesting for months, all around the world. It took all of this for some semblance of justice, I guess. So I didn't feel... I was glad, but I don't know. I wasn't that glad. It was more of a sad feeling of like, "This is what it will take in the future for people to be held accountable, I guess, in some way for their really awful actions." So I didn't have as strong of a reaction.

Emeri Burks

Sure. One more, could you tell me how you personally related to the discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice that have come up since the death of George Floyd?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I think the discussions have touched like every area and every field as their own "reckoning." We saw this... like once we started talking about systemic injustice, it started like, "Well, the paper is a little bit hypocritical for writing these things, when the paper has been historically has been a system of oppression for a lot of people – not just people working inside the newsroom, but for communities, like whole entire communities in LA that had been demonized by the paper over decades. Or I think the paper's like 130 years, something like that. I don't know if that's the exact number, but like from the beginning of its history is just like, it's said terrible, terrible things about communities in LA.

So I think it was like... Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm losing the question. Could you repeat it?

Emeri Burks

Sure. How have you related or reacted to the conversations of racism, racial violence and systemic injustice that have come up since the death of George Floyd?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, I related very well, I guess. Or making connections about all areas of my life and my family's life, that have been impacted by systemic racism.

I grew up middle class – I would say pretty privileged. But my parents were... they're from Mississippi and they recall their schools getting desegregated at 7 years old. They grew up poor in Mississippi. Just thinking about this ripple effects, and even myself coming from a middle-class suburb of Houston, but things I've experienced... and then like being in this newsroom at the LA times.

I felt honestly that it was the first time that I've seen blatant discrimination in my life. I knew things were happening. I knew maybe I didn't have the same opportunities as other people. But being in the newsroom, it's like, "Oh, this is what it's like to be discriminated against."

I think I would want that to be anonymous because I don't want to, just say like, "Oh, LA Times is discriminatory." But it is. We got a settlement a couple of months ago because there was a class action lawsuit against the paper.

Emeri Burks

Interesting.

Makeda Easter

Yeah, women and people of color were severely underpaid, and I was somehow part of that because the year range, I don't remember what it was, but I felt within that. I got a paycheck as well as like a lot of other people who were discriminated against. So it's not just my feelings. It's like, legally, this paper has been doing this.

So, yeah, I think I just have been thinking a lot more about that for sure.

Emeri Burks

To be clear. What specifically would you want to make sure was anonymous regarding your relationship to LA Times and the settlement?

Makeda Easter

I mean, the settlement is public knowledge. It was written about in NPR, I think. I would just say... I think I said something like, "being with LA Times was the first time I experienced very blatant discrimination." I wouldn't want that to... [unclear]. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

So that you'd like... ok. Gotcha. Thank you.

So how would you say that your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests have affected your work?

Makeda Easter

So I guess to go back a little bit, we... this was I guess in June. There was a story that came out that the paper did, and it was like, "Looters Explain Why They Did It." And then in quotes, "Get My Portion." The story had a photo gallery of people who were looting, and it was like 40 photos of mostly like black and brown kids who were getting arrested, and their faces were very there. It was just an awful, awful story.

It like set off this um, Just like this really, really intense discussion about racism at the paper, and framing of our stories, and the harm that we've done, in our Slack. That's also public knowledge. It's been written about because that Slack got really, really heated and people got really, really real. It was kind of interesting being part of that.

Then we formed this black caucus because we wanted to talk about our coverage. We want us to talk about how black journalists have been really mistreated throughout the paper's history. So we released a list of demands to the paper and the owner. Being part of that was rewarding. It was tiring because I was one of the main organizers. So I kind of helped... like we did like a social media campaign where we put out these graphic cards of black reporters who had worked at the paper, and just kind of them talking about their bad experiences as black journalists at the LA Times specifically.

But really when we really set list of demands, and the paper responded by... I'm not going to say that things have changed totally for the better. But there have been some great changes. Like we now have someone whose sole job on the masthead is diversity and inclusion. The Metpro program that I mentioned before, it's been revamped totally because of a lot of issues with it. The paper did this package that was like our reckoning with race or something like that. That was like really important for me to see. There's the work that I do just writing stories for the paper. But then there's work that I can do inside the paper to make it better for other people, and for myself, and my colleagues and friends and stuff.

So that was I think one of the biggest things aside... Like, I do want to keep fighting in whatever way that I can, even if it's as small as raising a question about "cruel" as not neutral. I just want to keep doing that work within the paper itself, because hopefully that will change our coverage in some way, or make someone in the community who reads the paper feel more seen, or someone who thinks like, "Oh, the LA Times is not for me," see work that is like, "Oh, actually it could be."

So yeah, I think maybe it hasn't changed my work for work, but it's changed my work inside of this institution, I guess.

Emeri Burks

Great. Thank you for that. All right. I'd like to... this is a great transition. Could you tell me a little bit about how you understand your role as a journalist, then?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I see my work as helping people tell their stories, and within the LA Times in particular tell stories focused on people or places that have been historically ignored within the paper. That's

of course not my official title. But a lot of my work intersects with identity, and the arts. So I think finding a lens into these social issues, because arts is seen as like soft news or sometimes people think of it as not that important, or it's kind of like frivolous. But for me it's very important to approach issues that people are talking about from the lens of the arts, and kind of like the word you mentioned before, like democratizing the arts.

I think a lot of people think of the arts as like, I dunno, "That's not for me." But everyone kind of interacts with it in some way, and so I hope to democratize that for people.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Yeah. Could you tell me what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I guess empathy is the most important. I don't think of myself as so important that it's like, "I have to tell your story. You have to talk to me." I think feeling a sense of being honored that people would trust me to tell their story, even if it's not even that deep. But that people reach out to me, feeling a sense of like gratitude, I guess, that people want me to write about them, and that my story resonates in some ways.

So yeah. Values – empathy, gratitude, doing good work that's interesting and accessible. I think that's really important to me – accessibility. Yeah, those are the main ones I can think of right now.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So these values and the expectations that you expressed earlier from your supervisors and your audience, do you ever feel that they're in conflict?

Makeda Easter

I don't currently because my current editor, he is on the same page as me. So it's been really... and like I said, I started working with him two years ago. So it's like, once I became his staff reporter, things changed in terms of like how I felt about being at the paper. He just has the same values. So it works out.

But I think before, in particular when I worked on the Metro desk, which is like a lot of breaking news, it's a bit different. It's like, "No, you go out and get the story no matter what. I think I wrote about maybe at year end being at the paper, it was like a mass shooting, and it was like, I felt really uncomfortable, but going out and being like, "You need to talk to this person." It's like, "Well, I'm here and they're sobbing. I can't like 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." And some people, we need those reporters who just get the story and have that tenacity, I guess. But it's not for me personally.

Emeri Burks

Could you tell me a little bit about in those situations, how you choose the best course of action – when you feel that your values might be in conflict with what's expected of you?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I'm trying to... because that was a while ago. There was a scenario, it was related to the shooting in Vegas and there was a rally in orange county or something like that. Yeah, I was supposed to go out and get "color," which is kind of describing a scene and talking to people that are there. I think an editor wanted me to talk to a specific person, and I was like, "This person's crying right now. Like I don't want to go and retraumatize them with asking a bunch of really personal questions." And they were like, "Just try," you know?

I don't know, this may have like gotten me negative points. I was like, "I really can't do this kind of thing." You know, to the best that I can I'm not going to do something that I personally don't feel comfortable with.

There's a smaller thing where I wrote a story about undocumented people, and the headline for the story was changed because we have very strict copy edit rules, and standards and practices. I don't know if it's changed, but at the time you couldn't use the word undocumented, you had to put "illegal," or "immigrants in the country illegally," or something illegal. So in the headline of the story I wrote, I wrote, "undocumented" in the headline. Editor changed it to "illegal."

I was kind of like going around and talking to people at the audience engagement desk, and I was like, "Is there any way you can, subtly change this? Because I don't even feel comfortable sharing this story with, 'illegal,' like right in the headline." Then someone changed it, but then it got changed back. So just try to find my way, doing things that I personally feel comfortable with. Of course, I'm a novice compared to people who have been at the paper for a lot longer. But, yeah. I dunno.

Emeri Burks

Sure. That's a great anecdote there. I wanted to ask a little bit about some of the contentious journalistic behavior that we've seen make the headlines in recent years, recent year. So can I ask, how do you evaluate journalists expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and or perspectives in public forum and forums in your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced and what boundaries should be revised?

Makeda Easter

It's kind of tough. I personally believe that no one's unbiased, and I think this idea that the journalist is this neutral, objective person with no biases – I think that's just kind of dumb. Like we all have our own biases, and I think for people of color, that's kind of been used... I don't know, like kind of something to use against them. Like you can't say black lives matter because it's too political, and it's like as a black person, what do you mean by that? There's questions about like, can journalists attend Pride? And it's like, there's some people who are like, "Well, I'm gay or I'm a lesbian. Why couldn't I attend Pride? That doesn't it make sense."

I think it's hard to kind of put into words. I think that no one is unbiased. I don't think objectivity is real, and I think that it's been used as a way to frame whiteness, to say that whiteness is neutral, and that's the standard that we work around. I think people have been starting to push back against that for good reason.

It's a hard line. I mean, if someone's out here who's a journalist and like... I don't even know what they're saying, but if they're expressing views that's really hurtful, and they're covering that community, then I think there's a problem with that. I think people should be aware of their own biases and do their best as they're reporting, or they're working as journalists to understand their own biases, and then report as accurately as possible. I don't think we can strive toward this true objectivity, but I think we can strive toward accuracy.

So I don't know. I don't know how you would monitor. I think you were saying expressions of something. I think that's something I don't know how to answer because I think people should be able to express things. I think journalists should be able to have Black Lives Matter in their bio, or be able to... I think recently there's been some, not drama, but issues around journalists calling out coverage of Palestine, and then being called out for being, not objective or biased. I think raising these issues that we've historically covered communities in an unflattering way, or like a not objective way, not like pointing out imbalances of power. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it makes the industry stronger. It makes like our work stronger.

So I can't fully answer your question cause I don't know. But those are things that I think about a lot for sure.

Emeri Burks

That's great. Could I break that down a little bit and ask, are there times that you think that a journalist should disclose their own personal bias or their perspective, which might be biasing their relationship to a topic either in a story or in the public forum?

Makeda Easter

Possibly. I don't know. I know there's something that I've thought about is like, there's a reporter who covers, I think business, and their family is one of the most the wealthiest, most powerful families in the state. Which is, to me, fascinating because something like that is not problematic. But you might be told you can't cover some issue because you're too close to it.

So I don't know. I think the line gets tricky and blurry because if I say that someone has to kind of disclose their bias here, but then I don't enforce it here – I just don't know how that would be well enforced. But I do think people... 'cause I don't know, what personally would I say online? Like, "I'm a black woman and I'm from the south. I support like progressive issues." Would that make me not able to cover certain things. I don't know. So to be honest, I don't really know the answer to your question for sure.

Emeri Burks

For sure. That's completely fair. You mentioned social media earlier. Do you have any views about professional versus private use of social media? Do you think that they are separate for

journalists? Should be separate? What rules of conduct should govern how journalists behave on social media?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I personally think it should be up to the journalist, how they want to engage with the social media world. Because when you are public, you do open yourself up for attacks, and hate, and stuff like that. But it's also a great way to connect with people and build an audience, which is increasingly important in this industry – kind of having your own audience in case you get laid off or something, and you need to find your way.

But then there's people who want to be private and I totally understand that, and I think they should have that option. I think we had talked recently about our social media policy as a union, and it's just like, everyone has very different ideas of how journalists should engage online. I think one of the issues is that like, you're not supposed to express political views. But people define political in so many different ways, that it's just really hard to govern.

Yeah, I think that's really tough. I think that journalists shouldn't be bullying someone on line, I don't think that's acceptable at all. Should they be able to be themselves? Yeah. Express political views? I mean, it depends on how we define political, and it's not defined very well. So I think they shouldn't have to hide themselves or hide parts of themselves just because they're a journalist. I think if we looked more at it as like, there's no such thing as unbiased, maybe people's ideas about how journalists can be online would change.

I personally am like, as long as you're not doing anything hurtful to people, and you're not being hateful, you're not bullying or anything like that, I think anything else is fair game, personally. And I know we're not supposed to talk about who we're voting for anything like that. But to me, I'm like, "Why does it matter?" Like, if you're a good journalist, if you are doing your work, if you're fact-checking, if you're being accurate as possible, I don't think it really matters to me. But I know that most people don't think that way.

Emeri Burks

So. Well can I ask, do you think that these boundaries are changing within the journalism industry?

Makeda Easter

I think it is. I think the younger generation is pushing back, especially because we grew up on social media. So it's interesting that these policies were created by people who – and this isn't to be ageist or anything – but people who didn't grow up with a MySpace, or Tumbler, or something like that kind of defining how we should engage online. Especially as our work is really important, that's how we get traffic now is sharing a story on Twitter, building a following. When you build your own following and you share your stories, you get readers, and that in turn helps your outlet that you're working for.

So what was your question? Sorry.

Emeri Burks

It was just about in your opinion, how you think that these boundaries are changing, or if they are changing, and what ways they are changing.

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I feel in the past – and it's hard for me to say for sure, because I would still Almost five years into being a journalist full time. So I'm still a little bit new. But it seems to have gotten a little bit looser. I think people are pushing back more on these kind of outdated policies of how you're supposed to engage in conduct yourself as a journalist online. So I do think it's becoming a little bit more loose. But I think it's people who are online who are pushing back and saying like, “You can't tell us that we can't say...” I keep using the black lives matter because it's was just kind of funny to me that there were policies that were like, you can't say black lives matter, or you can have it in your bio because it's too political. That's just so strange. Especially for a black journalist to not be able to say black lives matter, it's just kind of weird.

So I do think things are changing. But I do think it depends on the newsroom, for sure.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Sure. I like to take the conversation to a little bit broader topic now. Based on your understanding, what do you think society needs from the journalism industry at this time ,and what makes you say that?

Makeda Easter

That's hard. 'Cause we're in such a weird time where I don't know if people are really even engaging news a lot of times. Or they have their one source, and that's kind of all the they read, or engage with, or watch or something like that. A lot of people just kind of talk to younger people, and they don't read news at all. They kind of get it from Twitter, or Tik Tok, or Instagram. I do think journalism is important. I do think journalism has to evolve and meet people where they are.

It's like a really tough environment right now. It's very polarized. It's also a tough industry because people if they're not reading, they're not paying for news, they don't think that they have to pay for news, and then journalists don't have jobs. Then when there's no jobs, there's not people reporting on what's happening in the community or a city. There's a lot lost when you don't have that.

So I don't know, to be honest. I think that we need to reflect communities, how they are. I think we need to... In the case of a publication that has a readership that skews one way, but the city is not that population – Like if it's for instance, the people who subscribes to the LA Times, if 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.

So I think journalism should be a reflection of a community, a true reflection, for sure.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. And what about journalists individually? What do you think society needs from you or any journalist right now?

Makeda Easter

I think, yeah, they need people who tell the truth. And this idea of truth is kind of hard to define, but people who do their best to present accurate information. It can be engaging and entertaining. You can be a journalist who's working on Tik Tok. I think that's really amazing that you're reaching people that way. But if you're presenting your information accurately, I think that's great. I think, yeah. Journalists should be creative and do their work to reach out to people, to reach out to... I keep saying communities. But reaching out to communities that maybe don't feel reflected in the news. I think journalists should be well read. We should be reading all different types of sources to see what's out there. I think our jobs are important.

It's hard to say what we should all be doing, but me personally, I just want my work to be accessible, like I said before. I want people to like see the value in the arts, but also to make connections between the arts and all these other issues that we experience in this country and the world.

Emeri Burks

Great. And do you feel confident that you yourself would generally be able to meet these needs?

Makeda Easter

Kind of. I think it's hard. I think in a very like minuscule way, I can do my part. But there's just like so much to be done. I don't know if I can meet all the needs. But I can do my best, and that makes me feel pretty good if I know that I'm doing my best, and know that I'm reaching people.

Emeri Burks

So, what obstacles do you think prevent you from meeting the needs of the public or at least me prevent you from better meeting the needs of the public?

Makeda Easter

There's like the balance of like, it's the work that I want to pursue, but then the work that I am assigned to pursue. And there's like less and less journalists now because the industry is really struggling. So there's so much news. We have to figure out what is the story that I can write, and I don't want to work myself, like burn myself out working all the time.

So it's kind of like picking and choosing what you can tackle and confront. So that's, I think, the challenge is that there is just a lot of stuff out there – a lot of news, a lot of like worthy news. But you can't cover all of it. You just have to pick. And 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, I think, for sure.

Emeri Burks

What sort of support do you think your organization might be able to offer that would help you better meet these needs?

Makeda Easter

I think that paying someone equitably, like, it sounds kind of 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.

I think having an editor who's supportive, and who you can talk to.

In terms of pay equity, I feel a bit better now that we have a union. That's definitely helped out, for sure. And then my editor's really great. So I'm grateful for him. Even though he got promoted, so I'll have a new editor. So I'm a little nervous 'cause as I've seen, an editor can make or break your experience. So yeah.

What else?

Having an institution that listens, and if you have an issue, one that will at least try to like meet you halfway. I think that's also a limitation is that when you work within an institution, you have to meet the needs of that institution. Your work has to fall within the guidelines of that institution. So if I personally feel that something should be said a different way, it's not that it doesn't matter, but it's like you are representing the LA Times. So there are some limitations with that. But hopefully that kind of answers your question.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, it does.

So big scale again, broad scale. Do you feel confident that journalism industry will be able to meet society's needs at this moment?

Makeda Easter

Kind of. I feel like the issue, a lot of the issues is that there's not a lot of financial support for journalism currently. And there's a lot of local news that has died out because they've been just obliterated by like these conglomerates, or just haven't been able to find funding or support. And so when local news goes away, there's like whole news deserts and people who aren't really represented.

I don't know how that issue can be fixed. It's a little bit scary. So it's like hard to say if we can meet the needs, because I don't think journalism as an institution has support like that in this country.

But there are some institutions, like the New York Times is like very well-resourced. But I do think that a lot of local places, a lot of culturally specific, black owned, or Latino-owned media doesn't get that support. So then they just go away and disappear, and that's not good. So I feel kind of mixed about it.

Emeri Burks

Well, based on your experience and understanding as a journalist, what might help the journalism industry better meet these needs?

Makeda Easter

Back to the funding issue, like finding a way, I don't know what the solution is because it's just really, really tough. 'Cause I'm like, "can a government fund journalism and then have it be neutral... like not neutral, but like have it... I don't know. I don't know.

The money thing is very, very, very hard. I think we need more money. 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, and as middle management, and editors, and 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.

And I think, yeah, it kind of trickles out to the storytelling that we do when our institutions are reflective of the world we live in. So that's what I would say.

Emeri Burks

So has your understanding of social responsibility, of social need, influenced your work as a journalism? If so, how, but also has this changed since George Floyd's death?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I think I've always thought of my job as like, kind of... I'm not going to say a social service. But I always felt a sense of... and there's I think controversy around this term – but activism. Like I think of my work as a form of activism, which I don't know – I wonder if I'd get in trouble for even saying that on Twitter.

But I do think journalism can be activism because, even just, for example, I did a story on roller-skating last year, and for the story I did research in our archives about Venice in California – Venice Beach. I came across a story that was written in 1989, and it described this black section of Venice as... it was like if Venice is a carnival, this neighborhood, the black neighborhood, is it scariest ride. Then another subhead down in the story described this neighborhood as like "ghetto," like literally used that word. And I was just like, "This is not just offensive, this is like harmful and dangerous to describe. I just thought about how many different layers that... you know, the writer thought this personally, which definitely not unbiased to say that about a neighborhood. But the writer thought this, they actually wrote it, the editor was like, "Sure," copy editor's like, "Sure," the paper, the people who did the page design, and like, "Yeah, no issue with this," and it was just out into the world. And that was just like one small example.

It was like, if this was 1989, what has this paper done? What has... and not just LA Times, but like a lot of other journalism institutions – what have they done to these communities by telling stories this way, or framing people or places and spaces like this? It has a really bad effect, and I do feel like the work... The way that I think about my work is like activism against that, and

pushing back against that. I don't think of myself as important in that way, but just the small things that I do is my own little form of activism.

So I guess I keep kind of straying away from your question. But I do see what I do as like a form of social justice, or a small form of that – like very, very small. I'm not an activist like that. But I hope that my work does create some change even within like our paper. So I think that's really important to me

Emeri Burks

Clarify one point there – you said you see your work as pushing against “that” when talking about the very problematic language that the story on Venice was presenting. What is “that” in this instance that you feel responsible to push against?

Makeda Easte

I think it's just the way that the LA times, for instance, how the LA Times is... and I've used this word before. But like demonized whole communities in Los Angeles. So I feel like my work is pushing back on that demonization. And it's not like everyone was doing that. But if I could find one story in the archive that easily, and '89 was like 30 years ago – Like that wasn't that long ago, I just think... and that was something that came up, I think in the racial reckoning package the story did, was how the paper has characterized these neighborhoods.

I don't know what the impact of it is. But I don't think it's good to have the paper of record of the city talking about people who live in that city that way. I'd be curious if people do research on this, like what has been the impact of journalism on communities that way?

But I see my work as pushing back against that historical, I'm gonna call it mistreatment of people in LA. I mean, if you're writing about a community that way, you obviously don't think those people are your audience. So I think my work is like bringing in an audience who maybe hasn't historically been treated as they deserve to be represented or... I don't know, it's hard to say. But I hope that's what I'm pushing back on. Hopefully that makes some sense.

Emeri Burks

No, that that really helps. Thank you.

All right. We are nearing the end, and I wanted to ask some kind of concluding questions. So as a black journalist, what do you feel that others might have to learn from your unique perspective, and what might you bring to the work that someone who's not a black journalist would not be bringing?

Makeda Easter

I guess as a black journalist and working in a paper that's majority white... and this is something we've talked about – as black journalists, as journalists of color, you have a dual role of reporting, and then you're also explaining your culture to people, which is kind of annoying at times. But if you're not doing it, then the story gets kind of mangled in ways.

I don't know what that story is, but I think there have been times where it's like, “Well, I'm going to explain this to this editor,” and kind of like, “We shouldn't write it like this because

that's really clunky and uncomfortable language to describe something which signals immediately to the reader this isn't really for me. It's for white people to understand things about me, but it's not for me." So I think, my role or something people learn, it's just part of being a black journalist. Like you, you explain things about black culture to people and explain why things are important, and I really do feel like if I wasn't there – not just me, but if black journalists weren't there – they, and by "they" it's like people who are not black, wouldn't know these things. So then the story would get kind of mangled, as I said.

I think it's not a role that I thought I would be in. But it just comes with the territory of being a black journalist in a historically white institution.

Emeri Burks

For sure. For sure.

So what do you hope that others might learn from this study, then?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. What's like the thrust of your story is how George Floyd impacted, is it journalists of color, or like all of journalism?

Emeri Burks

Somewhat. This is a little bit tough. I can definitely, uh, elaborate a little bit more after the interview. I'm a bit leery about informing some of the way that you answer the questions. But, we're asking this question to predominantly BIPOC journalists, and a relatively diverse range of journalists, of experiences, backgrounds, ages, race, and ethnicities as well. And these are the types of questions that we're asking.

So based on your understanding of that, could I ask what you might hope your audience, or this audience might learn from the experience?

Makeda Easter

Yeah. I would hope they might question some journalism... like the institution, the practice of journalism as it has been. As we talked on the beginning, like neutrality and objectivity, kind of the standards... or what's expected of BIPOC journalists, and how that might compare and contrast with white journalists and their experience.

I feel like you might've gotten some similar answers from people about just feeling a lot of like pressure as a young, black journalist, to do well, and succeed, and just feeling a lot of anxiety about your talent and stuff. I feel like I hope people would maybe read that and think about what kind of environment are we creating for people, for journalists who are... 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 kind of trampled on. Yeah, I hope that maybe someone would question that.

And maybe even people who aren't familiar with journalism or don't think about it in the way that a journalist or someone who studies journalism would, would think about, "Oh wow. The people who are writing these stories are experiencing a lot behind the scenes, and that impacts the work that comes out." So maybe they can think critically about if my outlet isn't doing this story, or if they're writing a certain way, there's things that are happening that kind of leads to that.

So I think that's what I hope.

Emeri Burks

That's awesome. Thank you. And I can definitely tell you a little bit more after the interview as well. I want to answer your question honestly, as well.

I did have one last question on this and it's just a review to say, we're about to end this interview and I wanted to make sure that you had the chance to fill in any gaps that you might perceive or things that you wanted to touch on more. So, just as a review, we've discussed professional expectations from your supervisors, superiors, your audiences; some of the differences and how these expectations are set and how they affect people of color and white people as well. We've discussed your personal reactions and responses to George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, and conversations on racism, systemic injustice, Black Lives Matter protests. We've discussed your concept of your role as a journalist, your values, how you deal with conflicts of values and expectations, and your views on certain specifics of journalistic conduct. And we've discussed your views of society's need of journalists and journalism, and what can be done to best support journalists in meeting those needs.

So is there anything in there that you feel that we didn't touch on enough, or something that you want to go back to, fill in?

Makeda Easter

I feel like I can't think of anything. I think, yeah – it was very thorough. So I feel like I've covered everything.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Awesome. Well, that was my last question, then. So I'm going to thank you very much for joining and I am going to turn off recording then and...

Interview 6 – Richard Chin – June 23, 2021

Emeri Burks

Gonna start that then. So, hi there. We've already discussed a bit of the consent form. You're going to consider some of those options before we continue. But can I ask you for your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Richard Chin

Yes. My name is Richard Chin and I'm a reporter, a newspaper reporter with the Star Tribune in Minneapolis.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thank you. Can you give me your pronouns and your age please?

Richard Chin

I'm 61 and he, him.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thank you very much. What race, race, or ethnicity do you identify with or as?

Richard Chin

Mainly Asian.

Emeri Burks

All right. Can you tell me a little bit about your background – how you got into journalism, what led you to where you are today, in brief?

Richard Chin

Yeah. In short – graduated from college and with the exception of spending summer driving a mosquito abatement truck, I've been working... entire career has been working as a reporter with daily newspapers. In Illinois, Michigan, and here in the Twin Cities, and this is I think the six paper I've worked for. My entire career has been as a reporter for daily newspapers.

Emeri Burks

For sure. I actually forgot to ask you one question. Can I confirm that you've been working continuously as a reporter since the death of George Floyd last year?

Richard Chin

Yes.

Emeri Burks

Great. Thank you. So I wanted to look at the professional expectations that were set for you by your employers and supervisors at the various newsrooms and news organizations you've worked at before. When you think about the expectations that they made clear for you, what comes to mind?

Richard Chin

Expectations of the employers? Well, I guess the main thing is to write accurate and ideally interesting stories, and to a lesser extent behave in an ethical manner. I worked in Chicago, and I worked in Detroit, and things were kind of ethically looser in a different era. Let's put it that way. There was this ethical, professional, kind of conduct and behavior that was expected. In a

different era, things were a little bit different, I guess, than they are today. But that's in general what the expectations were.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Would you mind speaking to that or would you feel comfortable speaking to some of these differences you observed?

Richard Chin

Differences between now and today? You know, when I was working to Detroit, that was, I'm not saying it was the front page. But it was a really highly competitive environment, and there was an ethics manual. I kind of felt like when I was a fairly younger, I was the only person who read it because in a highly competitive environment, it was sort of like [unclear]... if there's something in this place that we needed to get to the information, you know, trespassing is fine. Kind of stuff like that, you know? There was kind of a crazy time. It's like, "Oh, if we get into this hotel room, if we see photos, we're going to grab them, kind of attitude. Not saying that stuff like that happened. But there was sort of like, you didn't cross that police line and go into the crime scene. It was just a little bit different, I guess.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. You mentioned accurate, interesting, and ethical. I wanted to ask more specifically about the norm of journalistic objectivity as it was expressed to you. How did your employers or supervisors discuss their expectations for this with you?

Richard Chin

I can't remember any particular kind of, "Oh, this is the way we do it. This is the way we don't do it." But there was just this general expectation on objectivity. It was kind of a big topic. But this sort of general expectation that you're a neutral observer. At the time, as I recall – I don't know if people still think this way – but... and it wasn't like I was like a political reporter. I did stories about local elections and stuff like that. But at the time I recall there was a little bit of debates. You'd have a political reporter at a vital vote in an election that would be taking a position, who refuse to even kind of cross that line. Objectivity? And there was, to be sure a lot of a general kind of attitude that you didn't accept anything of value from the source whether it was a meal or a gift or anything like that. You didn't do that.

Over the years, that sort of blurred, I guess. I wouldn't say blurred, but you get a more realistic or a different view of that. Because I was a news reporter. We were heavy duty on that kind of stuff about not accepting anything of value. Then you realize that the sports reporters, they got buffets in the press box. You realize, "Oh, things are different in different departments." Features reporters, all kinds of stuff gets sent to them of value, in theory, whether it's books or products or stuff like that. Things can be a little bit fuzzier than you thought they were. But in the news department, which I started with, that that was sort of a... ethos was very much, don't accept anything of value. Don't take any kind of... if you're a political reporter, or consider not

voting in an election. Because that would be somehow mentally crossing some sort of line of favoring one party over another.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. So objectivity meant for you then, avoiding conflicts of interests.

Richard Chin

Yes.

Emeri Burks

...And remaining neutral. You'd say?

Richard Chin

Yep. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Now, when you say neutral, is this about displaying any sort of preference, or about you yourself disallowing, yourself to choose a side? Could you define neutrality?

Richard Chin

Yes. I don't know if every newspaper reorganization that I worked for had this as a policy or rule. Some may have, some may have not. But I kind of maintained generally a policy of not participating, if you will, in public policy kind of things. It could be everything from putting a yard sign in your yard – I would never do that – to signing a petition. I wouldn't sign a petition. I wouldn't give money to a political cause or a candidate, even if it were anonymous. It didn't extend to like, "Oh, you know, I'll never give money to a church or the humane society." But anything that was kind of public policy oriented, I avoided doing anything that would take a position, I guess.

Emeri Burks

All right. Got it. Thanks for that clarification. Could I compare the expectations that your employers and supervisors set for you with expectations that your audience set for you? Were they different/similar, and how did you know?

Richard Chin

Here's the thing. I'm not sure that the audience has what kind of... I don't know if I have a firm grip on what the audience has in terms of expectations of a reporter. I think it's less defined than the expectations of the employer. I think a lot of the general public don't know very well the mechanics of the job, or to the extent there's any professional sort of ethics in the job. I think it's highly variable. I think a lot of people, or some people, might assume that we're being paid to write these stories by the sources that they're... others don't assume a level of professional ethics – the public as a whole. I don't think there's a whole lot of knowledge or education on that. Why would they know? I don't think anyone knows that, "Oh, we, you know, we should, or we would, avoid taking a yard sign, putting yard signs to support a candidate." I

think for a large degree among the public that there's an assumption that journalists are in the tank for one cause or another, whatever they're doing. I think the expectations are lower among the public if you will.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Sure. All right. Now these expectations that were set for you by audience members, as well as your supervisors, do you think that they affected you differently than your colleagues who are not Asian, for example? Do you think that there's any different implications based on race and ethnicity on these expectations?

Richard Chin

Expectations of objectivity? I don't know. I don't think so. But I really don't know. I don't think it's come up very much.

Emeri Burks

Fair. All right. I'd like to transition to some current events then. To set some context, could I ask what personal reaction or relation did you have to learning about George Floyd's death?

Richard Chin

I would say it was strictly disturbing on one level. I've seen a lot of like this in the past, and on some of it wasn't super surprising. It's, I don't know if you become inured on it. But I've seen a lot of incidents like this. This is long or reel of incidents. Some of these things that I've dealt with, or heard about, or read, or even reported on going back decades, and in my case. You know, incidents that no one remembers anymore. So while it was disturbing and upsetting, part of me was like, "Will this be one of those incidents that will be eclipsed by another one a few years from now, and no one will remember this?"

Emeri Burks

Right, right. Can I ask about your, reaction or personal relation to learning about former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Richard Chin

I guess I wasn't surprised at the verdict to the extent that I have an opinion on the verdict. And I gotta tell ya, this part of the objectivity thing I've sat through... I'm not a court reporter now. But I have done some court reporting and sat through many trials. It's rare that, like the Chauvin trial, it's rare that trial's covered kind of wall to wall, unless it's OJ Simpson or Derek Chauvin, you cover every minute of it. Even, you know, pretty important homicide murder trials, you're not covering the jury selection, you're not covering a lot of the technical stuff. So you rarely see everything that the jury sees, and what this jury sees in a lot of trial is a lot, a lot that a lot of people don't see, even if the coverage is [unclear] that every member of the public doesn't see.

The reason I say that is even if I have covered a trial, I don't feel like I'm qualified to say this person is guilty, because I'm not the juror and I'm not the person who saw everything, or even – and this is going to sound strange – a reporter often sees stuff that the jury does not see. There's a lot of times that the jurors are excused because lawyers are arguing about some issue that the judge does not want the jury to hear. So I guess my point is the public, even a reporter, does not see the case the a jury sees it. The jury has this really specific, privileged view of the arguments and the case. So on some level, again this is objectivity thing, I don't feel like I can decide, "Oh, this guy's guilty for sure. You know, he did it." But I feel like the jury came to the right decision. I think they must have, to tell you the truth.

Having seen juries operate, there's something that happens that people do not take this lightly when they get on them – no matter who they are. I don't believe that anyone takes these things slightly. So I feel like the jury came to the right decision. It's not a decision that I can personally make. But I'm glad that they were able to find a verdict, for sure. It would have been a bad thing if it [had] been a hung jury.

There's a part of you that strives for objectivity. It's fairly old school. But to the extent that I'm pleased that they were able to... pleased that justice was done.

Emeri Burks

Right. Thanks very much for that. Can I also ask how you personally related to some recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice, especially since the death of George Floyd this past year.

Richard Chin

How do I relate to... jeez. I think it's a discussion that's kind of overdue, well worth having. I can't say that I'm necessarily participating in a big way, on any level. But you know, I'm glad it's happening.

Emeri Burks

All right. And last question on context here – has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protest affected your work in any ways. And if so, how?

Richard Chin

I wouldn't say it's affected my work in a large way. I'm a features reporter. So I'm not doing the daily news, breaking news. I'm doing human interest stories that tend not to touch on these topics so much, to tell you the truth. I think there's more interest in getting more diverse voices in the paper, to be sure, in the features [unclear]. And we've had varying degrees of success in doing that, and what that looks like is kind of a work in progress, I guess.

Emeri Burks

Fair. All right. Well moving on then, can I ask, how would you describe your role as a journalist?

Richard Chin

It's kinda an open-ended question.

Emeri Burks

It's a very open ended... yeah

Richard Chin

Right now, like I said, I'm a features reporter. And I'm looking for human interest stories and, for whatever reason, I have written about sort of the... what's the best way to describe it without seeming too trivial? But kind of, sort of the unusual and the off offbeat and people with strange obsessions, to be in short. But my role as a journalist, is to ideally be accurate. But I got to tell you, my main goal is to be interesting. I guess there's a lot of newspaper stories that are accurate. Most of them are pretty accurate and a lot of them are interesting. So my goal is to write an interesting story.

Kind of the dirty secret, my dirty secret is, kind of writing it for myself. If I'm looking for stories that I'm interested in, people I'm interested in talking to, kind of experiences I'm interested in having; if it's, I don't know, driving the Wienermobile or diving into submarine. It's like, yeah, if I'm interested in it, maybe someone else is interested. But I'm mainly doing it because I will get to meet an interesting person, and ideally that'll serve the reader, give that person something interesting to read about. But that's kind of like a goal for me, I guess.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Thanks for that. Can I also ask what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Richard Chin

Yeah. When you touch on that, let's put this way, I gave up saving the world a long time ago. I mean, I've done a lot of stories, a lot of different jobs, and I haven't done everything in a newsroom, and I've done a lot of different things. I've covered crime, and courts, and disasters, and demographics, and done some investigative work, and some data work, and stories about... I did stories probably 25 years ago about the disparities – racial disparities in Minnesota. And boy, that was news, then. People did not know 25 years ago, and it was a lot of data work. Whether you're looking at incarceration rates, or infant death, or home-ownership rates, or graduation rates, or life expectancies, all these sort of data points. People didn't know that... people knew that the state was above average. But people didn't know that was because whites were above average, while blacks and other people of color were below average, and that the disparity was with greater than places like Mississippi. God, you don't want to be any worse than Mississippi. The disparity was huge – the greatest in the country. In contrast to other places that had relatively small at the time nonwhite populations, there wasn't that disparity in places like Vermont and Maine or whatever. But there was a huge disparity here and it was a huge mystery 25 years ago.

But in short – my values. Yeah. I did a lot at stories like that. Now you're making me recall my career. I did stories about disparities in mortgage lending, and did mean stories, then nothing changed. So I wouldn't say I've become cynical. But I realized there's limits to what a newspaper can do, and there's limits to what I can do in terms of trying to saving the world. So yeah, I don't expect to necessarily make this world a better place through my journalism. I just hope to write a story that and will be informative maybe, or interesting at the very least. Yeah, those are the values.

I have told a lot of stories about unusual individuals – I'm not guessing on too much on this. But just people who are... when I'd say stories about people where... I like stories that are offbeat. I like stories about people who have obsessions on different levels and people who are just different, and this has included – I can't remember them all – but at least a few naturists, for instance. These are people that used to be called nudists. Poly amorous – did a story about polyamorous. I did a story about people who don't like to wear shoes. These are, by the way, different. In the Venn diagram, these are a different circle than naturist. People who are naturist would think it's crazy not to wear shoes. Are you kidding? You're going to hurt your feet, and you get your feet dirty when you're walking around. But the people who wear clothes, but do not like to wear shoes in any situation – going to the bank or the library or wherever – life is better and your feet are healthier without those dirty shoes on your feet.

What else? But yeah, people who just do not... I've done a lot of stories about people who just are different from others. I've thought about this recently – why I'm attracted to... why am I... You know, I've had to fight editors to get these stories in the paper, and I've had people saying, “Oh, you shouldn't have written about these perverts. Are you sure... You can only... You should have included some psychiatrists saying they're crazy.” But I guess I'm interested in those people, people like that because on some level... I've gone to a lot of conventions. Love going to conventions where people kinda just rock out on this thing of interest to them that everyone else thinks is weird. But since they're with their they're kind, it's just like they have this freedom to... whether it's adult fans of My Little Pony, or fireworks conventions, or kite conventions, or puppetry conventions. I love those kinds of people.

I realized that I like writing about those kind of things, because A) they're interesting, and B) these people can feel – whether it's shoeless people, or the polyamorous – are kind of outsiders and I am attracted to outsiders. I sympathize with outsiders. And my goal when I write about these people is to just let them tell their own stories. This is sort of my value when I'm doing a story about something like this or profile, is this conduit. They get to tell her own story.

I am the person that tried to kind of shape that story so it's the most interesting story possible. But it's also the most authentic to who they are. I'm like, “Yeah, I'm not gonna judge you.” Also I tend not to... kind of a weird objectivity thing... When I write about something, I tend not to let other people judge them. I'm not like, “Oh, I'm going to balance this by getting someone else saying what a idiot this person is because they don't wear shoes.” I'm like, “You get to tell your

story, and if other people want to judge you, that's fine. The readers want to judge you and say, you're a kook for being a metal... spending your time searching for treasure with metal detectors, that's fine. You know, you need to get a life. But you know, you get to of say who you are, represent who you are in the best way possible.”

So that's my goal is to say, “Hmmm, People are different from everyone else, different from you. But this is why they're different in their own words.” This is a dirty secret, but I'll let a lot of my sources read my story before it's published. A lot of journalists are like, “That's forbidden.” I don't let them edit it. But I'm like, “Read it and tell me if there's anything incorrect.” Most of the time nothing gets changed, and sometimes, a few things get adjusted in terms of number or something like that. But I've found that really valuable to me and I think to them as well. So that's kind of one of my values is write interesting stories and let people tell their own stories. That's kind of one big part of my job, I guess.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So it sounds like being authentic and representing alternative voices, voices that are outside the mainstream in some way is kind of where you jive with that.

Richard Chin

Yeah, I think so. I'm not representing every flavor of person out there. But boy, if they're interesting, I'll give it a shot, you know? If they were willing to talk to me, give it a shot. Stories about phone sex operators, and you know, this person's a human too, and this is why they're doing it, and this is what the experience is like.

Emeri Burks

Right. Thank you for that. I want to ask, these values that you're expressing and the expectations that you've discussed – Do you ever feel that they're in conflict with each other?

Richard Chin

Maybe tell me a little bit more of what you're...

Emeri Burks

Sure. So for example you've mentioned accuracy, integrity, and being interesting. And as a value, you've talked about being authentic and representing alternative voices. Do you feel that there are times where to represent alternative voices, authentically expectations professionally lead you to be in a inaccurate or inethical, or anything like that? The expectations and values seem to work together, or are they conflicting.

Richard Chin

No, I don't think there's a huge lot of there's a huge amount of conflict in terms of those expectations of accuracy, and... But sometimes there's a conflict about... at a newspaper, at a general publication newspaper, people are sometimes uncomfortable about people who are

different, about writing about people who are different. The polyamorous thing, I got a lot of pushback within the newsroom. It was strange.

Emeri Burks

So how do you manage situations like this and choose the right course of action when you feel that.

Richard Chin

That's a good question. A lot of it kind of depends on having an editor who's willing to take a chance, I guess. And attitudes sort of shift at different times in the newsroom, different newsrooms, different attitudes. Yeah, I kind of wonder it might be harder to do a story about a phone sex operator today than it was 20 years ago. I'm not sure why.

Emeri Burks

Yeah. That is interesting.

Richard Chin

I think, how I would put this – 20 years ago there was feedback from readers. I think now there'd be a lot more comments that would hit us. So I think that changes the mindset of a newspaper. Like what kind of comments is this sort of story you're going to generate?

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well looking at ethical conduct of journalists, I wanted to bring up a few examples that have been in the news over the past year. So how do you evaluate journalist's expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and or perspectives in public forums. So in your opinion, what boundaries do you think should be enforced? What boundaries, if any, should be relaxed?

Richard Chin

It's a good question. I'm not a hundred percent sure about that to tell you the truth. My thoughts are kind of ill formed. I think on a personal level, I'm somewhat a little bit older school... To the extent I'm on social media, not on social media that much. But you know, Twitter, I tend not to express much opinion, whether it's political opinions or, Trump is bad or something like that, or like other people's political opinions.

Yeah. I'm fairly, you know, "Oh, it snowed a lot today. It's terrible. I don't like paddle bugs. That's about as far as I'll go. Part of it is, I'm not sure if that it's both a personal reticence, but also part of it is kind of a professional reticence, that this is a bad idea in terms of maintaining at least an image of objectivity. At the same time, I'm not sure I can say that that's the way everyone should be, that's the way all reporters should be, or that's the way that all journalists should be. I'm not sure I can say that, "Oh, it's bad for the profession if this reporter says something, or even expressed as a personal opinion. Or if this person says, "this is how I feel personally," that means, "Oh no, they should be fired from their job."

I'm not sure how I feel about that and I'm not sure I think that there's an involving kind of discussion to be had on that. I think the nature of social media is just so different that it's really hard for people not to reveal at least something of how they... say if you're going to participate on social media at all, and we have this super long history of social media. I don't think people should be super harshly judged for what they've said.

It's really a difficult topic. Like I said, I don't participate that much. I don't participate in social media that much. But it's hard for me to draw a bright line, say, "Journalists should not do this. They should not say this. Journalists should not have an opinion about A or B or C, or express that opinion.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Can I ask, does this extend to participating in community programs or activism? Say a lot of journalists got in trouble for joining Black Lives Matter protests. How do you feel these actions?

Richard Chin

How do I feel about that? It's not something I would personally do. I've never protested anything. Part of it is both a personal and professional reticence. I didn't sign, I've never... you know, someone asked me to sign a petition even on a topic I favored or have a strong opinion for, I would often decline. I would typically decline, 'cause I just did not want to... even if I wasn't actively writing about that, don't want to put myself out there.

That being said, it's hard for me to criticize other journalists who want to do something like that. I'm not sure why I feel I shouldn't, also why I don't feel I can tell them that they shouldn't. I think partly is... You know, I think some of these issues are so important that even if you're a journalist, you feel like you cannot stand on the sidelines. Even though I'm standing on the sidelines. I can't tell people that they shouldn't. I know even a paper like mine or other papers they... the paper would say, "You shouldn't do these sort of things. You shouldn't put up a yard sign in your... You shouldn't take part in a protest."

Boy, for some reason I can't, I'm not... I'm not saying I feel like, "Oh, you can do whatever the hell you want." But I feel that some individuals are compelled to make these choices, and it's hard for me to say, "Oh, this is the death sentence for you as a journalist. You should be fired." I think there are other solutions, even... How do I put this? I think there are other solutions. I think, for instance, I'm not writing about Black Lives Matter. I'm not writing about court, crime... On some level, I'm the person who should feel the most freedom to do that kind of thing. If I were a, I don't know, a music critic or a sports writer, some of these speakers, some individuals who aren't directly covering these things, there maybe should be more latitude to... individuals like that say, "I am opposed to this issue, or I favor this candidate, if I'm not a political reporter." I could say I love the Vikings and I hate Notre Dame as much as not want, because I'm not a sports writer. But a sports writer shouldn't say that Notre Dame – unless

they're a columnist – it's just a horrible program. There's some degree of objectivity there. But I don't know why it's okay for your typical news reporter to root for the Vikings as much as they damn well... on social media or anything... go ballistic when they lose or whatever. I don't know what the difference is there between a news reporter being a big Vikings fan, and a sports reporter being anti-Trump.

Emeri Burks

Interesting. Thanks for that. One more and it's a little bit more, perhaps nuanced in terms of disclosing, personal bias or personal identity. Do you feel that there are certain instances in which a journalist should disclose that they are say a person of color or a white person, or that they possess a certain identity with regard to the story that they're talking to them about.

Richard Chin

Boy that's... I'm not sure. I guess I'd have to consider the sort of the situation – exactly how that issue... you know, what particular circumstances on the issue.

Emeri Burks

[Unclear]

Richard Chin

It's strange being in the newspaper. Unless you're a columnist, most people don't know your race, except for someone like me where they can just read the byline and they all know my race. I'm disclosing every time I put a byline on a story, if you will. But that's not the case with everyone.

Emeri Burks

It's a fair answer. Well, can I ask these boundaries on journalistic conduct – do you think that they're shifting in your perspective these days, and if so, how?

Richard Chin

Are they shifting? I'm not sure. I don't think necessarily that the institutions have changed their attitudes, or I don't think they have changed their standards. Although if you believe for instance the conservative press, places like the Wall Street Journal, and their Op Eds, their position is that there is... outlets like Washington Post and New York Times, are clearly the [unclear] or whatever liberal causes, even on the news side, not just the editorial side. But in general, I don't think in our newspapers, our mainstream news outlets becoming more partisan. Maybe they are, to a certain extent, whether it's the Fox News's of the world, and there's so many different outlets these days, and what is mainstream?...

But I think to the extent that standards are shifting, I think it's because of the media environment, that we have social media and a typical journalist has so many other ways to... so many other faces, that he's he or she is exposing to the public. Whether it's on Twitter or Facebook, or have a podcast, or whatever. I mean, we're all kind of our own... we're all

publishers. We all have our own brand. And I think that availability of expression, you're able to just sort of let things fly, and no editor reads when you're going to tweet. I think that has led to some changes in how people conduct themselves, I suppose.

Emeri Burks

All right. Great. Thanks so much for that. I'd like to move on then a little bit, if I could. This is a big question, I know. It's very open. So based on your understanding, what do you think society needs from the journalism industry right now?

Richard Chin

Yeah, that's a good question. Yeah, I've seen a little, you know we've have had initiatives on this other people have [unclear] these in our paper, but I think... And a lot of it is a little bit navel gazing kind of stuff. It would be good if the public had a better idea of how we do our jobs and what what our constraints, and our values, and our standards are. I think there's a lot of misconceptions about that.

But boy, it's hard to kind of cut through all the stuff that's not there, yeah? I mean the media, what the journalism is, what the media is. What we're doing is all mixed in with anything that anyone might see on Facebook, or any tweet that someone gets or podcast or whatever. It used to be fairly simple. This is a newspaper came on your door and this is how these people worked. But now we're the equivalent of bloggers, I guess. Or too many people who are working on a whole different set of standards, and resources, and goals, and intentions.

So, yeah. It would be helpful if we the media, can help increase media literacy. I guess that would be one thing. Then beyond that, I don't know. Like I said, I'm not like coming in saving the world, you know? We still have important work to do in terms of just being watchdogs, and part of the problem is... You know, I'm in a pretty good place, pretty good situation. The problem is that there's just some fewer outlets, there's fewer people doing this. Especially in smaller communities, we're not covering those places and the lack of outlets to cover those places means there's just this kind of public policy how tax dollars are being spent. There's just much less accountability.

I don't know what the solution is there. That is the big problem, I think. It's just there's fewer people doing it, fewer outlets. It's not like our intentions need to change, or our standards need to change. But boy we just... the less people who are doing it, however imperfectly, is problematic.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Could I ask, what do you think society needs from journalists individually? Maybe you, maybe any individual journalists.

Richard Chin

That's a good question. I suppose... I don't know how helpful this will be, and I'm not sure... a lot of journalists don't like being the subject, if you will. But I think if the public knew more about us I think it might be helpful. If they knew this is this person's intentions, and this is this person's experience. This is this person 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?

There's just this... in my line that they assume that a lot of public [unclear] here doing this for some sort of malicious reason to make their day horrible. But that obviously is not usually the case. So I think maybe if they... I don't know if this is a solution. But if they knew on maybe a little bit more personal level, that might be helpful.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Can I ask, do you feel confident in your ability to meet these individual needs that society has for journalists?

Richard Chin

Not very.

Emeri Burks

Could you tell me what obstacles prevent individual journalists from meeting these needs that you're discussing?

Richard Chin

I don't think there's just a whole lot of... there's very many vehicles for that sort of thing. It's just, 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. There isn't a whole lot of thought given to... Like I said before, I'm writing stories that I'm interested and if they interest me like I've met a goal. But beyond clicks and it's sort of like there often isn't very much thought like, "How is this meeting the needs of the reader, and are they happy with this, and how do we... at least for the individual reporter. You know the higher ups have focus groups and so forth. But it's hard for us to spend too much time thinking how can we do this better, and how are we letting down the readers, or how can we better serve the leaders? It's how can we get an interesting story into the paper next Wednesday. So that's the main obstacle, I suppose.

Emeri Burks

Well, larger scale. Are you confident that the journalism industry would be able to meet the needs that you've mentioned?

Richard Chin

Not sure. I'm not sure what the journalism industry will look like. There will always be, it's clear, a media; and it's clear that people will have platforms to write things and to present

things. But in terms of whether we're doing that in a professional and ethical manner in the future, I'm not sure.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Can I ask is there anything, based on your understanding as a journalist, that might help the journalism industry better meet those needs.

Richard Chin

Yeah. These ideas are fairly ill formed. But yeah, more media literacy. Obviously if we had a business model that's a little bit less precarious than we have right now I think that would be helpful too. It's the only thing I can think of.

Emeri Burks

That's great. No, thank you. Well, let me ask your consideration of what society needs – some journalists will talk about social responsibility models of journalism as opposed to, say, “Free Press” models of journalism. Do you think that your consideration of social need has changed the way you do your work since George Floyd?

Richard Chin

You know, I don't think I've had enough time to consider whether we should be changing the way we're doing business. I think the management of the paper has thought about that, has taken some actions to be sure. But on my level, where I am in the engine room, maybe less opportunity to do that.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So I just have a few more questions to finish up the interview, and I wanted to ask you as an Asian journalist, what do you feel that you have to offer that others might not understand about your perspective, or about the way that you see the world? What unique things do Asian journalists offer to the audiences.

Richard Chin

Well, and I've thought about this. Like why do I like the writing about people I write about? I think it partly is in the United States an Asian is a perpetual outsider, and a foreigner. That was very much the case when I moved to Minnesota. I was asked where I was from, and the correct answer wasn't Chicago. Think that's worded where are you really from?

So yeah, you're potentially an outsider, and I think that's why I am attracted to outsiders and people who are different, and enjoy writing about them, and just sort of letting them tell their own stories, putting them in the paper when they normally would not be in the paper. Because they're not a mainstream sort of person.

So I think that kind of unconsciously, maybe, has shaped what I've done because I'm Asian.

Emeri Burks

Thanks very much. Well generally, can I ask, what do you hope that people might learn from this study?

Richard Chin

I don't know. Tell me again, who's the audience?

Emeri Burks

For sure that's a good question. I can say that I will be using this paper for my master's thesis, but I will be looking at shopping it around at various academic journals with a journalism focus. I'll be publishing it on my own website. To be honest, I couldn't tell you who the audience is going to be, 'cause I don't know who's going to read it yet.

But people who do, you've seen the questions that we've been asking about, the sorts of things that it's considering. What do you think you would hope people would consider or take away from it?

Richard Chin

Well I hope maybe that, depending on who reads it, people will learn that journalists are people too. We're like error prone human beings who are doing our best. We have opinions on subjects. We don't always feel we can express our opinions on subjects. Some of us have some very strong feelings on these things. We're not always comfortable with or or have the ability to get free range of 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.

But I think a lot of people feel like journalists are ill-intentioned, you may not agree with what we write about, or feel like we're doing a bad job. But I don't think people are ill-intentioned. So maybe that would be the most hopeful take away. That we're just doing our best with the rules and the standards that we think are wisest. But those things are changing or maybe changing, and we don't always know if they are the wisest standards.

Emeri Burks

Right. Alright, well that was the last planned question. I did want to ask if there was anything that we've discussed that you felt we might go back to, or fill in in a certain way. Maybe you didn't sink your teeth into a question as much as you'd like. So just as a reminder, we've discussed professional expectations as you understand them of being a journalist, your connections to George Floyd, Derek Chauvin and discussions of racial injustice in the past year, your understanding of your journalistic role and your opinions on certain aspects of journalistic conduct. Also, your understanding of what society needs and how the industry and journalists can meet it.

Is there anything in there that you wanted to jump back to?

Richard Chin

Yeah, there's just one thing you mentioned. The whole George Floyd case - I guess part of my emotions around that is just this feeling of a kind of regret. That George Floyd may have gotten justice, but there are just so many other cases in the past that I've seen, that I've covered, that I guess you can't do anything about.

There was a case where two teenage Hmong kids were shot gunned to death by a cop in Dakota County, and they were carrying a screwdriver. You know, nothing happened, and you wouldn't expect anything to happen 20 years ago [unclear] grand jury. But there are so many cases like that and there's a little bit of... I'm not sure what the way you express it would be... but they're there not a lot of joy in that George Floyd verdict. There's so many other things that have happened before, and I guess that's the nature of life, I suppose.

There's a whole lot of injustice might and not much you can do about what happened in the past. But I guess from my perspective it almost feels like... I'm not sure if it will be a one off. But it almost felt like that.

There's a little bit of sadness, I guess, when I think about all the stuff that's happened before, and I'm not even talking about five years ago. I'm talking 30 years ago. So that's the only thing that occurred to me.

Emeri Burks

All right. Well, that's it for the interview. Thank you so much for joining me, and for your stamina in pushing through all the questions. Your perspective does mean a lot to me and I know that you expressed earlier you were afraid that maybe you wouldn't know enough to speak specifically to these questions. And that's exactly the point, frankly. You know there are people who are speaking directly to these questions, people who do report on BLM. So in the end, I'm trying to gain a perspective of what journalists in general are seeing in this moment, and that that includes journalists like you and I really appreciate your viewpoints.

Richard Chin

OK.

Emeri Burks

So thank you very much for meeting with me and let me... oh sorry, you had a question.

Richard Chin

No, no. I mean just yeah, good luck with your study and let me know in terms of... I'll have to think about anonymity. But look, just send me an email when you need a decision from me.

Emeri Burks

Sure. For sure. I'll follow up with the consent form. I definitely will need a signed form with whatever your options might be before I could publish this or take anything out to the public. But it's not an immediate risk, but if you were comfortable getting it to me within the next few

weeks, that would be really helpful to me. But I'll continue to be doing interviews with other journalists, probably for another 2-3 weeks or so, and then after that point I'm into transcribing and coding and analyzing and it'll be a little while before the write up comes. But current projections looking at that like a spring of 2022 that what would be coming out would be coming out.

But in the meantime, I will also be checking back with you once I have transcribed everything just to make sure that there's nothing that you might feel sensitive about being released from this interview. But in the end, I want to make sure that you're completely comfortable and confident with what of yours I'm putting out there.

Richard Chin

Sure, sure. I don't feel too uncomfortable with anything we talked about so... But I'll stand by to hear more from you.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Well thanks so much for talking with me Richard, I really appreciate it. I'll be in touch.

Richard Chin

All right. Bye for now.

Emeri Burks

Alright. Bye Richard.

Interview 7 – Shaya Tayefe Mohajer – June 17, 2021

Emeri Burks

Hi, thanks for joining. Can I ask you to tell us your name and your position within the journalist journalism industry?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sure, my name is Shaya Tayefe Mohajer.

I am currently a professor of practice at Arizona State University, where I teach journalism. I have also worked in journalism for the better part of two decades as a reporter and an editor for the past decade. Based out of Los Angeles for the most part.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you. Can you tell me the race or ethnicity that you identify with or as?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yes, so I'm an Iranian American. The census identifies me as a white person. But I identify myself as a person of color through lived experience.

Emeri Burks

All right, could you speak just a little bit more to that specific distinction? I think it's worth being clear.

What basis do you use to self-identify as a person of color then?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think there's been a notable shift in how Middle Eastern people have been perceived in my lifetime. Sociologists have studied this specific concept of “browning” among Middle Eastern people, where legally and on paper we enjoy some privileges of whiteness – for example, on a real estate application or mortgage form, if I don't have an option then I would be directed to tick white. But in terms of lived experience and everything from when a person encounters an Iranian for the first time, I've often been the first Iranian people have encountered, and I've also dealt with very specific racisms and disrespect based on my ethnic background.

So the sociologist who has done, I think the most exceptional work on this has named Neda Maghbouleh, and her book is called the Limits of Whiteness. She catalogs how over you know post the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran when Iran and America changed their diplomatic relationship forever, going from a very close one to a nonexistent one to 911, and how the fallout of that terrorist attack affected the lived experience of Middle Eastern people in the United States – there have been a lot of global conflict incidents and incidents of terrorism that have changed the American perception of Middle Eastern people. And so a lot of hostility or threat is read into our identity where in 1978 it was unlikely that that would have been that would have happened. But as someone who was born in 1979 I've experienced race a bit differently and races evolved, because race is a construct. It's constantly evolving as well.

So anyways, I won't go into too much of a lecture, but that's a little bit of the background on how my race and my experience of race has shifted quite a bit.

Emeri Burks

It's a really useful distinction. Thank you so much for that. Can I also ask your age, please?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sure, I'm 42 years old.

Emeri Burks

Great thank you. So could you briefly describe your background in journalism – the path that has led you to where you are and what you're doing today?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sure. So sort of from the beginning of what brought me to journalism and onward? OK, I started as a... like many young people, I was interested in power and how it is executed. I didn't know I wanted to be a journalist, but I knew I liked punk music and hip hop because they spoke out against authority and I became involved very... you know, a little bit. But I my eyes were opened

by the Zine communities and the counterculture of alternative journalism when I was in high school. So I was brought in by a specific sect, I would say, of journalism. I've always been interested in the freedoms and liberation of diverse people. I think that's always been a significant force in my life. Growing up, my parents were always eager to protest for the rights of others and for the rights of people in far off lands. We had always had very big humanitarian hearts so...

Part of what brought me to journalism was the feeling that I didn't want to be a politician, I didn't feel like I could inspire a cult of personality, and I didn't want to be a lawyer. I don't have the energy to argue for something I don't believe in. So by the time I was in my... towards the end of my first year in college, I was a little bit adrift. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had double majored in English and political Science, because apparently I have an obsession with reading. But I also just enjoyed writing and I enjoy politics. So I literally wandered into the student newsroom, fell in love and never looked back.

So I've always enjoyed the exceptional privilege of being a journalist, and I've always been obnoxiously curious. I don't have a lot of I don't know... A lot of people walk into rooms and the interest of preserving their privilege, and I've never had that sense. And when I've entered places where I'm the only woman, or I'm the only woman of color, and I'm usually almost always the only Middle Eastern person, I've always, well for the most part, I don't want to praise myself too much, but I've I've really worked to try and maintain a sense of self and a sense of not pandering to privilege and really trying to identify how I can make an effective change in the world.

And that's that's the whole draw of journalism to me. It's always really confusing to me when people are like, "I want to be a journalist so I can be famous or any sort of other attribute... I think journalism is one of those jobs that can be exceptionally difficult and the payoff is knowing that you're trying to make the world a better place. But that's sort of my take and how I ended up as a journalist.

So I entered my college newspaper. I never looked back. I've always been very, very hard working and A-student kind of kid. I tested off charts, so I had a little bit of confidence walking into most rooms as well. And then yeah, I worked at the college paper. I took internships every chance I could afford, which was often because I would work multiple jobs to help get myself through school.

One of the first things I encountered when I went to graduate school was recognizing that journalism enjoys a specific class, oftentimes. And I showed up to graduate school in jeans and a T-shirt. And looked around the room and was like wow like that woman shoes are worth more than I have paid in rent for like a year.

So, I think that for me entering sort of the New York journalism world was also a real eye opener. I thought journalism because I was from the West Coast and because I was from maybe

not the best, the highest richest class, I had a scrappier or concept of journalism. And then working through journalism, you see that there is rarified air that some folks breathe, and that in itself at times didn't sit well with me.

So I've always been a little bit of a rabble rouser and a pusher. I've always tried to press for the betterment of the field, and sometimes I've been less effective than others if I'm honest. But yeah, that sort of tells you a little bit about me as a person.

I'm sorry, I feel like I'm rambling a little bit like you gave me too much lead. I'm like wow – my whole life and journalism, and why it matters to me, like I could go all day. But that's the nutshell of what brought me here and how I ended up here.

Emeri Burks

Thank you, thank you. And don't at all feel bad about rambling. I'm really, really happy when people ramble. So not at all. I did want to get a little bit into expectations though, now, as a journalist.

From the earliest bits through to now, when your employers, your supervisors have trained you in, I'm sure that they've expressed to you what you might be expected to be, to do during this time. So in your own words, whatever comes to mind, what expectations were made clear to you about what it means to be a journalist as you entered these organizations?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think the expectation was always that this would be very hard work, and that you would face a lot of blowback, criticism, and that you would have to be comfortable coming to like intellectual arguments, coming into hard places, and intellectual arguments, and defining a path to truth. That's the great privilege of being a journalist – is looking at what everyone says, doing all the diligence... The one thing you can't be accused of is being lazy or failing to get a side of the story, or failing to offer the proper context.

So I've always been warned of, like you know, there's a ton of work to do. And everyone likes to tell you there's no pay in journalism, so I was warned of that amply as well. And also warned that you know it's a tough job, and there are some very severe repercussions for shortcomings. It was never that like you would be suspended or given time off or, you know, be lovingly worked through a major mistake. It was always you faced threat of firing for every error in journalism, and that was always a very high octane threat to face as a young journalist. Because even on your best days, you don't know if you've done a perfect job in this field. So I think people who run newsrooms often benefit from that sense of terror because it's really scary and you gotta work really hard just to meet an imagined minimum. And that can be challenging.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So these shortcomings you mentioned, you talked about making sure that you are providing ample context that you are doing the work to get the full picture, what shortcomings are you mainly talking about? Is it these or are there other things as well?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah, I mean a shortcoming... The threat of firing sort of to talk about the expectations. I mean the threat of repercussions hangs over every aspect of what a journalist does from missing a deadline, to not calling the right source, to having a bad fact that's incorrect.

Yeah, there's not a lot of training, and there's a lot of repercussion for getting it wrong. So I think that's... And it could be really broad. I'm probably not thinking of half of the things that like a journalist could get in trouble for from a boss. But you know, an appearance of affection in tweets like, I mean, it's just... the list is endless. There's a lot of repercussions journalists face from readers, from their news leadership. And I think that unfortunately it contributes to a lot of burnout in our field from really talented young people who sometimes face really difficult repercussions.

Emeri Burks

Sure, I wanted to stop you on that one right there. You mentioned the appearance of affection in a tweet. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about expectations of objectivity as they were expressed to you earlier.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah. I think an expectation of objectivity is often imbued with a sense of an expectation of silence. And that objectivity means, "Oh just don't say anything about that obviously foul thing that you just witnessed." And I think that silence is a privilege that many communities don't have, but that communities who have traditionally run our newsrooms – traditionally white men of a privileged class – yeah, they didn't need to march for their civil rights. They always had them.

So I think that the perception of objectivity has been centered around the experience of people that people of color, young people – any measure of diverse people, if you're queer, if you're a person of color, if you have any sort of difference from white, hetero, cis, male leadership, then you were perceived to be as some sort of outlier, when in fact you know you're fighting for your existence. If you are raising an issue...

I was deeply moved by the case of Lewis Raven Wallace, who brought up this question of objectivity as it... it still gets me a little bit emotional thinking about it, because it's absolutely rotten. It's absolutely rotten that there are newsrooms that will tell a skilled, talented, smart journalist who's doing really original work that because they dared say that I deserve respect, and I am an equal, and I am a person... because they dared say that then they're not objective, and you know it's just...

To me it's a lot of hot air that benefits a lot of people who already have a lot of privilege, and a lot of power. And they're routing really smart, talented young people out of newsrooms and jobs that they deserve. So obviously that reads as a major bias, maybe. But I've seen it so many times that it's like, "No, you see this young, talented gifted person walk into a news room, and they voice, a thought, a concern, raised a question, raising a question about objectivity gets people fired consistently in newsrooms.

It's really upsetting, and it's really, I think... It's holding this industry back in a big way anyway. Sorry now I can really like, get feisty with you because the cat's out of the bag. I have a perspective. But this is a big part of why I'm in academia. I enjoyed working in mainstream, powerful national media. It's very exciting when your editor calls you at 5:00 o'clock in the morning and says they need you in Cairo, and go, and like you've got an assignment, and you're flying across an ocean to do important work. It's incredible – the feeling of that for a human ego is wild. It's wild. But at the same time, you have to be willing to push back, and recognize that I'm not bought by my privileges. I'm you know, I still... I don't think it's right if you're going to mistreat people on major things.

Yeah, I think the conversation about objectivity unfortunately gets sort of like drowned in the hiring and firing process. That's the only time that it really gets talked about. If you're getting canned, you're getting a talking to about objectivity, and it's really rare that there's like a good warning process, a good conversation or even an opportunity to push back and say, "Objectively, I'm a woman and I want to be treated as an equal when it comes to humans. Objectively, I'm asking for equality. I'm not asking for supremacy. You're asking for supremacy when you deny me the right to say women should be equals to men." That's actually the bias, here. That is a sexist bias. Women should be able to say everywhere we go, "Hey, I'm your equal. Treat me as an equal."

Anyways, sorry. Now I'm just like beating a drum. But that that's my take on it, and I think that my generation has come and gone. I mean like look at newsrooms. There's a lack of middle-aged women, who have my experience, and a lot of us are in academia now. That's not a mistake, and that's not because newsrooms were great places to be for women of my generation.

People were routinely routed out because they didn't go along with an alpha male persona, and identity of journalism. And I think that the best newsrooms are better rounded than that. But there's lots of room still.

Emeri Burks

Thank you so much for that.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I don't remember what your question was. Please go on.

Emeri Burks

No worries, I'll bring us back. We were talking about professional expectations that were made clear to you and I'd like to compare these expectations to the expectations that your audience has made on you. Could you compare the two?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah, I think that there are... I think the audience is more diverse than we ever gave it credit for. I think that for years, diverse... If I can offer an example.

I was very passionate as a healthcare reporter in Los Angeles, and I wanted to cover underserved communities. I thought that our communities here have really struggled with a lot of really unfair... everything – from Rodney King to, I mean, you name it. These communities have been harmed and humiliated by institutions.

And I wanted to write a story about black maternal mortality. Black women were dying at a very upsetting rate in Los Angeles compared to anywhere else, and I went in to my boss and I said, "This is a story. We should write about this. We should do this." And the response from a man, who's white and who you know doesn't have any friends – I believe... I would doubt it – in this community was, "Who wants to read that? Who cares about that?" In another instance I covered a multiple injury shooting. I believe there was also a death in South Los Angeles. And I did that as a new supervisor and I was reprimanded for covering it because who cares if those people kill each other.

Before anyone had the gumption to say Black Lives Matter, there were editors who were saying "black lives don't matter" in a lot of different ways. For those of us who could hear that it was loud and clear that they didn't care about a lot of people who matter to the city.

Sorry, I lost the thread that was going to bring me back to the question. Please repeat the question again.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So it was about audience expectations that have been placed on you and how they appear to differ in your experience and observation.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah. So the expectation was that the white male leadership of the newsroom understood what the audience wanted and needed. But in the year since that experience that I told you about, it's become very clear that... I mean, that story – I believe the New York Times magazine did it months after I pitched it, and I was shot down on the pitch. And yes, I marched that piece from the New York Times magazine into my editor's office and said, "We missed this. We could have had this one."

So I had to play to what I knew they cared about. Competing with other news organizations, and getting the Prestige pieces. They didn't care about communities. they didn't care about

empowering people. They didn't care people were dying in their backyard. But I used every tool at my disposal – Their vanity was the only tool that I ever had to say, “Wow, you screwed up. New York Times had this big blow out in the magazine. Wouldn't this have been a cool story for us to have first?”

And yeah, I'm the jerk in the newsroom who will do something like that. But my God, you know, like women are dying. Figure it out buddy. This is this is a story for some people.

And you know, maybe you don't want to read it. But you can't imagine that nobody cares just because you don't. And I think the audience perception was always very fraught. And I should say I had a rarified experience because when you work for a wire service you don't have subscribers. The wire service answers to no one. It is a... you know, they answer to their members who pay dues. But nobody subscribes to the Associated Press. It is a very powerful news organization with very little recourse for an audience to have any impact on it.

Which is why I've been very outspoken when I see the AP deserves some criticism, and they're doing something that I would interpret as bigoted or unfair. I'm the only person who may have an audience of AP people. And you know, I have to call it like I see it or I'll go nuts. Like, I just, I can't. Sorry not to make light of it or to be disrespectful to anyone mentally ill. But that's how I maintain a sense of being centered.

And that *is* my sense of objectivity. My sense of objectivity is that, like, I don't know... Look around. Institutions, have harmed people for a really long time. You have these enduring disparities. It's not a mistake. It's not a coinkydink. It's very serious. And if you don't approach it that way, you're gonna miss some really important stories.

So, sorry... To get back to the idea of audience. Audience was so prescribed by leadership that you know, with like a Caesar's thumbs up or thumbs down, they can tell you that your audience is not diverse when it actually is. They can tell you your audience doesn't care about women's lives when your audience actually does. They can tell you your audience doesn't care about race. When look at our country. Our country is very interested in race. We should have been doing a lot more reporting.

Alright. Now I'll stop. I think I got out one good tick in there.

Emeri Burks

Oh, you got it. You got it for sure. One last question on expectations, and you've already kind of answered a little bit. But compared to your colleagues who are not Iranian American do these expectations from superiors and from the audiences affect you differently?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think that. The expectation that, like I would have... Do the expectations of the audience affect me differently?

Emeri Burks

Both the audience and your superior, your supervisors, and...

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah, I mean, I think that... I don't... If I can be perfectly honest, I think I'm strange on a lot more levels than my race when it comes to like a newsroom conversation. I say strange with great affection. I don't think it pays to be the person who thinks like everyone else. But I think that, yeah...

There were many times where it was perfectly clear what the duty of the day was. We have a serious story. We've got people fleeing a wildfire. There are stories where there's not a lot of difference between where I sit and where any newsroom manager sits. We have to do the diligence we have to pay these people respect. We have to work hard to land the best reporting available. There's definitely times when I deeply agree on the duty and the sense of rigor that needs to come to the work. And there are other times when I just... I couldn't even imagine thinking the way they did. Like I couldn't even imagine how you get to that place of thinking about a whole community in a certain way, or a whole part of town doesn't matter to you. That was when it wasn't so much Iranian American, it was like, am I the only person on Earth...? I don't think that these managers interacted with or lived in communities that I lived in. And so I think there was like a real othering that I never properly...

I was so behind on fathoming what they were othering and how they were othering it because that language wasn't available to me yet. But I was just... I felt confused a lot of the time it's like, "Huh. Why is that like that? Doesn't make sense to me. Here's what I would think." And then I would make my polite little argument, and get dismissed very rudely, and told to go back to do my job.

It took years of like realizing, like wow. This is really a very one-sided approach to news coverage and it's whatever he feels like. It's not something that I have a lot of impact in.

Emeri Burks

So can I ask, were you observing your white colleagues being treated the same way or being told the same thing?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Oh, no. So in newsrooms... I think newsrooms like to operate under the Trumpian idea that I'm rude to everyone the same way – so it's not bigotry. It's just me being equally difficult on all grounds, right? I think that there are bosses who see themselves that way.

But I think that when you look at the end products of these newsrooms. They cannot for the life of them retain women. They cannot for the life of them retain people of color. And particularly for me in the outfit I was working for with the AP California Bureau - I was the 12th person. The person who I've sort of danced around as a leader, he took over as California Editor, and in his

first year 12 people left his management – 12. We had a cake once a month for someone who was leaving. They were for reasons such as he did not want to allow a woman flexibility for her child's severe health needs, he bullied out women of color, he bullied out men of color. And I know that he has great arguments for all of the piddling little things that everybody goofed, and misplaced a comma. So that's where my firing guns come from. And that's why I can range hit on you.

But sorry, I sound like a lunatic. I'm hearing it, I'm hearing it. But at the same time, you lost twelve people who report to you in one year – talented, gifted people who went on to work for other news organizations like that. Who went on to do much better for themselves immediately. But of those twelve people, eight were people of colors, six for women of color. I was the 12th. I was the 6th woman of color. I was the 8th person of color

And those are just the obvious available statistics that I have from that situation. So yeah...

I should be right around your questions, but drag me back to your question please.

Emeri Burks

No worries. But I did want to clarify because this did have some sensitivity to it. Is this something that you would feel comfortable or not comfortable being discussed? Is there any reason that you would get in trouble discussing this?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah, I haven't named him publicly and I think the repercussions... there would be repercussions for others who are known associates of mine. So I would not want to... Sorry it couldn't be a name for me.

Emeri Burks

Completely fine. Sure, absolutely. All right.

So I wanted to move on, then to some current events. I wanted to talk about your personal reaction and connection to George Floyd's death.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

My personal reaction was much like, I think, the rest of the country. It was shocking. Darnella Frazier's video was really gruesome for anyone who witnessed it. I think for me as a journalist, seeing the initial report of that from Minneapolis police, and how grossly it under told the story, was... it's chilling. It's chilling because, I think any reporter who's been doing this for any amount of time has taken the word of police. We've taken the word of police in the past, and it honestly has... Yeah, it gives me chills now thinking about how easily they hid this man's death in that press release to be like a medical issue or whatever. And really without that video... Yeah, I think that it evoked a lot of soul searching for a lot of journalists. I think that it was really upsetting.

But at the same time, for anyone who has friends of color, or for anyone who you know recognizes that there's been these long standing harms. If you've seen the documentary The 13th from Ava Duvernay. If you grew up in Los Angeles and you saw Rodney King get beaten on TV as a kid. I wasn't in LA. I was in Orange County. But growing up I knew to fear LAPD. Like watching that video was probably the first major like moment of like - Police aren't all good, and police aren't there to protect me. Because I did grow up in a privileged way where I had no interaction with police. And I saw cops and robbers shows on TV.

Yeah, I think George Floyd's death was obviously gruesome to witness for everyone who saw it. I think it was really upsetting. And I think as a journalist it really... It strikes fear into you that you missed a story – When you see a story like that. Because those press releases are a dime a dozen. Those press releases from police where they happen to never do anything wrong, and they happen to catch a bad guy, and they did everything right.

All of their press releases read that way. None of their press releases say, “We made a major mistake. We killed an innocent man, and we are apologetic for it.” I've never seen that press release. But we must know that it's happened more than once.

Yeah, I think my reaction to it, for journalism was one that, I hope it's a wake up call to a lot of people who take the word of – of anyone really – but especially of an authority who's armed.

Emeri Burks

Right. Can I ask similarly about your reaction to former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah. For me I saw the verdict and the first thought was this will be appealed, and this will be argued for a long time. If you see the fallout of any other sort of police officer who's face reprimand for similar conduct, the sentence lightens the appeal, picks away at it...

In a sense, I just expect that to be an ongoing legal argument as the story gets smaller and smaller and drifts from the news cycle. Because that tends to be what happens. But yeah, no, I don't celebrate any verdict. I do have some journalistic bones in my body. I just wanted this to be a fair verdict and a fair finding and, and I hope that's what it was. I hope that we saw all the evidence we needed to see.

Unfortunately, I don't think that story is over. I think that there's probably more to it.

Emeri Burks

Sure, one more on personal relations. How have you personally related to the discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice in the year since George Floyd's death?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah. I think I've probably made a deeper commitment to producing work that I find to be anti-racist, or at least speaking truth to power. I think that that's something that is lost sometimes.

And exacting the truth from power has only gotten harder. I recognize that the job of my students is more difficult in some ways because the veil has been lifted. I don't know who put that veil down in the first place. I don't know if I should have been fighting the veil harder all along. But it's a little bit... It's revealing in a way that I think makes journalists' jobs a lot harder. So preparing them for that is a big part of what I do.

I also have sort of been working on developing a form of journalism that I call "Journalistic Reparations," where we dig back and we look at the historical record, and we aim to re-report and factualize some of this stuff. There's people who are lost to the world, but whose reputations loom large in diverse communities. So there are people who have been unsung proponents of their justice, or their culture or their art. And I think that a big part of normalizing diversity is recognizing some of those people who weren't given their due in their day.

It's never lost on me that Ida B. Wells was slandered in newspapers of her time. She was called slurs. She was disrespected. And I'm sure there's countless other pioneers of various other industries whose names we don't know, who suffered disrespect in their day, and they were actually pioneers who did incredible things in their time.

Even as I say it to you, I'm nervous that it sounds like, "I want to do a revisionist history of everything." But I just think the first draft of history is journalism, and sometimes we really ought to do a second draft. We really ought to take a look and be critical of what we got right and what we got wrong. So those are sort of my commitments. That's a course that I've been working on developing and...

Emeri Burks

Could I jump in really quick? It's similar topic, but you said that you thought that lifting the veil has made journalism work harder. I wanted to ask – Your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. How have they affected your work personally?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I can't say it's affected me much in terms of work, to be honest. I'm a professor, so my work is a bit...

Well, sorry I'm gonna retract to say. My teaching hasn't changed, but my students' interests have been very focused on national events, obviously. I guess yeah, one aspect of all of this that has changed is talking to reporters about walking into everything with a firm spine and really demanding evidence, demanding truth, and proofs of truth, and being comfortable saying, "You know, I think that's an allegation. I don't think that's a fact that's been confirmed and I'm going to frame it as an allegation instead."

So that's an aspect of it, right? Like we shouldn't be saying that we agree with finding some fact if we can't confirm them. And so that's one thing, I guess that I've looked at a little bit more

closely and that I've discussed with students. But also students had a really visceral reaction to... I mean, it was...

I think there's a momentous event for every young person as a journalist, that they will always remember. For me it was 911, and for my students – I think many of this generation will never forget George Floyd. It was obviously a very different American tragedy. But it raised... You know, it stirred the guts of the country. It absolutely polarized people and I think that journalists, young journalists particularly, are feeling challenged to find ways to be good people and express their identities while they're doing a job that may malign them for doing that.

So a lot of conversations around that. I guess, yeah. Teaching is so fluid sometimes that I forget we are shifting with the times quite a lot. But I'm teaching the same old skills: Call'em back. Double check. Do we have it in writing? Where's the document? How do we look at that like? How do we... Is there video? Is there an image? How do we back that up?

So it feels the same in a lot of ways, but it's just a newfound, I think, vigilance.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, I think this is a good transition. Can I ask how you would describe your role as a journalist?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I'm not writing much, which is always an insecure thing. Like it's been a minute. I haven't had time to write. My role as a journalist probably hasn't changed all that much before and after George Floyd. Because again, I enjoy a profession where I'm allowed to be slightly more outspoken than your average journalist. So I've been able to remain outspoken in certain ways. In fact, more to be upset about, sure, but...

Yeah, I'm not sure much has changed to be honest.

Emeri Burks

OK. Could I ask what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

It's really important to me that everyone be given their fairest shake. If you disagree with someone... I've had people say very sexist things to my face, and I think it's still really important to allow everyone to express their fullest thought, and to be careful about how you treat people. Everyone deserves dignity and empathy in your story. And perspectives are formed by lived experiences, and sometimes a lack of lived experiences. And so I do try and coach my students to... whether or not you feel some kind of way, you have to be prepared to hear from everyone in this world. And that's really, really important. Whether I'm coaching them on how to address diverse communities they haven't had exposure to. Or if I'm telling them that you can't leave out a quote from someone you may not like. That's not how this works. At the end of the day our business covers conflict, and if the stories get so one-sided that there is nothing

expressing what the conflict is – You've done a major disservice to the record, and to the reader. You're going to have to include all sides. That's the baseline of doing this job well.

The other baseline of doing this job well is being willing to push your source to think harder, and pushing back a bit, and doing it in the proper interest to say if when someone approaches me, like when a sexist comment was made to me when I was a young reporter, I remember trying to catch my face, being like “OK don't make a big bad face about this.”

But I said, “I think women in my audience would be upset to hear that. Can you address that more fully, right? Like I didn't say like, “I'm mad at you, I'm a girl.” But I think you know the reality is my readers would have a reaction, especially if they were women. So you're going to have to say more, Sir.

And that's sort of what I coach my students through. You can't have a thin skin. People have really offensive ways of thinking. The way I think probably offends a lot of people.

You have to hear everyone out and that's the job. And it's not always pleasant, and you're not... But I also tell them, “Look, you're gonna think that some politician who's a flash in the pan is amazing, and has you know everything that you want in a politician. Give it six months before you go on the record, because people will disappoint you. And I don't mean to be a jerk about it, but nobody's perfect and the record tends to be revelatory, right?

Everyone... Politicians travel in arc. Everyone travels in Arc. There are things that you'll agree on, and there are things that you'll disagree on. Don't tie your boat to someone else's anvil without knowing where you're docked. You have to really... It's kind of a weird lonely profession, but you have to avoid some very close affections and ties. Sometimes even if someone very appealing or seems to be saying all the right things – Give it a minute. You know, like the people who loved President Obama. He absolutely undermined some of these most important press rights that we have. And we saw how much harm was rendered through all these DOJ snooping on reporters and doing all these things that are completely unheard of.

You don't tie your boat to anybody, you have to be a little bit of a lone operator. I sound a little bit nuts, but really don't want to tie your intellect to anyone else. You need to make sure that you are staying independent, being thoughtful, regarding information through your truest lens. “Oh, he's saying this is a great thing for everyone. Is it? Do I know anyone who this isn't a great thing for? What would those people say, and what can I ask on their behalf?”

You have to really force truth out of a world that is PR dominated. You know there's five PR people to every journalist. Everyone is saying the kindest, most wonderful things about themselves and each other, and nobody has ever made a mistake. And here we are in a very messy world where a lot of people don't have rights. So you have to be the factor of inquisition and interrogation sometimes to push, push. See if that's really the best situation.

I'm so sorry. I'm so over caffeinated and like underslept. I sound like I can't stop talking.

Emeri Burks

No, I really am enjoying it. I do want to check though. You mentioned before that you could be on, I think until two your time, is that right?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yes, sorry I'm checking in with a student right now.

Emeri Burks

Well, if we if the rest of the interview ran over 20, would that be cutting into your time? 20 minutes more that is. That should be fine, yeah?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I'm supposed to edit. Yeah, I'm supposed to have an edit session at 2, so I would like to try and wrap up. But I'm going to start giving shorter answers, how's that?

Emeri Burks

That's fine. I also wanted to ask, would you be open to perhaps a second session? Because I don't want to cut off your answers in here.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sure

Emeri Burks

Alright. Well, we'll get as far as we do today, and we can set up a second appointment at another time if need be. But I did want to ask the values that you've mentioned that you think are important for being a journalist. Do they ever conflict with the professional expectations that others have of you, and if so how?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think deadline journalism can be problematic on the level that if someone doesn't answer your call immediately, they are excluded from the record. But a lot of people have jobs. A lot of people have more difficult lives. A lot of people don't have a press agent sitting at the end of the line. And that's how diverse communities have lost out on coverage time, and time, and time again. Because there's not enough money and resource to have a representative of whatever group that your story is maligning available to breakdown what you're getting right and what you're getting wrong. so?

I think that's one facet of conflict. 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 something awful happened usually. That's their perception of journalists, and that's the work that remains to be done.

Emeri Burks

Right. So how do you choose the best course of action when you feel that there might be a conflict between expectations and values?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think you have to stand up for your beliefs as a journalist when it's appropriate. And there are times when you're going to look around and recognize that you're in the wrong newsroom. You're in the wrong setting for your own development, that not every newsroom in journalism is going to be able to foster your growth.

It's one of the reasons I post new jobs to Twitter almost every day. I never want one of my former students or friends to feel like they're dead-ended into a job, and that they have to for health care, for their family to pay the rent, whatever it is – No one should be forced to do journalism that they don't love. And that sounds really idealistic. But I think that that's the flip side of the field – is that I think if employees take back the power and say, “You know what? If you don't like diverse people in your newsroom enough to listen to their story ideas and allow them to advance, then you don't deserve diverse people in your newsroom, and they'll find other places to work.”

Emeri Burks

OK, can I ask a little bit more specific to some of the journalistic conduct that's made news in the last year? How do you evaluate journalist expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and or perspectives in public forums? In your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think in terms of... I think there needs to be a grand self-assessment among journalists to recognize that there's no such thing as an unbiased journalist. If you think you're an unbiased journalist, you haven't done any work to figure out where your biases are.

We all have them. We all have to negotiate them. We all have to recognize how difficult that is, and how counter intuitive it can be. We're talking about ideas that formed from the womb onward.

You don't have control of every rote reaction you will have to a difference in someone else. And I think that there's an element of toxic masculinity in newsrooms that says if you bury all your feelings then you don't have any. And if you pretend that you don't have any biases then they don't exist. But actually being in touch with, “Oh that made me feel a way.”

You have to recognize toxic masculinity tells you that feelings are in your tummy, or in your gut, or in your heart. All feelings are in your head. It's a form of thought and emotional intelligence is something that's not valued in newsrooms.

So I think that when it comes to navigating biases, any newsroom that tells you they've done a good job about it has not. And any journalist who doesn't think they have biases to navigate, really hasn't done the work.

It's work. And that's the big issue in why it hasn't happened in journalism. It's work and guess who has no time for extra work? Journalists, you know? I mean, it's a flailing business. It's tough to get a promotion and get ahead. There's not been a lot of investment into this type of like soul-searching. But I think it's absolutely key, and the best leaders are doing it, and have done it, and have issued newspapers are issuing mea culpa's. You know the New York Times said, "We're sorry we never have wrote obituaries for women and people of color." You know they have their whole overlooked series now.

Thank you. now, do the rest of the paper.

I'm very thrilled that there's a lot of these conversations happening. But I just think that the conversation about bias has often been an employer's tool of control and an employer's tool of – honestly – aggression to control any difference in the newsroom, and to establish a sense of conformity that's not healthy for journalism.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Can I ask a more specifically about the usage of social media for personal and/or professional usage? Do you again feel that boundaries should be revised/enforced on these lines?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think boundaries need to be... I'm sorry. My cat really wants to be involved in this question. I think boundaries need to be established that protect young workers. I think that what newsrooms don't... So, I was one of the first people at the Associated Press to sign up for Twitter and tell my newsroom, "Hey everybody, this is a thing. You should definitely get on this. People are talking here." I was an early adopter, I think that's called in the parlance.

You know there's a lot of hesitation and a lot of like, "It'll go away. Flash in the pan." There was a lot of just not accepting it. Well, this generation of journalists that I'm training was born on social media. They have long histories on social media. If they're thinking feeling smart young people, they may have developed affection, interest, or serious passion for anything. You name it.

I can't tell you how silly it is to me to tell a young person who put Black Lives Matter in their bio, that that's a bias that cannot be accepted or tolerated. If you've seen death reign on a community that doesn't deserve it, and you want to speak out to say this is an injustice, again, you're calling for an equality of human rights. You're not calling for anything specific.

I know there are newsrooms that will never agree with me on that. But I think there should be newsrooms that allow people to express their humanity.

A big part... It's honestly... what's the payoff in journalism? If it's not changing the world and trying to make it a better place, is it the horrible hours? The angry bosses? The insane readers? The low wages? There's a lot of things that do not pay off in journalism.

But righting a wrong – that stays in your heart forever. That's a feeling that... It's a big deal.

So I'm sorry to back up to your question. In terms of social media, I just think that there needs to be a real level of tolerance and realism that is developed around this for young people who... 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, to say, “Yes to you know...” in the case of Emily Wilder. Yes, she's college educated woman who has a lot of questions, and while she was in school, raised a lot of questions, and advocated for what she felt was an unfair situation. And she's not out of left field. The UN has called for inquiry. You know, there's major international groups – Betshavela [unclear], the Israeli group. There's... She's certainly not the first person. She's not an outlier, she's calling for inquiry. But it's a third rail you're not allowed to talk about that issue at all in journalism.

I've never, I've like... I think this year is the most I've ever said about Israel-Palestine because I know it's a third rail. You can't say very much about it. And I also, to be perfectly honest, have never felt confident talking about it. Because it's so complex and it's so difficult. But at the same time - yeah, so she joined a club in college. You're really not going to have her back in the face of some really bad actors. I mean Senator Tom Cotton who wanted us to open fire on George Floyd protesters. That's the guy whose privilege you're preserving?

Emeri Burks

Since you brought this up as far as being involved in community programs or activism, say joining the Black Lives Matter rally, for example, is this a line that you think should be preserved/enforced or revised for journalists?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think the journalists should be attending protests all the time. I don't think the journalists need to be carrying signs or declaring a side. But I think that protests are increasingly one of the few places where you will hear about opposition to the state where it's credible. Or you're talking to a real person, not some faceless bot on the Internet with 50 numbers in their name. That's a real person who really cares and decided to take their Saturday and walk in the streets about it. So I do think protests are very valuable point for journalism, and that avoiding them is problematic.

I think that that happens a lot more than journalists joining a protest and taking up a sign. I think a lot of newsrooms say, “Another protest. Why do they still care? Well, do we have to do that? Why don't we get images from that other newsroom and slap together something perfunctory and then we can say we went there and we did it? That's very common in

newsrooms. There's a laziness of like, "Oh, why don't we take this person's good social media video and do nothing?"

I think that's a lot more problematic than a journalist going to protest. But I do think you have to make it real for your newsroom, and you have to make it explicit for your newsroom. Tomorrow is Juneteenth. Tomorrow? No, sorry. Saturday is Juneteenth. Are there newsrooms who are sending out or drafting their memos to their teams right now to say, "Don't you dare be at a Juneteenth protest or event?" I'm sure there are. Does that memo apply equally to every member of the newsroom? It does not, and that's the bias that actually needs to be interrogated. To say, "Well, I don't know about all of your employees. Maybe many of them had Juneteenth plans, but certainly your black employees have the right to celebrate a day that marks the end of slavery, don't they?"

I think that's the harder question that newsrooms never post to themselves, never interrogate themselves about. And instead they write these blanket rules that happen to be the viewpoint of people whose civil rights were never harmed.

Emeri Burks

Alright, so we are about 5 minutes out from the end here, and I do have one more solid section left, and I don't really want to get into it and then get broken off. So I'd like to pin down a time that might work for you to finish up this interview, that's alright.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sure. Let me open up my calendar here. Thanks for bearing with me. I can be able to pin down, but I just have a lot of feelings.

Emeri Burks

Yeah. No worries, no worries at all. I am going to stop the recor-...

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Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

That's fine.

Emeri Burks

OK, so this should be 30 minutes or less, I'm pretty sure. But if it's not, again the point is not brevity, we will figure it out.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Sounds good.

Emeri Burks

OK, so we were discussing these different boundaries for journalistic conduct. Could I ask to get us back into this do you think that these boundaries on what is considered acceptable conduct for journalists is shifting now, and if so, how?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

So sorry. You cut out a few words in there and I missed it.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Discussing the different boundaries on journalism ethics we were discussing previously, do you think that these boundaries seem to be shifting now, and if so, how?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah, I think that... I work with young journalists. I work with people who have... 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. And these are not uncommon feelings for journalists. What's different is that now there's a record. And these young journalists are 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. Maybe in an archive, right?

So I think that journalism has to mature in the way that the information economy has matured. And recognize that people come to this field because they are passionate about making the world a better place. And that's not something to hold against them.

I think that newsrooms are not ready in many ways for that conversation. You see it at places like the Associated Press and how they treated Emily Wilder, who became the target of an alt right campaign. I don't like the term alt right, and I've actually written that we shouldn't say it anymore. But of a far right wing campaign to make a woman unemployable in our field. And that's very serious when you're basing it on stuff she said when she was still a teenager, or because she retweeted news of a major global conflict. That's not a bias. That's someone paying attention to the world.

So those are clearly my opinions, but as I see young journalists enter our field and I recognize that sometimes they come to it because their families have interactions with the prison system. Sometimes they come to it because they have a background as immigrants.

There's so many diverse people coming to journalism now who shouldn't be told to deny their feelings. Not their feelings – excuse me. Their experiences. They've had full lives.

So in that sense, I do think that it's time for journalism to develop a more tolerant and acceptant way of allowing people to enter this field without gatekeeping, in a way that keeps our field mostly male, and mostly white, and mostly privileged as it has been for generations

now. Those people are not bad people, and they are not bad journalists. But they have gatekept people out of newsrooms because those people are different than them.

And they will say that, “Oh, it's a bias that you posted that this immigration law was inhumane.” It's not a bias. They've seen that immigration law churn through their community and destroy lives. It's actually someone with insider knowledge of what that immigration law does on the ground, and journalism needs to value that. We need to value people personal experiences. It's something that we have to be careful about. I don't want any of my journalists dragged through the mud and accused of bias. But it's a very important thing to be clear with with young journalists that you're not disqualified for having lived your life.

Emeri Burks

Right. Alright. Thank you for that. So this is a nice transition. We're moving into the final section of the interview which discusses social need of journalism.

So based on your understanding, what does society need from the journalism industry at this time and what makes you say that? How do you know?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yeah. 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. And we need to cast a very discerning eye on institution 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.

Journalists have been bamboozled for many years by wealthy or powerful people, and I don't blame them. It's how things always were, and we have traditionally been an undereducated field, and a field that operates through networking, and through cronyism, and so people preserve privilege.

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.

And I know that I'm maybe big for my britches, but I've been in the trenches. I've seen how these institutions operate. I admire many things about what they do. Journalists are putting their lives on the line. Journalists are doing so much. But 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.

Sorry. 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.

Yeah, that's a bit of my personal perspective. But I am fearful for journalism. If we don't modernize, if we don't diversify, if we don't really stop gatekeeping based on allowing in the guy who looks like you, and acts like you, and talks like you, and never disagrees with you. This cannot be a medium of obedience.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. Thank you for that. I'd like to go a little bit more micro. Based on your understanding. What does society need from journalists individually? Like you, like any journalists, and how do you know that?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think for me. The best thing we can do as individual journalists is to have a clear eyed, reasonable, and emotionally resilient view of the world. We need to recognize that... One of the things I may have already said is that one of the ways that newsrooms exhibit toxic masculinity is by telling reporters that feelings are a goofy, untrustable thing. And I think that reporters actually have to have a high level of emotional intelligence to recognize the difference between rage and sorrow. Disenfranchisement and aloofness. There's a lot of different aspects of the human experience that we regularly report on, that deal with emotion, and that if you do not have a trained or inherent natural empathy it makes you a bad journalist. It makes you bad at this job.

It's hard the emotional labor is difficult. It absolutely devastates me sometimes just to read the news. To read. "Oh, the Taliban is back in Afghanistan, and all these awful things are happening around the world, and women face all these challenges." It is difficult. It wears on a soul.

But I do think that it's very important for us as journalists to recognize that feelings don't happen in your tummy, they don't happen in your heart, they aren't on Valentine's cards. There are things in your head and they're thoughts. Your feelings are thoughts. The feelings of others are thoughts and their motivations. They are discouragements of feelings are very powerful.

I would encourage journalists not to fear feelings or to imagine that having a response to something makes you any different than a reader or makes you less than a journalist. Having a response means, "Oh, I've got to think about this. What they just said was terribly sad. What they just said was terribly difficult."

And we have to figure out how to tell those stories without being extractive, without being exploitative, as many journalists were in the past. Getting someone to cry on national television was a goal of many national news journalists for many years. Barbara Walters made a whole career off of it. But 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. And sometimes that means allowing them to advocate for themselves, and to say that they've been mistreated or whatever.

So it's a roundabout answer. I'm sorry, they always are. But it's really important that we find the humanity inside ourselves as journalists. That's the number one thing we have to do. And sometimes that means looking the other side in the eye and saying like, "I get it. I get it that you've had, you know, a hard time or your very angry or whatever it is. You know sometimes it does take having empathy for someone who's been convicted of murder, someone who's done a horrible thing. You have to extend yourself to really represent all sides, and to really do that work.

And it's not easy. And it doesn't come naturally for most... Many of us get into this 'cause we like editing. I love a good copy edit. I love writing a smart headline. I like doing all those things. But doing work, particularly to cover to cover those communities that don't trust us, is going to take an emotionally astute and empathetic journalist in the future. And that's what I hope to model for my students.

Emeri Burks

Sure, thank you. Do you feel confident that you will generally be able to meet these needs?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I hope so. Yeah, I'm encouraged every day. I work with young people, and I don't expect them to agree with me. I just expect them to be edified, hopefully.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. What obstacles, if any, prevent you from meeting these needs of the public?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think the dominant paradigm in journalism remains different than what I'm telling you is needed. And I also think that journalists already have a very hard job and the institution has been weakened financially for many years. Journalists are being asked to do the jobs. 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.

So it's no small challenge to ask journalists to shift in this way. But I do think the benefits make it worthwhile.

Emeri Burks

Sure, what support from your organization might help you better meet these needs?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I do have colleagues who support or tolerate my views. I think that I recognize that I'm on the margins. I'm pretty far afield from some mainstream thinking in journalism. But I think that that's a role that some people should expand their privilege and do. There should be someone like me at every university saying we're not doing enough, and pushing for more diversity.

I do feel heard by many of my colleagues. I do wish I had more power. I think everybody does. But no, I do feel well supported.

Emeri Burks

Great. And large... going macro just one more time. Do you feel confident that journalism industry will be able to meet society needs at this time? Why or why not?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Oh, that's so hard. That's actually really difficult. In many ways, yes. I think that there's a terrific amount of promise that I see. And again my perspective now is mostly as a professor and a friend of many journalists. So I do see people who've been in this field a long time getting long deserved promotions. That makes me happy every time I see it. And it does happen. I do see long underrepresented communities entering newsrooms. I do see young people who want to do great journalism, and are obsessed with improving our field.

So I am very hopeful, and I am very proud of American journalism. There's nothing like it in this world. I'm very proud of what we do. I'm a little bit nationalistic. This is what my patriotism looks like. My patriotism is about American journalists and how hard we work to uphold our Constitution. So yeah, in many ways I'm very hopeful. But I'm also trying to be realistic about how hard of a challenge we face.

A little bit of both maybe.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well can I ask based on your experience and understanding as a journalist, what might help the journalism industry better meet these needs you're discussing?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

This is going to sound absurd and from left field, but 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. And it's too much to expect journalists to maintain sanity and work 70 hours a week on the hardest stories in the world.

So I think that if we can create fairness in labor, and I'll extend it to managers. I'm not just saying our lowly reporters, but I think the editors would be better people if they had a bit more rest and a bit more space. I think that we have operated in a way that's become unhealthy because... So, sorry. I'm just going to back up a little bit to tell you why I worked for the Wire

Service for many years. I worked for the AP and one of the things that was always very different about the AP was that I my deadline is now. never had... you know I would go out on assignment early in my career, and there'd be reporters from every other newspaper, and they make jokes and say, "Haha. My deadline isn't until five," and I'd be like yelling my lead into my phone and filing from the field, and typing into my BlackBerry like, "I've got an update." Because everything the Wire did was immediate.

But the wire is also famously a union shop, and there were limits. If I had to stay after if, I had to stay late, I charged overtime. If I was called back from vacation, I charged extra. My hours were a normal 40-hour week. People would always say, "Wow, you work for the AP. How many stories a day do you file?" and you know, "How do you do that?"

The AP to its credit, recognized that like you're going to have to have a workforce that can keep up and manage that. When newspapers digitized in my lifetime, in my adulthood, all of them suddenly had to compete with the AP, and none of them were union. None of them were preserving the sanity of their employees. And many of them said you're lucky to work here. This is a prestige shop. "Congratulations, you work for me, and now I own your entire life." And that was, you know, it's like it's a little dramatic, but, that was a huge shift.

And you see the push back now with unions saying unions entering more newsrooms and labor being more scrutinized for journalists. But, I think particularly for our high profile beats, it makes sense to... 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 different 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. And 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.

So I think, yeah. Shifting exploitation in newsrooms and labor to really protect journalists, and to protect their mental health is an important part of getting this right. And journalists work 10 hour days anyway. It's like I never had a day where I was like, "Oh, you know 7.5 hours – I'm clocking out boss. See you later." It's not shift work, it's work that keeps you up at night.

It's radical, but again, I'm way out here on the fringe saying a four day workweek would fundamentally shift our workforce.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you for that. So wanted to start bringing this to a close and ask as an Iranian American and as a person of color and a journalist what do you feel that others might learn from your unique experience and perspective that say a white journalist or a journalist of color who is not Iranian American might not bring to the work you do?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I think that oftentimes employers you know want their employees to be more grateful and submissive. And I think that It's very important to preserve the rights of every journalist who wants to speak out about inequity. That's one of the things that... always... I thought I would be an Iran correspondent. I thought I would go to Tehran and be a foreign correspondent for many years. And then I saw my heroes locked up in Iranian prisons and their lives devastated. And I didn't want to write a prison memoir. I wanted to serve the world with a view from Tehran.

So for me personally, protecting journalists and what they do, and their sanity is of utmost importance, and I've always cherished my rights as an American journalist. And I think that really does set me apart in a certain way. I'm a little bit more protective and I'm a little bit more probably sensitive to the harms that I see journalists facing. I don't like seeing journalists yelled at and pushed around and disrespected. That's very dangerous actually.

I know that everyone thinks like, "Oh, you can survive an insult." Yeah, I can survive a lot of things. It doesn't mean that anyone should be forced to deal with that, particularly in this line of work. I'm very protective because those insults that... those threats, the harm that does befall journalists is very serious And people leave our field because they're being disrespected by politicians, and disrespected by average Joes.

So for me that perspective and sort of helping journalists navigate that is very important. And that's probably formed by my background. I also have... I'm Iranian American and also my mother is hearing impaired, so growing up with someone who is disabled means you are very aware of how hard it can be to communicate truth, and how hard it can be to help people find their own best interests, discover what... how to navigate the world. So and that's something I've been doing since I was a child.

So I think that that background has imbued me with a sense of service and... Sorry this is a little bit deep. But I used to think that the world would be a better place if everyone was educated and everyone had all the information. But it turns out some people don't care about the education, and other people abuse the information to manipulate and control or harm others.

So, yeah. For me it's not always enough to just put it out there. We have to protect ourselves in the practice of the work too.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Thank you so much for that. Now I'm not sure if you remember everything that we've discussed between this session and the last session. But I did want to ask what you hoped other people might learn from this study based on what you remember we've discussed, knowing that I'm talking to a pretty diverse array of journalists right now about these issues. So what would you hope that others learn from this study?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I hope it's not dismissed out of hand that journalism can change and respond to the diverse needs of the audience. I think that, again, many newsroom leaders are overtaxed and under-resourced and shy away from or ignore criticism or even good advice. And I think that the number one thing I hope is that you're heard. I hope your hard work comes to fruition or at least gives folks some good ideas. Just knowing how the busiest newsrooms in the world operate, I just hope you get the visibility you deserve.

Emeri Burks

I appreciate that very much.

The last question was really just about seeing if there's something that you wanted to touch on a little bit more. So I'm going to review just one more time what we talked about, just to make sure that there's nothing that you can think of that you feel that we missed, or something that you needed to go a little bit deeper with.

Just one more time. We were discussing professional expectations and how they may or may not affect people of color differently; the expectations of your supervisors versus your audience; your relations to current events – Floyd, Chauvin, recent discussions of critical race theory, especially lately; journalist roles, journalistic conduct, and boundaries that should be enforced/revised. Your understanding of need and what we need to support journalists in the journalism industry to meet social need.

So anything in there that kind of rings a bell or something that you wanted to go deeper with or touch on a little bit more.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I will say I think the critical race... if I didn't say it before and forgive me for not remembering the critical race theory conversation is extremely dangerous and we're seeing moves to... in Tennessee I believe a politician there wants a professor fired for being a Latina who teaches on race. We're seeing some repercussions that are not unlike the purges that authoritarian governments undertake to stop certain kinds of thought that they see as threatening to their power...

Yeah, I'm sorry. I see Iran in a lot of things and that is one of them. If you're going to rob professors and journalists of their livelihoods, How far are you from taking them to the roof of the Parliament and lining them up?

I know that I sound dramatic, but when you take someone's livelihood, when you fire someone, when you destroy their reputation, when you change their fundamental ability to pursue life, liberty, freedom, all of those things, it's very serious.

I expect to be hired and fired on the basis of my merits and how well I'm serving my students. And there are bad professors and bad professors should not be teaching. But to have someone politicized for their job and fired is very, very dangerous. And I'm not just saying that because I'm a professor. This is... I mean, if you look at the Khmer Rouge – I'm not even going to talk about Iran. Look at Cambodia. They killed everyone who wore glasses because wearing glasses indicated that you read.

I'm not saying we're there. But I'm saying that there are modalities and ideas, and there's an authoritarian creep that's very dangerous. If you don't want to discuss the history of race in this country, you can't punish those who do.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha, well that was my last question, so I wanted to 1st just on camera. Thank you very much for joining. This has been a really, really enlightening conversation for me, and I'm really pleased that you came back to finish the conversation. I would hate to have missed this in our last session.

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

I'm sorry to be so hard to reach. I'm just... I never shut up, so I run late to meetings and then I'm hard to catch, so I apologize. But I love your project. I'm really excited to hear about how this goes, and I wish you great luck. You let me know if there's anything else I can do to help.

Emeri Burks

Absolutely, absolutely, I'm going to turn off recording real quick and then just talk about some of the next steps real quick.

***From follow-up email returned 10/13/2021**

Emeri Burks

Are there certain instances in which you feel it necessary as a journalist to disclose your personal identity or cultural affiliation in your writing or in a public place (e.g. being Iranian American)? If so, could you give an example of such a situation?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yes, but I can count the instances when I've experienced this on one hand.

Depending on the outlet and the story, this can be appropriate and allowed. During reporting, I think it can serve as a transparency disclosure at times, but we don't want to imply friendship through affinities we may have with our sources. The relationship is professional and needs to maintain boundaries. There are good reasons to guard ourselves against forming attachments to sources because it leaves us vulnerable to poor storytelling and manipulation, but alignments are sometimes irrefutable. But the actual stories shouldn't be about the reporter.

In my students, I've noticed an urge to insert themselves and their experiences into their stories at times, and 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, and 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. In practice, if you line up 10 Iranian American women, we won't even share the same shoe size, let alone perfect alignment of our thoughts, lived experiences or identities. 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 my framework. Seems self-centered, and journalism is above all a service to others and a distillation of the truth through others.

The need to disclose has been extremely rare in my experience. Sometimes a disclosure comes with my attempt for access to reporting; I'll speak Persian or share this aspect of my identity to gain a better story, ie while I offer to interview an Iranian in Farsi, to establish an opportunity for more comfortable conversation for ESL speakers. I may be forgetting better examples but the only instance when I recall feeling the need for inclusion of my own lived experience was in a piece I wrote was about so-called "Persian Palaces" of Beverly Hills for Curbed.
<https://la.curbed.com/2016/12/1/13567530/los-angeles-iran-architecture-persian-palace>.

It began as straight reporting, an architectural retrospective and I gathered interviews and explored the story fully, slipping in a personal tidbit or two... but my editor loved those lived experiences that I shared and the 750-word assignment bloomed into a very long reported essay that was richer with narrative detail. And I felt comfortable doing that because during reporting I realized that I did feel some kind of way about the story and that was because I grew up so misunderstood for being Iranian American that I began to identify with the un-living main character of my story, the Persian Palaces. It may sound absurd to a traditionalist, but I think not every story is meant for A-1 of a traditional broadsheet and there is something to be learned when a reporter lets us in a bit, gives us those aspects of story and narrative. And I do think there is more tradition of this than we let on—it was just a privilege reserved for yesteryear's white men in journalism, particularly in their dispatches from far off places and wars. When I do it, it feels like I'm borrowing a privilege rarely felt.

Emeri Burks

Has your understanding of social need (you'll recall us discussing what society needs from the journalism industry or from journalists) influenced your journalism work, and if so - has this changed since the death of George Floyd? How so?

Shaya Tayefe Mohajer

Yes, and 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. I haven't been perfect either, but I've felt an urgent need to report on state violence and racism for a long time now. As a news leader I chose to cover Ferguson, Eric Garner, Sandra Brown and others. I don't understand sometimes why it took George Floyd for people to take their heads out of the sand. 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. This is dangerously close to sounding like an I-told-you-so and that's not what I intend here, but somehow the events only firmed up my understanding of what we as journalists must do to serve society, even if some journalists want to drag their heels to it, or keep on secretly imposing unfair paradigms that they benefit from, and/or claim their vague ethics preclude them from doing the right thing. So my understanding hasn't shifted much, beyond the knowledge that there will always be more work to do. I'm only more certain that we can and must do better.

Interview 8 – Sarah Whiting – July 20, 2021

Emeri Burks

Put myself on space bar. All right so welcome Sarah. We discussed the consent form a little bit and you are going to decide what level of anonymity you want after we finish the interview.

But could you start by telling me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Sarah Whiting

My name is Sarah Whiting, and I'm the managing editor of the Minnesota Women's Press. I'm also the photographer for the magazine.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, thank you. And could you tell me your pronouns and age please?

Sarah Whiting

She, her, 47.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. And can you tell me what race or ethnicity you identify with or as?

Sarah Whiting

Oh, I'm Caucasian.

Emeri Burks

OK, so you identify as Caucasian?

Sarah Whiting

Yes.

Emeri Burks

All right.

Emeri Burks

Could you then tell me a little bit about your background leading into journalism? How did you get started? How did you lead to where you are now and what you're doing today?

Don't need to be too detailed. Kind of in brief – overviewing it.

Sarah Whiting

Right. So my background is in photography. I've been a professional photographer for a very long time – probably... yeah, that's the only grown up job I've ever had. I started doing more editorial work, specifically actually I have worked for the Minnesota Women's Press in a freelance capacity for maybe about 18 years? And that was the work that kind of drew me in the most.

It was always nice to be meeting interesting women who were doing amazing things, and changing the world. I loved hearing their stories. I felt honored to be making those pictures.

When Norma Smith Olson and Kathy Magnuson decided to sell the Minnesota Women's Press, they spoke with me and some other people. Mikki Morrisette I met kind of through that process, and she decided to purchase the magazine, and she brought me in as managing editor at the beginning of... well we were working on it in 2017, but our official start date was January of 2018. It was our first magazine that came went out.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. And how would you qualify Minnesota Women's Press? What kind of publication is it?

Sarah Whiting

I would say that we are interested in telling women's stories in a way that kind of uplifts women and marginalized communities, and allows them a voice on a platform that has traditionally ignored those populations.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, thank you. Now it sounds as if you've gone from a freelance capacity to photography and then being kind of pulled in on a somewhat independent magazine sort of operation. Would you say that you've worked in larger organizations as well? Do you know kind of the differences between the feelings there?

Sarah Whiting

Well, this would be the only... well, so I worked in Los Angeles with a company called Berliner Studio where we mostly were making images that then we would kind of sell out. We were not paparazzi. We were always hired to be there. But we were kind of our own separate entity. But we were making images to be published in magazines and newspapers around the world.

So, yeah. The 18 years that previous to my managing editor role was all still freelance. I also, I mean, my non-publication universe included about 14 years of working as a professor at a college, and specifically for photography and photography students.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. And can I confirm that you've been working as a journalist in the year since the death of George Floyd?

Sarah Whiting

Well, I mean more as more as a managing editor. But yes, I did not write. I photographed and I helped edit stories, and I helped put the publication together. But I did not write.

Emeri Burks

For sure. But you identify as a journalist yourself.

Sarah Whiting

Yeah. In some ways I actually more identify as a photojournalist because that is the hat I end up wearing more often in larger capacity.

Emeri Burks

That's the useful distinction. Thank you.

So I wanted to talk a little bit about the expectations that were set when you started the different journalism and photojournalism work that you've done so far. When you were hired

on when you talked to Mikki or to any of your other previous employers, what did they say about what your job would be? What words come to mind as far as what a journalist is according to them?

Sarah Whiting

That's funny. I don't know that it was necessarily coached in those terms because it... I leapfrogged pretty far forward in terms of my role. One would think that my position now, I would have spent a lot of years in the field, and writing, and that kind of thing, and that really wasn't the case.

There was a lot of photography. Absolutely, but in some ways the title is a bit of a misnomer, because I end up editing a lot more of the visual than the text in a lot of ways.

Emeri Burks

Yeah. Would you say that the expectations that have been set by your employers and supervisors are very different from the expectations your audience expresses to you?

Sarah Whiting

No, not necessarily. I think that our goal is to center women and marginalized communities, and I think that we've been getting a really positive response. We've also kind of increased the... I think that we try to be inclusive feminists so the idea of women is broad. We include nonbinary folk. We include transgender folk.

And I think that the audience – as we transitioned into a new team, some of our audience maybe did not see themselves and did say that they did not see themselves reflected quite as much, because our readership was pretty old, and pretty white. And our readership has been getting more diverse over last four years.

But I would say that our audience is pretty in alignment with what we try to accomplish.

Emeri Burks

So with an audience getting a little bit more diverse, as you say, how does that impact the expectations on you?

Sarah Whiting

We need to reflect. The diversity of our audience so that we can properly tell the stories. We can't be just outsiders looking in, and so we have been using more writers of color, we have been getting advisors that look at those stories, we've been speaking with a lot more genderfluid folk who can respond to our use of language, and make sure that we're being respectful to communities and making sure that they're seen the way that they would prefer to be seen.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure.

Well, I wanted to ask some compared to your other colleagues that you've worked with who are not Caucasian, do you feel that the expectations set by your supervisors and by your audience affect you personally differently in any way? And if so, how?

Sarah Whiting

That's interesting 'cause our staff is very small, so our writers are pretty much exclusively freelance. And because I work with more of the visuals, I don't work with a lot of those writers directly. I would like to think that our expectations are the same. But given the fact that I'm rarely working directly with that population, I feel like I'd be speaking out of turn.

Emeri Burks

No, that's fair. That's fair.

So I'd like to jump into some current events to set some context about some of the later stuff. So could I ask what your reaction or relation to learning about George Floyd's death was?

Sarah Whiting

You know that's an interesting question to go back to, especially after all of this time because I can't... I don't know if I can divorce it from everything that's happened since. They end up informing one another in a lot of ways.

I know that I as a photographer and wanting to make sure that the story was documented, I actually didn't feel like it was my story to document. So I didn't end up going out and instead we asked for submitted work from photographers of color, and photographers who lived right in that direct community (I live in northeast Minneapolis).

And it's strange – as a photographer to say somebody else really needs to tell this story. But I felt as if I would be too much of a warrior. And it's funny because in a lot of ways photography itself sets you up to be a voyeur. You have this lens in front of your face. You actually almost immediately become separated from your subject matter, and you are in the role of storyteller. That distinction and that separation ends up supporting you in some ways, but also divorces you in some ways. So then you're constantly battling that.

When I think too much about this, I always end up thinking about the photograph of... there was a child who was starving and there was a vulture in the shot. I don't know if you remember this image. I'm trying to remember the name of the photographer.

Emeri Burks

I know who you're talking about, I'm having trouble remembering the name myself.

Sarah Whiting

Yeah. He took the picture, and then he went and helped the boy. The story that was told... well, when people see the picture they just see that somebody chose to take a picture and not help. And I would imagine that in his mind he was helping both times. He was helping in a larger

sense by trying to get the story out, and then he put the camera away and tried to help in another sense. But it ended up affecting him so much – probably you know this too – that he ended up suicidal, and he did end up dying of suicide.

So that is always a question of like where do you choose to sit in your own community when events are this large and this tragic? What ultimately is your role? And now we also have the question of – and I know I'm veering pretty heavily away from writing and into imagery – but now we also have the question of the rights of protesters, because imagery has gotten to the point where it's very easy to identify people and prosecute. There's been a lot of laws created in various states that are anti-protest laws. So it becomes a bigger question of is it ethical to print an image that could potentially criminalize someone when they are merely trying to exercise their right to stand up for what they believe in.

So that was a huge debate in our office at that time. How do we handle this? What do we end up printing? And that was after my own debate on do I even photograph this in the first place?

And so I try to balance that in my own mind against how much I know photography has changed the world, right? Lewis Hynes back in... what was that? The 20s? 30s? His photographs of children – especially in New York that were child laborers – those images change the child labor laws in this country. People saw for the first time what these small bodies were going through. They saw for the first time and they could understand it in this kind of visceral sense, that that this just can't be.

And the people who are taking these images, they they truly do have noble intent. James Nachtwey is one of the most famous war photographers and his goal has been always to end war. You show enough images of the atrocities, you show people what's going on and maybe, just maybe, you can convince them that this is not the way to do things.

So there is that balance of like, what do we show? By showing that how are we affecting outcomes – both positive and negative?

Emeri Burks

Sounds like it's given you a lot to think about.

Can I ask about your personal reaction or relation to discovering former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Sarah Whiting

I was thrilled. Easy, I mean it's weird because it's like you knew before you knew, right? That one is an easier one because it's fresher. But you knew, because the verdict came so fast. There was just... It was like nah. If it had been different, they would not have come back so quick.

But at the same time, then I just think about the standards that needed to be set in order for that that verdict to come out, right? I think it will still be very easy to dismiss a gunshot because

it's fast. People can understand the idea of losing control for a second, and then regretting what you've done. They can imagine themselves there.

The video where Chauvin chose for an extended period of time, an action, there was proof, there was intent, and there was this clear continued intent. So does that need to be the gold standard in order to hold someone accountable? And then what does that mean? Because that's more rare.

I hope that it's clear that I do not think it should be the gold standard. I do not feel like that should be the standard set. However, I think that in a lot of ways it will be. It may be that we end up seeing this a little bit more as a one off, which would be tragic.

Emeri Burks

Can I ask about your personal reaction in relation to discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice that have come since the death of George Floyd including critical race theory more recently.

Sarah Whiting

Right. Well in our office, we've been discussing it for a long time. It wasn't news. I'm aware that I'm part of a system that gives me benefits, that other people do not have. I'm aware that racial bias creeps into every aspect of our culture. I'm aware that this systemic injustice ends up serving people who look like me. And that makes it incredibly difficult to change.

It's tricky because there are so many laws, and so many pieces that even when they're built with the best intent, they end up having some baked in racial and gender biases. And the amount in which the underserved populations need to kind of support their own case, it's truly exhausting. It's truly exhausting and there's no... I truly wish there was a fast answer.

Emeri Burks

Yep. If there was, there might not be a reason for interviews like these perhaps.

Sarah Whiting

Right.

Emeri Burks

Well, you did touch a little bit on some of the professional implications. Could you answer a little bit more directly on this? Has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests affected your work, specifically? Did you have any conversations about sensitivity? Did you have any trainings? What sort of differences did you notice around your regular work?

Sarah Whiting

We were already doing that work. And I when I say that I feel like I'm giving us a pass. Because clearly we did have more conversation and it is important to continue conversation. But we do

talk about these issues every month with every issue. We do ensure that we represent, and we've done this since we took over the magazine in 2018, that on our covers Caucasians are the least represented group on our covers always since 2018.

You know, we are trying to offer a space where we changed the narrative about feminism. Because it's been racist. Feminism has been racist for a very long time. How do we get marginalized communities to work together, and understand ways to support one another? Because our traumas are not the same, but there are things about them that overlap.

Emeri Burks

Sure. I actually... I apologize. There was one question I missed just a little bit earlier, discussing expectations set by supervisors and employers. I wonder if anyone had a conversation with you about journalistic objectivity when you were joining, or starting work at one of the newsrooms, or magazines that you've been working at.

Sarah Whiting

Well, we're not completely objective, and we're aware. We are unabashedly left leaning. It's OK. So we understand that... we try to present truth. But we are also promoting the stories that have not been told. So we're making a choice every issue. We're making a choice every story that the reason why we are telling this is for non-objective reasons, is because we see that it's not been told.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you for that.

So I wanted to get a little bit more theoretical right now, and ask could you describe your role as a journalist as you see it?

Sarah Whiting

Well, this is also not objective because I'm trying to help change the world.

Emeri Burks

Are there particular values that are important to you in how you do your job?

Sarah Whiting

I feel that for me, respect is a big one. I try to treat all my subjects with respect and affection. I try to I try to show them... I guess they lean toward the more positive truths of a person. The people that we're choosing to put in our pages are amazing people, and so I'm not going to light them in an ugly way, or I'm going to let some of that beauty that's in their work come through the images.

Emeri Burks

Right, right.

Can I ask the expectations that you expressed earlier from your supervisors and from your audience? Do you feel that they ever conflict with your professional values and how you do your job?⁶

Easy answer. Alright.

So I did want to ask more specifically about some pieces of journalistic conduct that have been in the news. How would you personally evaluate journalist expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and/or perspectives in public forums? In your opinion, what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised?

Sarah Whiting

That's a very large question.

Emeri Burks

It is, yes. You can take your time, and I can break it down if you want to start in one area, go ahead.

Sarah Whiting

Well, the biggest piece is I think we need to 1st offer truth in our creation of news, right? Like in this interview, I've been pretty blunt about what kind of news we are supporting and promoting. When I want objectivity, I will absolutely go to NPR every time. They are very good at that role, and I think that it's very important to me that I'm aware of who to trust. It's very important to me that I'm aware of where this information is coming from.

I think that you know we've seen media... and I personally blame Rupert Murdoch, but that was back in '98? '98 that we were looking and saying, "Oh my gosh. This is the death of news."

Emeri Burks

Right.

Sarah Whiting

This is the death of news. He literally is playing a game and he's told politicians for decades, you know? I mean granted – now it's his son's right? – but told politicians for decades, "Play this game with me," Right? You work with me and help pass laws that I endorse thing, and I will work with you and make sure your politicians look good.

When it gets into personal gain, it is no longer journalism in any sense of the word.

⁶ Sarah indicated "no" emphatically by nodding at this point, but not verbalizing her answer.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Does this have implications for how you feel journalists should interact on social media, whether personally or professionally?

Sarah Whiting

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, I suppose. More trust what you deliver.

Emeri Burks

Right. It sounds as if you're generally for some free speech on social media, but from a personal perspective, it's important to you to express reservation to air on the side of caution, would you say?

Sarah Whiting

Sure, I'm pretty cautious on social media... Well... Gotta be cautious on social media. I let people know what I felt about George Floyd. I let people know what I felt about what I felt about various events that were going on at various points, what my views are on Donald Trump.

I guess it's just under the understanding right that... being aware of your own risk, being aware that the response could be different to your work and what you have to say. And maybe that's fine. Maybe that's OK. I mean I don't think we've ever had a misunderstanding about what we do or what we're trying to deliver, what we're trying to show.

Emeri Burks

Sure.

Sarah Whiting

For me, I guess it doesn't matter so much.

Emeri Burks

All right. So it sounds like most...

Sarah Whiting

No, I'm really trying to chew through that question. I think I would really need a good solid, you know...

Emeri Burks

Well, could I paraphrase and you can tell me if it's close or not?

Sarah Whiting

Sure, but I I'm not quite sure how I'm... I'm still trying to understand my own feelings about it, because I will say that I've moved further and further away from posting anything on social media because it's problematic, it's problematic, and it's not worth it.

Emeri Burks

Well, could I ask about some of the specific instances that were in the news where people did post on social media, some people did get fired, some people had some pretty intense conversations with their newsrooms about journalistic conduct.

Do you think that it's fair for a newsroom to punish a journalist who has expressed themselves in an apparently biased way on social media.

Sarah Whiting

Well, I know that I'm biased in my own answering of that, right? Because for me, it depends upon what they wrote, right? If they said something racist, yeah they should be done, right? And I know that that's part of my own set of biases. Like if they choose to call out misogynistic tendencies in a newsroom, then I do not think they should be done.

I'm aware that I have a significant amount of biases in terms of what I think is a fireable or stern talking-to offense.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Could I ask about involvement in community programs or activism? Say for example, again, journalists have gotten in trouble for joining Black Lives, Matter protests, or joining movements related to the it. Do you have any feelings about journalist involvement in social programs or activism like this? Is it OK? Not ok? Not your call.

Sarah Whiting

I think it's ok. But I think it's fine as long as anything any piece that you end up writing about, that it's stated. I think why not say at the end of a piece, "I'm on the board of this organization. Just so that you're aware, I may possibly have let some of my own bias creep into this story because I'm on the board, or I'm whatever..."

Clearly like politicians should not be writing articles on a regular basis. I mean every once in a while a story, but you shouldn't have somebody in political office also as a journalist. Because that gets too deep in too many different biases. But for the most part, I think that there's kind of certain limits to how many stories you're going to be writing about that particular thing. And if you just then clarify, it shouldn't be a problem.

Emeri Burks

I'm really glad you mentioned this because I wanted to ask specifically about what you felt was a best practice with regards to public disclosure of bias. When do you think it is a good idea to

make a statement like that, either in a public forum in your writing itself, or in your photography, that you align with a certain identity or a certain view, something like that.

When is it a good idea? When is it not?

Sarah Whiting

Right. The immediate response that came to my mind was if it's measurable. I mean you can say I've been on the board, you can say I'm active and I've been active in these protests for a year, or whatever. That to me, is kind of the easiest qualifier.

Emeri Burks

Great one last question on journalistic conduct. Do these boundaries – between what's acceptable and unacceptable – Do they seem to be changing in your view now, and if so, how?

Sarah Whiting

I think people are still trying to chew on the social media question. I think that's why I'm also struggling with it because it just keeps shifting. I think ultimately we're probably going to land somewhere where if it is affecting a vulnerable group in a negative way, then that's probably going to be part of the line.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you for that.

So wanted to get extra theoretical right now and ask based on your understanding what do you think society does need from the journalism industry at this time, and how do you know that? What makes you say that?

Sarah Whiting

Well, I am thinking a lot about this last week. This is what you're going to hear about 'cause this is what I've been thinking about in the last week. I've been thinking a lot about World War I. So there was something called the stab in the back myth. Do you know about the stab in the back myth?

So at the end of World War I, people started circulating this rumor that liberals and Jews had stabbed Germany in the back by signing the Armistice to end the war and effectively ensuring that Germany did not win the war. That Germany could have won the war if the liberals and the Jews had not signed the Armistice, and they stabbed Germany in the back.

This is inaccurate. Germany clearly lost, was losing, signed in Armistice – the end.

Emeri Burks

I have heard this now. Yeah, yeah.

Sarah Whiting

Yeah. And that set the stage to end democracy in Germany, to cause the rise of Hitler's regime. So then you've probably also then heard the comparison of the myth of the stolen election.

We are needed because of things like this, and it is our duty to support truth, and to make sure that people have an opportunity to hear that truth. And I think that even though we have our own... you know, my magazine has its own biases, right? We are liberal. We are still supporting truth by telling these stories. These are still true stories that are allowing a larger perspective and a better understanding of events, a better understanding of people that maybe wouldn't be out there otherwise.

But yes, 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, right? Because we are definitely in danger of becoming even more polarized, even though that sounds insane. It sounds like we could possibly go further apart from one another than we are. But that is the danger.

And so that needs to be the goal – is offering an opportunity for truth... and again, in a perfect media world, you'd be getting different perspectives from different publications. But you'd still be getting truth, right? And that's what we need back. We need to know that we're promoting truth.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Alright. What does this mean for you individually or for journalists individually? What does society need from individual journalists right now?

Sarah Whiting

I need to help build trust again.

Emeri Burks

Do you think that your understanding of social responsibility or of what society needs has influenced your work as a journalist, and in particular more or less since the death of George Floyd?

Sarah Whiting

Oh yeah. I think that that's baked into everything we do here. I'm trying to think of a story that we've done that isn't about social responsibility and compassion.

Emeri Burks

Nice, nice, nice. No, that's great.

Well can I ask do you personally feel confident that you will be able to meet the needs of society that society has for individual journalists?

Sarah Whiting

I don't think there's any way I can truly answer that question, but I certainly will try. Try to do it, not try to answer the question.

Emeri Burks

Are other specific obstacles that you are aware of that prevent you from meeting the needs of the public, or at least better meeting the needs of the public?

Sarah Whiting

Sure, I mean it's the constant just trying to battle against these utter falsehoods. There's so much time wasted when you first have to try to get around the barrier of that that's just simply inaccurate. That's just not true. We could be going so much further, so much faster if climate change wasn't an argument – I mean come on. Look at fucking Germany right now. Come on.

Emeri Burks

Well, thank you for that. Can I ask what support from your organization might help you better meet these needs, if any?

Sarah Whiting

A bigger budget. We're doing a lot with very, very little. But I think that we could get the word out to more people. We could pay writers more and support journalists. There's a lot of things – a lot more that we could do if we had a bigger budget.

Emeri Burks

I mean, that's fair and direct.

Well, macro scale slightly, Again. Do you feel confident that the journalism industry in general will be able to meet society's needs at this time, at this moment? Why or why not?

Sarah Whiting

I mean no because the journalism industry, there are parts of it that are working against the other parts. You've got a lot of rural areas in the United States that only have access to a certain fraction of news sources. It ultimately creates a society in which people just don't even know who to believe, and they end up believing the faces that come into their living room the most nights whether or not those are reputable.

Emeri Burks

Well then, based on your understanding as a journalist, what might help the journalism industry better meet these needs?

Sarah Whiting

I think there should be more regulation crackdown. There should be more repercussion for actively promoting lies.

Emeri Burks

Got any recommendations?

Sarah Whiting

And it's weird because it's like, you talk about regulation of news and it feels like that could go really south in a lot of ways. But I think we've come to a point where we've gotta... well, something has to change.

Emeri Burks

OK. So I wanted to bring us to our closing questions right now, and first as a Caucasian journalist, what do you feel that others might have to learn from your unique perspective that a non-Caucasian journalist might not bring to the work that they do or the work that you do? You could also ask about your personal identity as a woman, but yeah, you individually.

Sarah Whiting

Right. Versus a non-Caucasian – nothing. As a woman, yeah I think there's some things that I have to offer because I'm marginalized. So you know stories that should hold a fair amount of importance, get pushed aside because they're not stories that affect people in power.

I just I keep thinking about Governor Whitmer during this conversation.

Emeri Burks

Yeah, what about?

Sarah Whiting

I keep thinking about how she had to... she was arguing the... they were trying to do a bill in Michigan about that women needed pay abortion insurance. She was like, "That's insane. You're basically saying women need to pay rape insurance." She finally told this really personal story that she hadn't even told her dad about her own rape in order to try to get them to see what a massively large issue this is, that it affects everyone, that it wasn't because this person was asking for it. And I've been thinking about how sad that is that that story needed to be told in order to try to convince people of the basic... of understanding a bill in a way that supports basic human rights.

And yet those stories need to be told, because if we are not telling them we still have these people in power that just can't seem to get it. They can't seem to understand – you're asking women first of all to shoulder the financial responsibility of a misogynistic culture because you don't see it as your problem. So those stories need to be told so that maybe, those that have imaginations can say, "Oh, I haven't been thinking about this as a problem, but just because it doesn't affect me directly."

Actually, I don't know. Having babies should affect you directly, but being a rapist should affect you directly. But just because it doesn't affect me directly doesn't mean that it's not important. That doesn't mean that it doesn't need a platform.

Emeri Burks

Can I ask what do you hope that others might learn from this study?

Sarah Whiting

I think it might be interesting to see the struggles that journalists and current society have. We're starting to accept that we can't be completely unbiased. There was a myth for so many years that we could just put on these magic blinders, and be completely objective. We wanted to show just the truth, and we do still, I think. A lot of us do still want to show just the truth.

But truth is not an absolute, right? There's so many different lenses that they go through, and you see truth shift and adjust based on which side is telling the story? They both can be truth. But you want to show every truth then. But we don't have enough pages to print them all. So we choose.

Emeri Burks

Alright. The last question I had and I did want to point out it's 1:59 if you needed to go at 2 then we would probably need to sign off right now. But I did want...

Sarah Whiting

It's OK, it's OK.

Emeri Burks

OK. I did want to just ask if there was anything else on the subjects we've talked about that maybe you felt we didn't get as deep as you think we should, or something that you felt you might miss. So I'm going to just briefly review some of the topics we've talked about, and if there's something you'd like to dive into a little bit more, we could do that right now before we close.

But we talked about professional expectations from supervisors from audiences; ways they might affect people of color or non-people of color differently; personal reactions to George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, Critical Race Theory, conversations of racial injustice; journalistic roles and journalistic conduct, your views on what should and shouldn't be acceptable, and the use of the word should, perhaps; understanding society's needs and understanding how journalism meets those needs.

So of those areas, is there anything that you wanted to return to, or get a little bit deeper in?

Sarah Whiting

I think we're good.

Emeri Burks

All right. Well I'm gonna.

Sarah Whiting

Did you get what you needed?

Emeri Burks

I did. No, I did. Yeah, yeah. I do want to be mindful of time and perhaps if we had a little bit more time, I'd love to let some answers be a bit more expansive here and there. But yeah. I think that... let me turn my recording off because....

Interview 9 – Wesley Lowery – May 28, 2021

Emeri Burks

I'm going to have mute myself, and yes, one more time. What is your name and what is your position in the journalism industry?

Wesley Lowery

Sure. My name is Wesley Lowery, and I'm a journalist and national correspondent currently working with CBS News in 60 Minutes. But I also write and publish a variety of magazines, outlets, other places.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Can you tell me what race or ethnicity do you identify with or as?

Wesley Lowery

So I'm black - biracial black and white. But I identify primarily as black.

Emeri Burks

Great thank you, and can you describe a little bit about your background getting into journalism in brief?

Wesley Lowery

Sure. I've, I've always worked in journalism. I worked for middle school newspaper in my high school newspaper and then my college newspaper.

During college, a series of internships, following college and turned up the Boston Globe, then went out for a job at the LA Times, left the LA Times over the Boston- back to the Boston Globe, which I then left for the Washington Post, where I worked for six or seven years and then left for my job at CBS.

Emeri Burks

Sure, now you've been in a number of different places. Can I ask what expectations of you were set by your superiors and how were they expressed to you?

Wesley Lowery

On what issue?

Emeri Burks

On being a journalist, what your expectations are as a professional journalist?

Wesley Lowery

Look, I think in each of those places and in every newsroom there are. Expectations and standards - First and foremost about the quality of work that we would do, um, that we would... our work would be original, that it would be independent, um, that we would... It would be fair. We'd see comment from all the various people and that it would be rigorous. Um I think that was a big part of it, frankly.

At most of these newsrooms, most of these jobs, these standards are kind of understood. There's not much conversation to be had. Everyone knows why, why you're here, and vice versa... That journalism is a field that operates off of unspoken and unwritten rules or values that are believed to be broadly shared, even if they're not fully articulated all the time.

And so it's kind of the sense that everyone knows... Like I said, everyone knows what my job is or what your job is. Everyone knows why we're here and how we would go about doing it.

Emeri Burks

Sure, you said a fair and rigorous. I wanted to ask in particular what, what understanding did you have of the professional expectations you had with regard to being fair and rigorous?

Wesley Lowery

Uhm, I you know I I think that... So it's interesting, right? Because those expectations changed over time, depending both on what I was covering and... and for what desk I was working.

So what I mean by that is... there is a premium placed on performative fairness around the coverage of politics, that may that does not exist on the coverage of many other things.

And so that is always tracking down the gun rights group and letting them comment following the mass shooting or always tracking down the hyper conservative anti-gay marriage group, when writing about the these issues... always contacting the Republicans anytime you're following the Democrats, right?

Like this is very binary... that there are two things that have to in some way be balanced against each other, and there's a particular sensitivity to that in the coverage of politics that doesn't always exist in the coverage of other things.

What I'd also say is that... and so I think that factors in in terms of fairness, while if I'm running on health or science, just because you know if there's a broad consensus around an idea, I don't necessarily have to track down the person who disagrees with it.

Much-- and much less present them as an equal side in the conversation.

The... as it relates to rigor – I think that they're... the biggest difference is when I started doing work on investigative staffs where the vast majority of what was published in the rest of the newspaper never would have made it through an investigative desk.

Just 'cause someone said a thing doesn't mean it's true, and so allowing a public official, be that a politician or a spokesperson for law enforcement agency, to just claim a thing, does not pass journalists' muster in an investigative context. Yet most of the rest of the newspaper is made up of people just making claims without any pressure provided as to figure out whether or not those claims are true.

Emeri Burks

Got it, thank you very much. I want to ask similarly what expectations have been set on you by your audience and how were they expressed to you.

Wesley Lowery

Again, I think I think there are... I think there are similar, and at times, competing expectations from audience. Right, I think that a large part the audience plays into the very same political framing of everything. I think that where everything is two sides – everything is, everything is either serving or rebutting a particular political agenda, that's so much of our conversation in so much of our public discourse is thrust into this binary that is not actually a particularly fitting frame for much of the public conversation that we have, and I think a lot of our audience has been trained to expect it that way.

They expect a weird balancing act, and so then they have a visceral reaction, when that doesn't apply. Or they are seeking more, right... it's not a thing that's ever... part of it that some of these are thirsts that can never be quenched, right? If someone has decided that you're politically motivated in your work, no amount of performing neutrality is going to convince them otherwise. They're going to find new things to complain about.

Uhm, what I think is also true, though, especially in the moment we exist in where our audiences can talk back to us and communicate with us, especially via social media, and as someone who covers issues that aren't necessarily always historically well covered by mainstream news organizations, the... You know I get a lot of feedback from my audience in which they appreciate the willingness to call a spade a spade, in which they appreciate the willingness not to pretend as if there is ambiguity where there are not, where there is not ambiguity. And I, and I think that the democratizing of news and the growth of new platforms, by which people can provide us feedback has allowed the reader new ways to keep us honest. That, and I think that that is really important, and that if we're missing context or we're refuse... or we're couching our language, there is a new way for people to get together and fight us on it.

Emeri Burks

Right, do you have experience of the audience “fighting” you in this way?

Wesley Lowery

Not really, I mean what I'd say is that... I mean, the examples I think of would be things... we've seen a big conversation in the industry about terms like “racially charged” or “racially tinged,”

which book terms I've spoken out pretty frequently about, right? These are words that are meaningless. They don't actually mean anything. What does it mean to be charged with racial?

Wesley Lowery

It doesn't... and so... but again, if we are as journalists supposed to communicating things clearly, why do we continually invent euphemisms that do not otherwise exist in order to express things. And I think that that is a space where we have gotten a lot of, I think a lot of journalistic newspaper shorthand euphemism – The types of language that only we use and we believe that language to be neutral, whether it is or not. And in fact, that language is not neutral, 'cause language is almost never neutral, right?

And so you see this with “racially charged.” We see this with the way we... in reporting crime, what the police said at the back of a declarative sentence: “Man stabbed 18 people, comma, police said.” As opposed to “Police claim man stabbed 18 people,” right? That there is a that there is in fact, uhm... Neither of those are neutral...

Emeri Burks

Right, right.

Wesley Lowery

...And yet, we pretend that the first one is. And so I think that there is a... I think that our audience has much more space and ability to call us out on things like that, than it ever did before. And I think it's forced a lot of people in the industry to grapple with that lack of neutrality.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, one question on expectation – one more here. Were the expectations that you understood from your superiors and from your audience... Do you feel that these expectations are the same for your colleagues? Are they different? And how do you know that?

Wesley Lowery

I think because these expectations go unstated, because most newsrooms do not explicitly state their values, most newsroom leaders are actually uncomfortable having much... Um, full conversation explaining their values or expectations. That newsrooms are governed largely by unwritten rules by internal customs, by local and newsroom traditions, and because of that you end up having systems where different individuals are treated differently and what crosses a line what does not cross the line is up to the subjective judgment of subjective decision.

That everyone knows where the line is, says three people, right? And they're... who are the arbiters of where the line is. But that doesn't actually mean that everyone knows where the lines and I think...

And so what I think is true is that 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.

And often the people who are enforcing these decisions, the people who have the most power in the newsroom, which are middle managers, right? Not actually the figureheads but the people who are doing the line editing every day – They often are just reading tea leaves based on what they think their theoretical bosses want, not even based on clearly and obviously stated standards and expectations.

And so what you have are just layer upon layer of subjective decision making, in which values and expectations and where a line is and where it isn't gets passed down often without anyone involved in the chain being able to fully articulate why decisions are being made in one way and why they're not being made in a different way.

Emeri Burks

And do you think that people who are not black have different expectations placed on them in the workforce as a journalist?

Wesley Lowery

The way I would word it is, I think that, I think the mainstream media remains largely unintegrated. That standards, expectations, norms have all been set in an environment that is... in the management environment that is almost exclusively white, and overwhelmingly men – more white than it is male. There are a lot of white women who are involved in making these decisions as well at this point. But both by both of those institutions.

And because of that, because these things are subjective, right? And what we're talking about is where is the line between what a, 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, right?

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.

And so therefore... I mean like that... I say this all the time, but one of the big debates that was had towards the end of the Trump administration was which and what of his behaviors could be accurately deemed or called "racist." And he, you know, openly advocated for congresswomen of color, who had been born here to quote, "Go back where they came from." Well, by any honest or diligent study of history, it's clear and obvious that this was racist, that...

And yet, much of the mainstream media refused to call these comments racist.

It's hard to believe that the people making those decisions had not been as white as they are, that it would... It's very hard to believe that if you want a masthead of 10 black people, they would have spent much time debating whether or not the clearly racist thing was racist.

Instead, we don't have mastheads of 10 black people. We have mastheads of 7 white people and like three others.

Emeri Burks

Right.

Wesley Lowery

And those three others have had to ascend in an environment in which they have to acquiesce the feel... the subjective feelings of this majority white industry, right? And so they may feel a desire to self-censor, or have even the facts, had their perspectives changed and molded by the overwhelming whiteness of the industry.

And so again, I don't know that... I don't know necessarily that expectations are different. The way I would frame it is that I think that black reporters and other reporters of any minority, are placed in position, or are placed in positions in which they are seen as oppositional to the norm. And too often in the in the industry, we don't understand that the norm is not itself an objective neutral. Rather, it's a subjective decision we've all made.

Just because it's always been done this way, does not mean it has to be done this way. Just because we all talk this way doesn't mean it has to be... we have to talk this way. Just because you think this thing, that is not the journalistic neutral. It's just a thing you think. It is your opinion.

And I think that that is something that a lot of that many people in industry have not really had to grapple with.

Emeri Burks

Right, thank you. I wanted to move on a little bit to more timely matters and ask what was your personal reaction to learning of George Floyd's death?

Wesley Lowery

Uhm? I don't know that I had much of a personal reaction. Uhm, as someone who spent years covering these issues watched probably hundreds, if not thousands of these videos, frankly, George Floyd was just another one that people were talking about on the internet.

I didn't immediately watch the video. It took a few days. I didn't go to Minneapolis for maybe a week until it was clear there was a real outsized... or or not outsized... but it was clear that there was a real significant community response to this.

But like I said for me, unfortunately the George Floyd video is just another day.

Emeri Burks

Is that also true with Officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts. Did you have a reaction to that?

Wesley Lowery

Oh, I think that's a little different. I think that the... I think that... I was surprised. I mean, I guess what I think what's hard for me is that I... because I cover these issues specifically, there's a little bit of level of remove, I think more generally.

There, the reality is that it's exhausting, and traumatic to watch people who look like you killed on camera over and over and over again. And you have the expectation historically and accurately rooted expectation that the people who kill them are gonna, are going to avoid any real accountability.

That's exhausting, uhm. That that state of exhaustion is true through George Floyd, but it was not a reaction to George Floyd. It was true prior to that, and it was true after that as well, right?

I think that... Like I said, I think I said the Chauvin verdict I think is different because for me it's such a specific data point in a thing that I have to analyze, like with some professional remove.

That it wasn't something that I felt a ton of, like personal emotion around for saying to the extent I did. Frankly it was emotion for Philonise Floyd, his brother, who I've gotten to know, who I've interviewed. And so I texted him right? Like for me again, like these are all things that I kind of am personally involved in a way because of the nature of my coverage. And so I'm not kind of experiencing it the way even another journalist might who is a few steps more removed from the work. It's like I know all these people in a way that's *inaudible*

Emeri Burks

Fair, so how have you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice?

Wesley Lowery

I think that look, I think that it's important that these discussions are happening. I think that the more like conversation happens, the more you recollect and recall things you have gone through and experienced yourself.

That can be both empowering, it can be frustrating. It can be difficult.

You know, I think there's been a lot of conversation happening in our industry in the journalism industry, which I think is a good thing. I, frankly, find a lot of it very exhausting.

You know I was, when I was... 19 years old, I got elected to the National Board of the National Association of Black Journalists, and so I've been doing like media diversity inclusion work my entire career, and... It's the same conversations over and over and over and over and over again. These conversations have to be calibrated to the feelings and sensibilities of the white

managers and the white colleagues, who get really upset that you might be accusing... they feel like you're accusing them of being racist.

And so then you just end up spending and wasting countless amount of time calibrating around their feelings about how they don't like how this thing that you said makes them feel. And so to be honest, I think there is... You know, I find a lot of these conversations exhausting, in part because I think it's very clear what needs to be done. And places that cared would do it, and unfortunately they have not.

Emeri Burks

Right, well, it sounds like you've largely answered this, but I have one more question just on this, and it's has your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent BLM protests affected your work in any ways? If so, how?

Wesley Lowery

I think the... again, my work unfortunately comes into high demands around an issue like George Floyd, because I've covered, policing and protests, specifically, now and am one of the kind of journalistic experts of the Black Lives Matter movement. When a moment like this happens, my phone is ringing a lot and there's a lot of work to be done.

And that can be difficult, it can be exhausting. And also, it's... you develop expertise so that in the moments when people need your expertise they can, they can lean on you. And so I in these moments I find that very important.

I think that, I think at this moment has led a lot of people to be more outspoken than they had been or would have been otherwise, and I think that's I think that's probably a good thing. I think that there's a lot of power in this moment in people telling the truth in public, and talking about what that means and what that is, I think that...

I think that we as journalists cannot be arbiters of fairness and justice if we do not function, if our newsrooms do not function in ways that are fair and just.

So, I do think that it's important for individual journalists to talk about their own experiences. And I think it's imperative that newsrooms and newsroom leadership not be reflexively defensive, but rather be committed to ensuring they're treating people fairly and just. And I think that too often what we see from our news organizations, which by the way are some of the most powerful institutions in our country, we see a defensiveness and dismissiveness and a lack of transparency. And as journalists we would not accept that from any of the powerful people or organizations that we cover. And so I don't think it's too much to expect that of ourselves, of our own leaderships, of our own leaders.

But that... 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.

I don't think any of these things are particularly radical proposals. And yet, most of our major newsrooms would fail at the test of just those three things. And we've seen case after case after case of major incidents in which at the end of the day, all someone was asking was for policies to be explained, values to be stated, or punitive action to be full, you know, fully vocalized.

And yet for some reason these news organizations – again powerful news organizations – are unwilling to do these very basic, humane things.

Emeri Burks

Well, this is a perfect segue from how would you yourself describe your role as a journalist?

Wesley Lowery

I think my role as a journalist. I think my rules as a journalist is to ask questions in public.

Emeri Burks

Fair.

Wesley Lowery

I believe my role as a journalist is too... litigate those difficult questions and provide the public with as detailed and factual of an accounting as possible. I think my role is to tell the truth, not to pull punches. I think that... So I think, I think it's important for my work to reflect reality, not what I wish reality was.

I think that too often we've inherited words and paradigms that do a disservice to our journalism. I don't believe my job as a journalist is to be neutral. If I write about a murder, you shouldn't walk away as the reader wondering if the murder was good or bad. I believe that would be a journalistic failure on my part.

I don't necessarily believe that we need to be balanced. I don't believe I need to spend 50% of my article quoting the world is flat people, and that there should be a balance between the world is flat in the world is round.

I think that my job is to be fair – and that is to hear out all people and figure out the best versions of their arguments to analyze what my own biases may be coming in, whether that's... is there someone involved in this story with whom I feel affection for, or someone who I feel derision for?

Is there... I was telling this story in the bar who might be more sympathetic to versus not, and how do I make sure that the person, or people, or side of a story I'm more sympathetic to I also asked the hardest questions of. And the side that I might feel the most oppositional to, naturally the most skeptical of that – I try to hear their answers in good faith.

Right? But I don't think I can do those things unless I accept first and foremost that I personally do have biases. I don't... I'm not foolish enough to believe that I'm, that I personally am objective. And so, therefore, in my reporting process I can correct for that lack of objectivity. And I think that that's really important.

I also think that the... again, I think if the job of the journalist is to tell the truth, the job of our industry is to tell the truth. Truth is a value. And I think that, and I think increasingly about the extent to which there are other values that are important and could be important or should be important to the process of journalism.

Emeri Burks

Can I ask on that what values are important for you in doing your job?

Wesley Lowery

Fairness, truth, justice. I believe people have a right... and so a fair amount of my journalism is about uncovering injustice. Why? Because I believe as a value that journalism should be in favor of justice, right?

In our in our nation – democracy. Now, I don't necessarily, now in a different nation, perhaps that term would be different, or how we would think about that term would be different. But we but we here as American journalists, you know, take our charge from the First Amendment. We are we... we are signing up for the system that we have here, right? And so, and so therefore, we are kind of pro-democracy one way or the other, which by the way is a subjective decision and a bias.

Plenty of people would say that democracy isn't the way to... you know again... To be pro-First Amendment is to have an opinion, right? It is to... and I think we sometimes this as an industry pretend as if that's not the truth. Right? That our industry is built upon a bunch of subjective decisions and opinions, that a free and fair and open discourse is important. Some would argue it isn't that it's important to have the ability to speech, to exercise speech, and to access the press. Some would argue that's not true, right?

And so we're already on a very political issue, taking up a position. I think it's equally important for us as an industry to take positions in favor of justice, in favor of equality, in favor of shared humanity. Some things are right, and some things are wrong.

Emeri Burks

Thanks for that.

Wesley Lowery

And I think that it's important in our journalism that we don't so tie our own hands that we can't call something evil “evil,” or that we can't call something that's an injustice an “injustice.”

Emeri Burks

Right, right? Alright? So these values that you've expressed. Do they ever conflict with your professional expectations as you understand them? If so how?

Wesley Lowery

I think the, I think the value, the way I the way I word it is that I think the values of journalism could conflict with the interest of journalism organizations. It is in the best interest of a journalistic organization to be as widely read and trusted by as many people as possible. Except in any environment much less in a hyper-polarized hyper-partisan environment, simply telling the truth is an act that will turn off more than 50% of your audience.

Uhm, that...

You want to think about famous examples, right? The... 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, and 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 about the access to vote, to the ballot box for black people, and to tell the truth about what it found right.

It is, it's so... I think that there is a balancing act there. I think we see this especially in politics, right where it's in the best interest of a reporter, much less of a publication to have Republicans be willing to return their phone calls, or Republicans to broadly, theoretically, if you could get them to trust the reporting. But at times that may clash with the value of well, but we have to tell tell the truth here about what just happened yesterday.

And I, and so I think that there's a clash which means two things. I think there's a clash between those two things on issues of race all the time, that you have majority white newsrooms led by majority white editors who are writing for an audience they imagined to be majority white, and we know that in in our country perspectives and perceptions of issues of race vary broadly and drastically based on the race of the respondent, right? And so a black reporter writing for white editors and her white audience is often going to encounter pushback on things they that they believe to be true, reporting. But that makes the white editor and by extension the white audience uncomfortable. That there are a lot of true things that make people very uncomfortable.

Emeri Burks

So in these cases, when there is a conflict between, say, your values and the interest of an organization, I can think of a case in not too distant news in which something like this happened. How do you navigate these sorts of conflicts?

Wesley Lowery

Uhm, you know? Look, I think it cuts in a few different directions. I think as an individual reporter you have to protect your integrity first and foremost. Your news organization doesn't look out for you, it looks out for itself. And it's important for the individual reporter to know where their lines are, what they won't compromise on.

Often you can push back internally, and there's conversations that can be had there. There are sometimes where you compromise where this isn't the hill you're gonna die on, but maybe the next one is. But I think in general this is a pressure that is not new, and has always faced black reporters in these newsrooms. The idea that they are expected to build sources and relationships, and draw upon their own black experiences, and then write dispatchers back to White America about them.

As opposed to writing things that reflect the reality of Black America for Black Americans. As opposed to things that speak clearly in an un-compromised way about things that have happened. And again, I think very often... going back to our false ideas – Neutrality or balance – I think that's those are big ways in which you end up diluting difficult truths.

That the entire black community believes a thing or feels a way, or a large portion of it does about the police, and you have to get the police not just responding to the thing, but being allowed to spin an entire different narrative, right?

That because someone would ask, “Well, what about the police? What do they think?”

Again, I don't. I don't have any issue with, I don't have any issue with reaching out to all shareholders and stakeholders and making sure that their ideas are reflected. But I often think that things that are true to Black Americans often have to be caveated in ways that things that are true to White Americans do not.

Emeri Burks

Nice. All right. So then how do you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and/or perspectives in public forums? You feel that there are boundaries that should be enforced, boundaries that should be revised?

Wesley Lowery

I, I think that, I think our industries had a really difficult crossroads on this. Prior to very recently, it was largely impossible for an individual journalist or reporter to, unless they've made a very deliberate plan or effort, to express much opinion or bias publicly.

I mean, I guess they could go to a march or give a speech, or in an even then for anyone to notice that would be particularly difficult to begin with. Today, every individual journalist and every individual person has publishing power. We're now publishers or our own news outlets.

And I think that creates a different tension that has existed previously because the printing press that is my Twitter feed is not owned by my employer, it's mine.

Uhm, and so I think that there's I think there's some difficulty there. You know, I'm someone and I think this is not... Perhaps this is intentionally provocative, perhaps it isn't, but I'm someone who does not care at all, short of like crimes being committed, what an individual journalist does on their social media pictures.

I think we should judge journalists by their work. We should judge journalists by their journalism.

And because again, the idea of policing public expression is about lying to readers. Journalists do have biases. They do have political... These policies are purely about concealing that truth from the reader as to get that, as to convince them of something that is not true – That the reporter does not have biases, right?

The issue theoretically, is not about the having of bias, it's about the public expression of it. And again, what I would question is 1. What right a employer has to regulate the speech and expression of an individual when that person is off the clock. And 2. What actual utility and purpose this serves in our industry.

Every that, 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. And we believe that our science intern not being able to tweet how they feel about a City Council race is the, is the thing that is going to save us. That the photography intern not going to the Women's March is the way is the way we're going to save our credibility with the populace.

It's nonsensical, it's divorced from any, from any reality.

Our editing processes are the things that ensure bias does not appear in our newspaper, right? And those processes don't exist for the interns Twitter feed, so why would we expect that the interns Twitter feed would comport to the same standards as what we're putting in the newspaper, right?

Emeri Burks

Since you mentioned it to, how do you feel about journalists getting involved in social action in joining a Black Lives Matter protest for example, or other community work.

Wesley Lowery

Uhm, you know I don't... I think it's really hard to know where those lines are. And I I gotta be honest, I don't feel hyper strongly in one direction or the other.

I get this question from college students all the time who asked me if they could like attend Black Lives Matter protests, and I tell them that I've never had to think about this because I do

so much that on the clock that I could never fathom being off the clock and going – You know what I want to do? The Black Lives Matter protest. This is not a real thing that would ever happen for me because of what my job entails.

That said. I think that, I think that that's an individual, I think that's an individual decision. I think different journalists feel differently on these questions, and I think that's fair and reasonable. I think that...

I largely think this the extent to which this, we talk about policy for an user, for an industry, I think it's a fruitless and nonsensical endeavor.

I do not believe that the science intern marching to 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.

And I don't think we as an industry... it's been so much time and so much effort trying to get into people who hate us, and do not trust us, that they should have not hate us and trust us. It makes no sense.

And we spend so much time, on this, like. Why anyone would ever need any policies about any of this is silly. And I think that... because what's also true is if you hire people who are trustworthy, if you hire people for who are, Who take seriously their commitments, they wouldn't do these things anyway.

Now look, I don't cover, you know, I don't particularly cover women's issues, right? I got covered Black Lives, matter stuff. And so I probably would never feel comfortable marching in a march personally. Because I believe that there's importance for distance now. Again, I'm at marches all the time with the notebook I'm talking to people, right? Like it's not... But I don't know that I would ever feel the need to carry a sign that's...

But were I to join the Women's March, which, like conceivably in a world where I wasn't a journalist, I could see myself like going with a partner like, you know, like I could see a world where I might be there. I don't actually know how that would impact my employer at all, in any tangible way.

Emeri Burks

That's fair.

Wesley Lowery

And I just wonder, like I said, we have these conversations and these things, and like... But it has nothing to do with what I write about. It's nothing to do with what I cover.

I'm not. I couldn't be marching in the women's March if I were covering it, 'cause I'd be covering it. Right? Like it doesn't actually work this way, right? And I just again I think it's reasonable

that as journalists we don't seek public office. I think I think pol... I think as we get to electoral politics there are some differences there. Uh, I think that makes sense.

I think it makes sense that we're not hyper-involved in partisan politics of one way or the other. I think the extent to which we're involved in any issue politics, perhaps it makes sense for us to recuse ourselves from that coverage of that issue.

But I, but I think what's also true, and what's also difficult is that we consider some things.. we consider something politics, and some things not. Right? That there are journalists who are landlords. Do they have to recuse themselves from anything having to do with housing?

And there are, you know, and so we... They have journalists who send their kids to the extremely expensive private schools who themselves went to schools that were segregation academies, are they recused from all discussion of equity in education.

The reality is just to be a human is to be political. And 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. And if we do all those things, it really doesn't matter what they tweeted on Tuesday night or where they marched on Saturday.

Emeri Burks

Alright, so I wanted to transition a little bit into talking about Social Responsibility versus say Free Press models of journalism.

So wanted to ask how has your understanding of Social Responsibility influenced your work as a journalist, and if so, how? In particular has this changed since George Floyd's death?

Wesley Lowery

Well, answer the second one first, nothing about my view on journalism has changed since George Floyd's death. You know that was not a particularly awakening moment for me. It was for a lot of people.

I don't usually think about the term Social Responsibility. I think about it a little differently, uhm, although I think it this is what you're getting at in talking about.

I've known since before I was in this industry, that this is an industry made up largely of people who don't look like me, who don't come from the background I have, often writing stories that exclude people who look like me and from my background, for the benefit of an audience that is not me.

And so I have always known, and I've always taken it as truth as I navigate this field, that I have a responsibility in this space to someone much larger than, to something much larger than

myself, to tell stories that otherwise might go untold, to tell those stories in ways that are accurate and fair and more so than they might be if told by a different story-teller.

And so I've always believed that I, as an individual journalist, have had a responsibility and accountability to a broader community. That I belong to a community, and I am held accountable by that community. So the work I do, and the work I don't do, the things that appear under my byline, the things that do not appear under my byline. That community isn't doesn't just exist online, it exists in real life.

It's... I'm accountable to the people who I walk down the street and get my haircut or I'm in my corner store with, right? That like if I'm going to be a person who covers Black America as a Black man who lives in Black America, I wanna hear from my readers. And there's accountability there. I think it's a good thing. I think it's important and actually think that journalism would be a lot better if more of the people covering more of the country had to actually walk down the supermarket aisle with the people who they're writing about.

And I think that... because it allows you and forces you to see humanity in ways that are different, it allows you and forces you to be fair in ways that are different. It's easy to be unfair to someone you never have to see. It's not so easy when you have to deal with them.

I think that... and so that's what I think about. Again, that responsibility is not about a loyalty to community over a loyalty to fairness and loyalty to the truth. Rather, it's about having an accurate understanding of the history of American journalism, knowing that there are communities that have been systemically underserved and miss-served by American journalism and hoping to be a small part of that corrected in the work that I do.

Emeri Burks

So then, based on your understanding, what does society need from the journalism industry at this time? How do you know this?

Wesley Lowery

I think I think that society needs, uh, I think society needs a journalist... I think society needs a journalism industry that is unsparing in its commitment to the truth, to fairness, and to justice. And I think that there are... 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.

And those values need to be reflected not only in our work, but in how we operate with these individuals, and more importantly, as organizations. If I watch you firing an intern in a way that is unfair, how can I trust your journalism to be fair?

And I think that that is very... 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.

Emeri Burks

But what does this mean for what society needs from you individually or from journalists individually?

Wesley Lowery

I don't know that society needs anything from me individually. I think that... I think I think as individuals, I think our job is to be thorough, is to try to be fair, to be well read, is to try extent we can to not be defensive – to be willing to hear good faith critique and push back.

I think there's a need for us to be open-minded, to be willing to accept that we don't know, 'cause there's so much we don't know.

You know one of the best parts of this job is learning something new every day, and I think that that's important to to keep learning and wanting to have that process.

But 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?

Emeri Burks

Right, well then based on these needs that you've identified, do you feel confident that you or the journalism industry and at large will generally be able to meet these needs? Why or why not?

Wesley Lowery

Look, I think that there's a lot of built in norms and momentum around a certain type of journalism. And I think that there's been a lot of... I think a lot of the norms of journalism have been fetishized by the current and previous generation of journalistic leaders, and so I think it makes it very difficult to have smart, good faith, honest conversations about the state of the industry. Because there's an automatic defensiveness that there's an ideology of objectivity that is much larger and bigger than what the term means or was ever intended to mean.

That a lot of people cling to as gospel as if you know Walter Lippmann came down from Mount Sinai with it, you know, on the on the tablets carved by God's finger.

And so because of that, and because people who make decisions and who are big bosses aren't used to have to explaining anything they do, very often there's a disconnect between folks who

are in good faith trying to have conversations about the future of the industry, and the powerful people in the industry don't want to hear it.

Emeri Burks

You starting to get into it, but what obstacles, if any, do you think prevent you and journalism from meeting these needs?

Wesley Lowery

A capitalistic decision making. Journalism is a business. We get back to the idea of our values and our interests getting in the way of each other. It may be in CNN in the interest of CNN value of telling the truth that when you turn it on the bottom [unclear] says there's nothing that urgent you need to know about, feel free to go about your Friday afternoon. That would not be in CNN's interest. It's interest is keeping you watching.

And so we are biased institutionally towards conflicts, towards urgency and franticness, towards sensationalism, towards hyperbole, because that is in our financial best interest. And I think that that is a big thing. I think that...

Beyond that, though, I think that we are... Our value of telling the truth often comes in conflict with the best interest of having our sources continue to talk to us. That it is, that if part of our business and journalistic model relies on government officials and police officers telling this information, might that incentivize us against criticism or critical coverage of those same organizations? Or skepticism of the things they are telling us? And so we see that conflict very often.

I think I had one more and I don't remember what it is, but. Oh well, and beyond that – if the truth is that everyone has biases, and you have a generation of journalists who've convinced themselves they have no biases, it's going to be impossible to get to a journalism where we acknowledge biases, as long as those are the people who are in charge.

That if one of the primary issues here is that is that subjective opinions of powerful people in journalism have been codified as mutual norms, those neutral norms protect themselves. And you have to get a set of people, a set of decision makers to agree to understand the neutrality of the or the subjectivity of these things that they believe to be neutral. And by the very nature, these are things that very often are not personally affecting the decision makers at all.

Emeri Burks

Well, the this.

Wesley Lowery

I was gonna say, that they've been trained in this gospel and now you're telling them it's not true. And whether it is true or not, that is very difficult for them to accept, much less ingest.

Emeri Burks

Right, well then directly on this point, then what support do you think your organization or newsrooms in general could be offering to help the journalists better meet these needs?

Wesley Lowery

Look, I think the news organizations could be clear about what their policies and centers are, which I don't think is much to ask. And yet, I think it's very obvious and very clear that's not the case.

I think news organizations should state full-throated their values. I think they should explain their policies. I think they should trash policies that leave massive grey areas, which most of these as policies written do.

They should be vigilant not to have unequal enforcement. If I get in trouble for something, so should the person sitting next to me.

And I think that... I think that's at the very least. Right? Whether I agree with where an editor or exactly producer might draw a line, if I just whether I agree with their standard or not, if I know what the standard is, then I can abide by it, or choose not.

I think many journalists aren't even being granted that ability. They couldn't follow the rules if they wanted to because the rules are so amorphous. And I think that that is an issue.

I think a news organization that wants to go above and beyond that could have conversations and actually listen to the people who work for them about where they think these lines should be, how they best express these values. Now again conversations require talking and listening, and if some of these organizations aren't willing even to define what their standards and policies are and explain them, it's very hard to imagine they're gonna sit down and not only do that, but then listen to other people and their feelings about them. But I think that that's very important.

Norm Pearlstein, outgoing editor the LA Times, we have a comment to New York Times talking about the consent of the governed and how important the consent of the governed will be for the new generation of editors – the idea that no longer will the editor be an emperor, but rather they actually will have to be more of a democratic power than that. That they that people will not just do what you want them to do because you are the boss.

And in fact, in this moment, now will not only not do the thing you want, but talk publicly about how you had this dumb thing. you want us to do. And I think that that is created a crisis for a set of editors who came up in relatively tyrannical times, where they could and would do whatever they wanted to you, and you were just happy to be there, and not laid off.

And I don't believe that's gonna be... I don't believe that's the case now. And I don't think that's how it's gonna be in the future. I think people expect responsive leadership that actually listens

to them, that hears them out and is willing to admit when it's wrong. And I think that's a massive change from the last generation of newsroom leadership.

Emeri Burks

Well, this study is nearly... This interview is nearly finished, and I did want to ask – As a black journalist, do you feel... what do you feel others have to learn from your particular unique perspective?

Wesley Lowery

Look. I think we all have lots to learn from everyone's perspective, right? I think that... I don't know what... I don't know what it's like to learn from me personally, but I think that one of the reasons I love being in diverse newsrooms is that every person around me brings me knowledge, new experiences, new background – things to learn from. That's the beauty, right? I believe in a mosaic theory of journalism, which is that each of us does our part. Each of us brings our thing and then together we tell the full and complete story.

And I think it's a mistake to believe that any one journalists can tell an entire story or the complexity and the completeness of the story. That I'm glad when I get to a story and see my colleagues there, because I know that means that I don't have to cover all of it. I can get my piece, my chunk, one of my best position to do and then this person will get this and this push to get that.

And I just don't come and say no, I... Look. I think that as it relates to the protest movement, now, I think there's a lot to be said for the politics of this moment and these young people. I spent a lot of time on the ground covering them.

I think as it relates to what it's like to be a young black man bear come this moment, obviously I have those experiences. But again I think that it's just, it's why it's so important we have diverse newsrooms, because we all have different lived experiences.

We all have eyes and ears through which we tell our stories. But their eyes and ears are all connected to the rest of our bodies, and we move through the world in those bodies. And the way our body is treated by that world is defined by what it is and what it looks like, and how people perceive it. And I think that without having those different experiences in a room, it's impossible to fully, accurately cover the world we live in.

Emeri Burks

So you've heard most of the questions that I asked during this interview. What do you hope others might learn from this study then?

Wesley Lowery

You know, look, I think that there's a like I said... I think one of the biggest things, I mean one of the biggest conversations we have to have or need to have is a conversation about... To go

back to what we're talking about, is a conversation about norms. Is about really thinking about the way we've constructed this industry.

Who is being served and who isn't? That if we were started, we were inventing journalism today. How, what would we do? How would we invent that?

That we're not actually handcuffed by any yesterday. We can do whatever we want.

And that's not to say you throw everything out for the sake of throwing it out. I don't advocate that at all. But I don't think there's anything that's above critical examination. It's never inappropriate to ask why.

And I think our industry is horrified of asking why? Why do we do things this way?

And what I would what I would say is 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, that it is as important as ever that we know the answer why, that we know why we do what we do, and how we do it, and that we articulate it.

And unfortunately I think too many of our newsrooms are failing at that right now.

Emeri Burks

Well, thanks for that. Last question – Is there anything else you'd like to share on these subjects that we haven't discussed so far?

Wesley Lowery

Well, I think we covered a lot of it, covered a lot of ground.

Emeri Burks

Well, that is largely it so, permanently unmute myself... I really, really appreciate this talk. This is.

Wesley Lowery

Of course.

Emeri Burks

Your articles were some of the first ones that set me on this path, in this particular study. So it is especially great you are the first person I've interviewed for this study, and I'll be working at getting some others.

Wesley Lowery

It's gonna be great.

Emeri Burks

So so next steps I will be following up with you later on just to make sure that anything sensitive that you said during the interview that you feel fine with them being specifically shared.

Wesley Lowery

Sure, but I'm sure it's all fine.

Emeri Burks

And I'll also give you a waiver form. Ok. But otherwise this is likely going to be a little while. Gonna be doing interviews through June. Going to be compiling and analyzing through the end of the year looking to publish in 2021, I mean 2022, and hopefully if enough people are comfortable with having video and audio, putting together a video sort of compilation and summary of the findings of this study.

So that's what we're looking at. Do you have any questions about the way the study is going to go or what I'm doing?

Wesley Lowery

Uh, no. It all sounds great.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, well, I really appreciate your time and I'm sorry. I think we definitely went over an hour.

Wesley Lowery

Don't worry about it. Whatever and like I said if you need anything else from me, let me know.

Emeri Burks

Absolutely thank you so much, Wesley. Great talking with you.

Bye bye then.

***Amendment added from Email June 8th, 2021**

What are your preferred pronouns?

He/Him

How old are you?

30 years old

To the best of your understanding, do the boundaries on acceptable journalistic conduct (with regard to expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and/or perspectives in public forums) seem to be shifting? If so, how?

There have not ever been an agreed upon set of boundaries on personal expression that applied across the industry. The rules at the New York Times were always different than the rules at CBS and at CNN and at Rolling Stone. I do think that, generally, the rules are shifting to

become more permissive of personal expression, but where precisely the line is remains a moving target and inconsistent across the industry

Interview 10 – Jenni Monet – June 22, 2021

Emeri Burks

Hi welcome. We've already discussed the consent form and some of the options. And you've said too, that you're comfortable with releasing identifiable information as well as the audio, but not the video for this interview for future summaries files. Is that right?

Jenni Monet

That's correct.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thanks so much.

Right. Can you tell me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Jenni Monet

My name is Jenni Monet and I am an independent journalist focused on indigenous affairs. And I also am the founder of a weekend newsletter called Indigenously: Decolonizing Your Newsfeed.

Emeri Burks

And can you tell me your pronouns and age please?

Jenni Monet

I prefer she, her. And I am 45 years old.

Emeri Burks

Great. And can you tell me what race or ethnicity you identify with or as.

Jenni Monet

I identify as indigenous or native American. And my national origin would be Laguna Pueblo, which is where I hold tribal citizenship – One of the native nations here in the United States. And then I'm also a direct descendant of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa.

Emeri Burks

All right. Thanks so much for that.

Can I ask you to briefly describe your background in journalism? What led you to it? What sort of experience of coverage you have of different areas, different organizations – in brief, but kind of detailing your path to here, to now?

Jenni Monet

Oh, sure. I got my start in journalism officially as a television news intern working for KOAT Channel Seven News. I believe their exact slogan is Action Seven News. It is the ABC affiliate in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was the summer between my junior and senior year in college.

I really seized the opportunity of working in that newsroom. I accelerated that summer, learned a lot, left with a reel, and immediately stepped into another internship upon returning back to my senior year where I was attending Fort Lewis college in Durango, Colorado. And they did not have a TV news program or a broadcast program. They had basically one journalism class and they did not have a journalism major.

I had been toying around with any kind of media classes that they offered – documentary, editing, design... Any kind of sound design. And so I ended up crafting independent study for myself and convinced the local CBS affiliate, which was a tiny little newsroom in Durango, Colorado, to work with me as an independent student/intern, so that I could continue basically going out in the field and shooting and editing and telling stories.

Before the end of my senior year, I was already hired, and by the time that at the end of that summer, I was basically anchoring my own show, shooting my own things. I know at one point I was basically shooting all the content for my own show, coming back, producing it, editing and putting it all together, and then getting makeup on and fixing my hair and reading the news. I mean I really was a one-woman show.

It was intense. I was hungry. I was young. I was living in poverty technically – below the poverty line. And none of it mattered because I was so into work, and there was not really anybody my age that I could relate to, because I really had this spirit of wanting to get started as quickly as possible. And by the time that I was 21, I was making six figures, I had been accelerated into a higher position within the same company, but in a larger market in Albuquerque as a weekend, anchor weekday news reporter.

I was accelerating faster than I really had time to comprehend. There was very few people my age that I could relate to, that were in that same kind of position. And that was my entry into, into journalism – was through TV news.

Emeri Burks

Wow. Sounds like you've been busy.

Jenni Monet

Well, it was exciting. It was exciting because I'd always known I wanted to be a journalist. I really wanted to be a long form magazine writer. But this was also at the dawn of the internet, and navigating the white male world of magazines at that time in the late nineties was more than impossible to do. I'd had no connections. I knew zero people in the journalism industry except for the access that I was able to have through TV.

And to be quite honest. I'm not even really sure how I got the internship in Albuquerque that got me going. I can't even recall. I think maybe I sent letters to everybody and they called me back, I think. I know for sure that I was sending out letters to magazines. I was sending out it letters of interest to some of the top houses in New York.

I think that that's kind of how it worked out – was the Albuquerque station probably took an interest that I was from New Mexico. I'm from one of the pueblos. The Laguna Pueblo is one of the 19 pueblos in the state. And so I think that that was also a draw for me. And that became my doorway.

Emeri Burks

I'm taking mental notes here on things that I should be doing as well. Thank you for that.

Jenni Monet

Sure.

Emeri Burks

Well I wanted to ask, from the beginning through to now as your supervisors and employers have established expectations for you, as far as what you, as a journalist, were going to be expected to do, what comes to mind as far as the instruction you received for a journalist's expectations. Does that make sense?

Perhaps I can clarify a little bit.

Jenni Monet

Are you saying that throughout my career, how were expectations of me defined at each stage, or were they addressed?

Emeri Burks

Yeah, that's pretty much exactly it. I'm interested in knowing the expectations that others gave to you as you understand them throughout your path into journalism.

Jenni Monet

Okay.

Well I'll give you a very quick overview. So I worked in TV news at the commercial level with CBS affiliates for about five years, and then I segwayed into public broadcasting in New York City. I was working at a small, independent television station called Brooklyn Independent TV. I worked there for about three years. And then I went independent and freelanced in radio and documentaries. That kind of was a mix of about working independently. That was about five years.

Then I went back to school for a year, went to grad school. And then when I came out of grad school, I moved to the middle east and worked for Al Jazeera for a couple of years... And came out of that and went back being independent again, and I've been independent ever since.

I tell you that trajectory because there's two strong stretches in there where I've worked independently. And I think that that is really telling to this question that you're asking me about what the expectations were. Because in this moment of the journalism industry itself reconciling with its journalists of color and the treatment invisibility of diverse by-lines in all of these publications, I'm really having a falling out with the industry. Over the last year I've been taking a mental calculus just by organic design of how much abuse I've taken in this industry.

Because the expectations were never spelled out, because the expectations of me somehow... I may not have met them from whatever my employer had idealized when they hired me. How I see it in my high performance, high functioning output as an employee of certain organizations and companies, I often felt well completely... I think treated differently in certain instances when it came to, how whatever kinds of issues that needed to be addressed that I just didn't see some of my other colleagues being treated in the same way.

I am 45 years old now. I've been in this industry for just about 21 years, going on 22. And I don't think that I will ever go back to a newsroom environment again. If I am a staff journalist at a publication, it would have to be at one of the elite publications to where I get to work remotely.

Emeri Burks

I see.

Jenni Monet

Because I just don't think that those environments have been kind to people like me.

Emeri Burks

Sure. And those... Sorry, just other sounds in the house. I did want to ask there what sort of themes people did bring up as they mentioned that you were not meeting the expectations they had. What expectations were your supervisors or employers bringing up with you in these different positions?

Jenni Monet

Well, I have this like... everyone at every stage of where I've worked, I kind of pin it by just bad experiences. So my first job, I think that they were upset that I was complaining about being discriminated against by viewers, not by colleagues. There were some... you know TV newsrooms can be cutthroat and you have to really have a thick skin. And so I wasn't really concerned about that as much as I was when I was out in public and being discriminated against in public by the citizenry of the city I was covering as a public figure for our brand, our news brand. And I don't think that I... I think whatever those expectations were, they were expecting me to just take it. And that was really hard, you know? It was really hard because, um, I didn't want to take it.

And I also think that there were expectations that I should just not be as outspoken, I think. I'm very outspoken. I have opinions. For instance, there was this time in one job where after nine 11, they had us wear these white ribbons to mark the atrocity of the terrorist act. And it wasn't that I did not feel bad for all the lives that were lost in that, but I also did not feel that we as journalists should be wearing these white ribbons to somehow punctuate or... what's the word I'm looking for? *Absolve* America's role in any way for how or why the attack happened. I mean, I was very engrossed in middle Eastern affairs at the time before the attack and upon absorbing the news around it.

You know, I firmly believe that we were not innocent in that attack and that for us to... I don't know if you remember, I'm not sure how old you are, but... there was a strong wave of nationalism and patriotism that swelled from the nine 11 attack and it surpassed boundaries within the media industry itself. All we have to do is look at Judith Miller and the spin that she put on the weapons of mass destruction.

In my approach... I mean, I wasn't protesting. But I did speak up about not wearing those ribbons. And at that point I think I had already pressed enough buttons with my boss at the time around other issues that that was the straw that broke the camel's back. So that was instance in that job where it's like, 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.

And I still believe that to this day.

I think that in other instances expectation-wise, I think you could just say that that's a common theme, you know? That if I were a white person who raised the same concerns, I saw those concerns being addressed differently than me. And so to put it in the context of expectations, were they expecting me just to keep my nose down and not say anything, even if it challenged the journalistic integrity of the news brand, of what we were doing, or of journalism itself. Yeah, I'm not quite sure

Emeri Burks

For sure. I will definitely be returning to that in just a second – the differences of how the expectations played out for different people is a central focus. But I did want to quickly ask about the specific expectations that you understood from your employers and supervisors regarding objectivity. Could you tell me how you understood the expectations that others had for you with regards to journalistic objectivity?

Jenni Monet

Well, I think that's a good question because I did not get my start in journalism by attending a formal journalism school. As I told you, I kind of made it made up my own program because I love journalism so bad, and I really was making it up as I was going along. No one took me aside and said, "What career do you want? And how are you going to get there?" I was feeling my way around. 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." And 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.

And so the question of what you're... Can you rephrase your question again?

Emeri Burks

For sure. The expectation for journalistic objectivity

Jenni Monet

Objectivity, right. So, I'm a media critic today. I write about our industry all the time through a very critical, measured lens. And it is because I started at an industry at the Dawn of the internet, and I've been able to kind of reinvent myself, become adjustable and adaptable to the changing tides of this industry, seize the opportunities when they become available... And at the same time, like today, for instance, I am called by a lot of people, an "old school journalist," because they see me as somebody who, for instance... I carry strong values about relying on tweets for people's comments, right? It's a very lazy kind of shallow way of doing that. And when you're looking at objectivity, when you're looking at depth, authenticity, all of that to me blends together when you're looking at the integrity of the journalism itself.

So when we're looking at expectations of that, I think that I've always come in with probably a pretty high bar. And I wouldn't say that that bar is nudged a whole lot. If there has been any kind of spelled out expectations of that, I would say they've been pretty clear. Newsrooms have style guides. Newsrooms have... if you're in a really good newsroom, like Al Jazeera, there is a constant kind of diary that flows.

One of our managing editors, he's fantastic, and he sends out daily dispatches to the team about what we cover, how it got covered, what were some of the highs and lows, and what we've got ahead of us. I miss those. I miss those internal dispatches because there's a continuity in and of itself. And I think that for real news people, like we feed off of that. We feed off of how the story grows. And then when I've worked in smaller newsrooms, it was very clear that I was the one that needed to be the responsible one to make sure that we weren't gonna get sued. So it ranges throughout the gamut and the ones that were more vulnerable without the expectations of objectivity and where those lines blur were mostly in Indian country – the indigenous publications or the brands, simply because they have for so long lacked, kind of the caliber of professionalism, and the training and the education – all that that bigger brands do, that they have.

Emeri Burks

That's really interesting. All right. Could I ask you to compare the expectations that were set by your supervisors and superiors to the expectations set by your audience? What would you say your audience's expectations for you have been?

Jenni Monet

Huh, that's interesting. I definitely know that the expectations of my superiors have been steeped in my indigeneity, my indigenous identity. There's an expectation that I'm supposed to write about Indian country perhaps in one way or another, and that's been throughout my career. There's this kind of notion that because I'm native that I'm pro this or pro that. You can't win in that battle no matter how you [are] standing in it. There's just no way to win.

Because I'm a journalist... some people will say well I'm indigenous first and then I'm a journalist. And for me, I don't really know that there is... I think I'm a journalist first more than anything. I think that for my readers, the ones who get that, I think that they... that's why I have a following. That's why people read my newsletter. Because it's not in this stereotypical package that's gonna pump a fist at every cause that's coming at you, you know? I mean, it's critical, it bravely raises questions about... that challenges ideas of my beat - indigenous affairs. And then therefore it challenges my readers. So I think my audience is a smarter readership.

But on the broader view outside of my audience that is following me, I do believe that there's an expectation, just like my superiors and the people who hired me, that I should probably be more pro advocacy to Indian country. It's a, it's a delicate balance to walk because it challenges my journalistic integrity at all the time, and I am constantly having to check, almost bulletproof whether or not I'm being too harsh. Am I right in the middle of the road? Am I little too advocacy leaning? I'm sure other people of color, other journalists of color wrestle with that. But you know, as a native journalist, it's been my entire career up until just now where indigenous peoples are really starting to just be paid attention to.

Emeri Burks

That's really interesting. Thank you. I did want to come back to the point you raised earlier. So compared to your colleagues who are not indigenous, not native American, do you think that these expectations that supervisors, employers and audiences have expressed affect you personally differently than others? If so, how?

Jenni Monet

Do I feel that native audiences view me differently?

Emeri Burks

Not quite. Do you think that compared to journalists who are not native, who are not indigenous, do you think that these expectations you've been discussing affect you differently, affect you uniquely?

Jenni Monet

Oh. Yeah, I'm not really sure. You know I try to consider that a lot, like Hispanic or Latina, Latin X journalist, of any diverse background... black journalists you hear a lot of what their vexings are and I'm able to relate a lot with that. I think there's probably a pretty steady center where we all intersect in terms of the challenges of being a journalist of color, being taken seriously when writing about our own people. Particularly by editors who are white, or news managers who are white. If I were to say that there are unique aspects that don't apply to other journalists of color for me as an indigenous journalist, I think that the stereotypes... sorry...

Emeri Burks

No worries.

Jenni Monet

Hi, I'm in the middle of a Zoom. Can I call you back?

Caller

Absolutely, darling.

Jenni Monet

Okay. Bye.

I would say maybe it's a little bit more extreme. I don't know that I would say that it's an either/or, I would say it's more extreme. And I would probably give you the example of my arrest at Standing Rock. I reported from Standing Rock and was arrested as the only person carrying a press pass that day. Even though I was permitted to stay, I was still arrested by another police officer.

To give you a sense of how the media responded – they had made a big stink about Amy Goodman getting arrested while on assignment, and it took other journalists that had been reporting with me alongside standing rock to say, “Hey, this was a horrible situation. Like she's the only one there. She's the only one that's been there.” And the media – like all of the media – just kind of shrugged it off. In fact there were... I'm not going to name organizations or institutions... but there were journalism organizations in America that questioned whether or not I was a real journalist or if I was just an advocate writing opinion pieces. That got back to me by a couple of the people who were trying to drum up support for me.

So, the racism within our industry is incredible. As an aside, there was a tale of two arrests – so that was one arrest, and colleagues of mine had to cajole other media organizations to report on my arrest. And then I was arrested two years later by an unprofessional event – it wasn't related to being on assignment at all – where I was racially profiled by police here in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I'm speaking with you. The media used it as a spectacle. Basically exploited what otherwise was a violation of my civil liberties for a very minor legal offense. We're talking misdemeanor charges for the gratification of just exploiting a journalist of color. I was not famous. I was not influential. I might have been giving a few speaking... It was beyond bizarre.

And to see that a year later the police brutality question come to the fore and the police accountability issue, penetrate... I mean, my case was almost the last example of how the media is complicit with police bias. There's media bias, there's police bias, but there's also media bias and that goes hand-in-hand. I was a victim to that media bias – double bias – if you will.

I don't think the industry... I think they are almost as complicit as the police themselves when it comes to how they view people of color, how they treat them in the press. We just saw the Associated Press this last week, announced that they are no longer going to write about or post people's mugshots about anything less than felony cases. I can't believe that we're only now at that stage. Because why we were doing that to begin with makes absolutely zero sense to me other than to publicly shame people – of any color, but basically people of color, really what it boils down to, and poor people. I just think that that's so shameful. I think that it also lacks incredible compassion and that there were a lasting impact to that.

That's why there's the law... there's, there's this law in other places called the right to be forgotten in Europe. And there are a couple of newsrooms that are testing those methods – one in Cincinnati, and one in Boston – The Boston Globe – they both have adopted right to be forgotten mandates to consider whether or not these past stories deserve to be erased in time. I just think that a law like that needs to be passed here in the United States.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well, I'm glad to bring the conversation to some more current events. Can I set some context by asking what your personal reaction or relationship to learning about George Floyd's death was?

Jenni Monet

So, because I'm a journalist. I don't always get excited about big breaking news. In fact – never. I kind of hear the noise, know that there's commotion, and then I'm like, “Okay, the commotion lasted, right? Like it wasn't probably until 48, maybe 72 hours, that I actually tuned in to hear, to really educate myself about what was going on. Because unfortunately, black men dying by police in America is not a new thing. It was so normalized at the time that when it hit my ears, I was just kind of like, “Okay. You know.” ...And saw the uprising around his death as curious, but not compelling enough until... I had a friend... and I don't watch TV news. The main source of my news is Twitter. But basically, that's what I just scan to see, because I follow a lot of journalists.

...And I saw the fires, I saw the protest, but I also saw Ferguson. Right? Like I just was like, “Okay.” I was at Standing Rock. And so this kind of stuff doesn't really phase me. But I had not watched the video of his murder.

So I did. I watched the – it was probably a couple of days after his murder – and I cried. I was already traumatized from my own arrest, and so I was very upset. Then as the conversation grew over the weeks, there was so much validation to the trauma that I was suffering from my

arrest, around the police bias and the media bias. Especially when you heard... Unicorn Riot had this live stream that was going on. One day they had let people come up and vent. Right? And talk about cases of their own from their families, whether or not they've lost loved ones, or their trials through court, their dealings with police. And I have to just tell you, there was so much validation because I related on a level that I didn't know.

I didn't know that there were all these people out there like that, 'cause these stories just aren't told. There is a great... you could tell how sensitive it is because I don't think that were believed [in] these kinds of situations. They're discarded, they're denied. I think that's what I was saying at the start of this conversation is that while all of this is really heavy stuff to talk about, the release, this emotional release, of relief. There is a relief that we're talking about it, and that it's being considered. In many cases it's being taken seriously. It's not at all perfect...

I hate that he had to die for that to happen. But I'm so grateful all the time for the opening that it brought.

I'm sorry.

Emeri Burks

Not at all. Speaking of people taking this seriously, what was your personal reaction or relation to former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Jenni Monet

Relief, relief. As someone who lived through the Rodney King trial, and remembers it... I was a teenager at the time, but I was mortified in watching those riots in LA. I hated... even then I remember as a kid, as a teenager, I hated even then how it made black people look like these... basically black men look like these villains, right? They villainize black men. And I knew that even then as a teenager, that... I understood the riot. I understood why there was anger in the streets. And yet I also understood that the PR behind it was going to be a mess for black Americans.

So I was so fearful of that as the jury was deliberating. Because unfortunately, even when everything is so clear and obvious at times, in the past over and over and over again, and justice has just been served up. We swallow it, and suck it down and move on. I was just so grateful. Really grateful that we didn't have to suffer through another one of those rounds.

Emeri Burks

Thank you for that.

Jenni Monet

M-hmm.

Emeri Burks

One more, just on context setting here. How have you related personally, as well as professionally, to the discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice that have come since the death of George Floyd. So personally – how have you responded, but professionally – how has it changed your work as well?

Jenni Monet

Well, I started my newsletter, and it was indirect response to George Floyd's murder. I launched it a year ago last week, which was essentially two weeks after George Floyd's murder. It was a knee-jerk reaction to needing to process everything that was going on, a big part of what led me to launch Indigenously, was that in the groundswell of righteous voices that were being raised around black injustice.

I also felt that the indigenous narrative was getting completely drowned out in the conversations, and it was not in a competition to force us in there, but it was also to politely provide a doorway that native people lead in police-led gun violence. We, our people die more than any other group in America when it comes to police-led violence. We populate – and I'm talking per capita, per capita – we populate jails in certain counties and states in the country more than any other. The racial profiling that we suffer is at the same magnitude, if not greater in certain pockets of America. And before George Lloyd's murder, obviously no one is talking about that, and no one is addressing that.

One of the prime issues around that spotlights that is the chronic rate of which indigenous women mostly are missing or murdered. There's an entire movement that has swelled from that. That is emblematic of, I think, the same kind of crisis as that raised around Black Lives Matter. It was all I could do to cope in that space, and in that environment. As a journalist, unfortunately these are the times where we rise to the occasion of making sense of what's going on in our world, and to shine light on all that's being absorbed in that moment.

So on one hand, the newsletter was intentional to mark the indigenous timeline in the greater scope of a racial reckoning in America. Secondly – and I didn't realize this until very recently a few months ago – how that newsletter saved me through all of that.

I think that we, as journalists, don't realize how much we are burdened by the weight of the world just because we know too much. And keeping that in is not healthy. Like there needs to be a cycle that happens where these kinds of thoughts are always forming and being shared and melding. Because if you harbor those feelings on your own, you're not really thinking critically about how it's going to be shared in community. Right?

But when you're sharing it in community, you are obviously coming out as the public voice that you are. And to put that kind of sheen on it is important. Otherwise, it can corrode. These ideas and traumas, if they get to that point can corrode.

So I am I'm 100% convinced that my newsletter was also therapy for me in 2020. I almost didn't continue it. Because I just didn't know where it was going. I didn't know why I launched Indigenously, where when I launched and digitally, I did not really see it having a lifespan at any certain point. And now it's a project that I'm growing because I recognize it for what it is. It's a beacon of hope when there's reason to hope, and it is a vessel to flow ideas when they need to have space to breathe. I'm just so grateful to have the platform and have an audience and to know the value of the space.

Emeri Burks

Thank you for that.

Jenni Monet

M-hmm.

Emeri Burks

I wanted to transition a little bit then. Could you describe your role as a journalist, as you understand it then?

Jenni Monet

Well, the first thing that comes to mind is what my first boss in television in the news business told me – that we're public servants. Our job is to listen to the community on issues that impact all sides of the community, not just one voice or one group. Our job is to come in as people who are trained to assess the situation and write about it responsibly, to chronicle a time.

It's changed my whole philosophy for how I've covered the news throughout my career. For instance, in Indian country, it can be a hard beat to cover because the distrust by native people is so great because for all the obvious reasons – the government abuse that has generationally, harmed native people, and then the kind of intergenerational cycles of abuse that come from that within community. So then there's just a lot of trauma. Putting that public servant lens on how I cover communities, it now is coming from a very trauma informed space and approach all the time. There's rarely topics in Indian country that aren't hindered by trauma. That often means spending hours on the phone with someone that you might only need to talk for like 10 minutes. But understanding that the gift of time is as valuable as their exchange of their story. I take it very transactionally that way.

You know, native people have had so much taken from them that the gift of their time is something that I try to honor every time.

Emeri Burks

Thank you. Can I ask, what values are important to you in how you do your job?

Jenni Monet

Ethics are something that some people would say that I'm a little too rigid about. But I am an ethicist. I believe in top Journalistic standards, even when it's me covering my own people. I don't believe that there should be double standards simply because I'm indigenous. That I should be covering Indian country any differently than I would any other government or any other community. That is critically important to me.

I think that's what gets me in a lot of trouble, because in my media criticism I do call things out a lot. I call out the problem that underrepresented through lines of journalism suffer from – Indian country is perhaps one of the best case studies to look at when you chronically don't cover something.

Then all of a sudden, right now, when you get this rush of attention on something, it's almost as if all of those journalistic standards get thrown out the window. They get lost in the frenzy to “discover” something. It's quite colonial actually. The kind of maniacal illness that is fixated on the indigenous narrative right now, the standards of which stories are being covered right now from Indian country – you don't see those kinds of things happen in other genres in the news business. You just don't. It's a degradation, it's a disservice to the greater people who don't know anything about Indian country and are looking to trusted sources to get a read and a take on things.

And yet that take is often distorted, it's often patronizing or victimizing in ways that people who don't know what they don't know are just kind of taking it all in. It makes my job incredibly hard. It's already hard, but it makes it harder.

So I think that more than anything, if you have the foundation of strong ethics, strong standards, everything else – your house of cards is pretty sturdy. But if you don't have that – you start chipping away at the ethical standards of things, then it just becomes a mess.

Emeri Burks

Sure. So I wanted to ask, these values that you've expressed and these expectations that you've talked about, do you feel that they are ever in conflict with each other – the expectations of your employers, of your audiences with your personal values?

Jenni Monet

Yes

Emeri Burks

Could you tell me more about that and when?

Jenni Monet

Oh, sure. 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 that if the public knew would have a different take altogether. I'm constantly walking those kinds of balances on how

much to reveal, how to... the tone to place on things, the timing of when to reveal something. And constantly kind of recycling 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. It 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 – 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 so 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.

Emeri Burks

When this happens, how do you go about choosing the best course of action?

Jenni Monet

Well, I bounce it off a few people. I talk to a few trusted people that are in my editorial world. Some of them are not native. Some of them are. They're all people I trust and that know me very well. They know that I wouldn't be pursuing certain hard truths if I didn't feel strongly about them.

I noticed as I've gotten older that I sit on things a little bit longer, before making a decision. That's interesting too. So just kind of not being so reactionary in the moment, letting things kind of percolate and simmer before deciding how to hit send, you know what I mean?

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well, can I ask about a couple specific incidences of journalistic conduct that have been in the news. How would you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas, and or perspectives in public forums? Are there boundaries that should be enforced? Are there boundaries that should be revised?

Jenni Monet

I know a certain case study from Indian country of a ruse – a woman who has been catapulted to an influencer status for all the distorted reasons, and all of the distorted reasons that I've talked about in terms of what the indigenous narrative is vulnerable to. The distortion, the lack of people knowing what they don't know, or not knowing what they don't know. She's pulled the wool over everybody's eyes. And I'm picking my moment to talk about it. This is a perfect example of what I just said – just sitting on things, knowing when to hit send. That's really it because nobody wants to come out and look like a professionally jealous colleague, or somebody who might have an agenda against somebody. There's so much of that because the

indigenous narrative is so mired in bad malpractice. There's so much journalism malpractice when it comes to the indigenous narrative.

To take that in, you really need to pick your battles. You need to kind of have it as clean and polished and ironclad as possible to come out with that kind of criticism. Because you're speaking to a bunch of people who don't know anything about us. So I see it from where I sit all the time. I see it all the time, and I don't call it out all the time. Because if I did, I would have a horrible reputation. And the few instances that I have created well-crafted ironclad arguments, I still have faced retaliation for seeming like I'm being too harsh.

And yet what saves me are other journalists of all backgrounds – not just native journalists or journalists of color – journalists who are ethicists like me, who care about this industry and who care about where it's heading, and the precedents that gets set if we don't do anything to speak up in terms of fighting the erosion of the integrity of the industry. That's also why I take my time and give great consideration and care to the kind of criticism that I feed, and I see it all the time.

I also see, in terms of the black narrative unraveling right now, there's a lot of black narrative that I would say commits indigenous eraser. Because people writing this kind of historical call to justice, right? History as justice narratives. It's just completely removed of including the indigenous timeline. I repeat all the time, the origin story of this country did not start with slavery – period. Like we need to have that conversation all the time, whenever talking about slavery. I look forward, I hope that there will come a day when a project like the 1619 Project – even though the indigenous narrative should not be front and center, it should not be completely void either.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well with regard to social media, do you believe in journalists keeping a professional account separate from a private? Do you think that they are the same thing? Do you have any objections to how people are using social media in journalism these days?

Jenni Monet

I think that tweets get relied on too much for quotes and context in day to day news coverage. I understand why journalists rely on tweets because they're under fast deadline pressures, and they're accessible. It's easy, but it's also lazy. It's a lazy way to frame narrative. Because we give, I think the power of the tweet too much service. And that's a Trumponian thing, right?

We were doing tweets before, but because Trump was on Twitter and his Twitter feed was the fixture of every day to day newscast and news story. Trump tweeted this, and Trump tweeted that. I just think that the depth of where we should be going right now needs to get a little bit more intentional, more informed, and I hope that people, that other journalists can just invest more time in their stories. I'm actually thinking of stepping away from social media. I think that it's gotten so overly charged with a drive for influence or status, that there's a great erosion of facts at play. Not so much by, I think the hard line journalist, I think you see that a lot, but

there's a lot of marauding going on by people who are “writers” and have “by-lines” in their opinion pieces.

You know, that's irksome because it's like, you know how we went through the phase of Instagram's rise, and everyone could be a photographer all of a sudden, right? Everyone had their... and the phone with Instagram made everyone a photographer. And now it's almost like we're entering this new wave where everyone's a “writer” or, I see some people actually throwing the J word around, the journalist word around.

It's a slippery slope because our profession is not licensed. You have this kind of mindset that anybody could be a journalist – citizen journalism all the way to formerly trained journalists. And the social media space is fading those lines. And I'm not sure what the solution is except to promote the kind of media criticism and support it when it aptly questions these kinds of transitions and shifts that the industry is taking. I think that social media, particularly in the indigenous space, there's so much misinformation. When you look at all of these advocacy brands floating around story on Instagram and Tik Tok. It's really deeply troubling actually.

Emeri Burks

Thanks for that. I had two more bits of journalistic conduct I wanted to talk about, but I did want to be mindful of your time and my time. The schedule here was originally from 2:15 to 3:30, and I'm completely comfortable continuing talking.

Jenni Monet

Oh, thank you for pointing that... Yeah, I'm okay.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. So I do have a bit more and I wanted to push on, if that's all right with you.

Jenni Monet

Yes, it's fine with me.

Emeri Burks

Thanks. All right. I wanted to get into public disclosure of bias from a journalist perspective. Do you think that this is something that journalists should be doing as a standard of reporting? Say when their interests interact with the interests of a story, and if so when should they do that? When shouldn't they do that?

Jenni Monet

Well, that's a really good question.

I'm trying to see how I've managed that. So, I have my newsletter, right? And that very much reads like a column, where I have opinions and ideas and I don't really make a lot of explanation around how I'm going to express myself there. I just express myself. But my audience turns to

that newsletter because they know that they're coming in to hear my take on something. I'm not there to necessarily give you a formal dispatch. Right?

But it is complete with facts that are fact-checked that have information. I'm not saying anything that isn't true or that I haven't investigated in some way. But I do put a slant on it, and I know that I do, and I don't explain for it. But that's my platform. If I'm writing for a client, that's different and it's not a first person voice that I'm using. I'm using my reporter voice, my trained, journalism voice. If I do have certain views, I'm probably less apt to frame it as directly as I would in my newsletter, and I might vex it in a way that is intended for public conversation meaning I might raise it in terms of a question as opposed to a statement.

So for instance, this was in a piece I recently wrote around interior secretary, Deb Haaland. She has this kind of packaged story of coming from poverty to power. Right? Anybody who knows anything about Deb Haaland, they're like, "Oh yeah, she rose to the top. She came from nothing." And there is some truth to that. She struggled, she was a single mom saddled with student loans, put herself through school, all that. But when you look at aspects as those decisions and choices that she made, and in the timeline of her life, she wasn't poor. She didn't grow up poor. She grew up in a structured, sheltered life, and actually grew into poverty by choices around her educational ambitions – going to law school when she didn't know... So this is a question I raised in the piece.

She had made a choice to attend law school. She was under the impression that she was going to have in-state tuition, and she didn't have it. And yet she continued to pursue law school at a higher rate, as opposed to waiting to get in state tuition again. That's a choice and she got saddled with debt that she says she's still paying off. So in that piece, I said somehow she missed the fact that when she moved to California and came back in-state tuition was not going to apply.

That's a perfect example of stating something that's obvious that maybe puts my own skepticism in the piece. But not making a big stink about it. Do you know what I mean? It raises a question for anybody reading something on the page, and then it raises a big question about her whole persona, right? I mean, she was struggling like any single mom I think struggles, and could always use 10 extra pair of hands. Right? But in this case, having kind of scrutinized her pathway, it's not as simplified as I think people like to just digest.

But that's emblematic of, I think, American culture. We like feel good stories. We like underdogs. We like neatly packaged...

Emeri Burks

...Hollywood endings.

Jenni Monet

Yes, exactly. And people want to believe in Deb right now, and I do too. So it's not an attack. It's just what it is.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Are there instances where you feel it would be important for you personally to disclose a personal bias you had with relation to a story you were recovering?

Jenni Monet

Oh, for sure. One that I'm working on is around my illegal arrest and the trauma that ensued from that. It was a public crisis. I suffered public shame to a great degree. There are aspects to that investigation that I shouldn't even be investigating on my own. It should be a third party that should be investigating this. So two and a half years after that arrest, I still haven't written publicly about it because the tone is not ready yet. It has everything to do with me addressing my own bias, my role in it, and where I stand in terms of kind of shifting from journalists to personal memoir. It needs to be somewhere in the middle. Less dramatic and in any kind of published work.

Say for instance, my reporting from Standing Rock, there was this expectation, I think for a lot of people, for me to be slanted perhaps towards the water protectors all the time and to constantly promote stopping the drill, stopping the pipeline from getting to the drill pad. I just never did that. Like I just reported the story from all these sides and gave people the facts.

But there were times when I understood so deeply the aspects on the ground, whether it was emotionally, whether it was historically charged, that I would insert my expert voice in that 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," right? It's a very possessive term of art that I rely on. Because otherwise it's so far removed and it just is odd. It's 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. I mean, my indigeneity is almost interconnected. I wouldn't even say there's dividing 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.

Emeri Burks

Right? Kind of related to this then – are there boundaries that you think should be enforced or revised with regard to journalists getting involved in community programs or in activism? We saw a lot of uproar of journalists joining Black Lives Matter protests. Do you think that this is a right of journalists that should be protected? Or is it something that should be debated or questioned?

Jenni Monet

Again, I'm probably old school in the eyes of a lot of progressive's today. There's a lot of progressive people today. I think that's great. I mean, we're living in an awesome time right now where the gaps of inequality are closing in because of progressive politics. But that's not my role – to take part in the progressive timeline. My, my role is to observe it, to make sense of it, and to write about it. I think that any journalist who wants to participate in the progressive

advocacy and uprising should do that. But they shouldn't write about it in a capacity that is intended to bring objectivity, and to bring some kind of analysis to these matters that are so critically defining our time right now. If they want to write about it in a column and in op-eds, and it's clear that that is the kind of genre of the writing, I think that's great.

But this is what troubles me most is that all too often editors are blurring those lines, particularly when it comes to journalists of color right now. Because there's been such an ignoring of marginalized community that there's this kind of prepackaged notion that everything should be centered around some kind of racial justice, social justice framework, and I think that that's dangerous. It's dangerous because what happens is there's a new ignoring happening, and that is not holding accountable other communities. Sometimes even those protests organizations themselves, I'm thinking green organizations who build millions, if not billions of dollars in climate campaigns and organizations largely at the expense of indigenous peoples. And no one's having any accountability of what's going on with that money, where it's going. We saw that at Standing Rock. That's what I mean in terms of becoming entirely lopsided in an advocacy leaning slant is that you lose sight of a balance that should exist.

***From follow-up email**

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. My theory is that this is largely in part because today's stories about communities of color still are largely not being written by journalists who come from these communities but rather a predominantly white class of journalists who have certain access to the overall network of the industry.

Emeri Burks

Well speaking of advocacy, I wanted to shift a little bit more to your understanding of social need. Based on your understanding, what do you think society needs from the journalism industry at this time? What makes you say that?

Jenni Monet

The journalism industry needs a great truth and reconciliation. It really does. It needs an honest assessment of how it's treated it's journalists of color, of how it's ignored communities of color, of how it's treated community colors when it hasn't ignored them. And 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's a group right now called Media Reparations 2070 Project⁷. I probably bungled that name somehow. But basically it's a goal to achieve media reparations by the year 2070 in this kind of radically imagined sense that would address media harms imposed on black and brown communities in ways that not only shift narrative, but completely overturn the colonial structure of this industry.

What does that look like? What does that mean? How do we function in that society? And some of the questions that you're asking – where does advocacy end, and journalism begin? I just think that those conversations are so rich and vital. Right now they're happening in kind of siloed spaces among journalists of color themselves. What really needs to be happening is that it needs to include a lot of these white institutionalized structures that aren't just the big ones like the New York times and Conde Nast. We're talking about every city newsroom across America. We're talking even the small ones, right? Those small newspapers. Every institution needs to start looking like the Associated Press just has at how they've treated people of color in their headlines, and taking action like the AP did about saying, “No, we're not going to cover petty crime or misdemeanors anymore, and slap people's faces all over the internet. I don't know what approaches in terms of how there's a groundswell of reconciliation except to say that 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.

Emeri Burks

Sure. How about individually then? What do you think society needs from journalists individually? You, me, any journalist?

Jenni Monet

Well, I think that there is a distortion of what a journalist is today by general society, and I think that if the industry itself can start upholding a lot more ethical values behind the journalism itself... I think that before George Floyd's murder, there was an incredible apathy. There was a laziness beyond of which people just didn't care. There was incredible racism happening within the profession itself. My arrest and how it was covered, my last arrest and how it was covered, is a prime timestamp on that. So I think that that hinders how everyday Americans see journalism, receive it, understand it.

There was in that media reparations group that I often sit in on their meetings, they did a recent survey. One of the interesting stats that they came up or... I guess it was a graph or something. One of the interesting graphs was what do people perceive when they hear the word “media?” When people say, “Oh, ‘the media’ did this or ‘the media’ did that. It was really fascinating – people's responses. The majority said the news, like TV news, and New York times, and newspapers. But there was a lot of segmentation happening around how people saw it in podcasts, social media, Instagram, Tik Tok, the memes as there a new source. It's fascinating

⁷ Media 2070: Media Reparations Project

because I think that generationally there's a mix of ideas and I think that the younger generation, as the generations, get younger and are further removed from a pre-internet understanding of the world, that there's this incredible and urgent need to redefine the boundaries of the journalism space in terms of staking claim to the highest ethical standards.

Emeri Burks

Can I ask, do you feel confident in your ability to meet these needs that society has for journalists individually?

Jenni Monet

I feel confident that I practice them every day, that I make it the root foundation of my newsletter. And I don't think that that is misunderstood to my audience. I don't know to what degree I will have an impact on that mission that should be happening. But I know that I have a strong community in place within the journalism community. It's not large, it's not very big. But it's pretty connected to people that I think are equally invested in and care about upholding the virtues. I consider this profession, one of the most, no – the most noblest profession to be sure. But that is slowly becoming untrue. If we allow for a lot of these fakes, a lot of these performance artists coming in and passing themselves off as journalists, and really they're nothing more than, I think, people craving influence and attention. Right? There's a lot of that. And we live in an environment right now, in a climate right now, where unfortunately that kind of model exists and works.

Emeri Burks

Could you speak more to the obstacles you see that are in the way of journalists meeting the needs that society has for them?

Jenni Monet

I don't think that there is a unified front addressing the ills of the industry. I think that there are pockets of people who agree when they get together, they vex over it. But I don't think that there is a call to urgency that is driving people to act to unite and to do something, and that worries me.

***From follow-up email**

As someone who is not a joiner of any organization, I don't know how helpful I can be to respond to this question other than to say that I have found these organizations to be lacking for someone like me - one who is independent, from marginalized community, and who has somehow found my way to mid-career level in a profession that has historically not made room for my beat which is Indigenous affairs.

I think what is unhelpful is a reactionary latching on to Indigenous people by organizations that are largely not Indigenous led. I've seen organizations make decisions on behalf of my beat, Indigenous affairs, that do not align with the overall values of Indigenous peoples themselves - and that, in a sense, is a reproduction of colonization of the industry, itself.

Emeri Burks

Do you feel confident in the industry's ability to meet society's needs at this time?

Jenni Monet

No, I do not feel confident about the industry meeting society's needs at this time. Not at all.

Emeri Burks

Right. Right. Well, can I ask then based on your experience and understanding as a journalists, what might help the journalism industry at least better meet those needs?

Jenni Monet

I think there needs to be an organized front. The Columbia Journalism Review organized this beat called, is it Climate Now? It's a network of news publications of all sizes – big and small, indie. You name it. Covering Climate Now is what it's called. And it's great. It's in the spirit of putting a new, fresh spin on how we cover what I call our biggest emergency – the climate crisis. Covering it in ways that are removed from the what had been the typical doom and gloom headlines that were so often reactionary as opposed to smart and informed, and ahead of disasters. It's great. It's really taking off.

Imagine if we had something like that in the realm of journalism justice, right? And looking at the integrity of this profession, where its flaws are, the gaps and a unified front to say, “You know what we're going to do better.” I think that that would be something that wouldn't be hard to mimic. I do think what the obstacle would be, would be getting a lot of journalists to be brave enough to stand up and call people out on when there is journalism malpractice. You see a little bit of that in terms of like “fact checking.” But look at how distorted it's gotten. What was the... there's this ongoing story about the origin story of the Coronavirus? Have you been paying attention to that?

Emeri Burks

The Wuhan Lab Theory that perhaps it was really... yeah. There are lots and lots of interesting stories that I think are...

Jenni Monet

But see. That's a perfect example of what happens when you sit back and you're like, “I'm not gonna say anything. I'm not gonna say anything. I don't want to look like I'm, you know, jealous over a colleague to say something and call somebody out.” We have to strip away these stigmas. Because that's what they are. They're a critic. That's why I hold on to that label, if you will, because this is not professional jealousy to say, “Hey, I smell bullshit and I'm calling you out on it,” and in a way that's professional and full of care.

That's why I also say that I'm... I consider myself a narrative caretaker, because particularly of the indigenous narrative. Because I know what happens when media distortion is so prolonged, it starts to impact actual reality.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. I had one last question on social need and that was just about, has your understanding of social responsibility of the journalism industry impacted your work as a journalist? And if so, has this impact changed since George Floyd's death?

Jenni Monet

What do you mean by social responsibility?

Emeri Burks

Right, right. I mainly mean "social responsibility journalism" as opposed to "free press journalism." The four models that... I'm actually blanking on who wrote about it first. But when people talk about objective journalism, they tend to be equating objective and free press journalism and social responsibility and advocacy journalism. So you talk about the fine line where advocacy ends and journalism begins. I'm wondering if your relationship to social responsibility approaches to journalism has changed since George Floyd.

Jenni Monet

That's a good question. Since George Floyd, I think that I've actually softened on social responsibility with regard to my newsletter, because it reads like a column, and not like nuts and bolts journalism. But that's intended for that space. It's a newsletter. Right?

But on the other hand, Indigenously as a brand also promotes fact-based, deeply informed reported facts, or reported journalism. It's almost like I say that with a buffer because I am vexing my opinions in this time. But I'm also doing what I can at every turn to continuously uphold the narrative and kind of address things that I see that aren't exactly true. But then Indigenously also produces content that no one else is reporting on through deep investigations, through deeply connected sources that otherwise people wouldn't know about.

So I wouldn't say that even though my social responsibility has softened in terms of the voice I give to the weekly newsletter, I wouldn't say that it softened the integrity that I had already in place. It's almost that I've just inserted a little bit more of my voice and my opinion, because I can. I've never written a column before. I've never had a newsletter platform before. And I think that in these times it's required to bring that kind of personal context into situations. Every one of my additions of Indigenously, you will get a little taste. It's not not overloaded with what my personal connection is to a topic. But you'll get like a little cookie on the side of how I can relate to big issues happening that I write about. I think that that kind of context would not be as powerful... What I write, without that personal peg in there at each edition, I don't think that the content would be as powerful as it is. I think that that's why people come back because they know I'm writing about something that is very personal to me. It's something I'm not removed from that is deeply indigenous to me. It's one of those things, again, it's like you can't

just extract your indigeneity out of the journalism. You just can't. It's impossible. But to make it overflow, to overpower the journalism I think is the danger.

Emeri Burks

Well on that note, what do you think that you, as an indigenous journalist understand that perhaps others who are not not an indigenous journalists might not? What a unique value does your voice have in these conversations?

Jenni Monet

Well, I think those personal ties to the broader topics of issues that people are learning about is important. I think it deepens the understanding for the audience.

I'll give you an example. The boarding school discovery of the 215 student bodies that were discovered in a mass grave a few weeks ago in British Columbia – That is not a narrative that's removed from here in the United States. They say that there's not really any native person alive today that doesn't have some kind of direct link to that horrific legacy.

So bringing my own experiences into that story, I got so much feedback from my readers after I sent out that newsletter around that of people expressing their emotions around it, their kindest regards to me, but also their openness and how they just did not know. They had no idea about these these awful things that we've had to live with. Right? Even though it might've happened a hundred years ago, it's still very much with us. I have aunts that are still alive who are boarding school survivors. It's not history to us. This is present day trauma that plays out at our dinner tables, and our car, and our road trips, and our family reunions. I think that to give that personal context to people who are learning about something I think is really, really important, critical, but also incredibly powerful for a kind of social change that stories bring

Emeri Burks

Fantastic. Thanks for that. We are about finished, and I just had a couple final questions. Say, for example, what do you hope that others might learn from this study?

Jenni Monet

I hope that it deepens their 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.

I think that there has been such a suppression of the trauma by other journalists of color because the industry is competitive, it's cutthroat, it's something that I believe many of us feel a calling to, and so we put up with it. I firmly believe that journalism is one of, if not the most, abusive industries in America today. And again, I'm just saying it's a real natural effect in this new time that we're living in, of how I am just processing all that I kind of shoved down over the course of career. Because I didn't want to stir the pot. I didn't want to rock the boat. I didn't want to risk my chances of not rising and ascending. There's a big realization for me right now of how I wasn't helping other journalists of color by doing that, that I was subscribing to the

colonization, to the white supremacy, to the injustice that continues to play out in these newsrooms, and how it plays out in our communities, and in terms of how we cover communities of color.

I have a very low tolerance for things that I so readily detect right now are steeped in that kind of media bias. To be quite honest, I have never in my entire career been so intolerant of the same old way of doing things. I've walked away from organizations and institutions and projects because it's time. We're not doing this again. It's not a "opportunity." It's a mandate right now.

So I feel a real responsibility to act with some integrity, to lead the way that I want others to follow as well in terms of how we call for the kind of media justice that we're all looking for as journalists.

Emeri Burks

Right. Right. All right. So I wanted to take this chance to see if there was something that you wanted to jump back in or fill in a little bit more, things that we've already discussed that you wanted to come back to before we finish.

So for example, we've discussed professional expectations that have been set; your reaction to current events, George Floyd, Derek Chauvin; conversations of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice; your reasoning about what your journalism role is; the values that guide you and what happens when you see a conflict between values and expectations; your understanding of social need, and how to meet those needs. Are there any areas there that you feel maybe we could have gotten a little bit deeper into or that you didn't say everything you wanted to say on?

Jenni Monet

No, no. I would just add that at every step in my career, I have dealt with abuse from... and mostly from white men, and not far behind – white women. It's just incredible to process all that accepted to strive in his place that has never really been for somebody like me.

I strongly, strongly, believe that I'm going to make my own media space. I've always pushed back against that because I felt that the legitimacy of the indigenous narrative really needed to be in elite spaces. I still do believe that. But those elite spaces are fraught – is putting it kindly. I think I've just met at a crossroads where I'm no longer accepting of the inequality and the blatant racism that this industry has been able to get away with for so long. I'm just not going to do it. I'm not going to do it anymore.

So that's all I have to say.

Emeri Burks

Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate your stamina in this interview, and all of your personal responses. This has been really an honor to me. It's uplifting to know that it's possible to fight against these entrenched sort of forces as well, and to come into the success that you

have, and elevating your voice and being heard. And it's not to say that you're not still fighting other forces along the way. But it's encouraging to me, and I hope that [unclear] to others.

Jenni Monet

Oh. Well, I look forward to reading your report and just stay in touch with anything you might need.

Emeri Burks

Absolutely. I'm going to turn off recording right now.

Jenni Monet

Ok.

Interview 11 – Anonymous – June 22, 2021

Emeri Burks

Okay. So, hi. We've already discussed the consent form a little bit and you'll be signing that a little bit later. But can I ask for your name and your position within the journalism industry?

[Anonymous]

My name is [Anonymous] and I am an associate producer for radio.

Emeri Burks

Right. Great. Could you give me your pronouns and your age please?

[Anonymous]

She, her, hers, and 35.

Emeri Burks

Great. And what race or ethnicity do you identify with or as?

[Anonymous]

White.

Emeri Burks

Alright. Great. So I wanted to start talking about some expectations and to get into at first, I wanted to know a little bit more about your background in journalism. What led you into the fields that you're in? Some of the different things you've reported on? Things like that.

[Anonymous]

So I always loved writing. So I got on the journalism track very early in life. And my first... I majored in journalism and my first job was a grant funded position that was partially with a public media station, partially with investigative organization. And it was really centered around community based reporting. And so we actually partnered with nonprofits and regularly held audience with low income, predominantly immigrant/refugee community, and let them kind of drive where our focus was for a month or a quarter at a time. So they would kind of tell us about their, their concerns or things that they were seeing in the community. And then as journalists and practitioners, we would find ways to elevate those issues or, you know, investigate and find whatever lever that was causing issues in the community and what solution there could be.

So I learned journalism through this community focused lens, and then I went on to become a more kind of traditional beat reporter. And then now into the position where I am now.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thank you. So speaking of expectations – professional expectations – that were set for you by the superiors that trained you in to the various organizations that you have worked at, what expectations come to mind when you think of how they defined what your job was to be.

[Anonymous]

And this is talking about kind of early on or now, or...?

Emeri Burks

Whatever comes to mind, including from the very beginning through to now. But your concept of the expectations other people have for you as a Journalist.

[Anonymous]

I think it has been to uncover and fill gaps in coverage. So whether that's elevating community voices that other organizations were ignoring, or looking at issues that weren't yet on the public agenda, but should be. And I think now as a producer and somebody who's not in the community as much, that still is definitely an expectation. But it's about equal with sort of getting "newsmakers" on to have questions asked of them and be held accountable. So I think, I guess I'm a little bit... I struggle with kind of the beginning of what the expectations were and now trying to continue that ethos in a job that's much more mainstream, and fast, and tends to let institutions and elected officials run the agenda.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Sure. I wanted to ask about one term, you said there. “Newsmakers,” you say, as opposed to say news reporters, is that the alternative? What's the distinction there?

[Anonymous]

News makers meaning people... yeah, it's like a broadcast show term, I guess. But like the governor, or somebody who can set a policy and therefore they've made news that day. So they tend to be, yeah, elected officials, people with high public profiles.

Emeri Burks

All right. Is it fair to assume then that as a reporter, you are not expected to be making news in your job? Is that your understanding?

[Anonymous]

Well in my current job as a producer, it's a much more responding and filling out the news that our newsroom is making. But yes, in my previous work as a reporter the goal was to make news. It was often the community making it quietly, and it was uncovering that, and bringing it into the public agenda. That's definitely the expectation, and my expectation for the reporters I work with.

But now I'm in a role of sort of trying to round out the coverage. So we can we bring in more voices to compliment what they're doing. Can we add more context, explainers, that kind of thing?

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Thanks for that clarification. I did want to ask about one specific topic regarding journalistic expectations – It's in the news a lot. Could you speak a little bit to your understanding of journalistic objectivity, especially as others have placed expectations on you?

[Anonymous]

I think that I've always operated in a space where there is this concept of objectivity or neutrality. But luckily I've always worked in organizations where the goal is to give more weight to the “oppressed,” than to the oppressor. So I think the goal isn't to be 50% on this side of the story, and 50% on this. The goal is to really kind of focus on the experience at hand, and then acknowledge that these other opinions are in the same sphere.

In terms of like a lot of conversations around objectivity and race I thought about that a lot this year, and a lot of... like we got a lot of flack for focusing a lot on the riots in Minneapolis and building destruction. And even as it was happening and my feeling there when it's like, “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.” So I thought that was just a very objective approach.

But now I think a lot about how the idea that buildings burning is a public safety issue. That can be interrogated and discussed now. But it had never really crossed my mind. So, yeah. Do buildings really matter when people are being shot in the streets? So what we used to think was objective was actually pretty... was really shaped through a white lens, I think.

But I do still feel that it's really important to invite everyone into the conversation as much as possible. And so that may be... I think like I work with a lot of students and they want to just completely ignore the other side. And I always say like, “You can't do that because it just shuts people off. They stop listening.” So you need to always be there engaging them. So the moment they start to think like, “Yeah, but...” then you need to be right there with the “yeah, but,” and address that thing before their mind starts to wander. Because I think if we don't do that, then we just continue to have this town square degraded. I think the idea of what is objective is changing and should be discussed. But the idea of not shutting out every opinion, and trying to create a place where people can have... live within the same universe of fact, and still talk to each other, and still have to look at each other, and still empathize with each other – to me that's really, really important. And so I'm not ready to give up the idea of some sort of neutrality or objectivity.

Emeri Burks

Great. I really appreciate that distinction/clarification. I wanted to ask about the expectations that have been set for you specifically by your audience. Do you feel they're very different or similar to the expectations your supervisors and employers have set for you historically?

[Anonymous]

Yeah, the audience just wants you to say and report on what they already think. So, if we have... our audience's largely liberal, we don't try to like play to that. We try to, again, find some neutrality. But if we have a Republican lawmaker on, we will get emails with people saying like, “Why would you even give them the time of day, or let them spout that nonsense.” And again it goes back to, we want to create this town square where you still have to hear and look at each other in the face, you know? So yeah, the expectations are different. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Great. Thanks very much. Alright, I wanted to ask little bit more of a specific question now. Compared to your colleagues who are not white, do you think that the professional expectations and the expectations that the audience are setting affect you personally differently in your understanding?

[Anonymous]

I guess that makes me think about how from the get go, we wanted to try to not tell the George Floyd story through only a white lens. We wanted to try to really be thoughtful about it. And I think that created a situation where particularly our hosts of color had to... like they were always thrust into the forefront, “And we want you to host this conversation. We want you to be the face of this.”

And so I think that people of color in our newsroom had to sit with people's grief a lot more than I had to. And I've even talked to one of them who I think never really processed George Floyd in a personal way. Because they were so busy creating a place for other people to process it. But in terms of the news gathering... and I should say that person's role is very much in creating community conversations. But this was like on overdrive, and it was like, “Hey, every day we want you to think about this thing that you've dealt with your entire life. Are you cool with that? You don't get a break.” But in terms of the news gathering side – I think I felt that the expectations were the same, regardless of race⁸.

Emeri Burks

Great. Great. Thank you.

[Anonymous]

Although I will say, and I decided this was not the question you asked. But I do think, a lot of times women get asked to do what people think are soft skills, which is go and talk to people in the community. I would argue they're harder skills, and that it's much easier to sit there and wait for the PR person to call you back, or for the latest court document to drop. So when it

⁸ The interviewee later explained of this quote that the extra burden fell on hosts of color whose job it is to create space for people to process the news. She said her organization really wanted hosts of color to be the face of every conversation about race. Nevertheless, she added that the newsgathering work at her organization was pretty balanced among white and BIPOC journalists.

comes to our coverage that was more community centered, I think that sometimes I often see women hold that burden more.

Emeri Burks

Thank you for that. On that, I'd like to ask a similar question compared to colleagues who are not women, how do you think these expectations affect you differently in your understanding?

[Anonymous]

Yeah. I think, well there's certainly currently this thing of like white men not wanting to step in it. So it's like, "I'm going to put you in charge of this, so I don't step in it. And that's probably not fair.

That being said, like the kinds of stories they want to put me in charge of are usually the ones that are more engaging for me. But yeah. So I think, the similar in way that we're like, "Oh, people of color – You can deal with this very delicate situation. There's another layer of that, that's perhaps less cute, of like, "Oh. Well women, you deal with this now." And that's kind of overdrive compared to how it is. I think it's always been that way.

Like I used to cover a lot of wildfires and I was always the one who had to go find the person whose house burned down, and it was always the man who got to be like covering the flames and everything. But now it's like that on overdrive as well.

Emeri Burks

Interesting. Thanks very much for that. Okay. I want to transition a little bit to current events, then. And I wanted to start by asking for your personal reaction or personal relationship to learning about George Floyd's death.

[Anonymous]

My personal reaction was just like... you know, I felt sick to my stomach. I used to always be able to see tragic news... like tragic events as a reporter where I could kind of immediately go into reporter mode and deal with it that way. You know, what information do we need to find? Who do we need to have talk about this? And I would often have sort of a delayed response. Because I went into reporter mode. And then when I went home at the end of the night, or when I filed that story after weeks of working on it, then I would have a day where I'd be really depressed and I'd be like, "Oh, what's going on with me? Oh yeah. Okay. I just spent two weeks talking about this really difficult topic. This was the first time where it was immediate just despair and like physical, like sick to my stomach.

And then there was a lot of trauma related to the unrest that followed. Because it was happening in my community, and I was at once... I was both in the control room trying to inform the wider public, and watching how close things were to my house, and like texting my partner and making sure that he had the information he needed him in case he had to get out.

Emeri Burks

Sure. It sounds like it affected you quite personally then, would you say?

[Anonymous]

Yeah. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Thank you. Similarly, I wanted to ask about your reaction or relationship to learning about former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts.

[Anonymous]

I think that I was on the ground at the courthouse when it happened, and I did go and meet... well, I felt a deep sense of relief, and I felt really proud of my community. Because it seemed... like I talked to this guy who was grilling and I was like, "How are you preparing for a verdict? And he was like, "I wasn't preparing for a verdict. I was just preparing for my community. I was going to be here to feed them no matter what." And I just really felt connected to my community in that moment. And that made me feel really joyful. And then, I kind of went into reporter mode, and then as I was driving home I called my brother and started crying on his voicemail.

So it was like, personally... I was happy with the verdict. But there was also... it was also just a sense of relief that was not based on what I thought was right or wrong. But that was based on like, "Okay. My community is gonna be safe tonight. In fact my community is going to party tonight, and my community deserves that after this year."

Emeri Burks

Right, thank you. Similarly, how have you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice, especially since the death of George Floyd?

[Anonymous]

I think that I... So, I am not from Minnesota which has very, very deep racial divisions. I'm from a place where people of color were at all levels of elected government, at all levels of corporations. They were my friends, they were... So for me, it kind of feels like the very basic conversations that we're having, like taking an hour out of the news day to define what is

implicit bias, and just like, “Gosh, like when do we get to do the news?” And I know that that comes from me just having a different experience. Like, I don't feel that there's this huge wall to scale, whereas people in my newsroom do.

So I guess I am listening and I have like... you know, I do follow people with the intention... like on social media that sort of thing with the intention of personal growth. But a lot of me is like, “Let's get on with the news gathering because ultimately, I don't know if all of the semantics of things matter as much as uncovering things that will create policy change, and make a difference in people's lives. But I also understand that that comes from a very white perspective where I think a lot of people feel that even the “semantics” of things, will make a huge difference in people's lives. So I don't know. I guess I wrestle with it and I struggle with it.

Emeri Burks

Sure. And your experience related to George Floyd's death and a subsequent black lives matter protests, have they affected your work in any other ways? You've already described some, but how have they, and the conversations of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice affected your work?

[Anonymous]

It's definitely made me more thoughtful about who I reach out to to be an expert on something. I definitely think about source diversity and beyond... think about how can I bring voices of color into the conversation where they're not just talking about being people of color? So I think a lot about source diversity more than I did before. And I think... I wish I was out in the community more continuing to tell community based stories, but that's not really the role I'm in.

Things feel really, and this goes back to the town spirit idea, but things feel really polarized. It almost feels like sometimes... well, so I guess I feel more strongly than ever, like how can I bring nuance to civil conversation into this culture clash that's happening? So I think about that a lot.

Emeri Burks

Right. Thank you. That's a great transition. Could you help me to describe your role as a journalist, then, as you see it?

[Anonymous]

Yeah, I think as a producer right now, I do feel that my role is to keep the conversation going. Again, create a space or a town square where people have to hear each other. Because I don't want to give up on the idea of having empathy for one another. And I just, I really, I really fear a

world where... that we're already in where people are only consuming things that they agree with. And not just consuming things they agree with, but are in really like radical pockets on all sides. So, yeah. My goal is to create content that's well-rounded, and thoughtful, and nuanced, to try to bring as many people in as possible. But still challenge them. So that's what I see my role as a producer.

Now, if I were a reporter who was able to be in the community a lot, I would still probably... I think there'd be a lot of this idea of the town square and fostering conversation. But I would still also feel very strongly about finding those community-based stories and helping them bubble up.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. I did want to ask there you identify in this case as a producer, as opposed to a reporter. How did these two terms relate to being a journalist in your mind?

[Anonymous]

I think that both our journalists with different tools at their disposal. So I see them as complementing one another, all toward the same goal. I guess, which is fostering dialogue that helps people be civically engaged, and helps people know about things that are going on in their community that they wouldn't otherwise know about. So they can engage with one another, and protect one another, and I guess understand one another. So that's the overall goal, whether you're a producer or a reporter.

And then the different tools are uncovering on the reporters, side versus prioritizing, and filling out, and complimenting, and adding context on the producer side.

Emeri Burks

Got it. Thanks for that. How about your personal values with regard to doing your job? What values are important to you?

[Anonymous]

I think empathy and kindness and just helping people see each other as humans.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Okay. Now these values that you have expressed and the expectations that you've talked about – both from your employers and your audience – do you feel that they are ever in conflict with each other?

[Anonymous]

Expectation-wise? No, I don't think they're in conflict. I think sometimes the format makes it really hard to present somebody as fully human as you want them to, or to bring out the humanity in your listener. So expectation-wise – no. Format/demand-wise. Yeah.

Emeri Burks

Okay. That's a useful distinction. Thank you. All right. I wanted to ask about some of the specific aspects of journalistic conduct that have been in the debates lately. So for example, journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, and or perspectives in public forums. How would you evaluate these bits of journalists conduct. For example, what boundaries do you think should be enforced? What boundaries do you think should be revised? If any?

[Anonymous]

I think I'm pretty old-school and feeling that you should limit your public display an opinion in order to maintain this platform that you have, that not many other people have. And it goes back to the town square idea of what does it... I think my stories don't matter if only people who agree with it are listening to it. And so to me I think it's important to not divulge too much in public.

But I think that comments publicly on labor organizing within the journalism industry – I think that's fine. I think it's fine to comment on just general issues related to being a woman, and I think things like... we can all agree that people not having homes or children being harmed – I think it's okay to say that those things are bad. And I think a lot of journalists are like afraid to even say those things are bad. But I still think that you should try to limit it in the public sphere.

And even like, we had a conversation at our organization about whether or not you could use the hashtag black lives matter. And that's in line with the harming children is bad. Like yeah. Black lives matter. But I refrain from using it because it's become so politicized. I feel that personally, but I'd rather tweet a story that I put a lot of time into being thoughtful and that brings new voices to the air. I'd rather tweet that story without black lives matter hashtag so people click on it and read it than to have the hashtag and people just don't read it.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Is there any distinction for you, then, between professional and private social media use, or should there be in your mind?

[Anonymous]

I think unless you're private social media is... I mean, I personally don't distinguish between the two – my personal accounts are the same as my professional accounts because we already have enough to do in the day. To maintain two accounts is like ridiculous. But I think for people who want to maintain private accounts – good on them. But also that's not going to stop somebody from, if they really want to take down your organization, it's not going to stop them from finding out what you're saying on your personal account.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. And do you feel that there are instances where you should or should not disclose any personal bias that you might have related to a story or the topic at hand?

[Anonymous]

Can you be more specific?

Emeri Burks

Right. For sure. Well, you mentioned that you would comment on factors relating to being a woman, for example. Would you comment on, or do you think that journalists should comment on conversations about reporting itself for example?

[Anonymous]

Yeah. I think anything about the industry is okay to comment on. And I think it's okay to comment on things that your catalog of work would backup. So, like I used to cover a lot of immigration, and I would never tweet, like “Trump hates immigrants.” I wouldn't tweet something like that in the public. But I would maybe like comment on Trump immigration news, and say like, almost as like an authority on this, like, “Here's X, Y, and Z, like what the fallout could be from that.” “We've seen this before it. It didn't work.” So that sort of thing that's rooted in past reporting that I've done.

Emeri Burks

So if it's rooted in past reporting, then yes. If it's rooted in personal identity, is that off limits then in your mind?

[Anonymous]

No. Because for better or worse I identify very strongly as a reporter, and in particularly as a female reporter, and so those are two things I feel comfortable... So yeah. that brings up a lot of... that's interesting. Because from my perspective, somebody who's reporting on black lives matter protests, and then tweets something that can be viewed as opinion, siding with the

protestors or something like that – to me, that's wrong. But they're just commenting based on their identity. Right? So I don't know. It's something interesting to think about and I appreciate opening that little gap in my logic, for sure.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well, one specific aspect of this that I think comes up, I've noticed you write a lot on... at least recently on social justice, and the George Floyd Square, and about police safety. Do you think that your whiteness affects the story in a way that you should or should not disclose in certain stories for example?

[Anonymous]

I don't know about "should or should not disclose." But I definitely noticed that I maybe softened some of the rhetoric of my sources. Because it was radical perhaps to a degree that made me uncomfortable. But also thinking about like, "Oh, I want to bring people together." So this idea of trying to present people to one another in a way that they'll listen to one another, I think I risk softening somebody in a way that could be inappropriate. And you know, the other thing is a lot of reporting for radio and for anything is picking out the details that stand out to you as you're driving home from the interview, or the statements that stand out to you. And what stands out to me may not stand out to a reporter of color. So I think in that way it also shapes the coverage. So what I think is pertinent or interesting could differ. And then, yeah, I thought a lot about was I kind of buffing these people into a shine that was not quite appropriate.

Emeri Burks

Interesting. All right. Thank you.

One more on journalistic conduct. You mentioned commenting on labor unions of journalists, for example. Do you feel that journalists should or should not, can or cannot, become involved in community programs or activism say including joining the black lives matter protest?

[Anonymous]

Yeah, I think that they probably shouldn't because I think every... with the news cycle that we've been in, it's all hands on deck for Black Lives Matter protests, and coverage, and resulting policy change, and that kind of thing. And like I said, Black Lives Matter has just been so, so politicized. And so I personally think that no journalists in the organization should participate in a Black Lives Matter protest. Yeah, 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.

Emeri Burks

And I wanted to just draw an outward boundary on this. Joining the Black Lives Matter protest is one thing, but commenting on a labor union dispute is a different one. Where's the line for you?

[Anonymous]

For me it's industry. I am never going to be covering journalists. We don't need to be covered. I mean, we do, we do certainly. But the job I'm in is not really in the business of covering journalists, and if for some reason, like maybe like a local organization unionized, I would refrain from covering that. I used to be an education reporter and I thought a lot about whether or not my union activism would make people think that I am pro teachers' union. And I think yeah, they probably do think that. If they asked me about it, I guess what I always use to rationalize that is the fact that I actually didn't like a lot of the tactics that the teacher's union use. Actually, I didn't really... I had issues with the teacher's union.

I guess the other way I rationalize it that, that the general public wouldn't understand really is that I've been really involved in unions, and I see that one union is not the same as the other union. I mean even under SAG-AFTRA, the contract at my old station was very different from the contract here, and there are things happening that the union did here that I like... So to me, each union is very specific beast of its own. But yeah, the general public would not understand that, and they would just look at my union activism and say, "Oh. She supports all labor, and must be a Democrat, and must be on the left, and is biased.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Sure. All right. Thanks for that. I wanted to transition now to discussing what society needs at this point. So in your journalism studies, have you come across the term "social responsibility" journalism, as opposed to quote "free press" journalism? Do you know these terms?

[Anonymous]

I guess I haven't really sat with them for very long, or can't recall seeing them discussed kind of in opposition to each other.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well let me ask then, based on your understanding what does society need from the journalism industry at this time?

[Anonymous]

I think it needs journalism that is, to use their social responsibility term, that is like socially conscious. And so, especially at a time when there's like a whole lot of news to cover, and not many people that do it, I think we need to focus on the things that aren't being talked about, but really, really needs to be talked about. I think we need to focus on doing that in a way that gets as many people to listen to those stories as possible.

So I think what society needs right now is a lot of healing and empathy. And just covering everything is not going to get us there. I think journalists, the only way we can help society achieve that is through prioritizing, through leaving stupid crime stories at the door, and not falling into like traps of false or unimportant disputes. I don't know if that makes sense.

Emeri Burks

It does. It does. Can I ask then what does society need from journalists individually? Maybe you, but other journalists individually, then.

[Anonymous]

I think this is a very journalist centric answer and white centric, but I think that we need more news literacy, and we just need journalists to be in the community and show that they're not there to meet their deadline that day. Like we just 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.

I mean, another thing that I keep running into in the community is people who feel that journalists are making money off of their story, and so they should be paid for the interview. And I want to have those conversations. There are not really many journalists, at least in this market, who I think are out there talking about like, "Okay. Well, let's... how about let's extrapolate on that?" Like if we had to pay for every story at a time, when people want more and more coverage of more and more communities, there's only a finite amount of money. So how does that work? I think we need to just engage in our communities so they can understand why we operate the way we do, and so that if there are flaws in our logic, that becomes apparent to us and we figure out how to fix that together.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Do you feel confident in your personal ability to meet these expectations or these needs of individual journalists?

[Anonymous]

On a small scale. Like I can use the best practices that I know and try to model for the other journalists in my newsroom, and also build trust for the community. That means spending time in the community without having to turn a deadline. Yeah, it's using my best practices to both model for my colleagues and for pockets of the community what the relationship can be between journalists and the community. But I think there needs to be a more large-scale conversation that I hope journalists, like professional organizations and newsrooms engage in that is not just like, "Let me tell you about journalistic values." But like gets into like the, "Dude, do you want us to pay for your story? Like how does that work? And like, let's really unpack that." And maybe we should, or maybe we shouldn't. I think organizations need to really get into the community and really, really wrestle with some of the stuff that's happening.

Emeri Burks

Okay. Yeah. Well, similarly you've talked about some of the obstacles that might prevent journalists from meeting these needs. So what other obstacles do you think are keeping individual journalists or the journalism industry from meeting society's needs at this time?

[Anonymous]

Past practice of focusing on elected officials and people in power, and letting them set the agenda. If there's just this rhythm that I see, especially here in Minnesota, that hasn't been broken. I think the newsrooms need to set the expectation that you are going to be in the community frequently, and building stories that way, and not just taking the latest, like hot conversation on Twitter and finding somebody via the internet to comment. You know a lot of journalists say that they don't have the time to be in the community. I think you can work smarter and make that time. But I also understand – yeah. Like organizations they set the expectation that you need to be in the community, they need to also allow for that time or allow for you to say, "Hey, I'm not going to file something today."

Emeri Burks

All right. Sure. And going broad scale again, do you feel confident that the journalism industry will be able to meet society's needs at this time? Why or why not?

[Anonymous]

No. I often feel like it's too far gone. Like everybody is just too far into their corners and their little echo chambers. And it's going to take, like, I don't even know what it would take. It needs giving me... no like it would take Facebook just shutting down, and Twitter shutting down. I guess it would take an internet outage.

I think we can do it in pockets. I think we can say we're going to focus really hard on developing relationships in this community, and then we're going to do it in this community, and this one. But I think there's a large segment of the population that's just very comfortable in their echo chamber, but would shut the door in our face before we could even have the kind of conversations we need to have with them.

Emeri Burks

All right. So last question on this area, then. Based on your experience and understanding as a journalist, what might help the journalism industry at least better meet these needs the society has?

[Anonymous]

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. They don't care what the governor has to say⁹. So I think, the old guard needs to engage in conversations with younger reporters, and find common ground with them, and understand the value of that they bring.

I also do sometimes worry that younger reporters come in, and immediately dismiss some of the journalism standards that a lot of us hold dear still. So I would also say young folks need to come in and look... you know, test the water out and see... understand the ecosystem. And then we just all need to have productive conversations together.

Emeri Burks

All right. Well, I wanted to bring this to some of my closing questions then here. So as a white, female journalists, what do you feel others may have to learn from your perspective? What things might people not be able to understand as well as you, because you are a white female journalist.

[Anonymous]

I think that they can learn that... So, two things that I run into is this getting pushed into the "soft skills" realm and that not being valued. So people don't understand the real value in the real hard work that goes into that. I also... women often deal with high stress situations differently. It's a weight calculated in your head, rather than like screaming, and then call the

⁹ The interviewee later clarified of this quote that she does think younger journalists care what the governor has to say, but that they're not as interested in letting him set the news agenda.

shot. And a lot of times men see that as like, “Oh gosh, she doesn't know what to do.” Or like, “Oh, she's not assertive enough.” And it's like, “No, actually I'm just being more effective if you just give me a minute. So not understanding that. Although I have to say that the men I work with have allowed me to talk to them about that and, and understand it.

I think also... I could be, I probably am totally wrong, but I feel like this idea of trying to foster empathy and humanity is maybe more a female trait, and I see a lot of like men in the room competing to tell the same story that every other male journalist is telling. So I may appear not as competitive. But the reality is that they're competing around [things] that I just don't give a shit about.

Emeri Burks

All right. Sure. So what do you hope that others might learn from this study?

[Anonymous]

I hope they learn that there's a lot of nuance, in how people approach things, and there's a lot of heart and good intentions, no matter sex, gender, age, color, race, ethnicity. And hopefully use that to be a bit kinder with each other, because ultimately people are just going to shut down and not have the conversation at all.

Emeri Burks

Got it. All right. Um, now we've talked about a lot of different things: journalistic expectations, relations to current events and George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, your understanding of your role as a journalist, your understanding of societal needs and meeting them. Is there anything that you wanted to go back to or fill more in? Anything else you wanted to share on any of the subjects we've discussed so far?

[Anonymous]

I feel like my answer on how the George Floyd murder has affected my coverage – I wasn't very complete on. I guess I don't know what I would add.

Emeri Burks

Sure. We can go back to that. What do you think was maybe missing there?

[Anonymous]

I think was maybe... I'm more... I'm less likely to dismiss something as like too radical or crazy. And a lot of that comes from my own thinking through this idea of whether or not I overly softened people's stances in some of my past coverage. I think I entertain potential inner

stories or interviews for the show that maybe once I would've thought were too radical for a general audience. I consider them much more thoughtfully now.

Emeri Burks

Interesting. So before George Floyd, you might be less likely to consider a more extreme viewpoint. Is that what you're saying there? What do you think has contributed to this change for you?

[Anonymous]

I think the saying that... I think a very specific example is defund the police. Like what?! I think when we first heard that we were just like, "This is radical and crazy." And then you see the city council members get on board with it and it becomes a legitimate policy discussion, and then you think like, "Wow, how much hobbling of these ideas happened in the past because we thought they were too crazy." But they're actually not that crazy if you really sit down and talk to people about it. I think seeing how far the conversation went in those early days, and then seeing how that momentum kind of slowed also, I guess.

Emeri Burks

It sounds as if George Floyd and the news since then has really affected a lot of how you do your job, how you interview people, how you find sources. Is it complete? Are there certain areas that you feel have been reinforced or become stronger, or other changes.

[Anonymous]

I think, I think more clearly now about how to craft interview questions for our hosts that are not solely through a white lens. Some of my past reporting experience before George Floyd helps to begin to shape that. And it's just kind of crystallized since George Floyd.

I think George Floyd put a lot of words in practices to things that were sort of nebulous for me before.

Emeri Burks

Sure, sure. Well, that's my last question there at least on camera. I was going to ask you if you knew some other people who might be interested in doing this study off-camera. But is there anything else that you wanted to be sure that we covered fully, or areas that you wanted to fill in here?

[Anonymous]

No, I feel like it was really comprehensive.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Awesome. Well, I really do appreciate this interview a lot. Your perspective means a lot to me personally, and it really does mean a lot to this study as well. I'm going to be turning off the recording now.

Interview 12 – Miguel Otarola – June 15, 2021

Emeri Burks

Awesome. OK, so I've got recording on. We've already discussed a little bit about the consent form and you're going to be going through the interview and then telling me what preferences you have for anonymity either after that or even after the interview doesn't have to be right away. But wanted to get started here.

Can you tell me your name and your position within the journalism industry?

Miguel Otarola

Yes, my name is Miguel Otarola and I am a climate and environment reporter with Colorado Public Radio.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, can you give me your pronouns and age please?

Miguel Otarola

Yes, he/him, and I'm 27.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha and can I ask what race or ethnicity you identify with or as?

Miguel Otarola

I identify as Latino

Emeri Burks

Great. Thank you for that. So I want to get a little bit of background. Could you briefly describe your experience leading into your career in journalism? How did you get started and what has led to where you are and what you're doing today?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, well, it's been a long journey. I mean I started back in high school, I think maybe in the middle of high school joining with the high school newspaper, directly from there I went to school to study journalism over at Arizona State University. Got a masters there as well. And through that time did a lot of internships in places like the Arizona Republic in Phoenix, and the Seattle Times, and the Boston Globe. And after that I graduated in 2016, went straight to my first job after that Boston Globe internship to the Minneapolis Star Tribune where I covered the

suburbs and then I covered the city doing a lot of general assignment, reporting, City Hall reporting, neighborhood reporting. Was there for four years and then I left at the end of last year and I started my new job here in Denver with Colorado Public Radio at the beginning of 2021. I wanted to make the switch to radio for a long time and try it out and here we are today. So that's I don't know how many years. I guess this may be like 2010 or so, yeah.

I lost you. I think you're muted.

Emeri Burks

I am but my spacebar should be unmuting in there. I'm sorry just one second let me check.

Miguel Otarola

That's alright.

Emeri Burks

Great. That's great. Can I also confirm that you have been working continuously since the death of George Floyd last year as a professional journalist?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, I took a one month break in between jobs, but yes.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, awesome. That was just one of the few prerequisites we had for this study. So thinking about these different places that you've been working sounds like with 26 years you're you've already been around quite a few different organizations.

So when you think about the expectations that were expressed to you by your supervisors and superiors, what do you remember People telling you your job would be about? What did your superiors tell you it meant to be a journalist as far as you can remember, and what comes to mind?

Miguel Otarola

And then we're just kind of talking about the general kind of going into the field and then and learning from it this stuff.

Emeri Burks

Right, right. Your understanding the professional expectations as a journalist as they were expressed to you.

Miguel Otarola

Well, I think there were different things. I mean, there's obviously what they teach you in school, which is very kind of regulated and structured and all about... excuse me... the ethics and the basics of journalism. Basically, always be accurate. Those five tenants that we talk about all the time, you know, seek truth and report it, and things like that. Be fair. Hold people accountable, and that's all well and good. But I think what I learned most was from sort of

outside that experience, and reporting trips, and one on ones with mentors and having them look over my work.

And that was basically just, I think the most important thing that I learned that I still try to carry to this day is journalism requires being there. You know, it's a lot about getting the chance to go out, and travel, and meet people, and you are tasked with the responsibility to ask them questions.

That I think is really... I don't know. I guess it's very humbling and also I had a lot of responsibility.

But basically, yeah. It was that. It was just you get a chance to go ahead and meet people, and tell their stories, and to me that was probably like the biggest thing and whenever it drifted too far away from that into something a little more rigid or plain or bureaucratic, I guess like politics reporting for example, I started to kind of tap out so...

You know, I think I learned a lot from... about just how fun the job can be, how devoted you need to be. That you're not going to make that much money, that you're not in it for the fame. But you're there to go ahead and get stuff for the record, and get a chance to give a voice to people that don't have it.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, now you mentioned fairness. I wonder if you could speak a little bit to your understanding of objectivity. I don't know if your supervisors discussed this aspect of journalistic conduct specifically with you. But from what they expressed to you, how did you understand that term and how you were supposed to be fair as a journalist.

Miguel Otarola

Well, that's definitely evolved over time. I mean back when I was in school, it was definitely super... excuse me... like a crystal cut definition of what objectivity is. Don't share your opinions online. Try to remove yourself and your viewpoint as much as you can from a story. Almost the gotta hear both sides kind of thing, you know.

And over time, we clearly know that that's not really the world that we live in. I mean, when I left school and I came to my first job at the Star Tribune, I really tried to carry a lot of that into the job because you're young and you want to play by the book basically. But suddenly that became really difficult when I started just, obviously feeling a certain type of way about certain things that were happening in the city, about certain topics – political things, obviously.

But still to me, I think what I took out from objectivity was, yeah, of course – the story should not include my own viewpoints. It should not include what I think it should... It really shouldn't gravitate too much toward my own perspective and my own beliefs. Fairness to me is really about just... really, honestly, hearing somebody – first of all. Getting their honest, kind of like pure take on what it is that they're dealing with. Of course, asking questions. You're free to

push back. And then kind of weighing those things. I mean, I always... combining that, I've always combined it with just, again that that whole thought about holding people accountable and comforting the people that are afflicted.

And to me that... when it came to objectivity, I think you kind of have to put that sort of like equity into perspective. You need to go ahead and say, "Well, there's people that are going through certain things, and I think our job is to go ahead and share those stories. And the people that maybe are responsible for those conditions, they're responsible for... maybe what they're going through have a lot more power. Those people need to be questioned harder, and do need to be scrutinized. And you can definitely carry that out in a story.

In a way that is fair in terms of, hey, you asked the questions you gave them their chance to talk and you lay out the evidence and all the other research and reporting that you've done on that story in that one article, in that one piece.

So it's definitely just a... Yeah, it's kind of taking all those things into consideration. I mean, not just putting both things on an equal playing field, if you know what I mean.

Emeri Burks

Right. Now it sounds to me like objectivity and fairness are different terms for you. Is that correct?

Miguel Otarola

I would agree.

Emeri Burks

And what would you say are the big differences between them?

Miguel Otarola

Well, objectivity, just kind of deals more with, I guess 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, and it's also impossible to stay quiet in this day and age – you can't do that. You know people want to know about who the person is that's behind you telling the stories. Unlike, you know 100 years ago, or 50 years ago, when the place was a lot more... just looked a lot different, you know? We can go into that later.

And then fairness to me is really, again just... 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. And then properly displaying that in a story. And I guess that can really depend on any story that you're doing. I mean, it's not a didactic thing. It depends on each kind of thing that you're particularly working on.

Emeri Burks

Got it. thanks for that distinction. Now? Could I ask, do you think the expectations that have been expressed to you by your audience have been different from the expectations expressed to you by your supervisors and superiors?

Miguel Otarola

Oh yeah. Completely. And the audience can also sort of vary.

Like for example... You know, the Star Tribune is a very traditional newsroom. You know, it's been a newspaper that's been around for a really long time. It's got a certain look. It's got a certain kind of depth and seriousness to the stories that we're working on. So we tend to gravitate a little more towards that audience that we've had for along with that they've had for a longer time.

However that's not really like the people that I'm serving when I was covering Minneapolis, you know? Minneapolis is much more diverse. Minneapolis is much more left leaning, much more liberal. As you know, especially after last year, there is a lot of scrutiny over what the press is doing and how we present information, and whose stories we are telling.

So yeah, I mean there was kind of like a lot of that... There was a lot of reckoning, and I feel like a lot of realizations as we were doing all that work that maybe the old way that we've been doing things or the audience that we have been serving is not especially for me. The people that I'm actually writing about and trying to serve. The people that are... our existing audience that are... what's the word called? The audience that we've had for so long – It's not the same as the people that I am writing about, and I'm serving.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Now can I ask compared to your colleagues who are not Latino or not a person of color, do you think that the expectations set by your superiors, supervisors, and audience impact or affect you differently?

Miguel Otarola

Can you repeat that question please?

Emeri Burks

Sure, compared to your colleagues, the other journalists who work with you who are not a person of color or not Latino/Latina. Do you think that these expectations affect you and them differently? And if so, how?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah. I mean they do. Not in the sense of either... but not in the sense of the audience is going to treat them a different way, or the people that we are serving are going to... Well, let me repeat that. I guess...

When I think about my position, for example, it doesn't matter to me if I was Latino or if I was white, I think the people that I was writing about and the things we were covering, that group – the people that we were writing about would have treated me any sort of way. I think dependent... did not depend too much on my race, unless of course I'm not black. I can't really speak to that experience, 'specially after what we went through Minneapolis. Because they just see me as a journalist and they see me as part of an institution.

It may make a difference. The expectations might be different from our editors, and from maybe some of the people that are in charge, I think purely because if they were not people of color, if they were white, and I can just kind of talk like anecdotally and talking from what I've seen it's just... they're not really expected to have to think about those things as much as I am purely because of my background, and the things that I see. And you know, kind of like again, the sort of questions that I've raised about our coverage. It's almost to me as if like white reporters don't really think about that and don't have to think about that, and have the privilege of not having to worry about that.

And of course you know the editors, who are also largely white, aren't pushing them on that if they didn't have to be pushed on it. Meanwhile, for me it's just part of my regular experience as a reporter.

Emeri Burks

For sure. You say that as a person of color, you might need to consider race more than your white counterparts. How does this translate to the expectations professional expectations impacting you differently? Does fairness mean something different for you? Does accuracy mean something different for you?

Miguel Otarola

Accurate 'cause accuracy doesn't necessarily mean anything different to me. I think there's definitely a space for proper reason and rational thinking and truth, facts – fact checking things. Only again the question about truth is a whole another different subject, but...

Sorry I had a point and I lost it. Can you repeat your question again, and that's going to remind me.

Emeri Burks

For sure. For sure. Now you were saying that as a person of color you might need to consider things that a white journalist might not be expected to consider, that there's a privilege in not being expected to address certain types of issues. I'm curious the expectations you mentioned that you...

Miguel Otarola

Oh! I remember now. Well, I mean yes the expectations are completely different because, I mean, a lot of this is just... not that I'm expected to go ahead and think about these things, but

it's very natural for me to go ahead and think about these things purely just from the type of person I am and what I went through, and the different kinds of people that have been around.

Now I'm grateful for that experience and a lot of it isn't just because I was hanging out with a bunch of Latino people who've had a really... I'm grateful to have had a very diverse set of circumstances and groups, and notice a lot of different people growing up. But I think it does come with me... as far as it comes to fairness, I think it definitely just kind of... it comes with having to tell editors and having to tell people that are in charge at the newspaper how certain communities operate, being really honest about how certain communities operate, about how they feel about reporters. How they have someone earn their trust. How they share their stories. How you're supposed to ask questions. All those things which vary so much on different, you know ethnicities of different races and cultures and so again, when I talk about kind of meeting people where they're at, to me, that's really sort of what it is, rather than the old school traditional way of thinking that like everybody acts and thinks and beliefs the same way. They don't and you shouldn't treat them that way either. And you shouldn't cover them that way either, and write about them that way either.

Just it's all so nuanced, and it's something that I'm constantly learning about every day. You know it. It takes a lot of listening, just observing.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Thanks for that. Alright, I'd like to get a little bit of context now before we go too much further into these discussions, by asking about your reaction or relation to learning about George Floyd's death.

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, well. You know, I was covering the city for a couple of years by then, and I had been around the big protests during Philando Castile after the Yanez verdict, and seeing a whole bunch of other things. And I was really hoping that because it was a pandemic, and we were all quarantined and locked up, locked down – excuse me, it was going to be a relatively quiet summer. I honestly can tell you that I was thinking, “I really hope the police don't kill anybody this summer.”

'Cause I know you go through these things enough and you kind of just realize this is how the patterns evolved, right? And you know what the reaction is going to be. And you know that people are going to be rightfully upset. But I just figured for some reason, because of it being a pandemic it wasn't going to be... I mean that was going to be our thing. That was we're going to have to deal with. You know, remember those early days that were very quiet, and I thought that would carry on into the summer.

Anyways, I was visiting my parents in Arizona, and I drove my pickup truck back from Arizona to Minneapolis. I got back the day before Memorial Day. Then Memorial Day happens, and I'm just having a great day, and I'm like, “OK, good one day arrest.” Go back to work the next day. On

Tuesday morning, I opened up my laptop and I see that right there on our home page is that story about the police having killed George Floyd.

And I was like, "Oh no, it's not good. Let me watch the video." Libor had already written an incredible story, an incredibly detailed story about what had happened. I saw the whole video, and I instantly felt that it was going to be completely different from anything else that we had ever seen. I thought it was going to rise to a whole another level than we had ever seen purely because of how just disturbing, and raw, and long watching that death was.

And so I just kind of knew. I was like, we're not going to be the same. It's going to be different. It's going to be a violent. It's going to be emotional. And then even my expectations were completely surpassed after that.

Emeri Burks

Right, thank you. Can I ask for your reaction or relation to finding out about former officer Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts?

Miguel Otarola

Just elation – a real sense of relief that I hadn't felt in a year, a year and a half – however long that was. Shock. Yeah, I just kind of feel like I let my defenses down finally. It was a difficult thing for me to cover – what happened in Minneapolis last year.

I have never really been... like really, personally speaking, I've never really been a person that likes confrontation, or runs into violence or anything like that, or chaos. I like being able to listen to people, and tell their stories, you know calmer settings, I suppose. Or when people want to go ahead and share those things with me.

After I saw the video, I was really.... I was really kind of scared. I was like, this is going to take a lot of me. And it did. It was bad. But after the after the Chauvin verdict I feel like the people on those streets. I just felt a sense of complete just release.

Emeri Burks

Nice. What do you think was being released at this time?

Miguel Otarola

Well, my fears that Chauvin was going to be found not guilty on even one of those verdicts. My fears about what that could have meant, you know? Especially in journalism we tend to write so much, and think so much. You know, covering[unclear] race, every single possible point and outcome of perspective and opinion... And you sort of lose sight of what is actually going to happen because you're all just nervous about what could happen.

Emeri Burks

Alright, thank you. Can I ask also, how have you personally related to recent discussions of racism, racial violence, and systemic injustice since the death of George Floyd?

Miguel Otarola

I've learned a lot. I've learned a lot, lot, lot. I think, normally what I tell friends is that I am... you know, I always thought it was terrible being like just the continued unequal and unfair treatment of black people when it comes to the police doing so. But it wasn't really until George Floyd's death, and until talking to all those people and seeing all the protests and what it unfolded, that I got even close to thinking what it is like to be a regular, what it's like to be a black person in America. And even say... I'm obviously not having that experience. But it actually made me feel like, "OK. Like, yeah. This is like a whole another, completely different experience that is so cruel.

And then I was looking through my own past coverage and how I would write about things. And it was not perfect at all, you know? And I wasn't considering those things that people were telling me this whole time, that they were telling all of us this whole time. And then of course, you think about your own things. I mean, you think about your own unconscious behaviors towards certain people, and thoughts and, why you think those things, right? What is it ingrained about us, or what we hear, or what we grew up with?

So, I mean it was incredibly to me, like in a good way, belittling because I learned a lot about something that we should have all known like a long time ago, I suppose, especially in my role as a journalist.

Emeri Burks

Thank you for that. Can I ask professionally how is your experience related to George Floyd's death and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests affected your work?

Miguel Otarola

Again, I mean it's nuance. It's definitely a nuance of... You know when you talked about fairness earlier and we were talking about just how different communities operate, and how they share information – which is like a stronger realization of how black people and black communities share their information, and their beliefs, and how to talk to them, and how to meet them on their level.... So that was really good because it definitely just kind of opened me up into a whole different way of being able to interact with people. Again, a more human way rather than like the very professional stoic way that we always think about journalists. Like humanity is really important.

How else did it impact...? I mean, definitely a lot more scrutiny towards politicians electeds... I feel like I already had a pretty strong scrutiny over law enforcement and not taking their word for things, always double checking facts about certain information.

And I think especially after... during the week when George Floyd was killed on all those protests and everything that we've seen, they definitely did sort of prepare me in a lot of different ways, for anything else that would happen that would rise to that level of just complete chaos and tension. And how to do your job in between all of that? I hate to say it, but

I think next time around if something were to happen, I would do it a whole lot better purely because of having had that experience.

Emeri Burks

Right.

Miguel Otarola

You know, it's like you think you're kind of cool, calm and collected. And then it's... again, a whole another level of things. And then... well then you kind of build upon that, and that level of like making sure you stay levelheaded or have clear eyes when you're seeing what what's happening.

Emeri Burks

Awesome, thank you. Well, this is a good transition then. Could I ask how would you describe your role as a journalist?

Miguel Otarola

I've been thinking about this lately. I honestly think, and this is going to sound cheesy, but I honestly think that the way I see my personal role as a journalist is to tell stories – tell real stories that are happening. Basically like a documentarian in a sense. Like, it can be narrative. It doesn't have to be narrative. But just real nonfiction stories about people and about humans. It relies a lot on that connection. It relies a lot on, just like how people... their lives, what they feel, how they are affected by certain things. And trying to, obviously, tie that all in with just our systems... all the different things that we kind of face as Americans.

Whether it's immigration, or whether it's climate change, or whether it's police brutality, or whether it's even the decisions that the Park Board in Minneapolis makes and how it impacts people who use the parks. Like to me, my role is to go ahead and say, “OK. But what do people think about that? What are the regular people that are not in charge of any sort of... who do not have any serious control over any of those powers, feel about those things?

So I feel like my role is to bring those voices to light. It's a lot about talking to very regular people that are impacted by these things. They may not even realize it. But their experience is just as valid as anybody else's.

So yeah, I would say that's what my role is because people need to go ahead and see what they have to say. And maybe they sympathize. Maybe they disagree. Maybe somebody who is influential can feel a certain type of way, and it leads them to make some sort of change. And of course they will feel well served because I'm trying to do this for them. You know, who is this that you're writing for? So...

Yeah, I think in a very basic level it's definitely just telling stories.

Emeri Burks

Sure. And can I ask what values are important to you with regard to how you do your job?

Miguel Otarola

Honesty, just being to the point, and truthful. I think respect is a really important thing to me. I really try to respect anybody that I speak with. Being clear and being totally honest about what it is that I'm trying to write about and say, and give people a fair chance to answer those things. And it's all been work in progress, by the way. It's all gotten better over time, especially now that I'm in this job.

Justice. I know that's like a weird, very vague and large term, but just as we sort of mentioned, comforting the afflicted, and afflicting the comfortable... Conflicting the comfortable is kind of [unclear]... I'm not trying to afflict anybody...

What other values? I mean just kind of like the belief that everybody deserves a really peaceful and happy life, you know? I know I'm kind of a corny guy. But I think it's true. Like you know, just fighting, suffering, and fighting injustice, and doing that through my role.

There's probably like a whole bunch of other ones that I'm not really thinking about at the moment.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, perhaps more might come up with this next question, then. Do you think that your values ever conflict with your professional expectations, and if so, how?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, I mean, there's like certain things that about journalism that are not really a part of my own like personal values as a person, you know? In terms of pay, my beliefs, like politically for example, Or about systems or certain things.

I am like a pretty... I'd like to think I'm a pretty relaxed person, and I think there's a lot of stodginess in journalism, that I felt that I had to be like – which was not a good idea to try to be something that I'm not.

You know, I think it's just entertainment, humor, being casual, being like silly in that kind of sense. I think like restrained but also like showing people that you're not a journalist 24/7. That you are also a human being that is impacted by things and likes a whole bunch of other things. As you can see, I love music. I love sports. I love all... I mean just a little bit of everything.

I think that my value to be a more varied person, and to have different interests – I don't really see that reflected in journalism at all very well. It's all very... like our message is very rigid.

Emeri Burks

Could you speak a little bit more to the rigidity and where that doesn't align with your personal values for your job?

Miguel Otarola

Well, that's just like not how people are, you know? Like nobody behaves that way. People are fluid and they have ups and downs. They're not always perfect. And this is like a problem with journalism, right? I mean, I remember back when I was at The Globe, one of the editors basically told me that we don't have anything if we don't have accuracy, and I was scared straight for a long, long time.

Like people are human, and they make mistakes. And I think that it's journalists in journalism, like American journalism – we're sort of expected to be superhuman in a sense. And it's not even just from the industry itself. But also from people that read us, and listen to us, and are very judgmental and critical.

And that's because there's a lot of humanity missing in the whole thing. You know, like they don't know who you are. 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.

And I'm young, relatively, in the in the industry. So maybe it's never been this way for a lot of people. And maybe I'm growing up and learning about journalism, and seeing kind of what people who are famous, or in DC, like are big on Twitter, or big on television – this is the way they act. Seeing what the New York Times does, seeing what the Washington Post does – that this is the way that it's supposed to be. And then I tried to be that way.

No, I mean, I think that there is so much more room for expression, and just reality in the terms of how people operate, that is missing or not really there in journalism at the moment.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well can I ask, how do you choose the best course of action when you feel that there is a conflict between your values and the professional expectations that are placed upon you?

Miguel Otarola

I mean, I usually just follow my values, and then I'll tell my editor, "Hey, I don't feel comfortable doing this. I wanna ask that question. I didn't ask that question. I did this. Just so you know."

Like, you are in charge of your own person, for the most part, and the work that you do as a journalist. You don't have to share everything, I guess, with your editor when it when it comes to that sort of sense. But it's just basically like, OK – you have that conversation. If you editor feels a certain type of way, and he wants you to try again, then you do it. And you say to the person you're speaking with like, "Hey, you know what? You know the newspaper, or my editor just wants me to make sure that I'm doing this." But initially I always just try to choose my own course of action rather than fearing anything if I don't do that.

I'm sorry, I'm sounding really vague at the moment, but...

Emeri Burks

No. For sure. Do you have an incident in mind, or an anecdote that kind of illustrates this?

Miguel Otarola

You know, maybe I can think about one. But not necessarily. I mean, kind of the biggest thing for me comes to, for example, somebody doesn't want me to use their name, right, for a particular reason. Or somebody just wants to speak off the record or on background. Or you feel really uncomfortable about doing a story, you know?

For example: This is an example of a story that I... This is an example of something that didn't go the way that I really planned, but I kind of learned from. So I had just started covering Minneapolis at the STrib. And I had gotten a you know, email from... I was writing a lot about sidewalk snow shoveling. I was looking at it much more from a perspective of why it's important to do it. What the city is thinking about doing for this. Why people with disabilities really need to have some more help with this. Somebody had emailed me saying that, well, the City Council President sure is one to talk. She doesn't even shovel her own sidewalk. Then there was a link to a site, like the city citations on snow lock-shoveling that you could get from their own public portal.

And it, yeah, that was her address and it showed that she had like seven citations, and had a fee that she had to pay because the city had to go and clean up her sidewalk. And in trying to impress my editor as a new reporter and new with him, I told him about it, and he said that story – I said it as a joke. Basically, he said, “That's a story. We have to do that, we have to do that.”

I was like queasy about it from the beginning, but I didn't say anything. And I just kept going and tried reaching her a bunch of times. And I was like, “I really don't want to have to ask you this question about your sidewalk [unclear]. I hope that you don't hate me,” basically.

Finish the story – Story comes out. It's like a whole big fucking thing. Viral. Everybody's hating on her. That she hates me, obviously. That didn't necessarily help my relations with this person that I'm supposed to be covering for the rest of my time as a Minneapolis reporter. You know, like the cost-gain/benefit... What's it called the cost...?

Emeri Burks

Cost-benefit analysis.

Miguel Otarola

The cost-benefit analysis was not good when I made that decision. I mean sure, yeah, it was some sort of like scoop or whatever. And I riled people up, got them thinking about how hypocritical politicians are. But it hurt me in my relationship with people in the City Council.

And had I taken my own sort of belief? I mean, like I don't think we should do the story. I think it's sort of petty. I think it might take some more... You know it's a very... specific case and sort

of a tabloid. I didn't say that, but had I done that I feel like it would have been... I would have felt stronger as a journalist in terms of what I feel is a news story. And then it also would have helped my entire relations I think going forward.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Now this is an instance where it sounds like you did not follow your values perhaps as much as you would like to. Do you think since then it has pushed you to follow your values more?

Miguel Otarola

Yes. I mean completely, yes. I will tell you like right now. Yes, yes, yes. Now, still at the Star Tribune, like slowly, maybe in certain types of ways. But then, like you kind of still... you know you come out of school and you think that you're gonna get fired for any sort of little thing. And so you really want to please, and you really want to do your job well and quietly. So maybe not as much then, and it really depends on the relations that you have with your editors, and a lot of personal stuff that I was going through with my own emotions.

But no, since moving and starting a new job, you kind of feel like, "Oh, OK. Well, you know I'm a professional now. Like I'm older. Like I can..." You know, I'm learning a lot from other reporters have ment... like younger reporters that have been through all this stuff before – they taught me a lot about what's it means to own up to your own person, and your own career as a journalist. Because at the end of the day, that's really the most important thing. And as we all know, those reputations can get tarnished very easily and quickly.

Emeri Burks

Well, I wanted to get into some of the specific bits of journalistic conduct that have been in the news in the past year. So can I ask, how do you evaluate journalists' expression of personal biases, beliefs, values, agendas and or perspectives in public forums? In your opinion what boundaries should be enforced? What boundaries should be revised?

Miguel Otarola

I think it is fine for journalists to share their opinions on things that they're not covering, basically. You know, it's fine if you want to go ahead and talk about music, that you like, or basketball or... Let me let me sort of rephrase this, I guess in a sense. I think it's fine for people to share their opinions and beliefs on things that... unless it is things that they are covering, unless it is things that their peers are covering, and unless they are things that could potentially sort of... Yeah, brandish those reputations, sorry, ruin or harm those reputations, and relationships with people that are your audience with people that you're covering, and that your peers are covering or trying to reach out to.

For example: I cover climate change now. I think the most important thing is to just share the information of what exactly is happening. You can feel free to share your opinions about or do a

little quote retweet, and say, “This is terrible. You should all be paying attention. It's like Oh my God,” for example.

But what that serving really? You know, like who am I to tell you that...? I mean you have a platform. Who am I to tell you that this is how you should be thinking about something purely because I think about it that way. No, my job should just go ahead and share that information. Share what other people think about that information, and those news.

Nobody wants to hear my opinion on that. They just want to get the actual news. And I feel like a lot of journalists don't really realize that. They just share the information and then they kind of offer some sort of very close to objective, but not quite – because you're not really listening to other people – belief of of what that thing is or an opinion on what that thing is about. And that just hurts us, because then we are seeing us being people who certainly think a certain type of way. But I think it also undermines the people that we're trying to reach in the first place, you know? They don't deserve that. They can make their own thoughts and their own opinions about these things. So my job is to just share that.

And something like climate change is pretty interesting, for example, because it's indisputably terrible, and bad, and it's something that we need to take seriously. But you can do that through your work and through the stories that they're just showing people what is happening. They will understand. Either they do or they don't, and if they don't, well then write about that – why is it that they don't?

I think you gotta just kind of strip all that away. Take it out. It's like a lot of ego death stuff, basically. You gotta just take your ego out the whole thing. Just because you're a professional doesn't mean that you have the right to say whatever the fuck you want. You do have the right to say whatever you want. But, I think it ultimately comes at a cost to journalism, and to journalists, and then obviously to the people that read us in our country.

Emeri Burks

For sure. And when it comes to social media, then. Do you think that there's a separate professional and private sphere for a journalist. Are they separate? Should they not be separate? What guidelines should be enforced for how journalists interact on social media, if any?

Miguel Otarola

I mean right now I think it's all pretty... as far as it comes from like journalism industries and outlets, I think it's all pretty rigid. I think it's unfairly rigid. I mean people have gotten fired for the smallest of things, or maybe just one simple error. So I don't like that necessarily. Again, going back to the whole thing about people being human. I think if it's in your job description that you should not tweet about certain things or that you should tweet about certain things that you should probably follow what you applied for in the job that you got.

So your contract for example: if there isn't a certain thing like that, then I don't think that you should be expected to have your own professional account or sphere of things. I think, you know all of this is free. Right now... well, not none of our other job descriptions, but in many of our job descriptions, it doesn't say we have to tweet two to three times a day, and share our articles or other people's articles, or to always be professional 24/7 on our social media. I mean like this is all auxiliary and additional and extra to everything else that we're already doing as reporters.

Like, you don't have to follow me. It's free. I don't have to tweet. It's free. I'm serving Twitter. I'm not serving you guys. I mean, I just kind of always think about that. Because like, yeah, you can read my stuff. It's there. Like this is some of my professional work. My professional work is on that site. You don't have to follow this, though. I mean I'm going to try to do my best that I can, but if you like who I am then you might want to follow me. And if you don't, I'm sorry. You're not paying for it.

Emeri Burks

What about, then, things like community programs or activism? Do you think journalists should abstain from getting involved in community activism or community programs or no?

Miguel Otarola

Well, I would differentiate, I guess community programs and activism. I mean activism is pretty clear that you're really staking out a very public opinion about something and try to change course or push for a certain policy or course of action. And I think that journalists should probably refrain from that – sharing those things publicly. Because it goes back to the same thing that I kind of told you about just how much power you have as a journalist in terms of what people know and what people think.

Community programs, though? I mean no, it's important to be part of your community. That makes you a stronger journalist. Like if you don't know what's going on around you in a non-professional setting, then you're going to seriously miss out on a lot of the things people are talking about, and people that you may be able to talk with down the line. I was a part of community programs and volunteering. And there's no reason, there's no way you can hate on that.

But activism is a another kind of different thing. And I suppose there could maybe be a way that you do it where you're silent about it and not really sharing any of those things publicly. But only if it's not something that obviously you cover. If you cover that, you should probably stay out. Because then that means you're influencing what is happening outside of your work.

Emeri Burks

Sure can I ask you... Well then specifically on this one, you said that advocacy is something that generally journalists should abstain from if they're covering something related to it. There were a number of different instances where this happened, where journalists were joining into Black

Lives Matter protests, for example, and number of them got fired. Do you have an opinion about the response and the actions there?

Miguel Otarola

I guess I don't know too much about it. These are people that were covering Black Lives Matter or covering racial issues.

Emeri Burks

Covering racial issues, or public safety issues. There were a few different ones around. But a number of people did get in a bit of trouble for expressing some degree of support for Black Lives Matter, whether by showing up to a protest in a T-shirt or by commenting on social media, for example.

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, I can't say whether they should have been fired or not for that. But what I will say is that I think if you are covering those issues and you see those things, then you are inserting yourself into the story. And our job as journalists is not to insert ourselves into the story. It's to write about other people that are dealing with things. That's basically the deal that we had to make with the devil when we made this job, right? When we took this job. It's like, alright. You're out there to tell other people stories, not yours. You're not going to influence the work. You're not going to be the story.

And I joke about that with my friends all the time, because journalists do that all the time. So when I see that, for example. And I can only speak from my experience, of course. I think that there's a big difference between what I what I see as a male, Latino reporter, and what a black reporter sees and has dealt with.

I just kind of see you kind of like putting away your professional duties, for your own personal way that you feel about things, and trying to make a difference. And that's fine if you want to do that, you should do it. But it will make your job harder, and it will make you... what's the word that I'm looking for? Just... it will come at a cost in terms of your professional career.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Thanks for that clarification. One more specific point about the public disclosure of bias. We've discussed bias a lot in recent years, about how the different perspectives we have might limit what we understand and don't understand. Do you feel that there are or are not certain instances where you should disclose maybe a facet of your identity or your bias that might be impacting the reporting that you do – either in a public forum or in your writing itself?

Miguel Otarola

I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, my initial thought is no. I think that you shouldn't have to publicly disclose anything that you don't want to, if you're not necessarily... again, like I said, being unfair or inserting yourself into a story, and your own opinions.

You know, I think people can easily discover that and then deduce that from what it is that you post online, and think, and the kind of person you are. But maybe they get it wrong too, and then that's a point in itself.

No, I don't think so. There may be an example of that, that I'm... there's something in the back of my mind that I kind of remembered from years ago now about when maybe it would be a good idea to disclose those biases in the story. I mean, I think if you do, people would be more real and honest and happy that you're sharing that information. But I think it's unnecessary.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Completely fair. So can I ask these boundaries on journalistic conduct – do you think that they're shifting now, and if so, how?

Miguel Otarola

In what conduct?

Emeri Burks

Journalistic conduct, so for example, social media usage, the things we've been discussing here.

Miguel Otarola

Oh, oh. Yeah. I mean, totally. It's like I mentioned earlier, there is no way you can not share. 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 less relenting and kind of letting go a little bit.

Now, you still hear about people getting fired for certain things, and with certain things that they cover. And I suppose, as an organization unless you're breaking some sort of law, or contract, or anything like that, then you can do whatever you want. But no, I definitely do... to me, it definitely does feel like it's becoming a little more LAX over time, when it comes to that conduct.

And also, like I mentioned, 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 like hear your voice. But even with other reporters and journalists they want to know who you are, and they want to get a peek behind the process, and 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.

Yeah, in that sense those conducts are also changing. It's less of that... what's the word called? The something curtain? The steel curtain? Anyways, I mean there's less of a separation between journalists and the audience.

That's really good. I support that. Yeah. Of course, if it comes from a good place, I don't support violence or threats or anything like that.

Emeri Burks

OK. I wanted to go a little bit macro then here. Based on your understanding, what does society need from the journalism industry at this moment? And how do you know that? What makes you say that?

Miguel Otarola

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.

I think we need less content, in general – way less content in general. That's impossible. I don't think it's going to happen.

We need to treat people like intelligent human beings. We need to stop trying to meme our way into everything, or try to write catchy headlines that will get a certain kind of attention. We need to hold ourselves to the same standard that we want to hold our readers to, and the other way around.

Like in order to raise the conversation and progress in a better way of society. I mean, it starts with us. Like we all we have to do that as well.

Yeah. I mean, in a in a perfect world it would just be less about outrage, and clicks, and content. And just more about real depth and nuance, and storytelling behind the reporting that we're doing.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well then, based on your understanding, what the society need from journalists individually? Maybe you maybe any individual journalist?

Miguel Otarola

I think they need us to be honest about who we are. Again, to accept our faults as humans. They need us to, like I mentioned, be less reactionary and leave our prejudices at the door, when we're talking to people. They need to be able to... I mean, they call it communications for a reason, right? They need to be able to know how to communicate well with all kinds of people. They need us to be involved in the community. They need us to be more than just white people. You know, they need us to look diversely, and represent the people that we're actually covering.

And they need us to, you know, do our proper job and not try to be really quick or easier, or not really put in the work. You gotta put in the work, because you're the one that has to do that. If someone... Nobody else is gonna do it.

Yeah, you just basically need to not try to be lazy, which is a work in progress for all people. And I also don't expect you to be cranking out stories and working. 9:00 to 5:00. I mean not 9-5, 24 hours either. 'Cause that's not good for you. It's not good for anybody. It might help your career, it might help people who want to be performer. It's not gonna help you as a person. It's gonna cut you short.

Emeri Burks

For sure. And do you feel confident that you yourself would be able to meet these needs as a journalist?

Miguel Otarola

I try my darndest every day to.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Do you feel that there are any obstacles that might prevent you from better meeting the needs personally?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, definitely. Perhaps if I decide to share this stuff, this one can could stay off the record. But you know...

Emeri Burks

You have the right just by the way, to say on or off the record if you want.

Miguel Otarola

OK, well then. *Off the record... back on the record* – what was the question?

Emeri Burks

For sure, what obstacles, if any, prevent you from meeting the needs of the public?

Miguel Otarola

Oh well. You still live in your own personal bubble. And with the pandemic, I think making things more virtual and kind of cutting that human contact was really bad. I really hope that it wasn't completely tarnished. 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. And if you want to be a journalist, that's not the way you do it at all.

What else? Any other sort of things that could prevent me from reaching those standards.

I think that's the biggest one. I think it really is just that human connection.

Emeri Burks

For sure.

Miguel Otarola

... and it being destroyed slowly by our digital age.

Emeri Burks

For sure. OK.

Miguel Otarola

Some people would say it's better, right? That you're able to be in contact with all those things. I think it kind of messed up the whole way that species are supposed to interact with one another.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Could I ask what support from your organization might help you better meet these needs?

Miguel Otarola

Oh well, you know time and resources to get to go places where the stories are happening, and get to do original content, and find original stories. Having opportunities to meet people outside of our regular job outside of reporting or trying to talk to them for stories. But ways that we could have one on one – they can ask us questions about our process, whether it's some sort of panel or some sort of community event.

I think, just seeing them seeing us as regular people is really important and can help with that. And I've also been thankful to say that here at CPR, I felt that much more than I did back at the Star Tribune, where it felt like resources were really limited.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Well, what about macro again then? Do you feel confident the journalism industry will be able to meet society's need at this moment? And if so why or why not?

Miguel Otarola

I'm not confident about it to be honest.

Emeri Burks

Sure, what makes you say that?

Miguel Otarola

You know we were already so divided over the last few years, and we already kind of messed up the opportunity to really know what people are thinking. Because we weren't talking to them. We were talking to politicians, we were talking to talking heads and experts, and we missed a lot of things, and that's a really hard thing to restore and repair. And I just don't see it going in a good direction.

I just think like macro in terms of our nation's leaders and the people that we're electing and holding accountable, we're still doing the same thing of sort of sensational stories and what people think. Donald Trump is still in the news somehow, despite him not really doing much of anything. Although he was our president. But we should have known over the last four years that he lies, And we shouldn't be reporting those lies.

And also the scrutiny that we give to Joe Biden, for example, you know in terms of the idea that things are going to be “calmer” because he's in power, that doesn't necessarily mean that he's going to be right, and doing the right things all the time.

And so I'm just not seeing a whole lot of that. All these things that I've mentioned, my own expectations of what it takes to be a journalist, and what it means to be a journalist, I think they are disappearing. I don't think they're shared by more people. And purely because the people who run journalism institutions and the way that the industry is going – the expectations are different.

Emeri Burks

Gotcha. Well then based on...

Miguel Otarola

It sucks.

Emeri Burks

Thanks for that. Well could I ask?

Miguel Otarola

I make very deliberate choices to pick where I work, and the jobs that I work, because it allows me to do these kind of things and I really I support kind, appreciate that. And of course, there's always room to grow. I'm not going to be completely blind to any of that. I may be wrong. But yes, I mean, I put very conscious efforts beside behind my choices.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Well then last kind of macro question on this. Based on your experience and understanding as a journalist, what might help the journalism industry better meet the needs that society has for it right now.

Miguel Otarola

I think all journalism organizations should have a very public reckoning about all that they have done, and all of the things that they may have missed. And all the ways they may have treated people in the past and contributed to a lot of the dysfunctionality that we may see with our country, and with the people that we covered. I think we need to be...

What was the... truth and reconciliation basically, you know? Acknowledge our role in what we did. Be frank about it, and then actually be real conscious about not doing that again. That

doesn't come from committees. That doesn't come from statements. It comes from just putting your money where your mouth is, and putting your hiring where your mouth is, and how you sort of divert those resources and the stories that you choose to do. And of course that comes from your leadership.

So yeah. I think that would be great. I mean, I saw some papers do it. I don't know if anything has come out of it. You know, we just need to be held accountable, and continue to be held accountable.

Who does that? I'm not necessarily sure. But I mean, we were entrusted with a big responsibility, and I think especially after what happened over the last couple of years and the direction the country is going, I think it's important that we sort of acknowledge that. We need to take our own responsibility for the false and move forward.

Emeri Burks

Sure. Well, last question on...

Miguel Otarola

It's also very depressing.

Emeri Burks

It's important. It needs to be said, it needs to be sad. Well wanted to ask how has your understanding of social responsibility and social need influenced your work s and journalist and if so, how? But also has this changed since George Floyd's death. You're thinking about what society needs and how that impacts your work.

Miguel Otarola

Yes and yes. For both things. Like I think about that every day, and I think it's part of the stories that I decide to do and the people that I reach out to and cover. For example: even with this job, I could just subconsciously see myself knowing like, OK, I'm a Latino reporter covering climate change and the environment. There weren't many Latino people doing that here in Colorado before I got here. OK, I'm just one person. But there wasn't that much of that kind of coverage.

But this state is so vastly Latino. There are so many stories that we're missing. I already see myself subconsciously, starting to do stories that gravitate more towards that, because climate justice is such a big component of this whole discussion around climate change and who suffers from it, and whose voices have been normally left off the table, and where the responsibility lies.

So, that influences a lot of the stories that I do regarding that. After George Floyd's death in particular? Yeah, like I previously said a couple of times, just it changes the ways that I interact and report on certain communities. It has changed my reliance on certain sources of information that we have always found to be institutional. And it has definitely changed my

understanding of why I'm doing this for, or even solidified my understanding of why I'm doing this job? Because it isn't to serve the people that are in power. It's to help, and listen to, the people who make up the bulk of this country, you know? And the people who need to be informed. Because if we don't do it, who else is gonna do it?

So that's good... I hope.

Emeri Burks

All right well.

Miguel Otarola

You gotta have some fun with it, you know? It's like if you don't have fun with it, it's going to be just not good for you.

Emeri Burks

You have to. Mental health is important. You can't do the job without it.

Miguel Otarola

No, you need to be a welcoming person. Anyway, sorry go ahead.

Emeri Burks

Not at all. Not at all. I did want to move on to just the closing questions now. So as a Latino journalist, as a journalist of color, what do you feel that others might have to learn from your unique perspective that, say, a white journalist or a journalist of color who's not Latino might not bring to the work you do?

Miguel Otarola

Well, I might take a slight adjustment to that question. I wouldn't necessarily tell any other journalists of color what to do or anything like that. Maybe I'll try to answer that. But for White reporters, I think just constantly thinking about race and ethnicity every day in all the stories that you do. We have to do that purely because of the kind of people that we are on and the kind of position that we were in. Where we were born, and who raised us. You know the different just cultures. This country is so much more than just white people. And for white journalists to not be covering that properly is a real harm.

As a Latino specifically, I think it's really important to... One of the really interesting things about Latinos is that we are not all the same person. We don't all have the same culture at all. It's incredibly varied. Like I'm Chilean, I was born in Chile. I'm browner, I'm brown. I *am* brown. What am I talking about? But Chile itself is a much more affluent country than a lot of other Latin American countries by a lot. And much more Americanized in a sense. And there's a lot of class issues, and color issues. Because usually there can be a lot of white Latinos that... they're definitely the ones that maybe are in power, or you see on television.

So I think it's important for other people to realize that you can't put one particular stereotype on a certain... any race. That it just goes to show you that people are different, and you can't say that one person's experience speaks for everybody else's experience. That's usually never the case. And I think I know that purely from being a Latino who doesn't fit in anywhere really. I just kind of try to carve my own path. And knowing that, like you know, I grew up around Mexicans in Arizona, but I'm not Mexican and I'm not going to pretend that I like a lot of Mexican things, you know? Which I do. But I also don't. Or I'm not Cuban. Or I'm not Puerto Rican, who are a lot of the other Latinos that I know and I meet. And I love that they love what they love. But that doesn't mean that because I am also Latino, I need to like those things.

The lesson there would be don't be prejudicial, and really just try to really be nuanced in terms of like what a person's experience, and what a person's background means for them.

Emeri Burks

Awesome. Well then can I ask, what you hope others might learn from this study given the questions I've asked you, given the fact that I'm interviewing a diverse range of journalists from different races, ethnicities, ages, backgrounds, focuses... What do you hope people might learn from this?

Miguel Otarola

I mean, I hope they learn who really makes up the country. I mean our news institutions may not look like the rainbow. But it sounds like with the study you are really trying to do that. To find a whole diverse group of voices. And I hope that seeing what all of us have to say, and however it is that you distill it and present it, it gets them to realize that there's so many journalists here that are trying to make a big difference, and we hope that this is the future of what journalism looks like – literally, I mean physically, and through our work.

That I hope it is the future, you know? I just hope they learn that we're... No, that's it. That's it.

Emeri Burks

For sure. Well, I wanted to ask if there's anything else that you wanted to share on these subjects, so if there's an area that you felt we didn't really get in deep enough, or you remembered something you want to go back to. So let me just really quickly remind you what we've discussed so far: discussing expectations expressed by supervisors and superiors, and by audiences for being a journalist, the way that these expectations might or might not affect people of color differently, personal reactions to George Floyd, Derek Chauvin, and discussions of racism, racial violence, Black Lives Matter protests, etc., your view of your role as a journalist, the values that guide you, and how you deal with conflicts in values and expectations, your views on specific bits of journalistic conduct – especially ones that have been in the news lately – social media or public activism, your understanding of social need, and how we best meet the needs that society has for journalists and journalism. So any of those areas that you think

there's something that maybe we missed or something that we could go in a little bit more detail with?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, there's one thing that I would like to add, and it sort of ties a couple of these different subjects. You know, we're kind of talking about being being very kind of... like putting our defenses down, and being transparent, and being human – that was also the real huge realization after George Floyd for me. Like I told you, like seeing what I saw was terrifying and terrible. It really harmed me mentally to go ahead and have to see and have to do all that work. Again, I'm just speaking from my own personal experience here. Through that chaos, my apartment building almost burned down, like literally. Because some arsonist set the Family Dollar that was right next to it on fire, and we all had to evacuate in the middle of the night. And then I somehow wrote about it later that day and I reported. But I just want people to know that that had a real impact on a lot of people, and they may be more quiet about it, and stoic, and try to keep it away. But in reality, really, they're not going to forget that, and they're not going to let that go for the rest of their lives.

It definitely influenced me. What's the part of the reason why I decided to move and start a new job – not the whole reason at all, by any means. But when you see and what you deal with, especially when it is about the place that you're living in and impacts everybody so many different ways, you can't not have a certain response to it or react to it.

That's it.

I lost you again. You're muted.

Emeri Burks

Alright mute button just coming off. No more space button.

Miguel Otarola

Sounds good.

Emeri Burks

Yes. That is the last question I had for you, so I very much appreciate you making the time for this interview and for joining in, and for all of your deep and meaningful thoughts on these issues. So is there anything that you wanted to say while the camera is still rolling before we finish our interview?

Miguel Otarola

Yeah, can we talk about the consent options again.

Emeri Burks

Yep. For sure. For sure. I'm just going to take us off recording as this is it for the data real quick.

Miguel Otarola

Oh yeah.

Emeri Burks

Yes.