A Seat at the Table:
Exploring the Perceptions of Diversity by Minority Journalists
In the Wake of Shrinking Newsroom Staffs

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Chapter I

Introduction

The era of digital disruption, advertising fragmentation, and doing less-with-more economics has halted decades of overall employment gains in newsrooms with a commensurate outcome for racial and ethnic minorities. The job losses have changed the face and reality of journalism inside news organizations and threaten to undermine the credibility of journalism as it seeks to tell accurately the stories of an increasingly diverse society. The full impact, however, of the job cuts in journalism’s new environment have yet to be studied fully for their lasting or even-short term effects on the value of diversity and the value of minorities in leadership roles.

The influence and importance of news media in society as both mirror and participant is well documented. Realizing that changes in the news environment can adversely and disproportionately affect minority journalists and audience members, it is necessary to explore the messages about diversity, the policies toward diversity and its value inside news organizations. Having a deeper understanding of the attitudes held by minorities who gather news and newsroom leaders—those with seats at the table—who work through drastic change, can lead to a more productive navigation of diversity’s importance and utility in news organizations, the framing that takes place during coverage of the community, and in community perceptions.

Newsrooms staffs are smaller. The findings from an annual American Society of News Editors (ASNE) census bear this out. From 2008 to 2009, the number of full-time minority journalists at newspapers dropped from 6,300 to 5,500, a decrease of 12.6%. Overall, newsrooms lost 5,200 journalists, or 11% of the workforce during the same period. Note that much of the overall job loss can be blamed on the closure of more than one hundred newspapers during the same period including large and medium ones in Denver, Colorado; Seattle, Washington; and Tucson, Arizona (McChesney and Pickard, 2011, p. 104). In terms of percentages, however,
minority representation in newsrooms has seen a slight increase. In 1978, when ASNE first began adding up the number of minorities in newsrooms, there were 43,000 journalists, 3.95% of whom were minorities. In 2011, there were 41,500 journalists and 12.6% were minorities. This number is a slight recovery from the dip in 2007 but is at 1990s levels.

For the purposes of this study, minorities will be defined as racial and ethnic groups that are differentiated from the most socially influential group as well as the numerical majority. Thus, this study, facts and figures from the U.S. Census and other national organizations in the United States, and references to those figures will define minorities as blacks or African-American, Hispanics or Latino, Asian or Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

It is important to note that the ratio of minority newspaper staff to the minority population in the United States remains unbalanced. According to the 2010 U.S. Census report, minorities represent more than 29% of the population. That leaves a nearly 18% difference between newsrooms and the communities they cover. Here are some other census figures of which to take note:

- The largest group of American residents reported being white (223.6 million), accounting for 72% of all people living in the United States.
- The black or African-American population totaled 38.9 million and represented 13% of the total population.
- Hispanics comprised 16% (50.5 million) of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million.
- Approximately 14.7 million people (about five percent of all respondents) identified their race as Asian alone.
- There were 2.9 million respondents who indicated American Indian and Alaska Native alone (0.9%).
Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43% (15.2 million people), accounting for more than half of the total population increase of the United States. The non-Hispanic population—other minorities and whites—grew relatively slower over the decade, about 5%. (www.census.gov, 2010).

Numbers show that newsroom diversity has not gained much ground in recent years, especially in comparison to the growing diversity seen in the demographics in the United States during the same period. Over the long term and across the aggregate of ethnic and minority groups there has been some improvement. Also, ASNE found that since 2001 the number of Asian-American journalists increased by 4.4%, while the number of black and Hispanic journalists fell by 31.5% and 7%, respectively. The number of Native Americans in newsrooms fell by 20.9%.

The United States is not alone in its lack of minority representation in news media. In 2001, Greg Dyke, then-BBC director general and currently the England’s Football Association chairman, became the first media executive to apologize and declare publicly that the organization he ran was ‘hideously white.’ In a radio interview with BBC Radio Scotland, he admitted that the BBC was almost entirely white and that the organization had failed to tackle the problem. Although he did not go so far as to say that the corporation was racist, Dyke remarked that the BBC was unable to retain staff from ethnic minorities and questioned whether they were made to feel welcome in the organization, according to news reports (BBC, 2001, para. 5).

Across all market sizes, minority newsroom employment is still substantially lower than the percentage of minorities in the markets those newsrooms serve. The second-largest category—50,000 to 100,000 average daily circulation—of newspapers, with daily circulation between 250,000 and 500,000, is closest to the overall goal of having minority employment match
population. On average, those newspapers had a minority workforce of about 20% of their total workforce, while they reported that about 30% of the population of their circulation areas were comprised of minorities. The smallest papers—those below 5,000 circulation—had an average of 6% of their workforce classified as minorities. They reported that the average minority population of their circulation areas was about 18%.

Newsrooms are further along in terms of diversifying their management according to ASNE’s yearly census. For years, minority representation in leadership roles slowly grew in America but still was underrepresented proportionally to the population. In relation to supervisory positions—those who have a seat at the table—in the United States, minority workers account for 11% of all supervisors in newsrooms, which remains virtually unchanged from 2010 to 2013. Of all minorities, 21% are supervisors. (ASNE.org, 2013). The leadership roles held by racial and ethnic minorities are of primary importance in the exploration of the value of diversity in newsrooms. The number of minority managers and supervisors points directly to news media leadership’s commitment—or lack of—to diversity. It sends a message about how valuable varied points of view are in the guiding, gathering, editing, and presenting of news.

According to the policy statement by ASNE, newsroom diversity is “essential to the newspaper’s responsibility in a democratic society and success in the marketplace. To accurately and sensitively cover the community, newsroom staffs must reflect society as a whole” (ASNE.org, 2013).
Chapter II

Literature Review

News media leaders have—with nudges from inside and outside of the industry—sought to address years of bias as they realized their role as an integral part of the changing society. One initial step in redressing the grievances of minority audiences is a decades-old commission study commonly known as the Kerner Report, which questioned the influence of the news media on the highly politicized and then-growing civil rights movement. The group was brought together after a series of protests and riots forced the industry and society to train their eyes on how the media reported stories about the black community.

The Kerner Report came in 1968 from the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Former Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner guided it. The report took special interest in negative media influence and stated:

Our fundamental criticism is that the news media have failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as related matter, to meet the Negro’s legitimate expectations of journalism …. The media write and report from the standpoint of a white man’s world…. Slight and indignities are part of the Negro’s daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls “white press” – a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America. This may be understandable, but it is not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society. (Kerner Report Revisited, 1968, p. 92).

Nearly two generations have passed since the report sharply admonished the news media and suggested a number of changes to be more inclusive of blacks in their newspaper pages; certainly changes have been made. But the words of Kerner resound as loudly as before, stating
that “some newspapers and stations are beginning to make efforts to fill this void, but they have still a long way to go (Kerner Report Revisited, 1970, p. 92).

Throughout the report, the commission rebukes the coverage of diversity by the “white press” and, by extension, indicts the news industry for systemic biases that extended into newsroom staffing. Among the report’s recommendations were that newspapers and other news organizations should hire more black journalists and promote black journalists to decision-making roles (Kerner Report Revisited, 1970, p. 93).

Literature does not necessarily back an implied assertion leveled by the Kerner Report that the content would change to become more positively diverse because of diverse staffing levels. Research has attempted to relate minority staff representation with audience readership and some perceptions about the media outlet that produced the news. Findings in a study by Adams and Cleary (2006) appear to run counter to previous beliefs about minority trust and minority staffing in the newsroom. The analysis of data showed no significant relationship between the minority staff and percentage of all people who said they believe what they read. In fact—and perhaps surprisingly—the study found that as the number of minority staff at a newspaper increases, the less likely the black community is to believe all or almost all of what they read in the newspaper with which it is most familiar (2006, pp. 51-52). However, the perception in the findings of Adams and Cleary could be based on the lasting impressions of a media industry and prevailing culture whose framing of stories through the latter part of the 20th century has been predominantly negative or nonexistent. The lack of coverage of various minority communities by the mainstream media has been well documented (Cropp, Frisby, & Mills, 2003, p. 185-190). Coverage of minority groups continues to focus on negative aspects of the community affecting the perceptions of minority audience members and, thus, society in
general. Those negative examples include an seemingly unbalanced abundance of crime stories, or “stereotypically positive” articles that feature entertainers or sports figures (Cleary, 2005, para. 10). As media and media framing scholar Robert Entman has noted succinctly, print and broadcast media have not been able to provide a balanced view of racial minorities in their news coverage. It is worth noting, according to the Adams and Cleary study (2005), that there was no significant relationship between staffing levels and white “trust” of the newspaper. It also is worth noting that the study does not specifically measure how much of the coverage was executed by minority staffers.

In 1978, ASNE vowed that the industry would mirror the country’s demographic makeup by the end of the century. That year ASNE began compiling statistics that would show the slow but steady growth of minority representation in newsrooms (Edward and Pease, 1994, p. 9). In less than five years, however, those gains were forced back and the growing concern for diversity began to compete for recognition once again as it does now.

Despite the stated advantages of a diverse workforce, challenges still exist for hiring and retaining a diverse staff. These obstacles are typically due to communication and value differences between employees, the effectiveness and training of managers, and the corporate culture, all of which take time, commitment (from the top), and resources to mitigate. Some managers in a Brunner study, in fact, wondered, “why it is necessary to spend money, time, and energy on [diversity]” (2008, p. 156).

Thomas (1990) states minorities have found their way into business, but the problem now lies in their promotions to more senior level positions. Lehrman (2006), however, found that it has been difficult to hire and retain minority employees, at least in the news profession. Thomas (1990) also states that while prejudice may still play a role, management’s concerns over
minorities’ qualifications is more of a hindrance to hiring and promotion. This is a lasting negative effect of affirmative action, according to Gilbert, Stead and Ivancevich (1999), when the perception existed that hiring standards were lowered to attract minority candidates.

Knight Ridder Inc. was one of the leading newspaper chains to push for diversity in the 1990s until it was sold in 2006. The corporation’s commitment to diversity was clear as it created the position of vice president of staff development and diversity to focus on diversity training among other staffing initiatives. The Akron Beacon Journal, a Knight Ridder newspaper, weighed into the fray of newsroom diversity and journalist perceptions in 1993 as part of an attempt to assess the impact of race on American lives using the city of Akron. The medium-sized daily newspaper turned its focus inside enlisting nine white and eight black journalists to respectively form two separate focus groups. The results were two distinct sets of perceptions about the same institution. The Blacks, for the most part believed the deck was stacked against them. Despite the fact that the publisher at the time was an African-American, many felt that the real control was in the hands of white managers and staffers who did not understand the minority staff or the minority communities they were covering. In contrast, the white journalists at the newspaper felt that Blacks were receiving special treatment. According to the report, whites at the paper felt constant pressure “to bend over backward to embrace minority perspectives.” Focus groups of separate racial makeup in the Akron community found similar responses (Akron Beacon Journal archives, Edward and Pease, 1994). The different perceptions among the Black and white journalists is an indicator that exclusively exploring the attitudes of minority journalists about diversity in current newsroom culture will offer a distinct view, separate from other groups who are affected by the issue of diversity.
Theoretical Framework

Exploring communications, media effects, and racial and ethnic diversity requires a conceptual combination of theories that looks at how humans develop and form attitudes about self, others and their environment through a complex system of interactions. Here, those interactions take place within the unique workings of the modern newsroom. The themes that exert great force in American news media are that of framing and the divisions that exist among races leading to bias.

Critical Race Theory. First, consider the state of affairs that requires research into racial and ethnic diversity. The discussion would not be necessary except for two stances: a belief in ethical behavior that places great value on equality and the partial rejection of that belief. The ages-old ideology of equality is referenced by philosopher John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*, which encapsulates centuries of thought on fairness including principles of virtue, obligation and utility championed by philosophers Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and John S. Mill that seek equality among all members of society (Rawls, 1971, p. 10). Rawls theorized that a just society would value differences, account for them and make a plan that would bring parity to all. He wrote that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.

The antithesis of this philosophy—inequality, superiority, and oppression—is as old as the aforementioned obligations for equality. Race, the color of one’s skin, and one’s cultural ethnicity have been the great divide by which dominant cultures have separated and subjugated members of their societies. This research study, while not focusing solely on race relations in the newsroom, must be aware of the prevalent racial context and environment in which it is conducted.
Racism’s prominence in American society is explored anew in the relatively recent concept of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which holds two major tenets. First, racism is common and ordinary, i.e. “The usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012) Second, the systemic biases in the United States preserve white superiority through continuing psychological and material means and thus, the dominant culture sees no need to truly eradicate racial discrimination (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 8-9).

Critical Race Theory came to prominence as a movement as much as it did a theory, which was used primarily in the realm of law. It was applied to further the insistence for equal justice and rights for Blacks in America. Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw’s seminal and comprehensive look at the emerging theory and its influences show how it is spreading from courtroom to classroom to cultural concept (Crenshaw, 1995). Where the theory was an intersection of race and law, it now finds usefulness in efforts to explain the continued bias that permeates all areas of American institutions.

An aspect that weighs heavily within Critical Race Theory is that laws or policies are placed by a dominant culture and even those laws and policies that would address and correct inequalities are still biased because they are seen through the mindset of that dominant culture. For instance, diversity recruitment policies written by members of the dominant culture will invariably and quite naturally lack the perspective and values of the very people who are being sought. A 2000 study by three University of California professors, who looked at “microaggressions” on college campuses through the lens of CRT, found that while African-American students apparently were welcomed onto campus, within the classroom they experienced “micro” or subtle insults. Microaggressions are a less-obvious form of the pervasive
aspects of bias and racism that exists in American society and its microcosms such as media newsrooms. Although the slights might have been subconscious, they never the less led to demoralizing experiences or at the very least awkward faculty-student interactions (Solorzano, 2000, p. 66). The article published in the *Journal of Negro Education* found in the qualitative study that African-American students felt invisible on campuses where they were recruited. As one student was quoted, “I think that when the professors see that there’s fewer of you, they’re less likely to address your concerns” (Solorzano, 2000, p. 65). Another study illustrating the dichotomy of inclusion programs for African-Americans looked at the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill (2010). The study used Critical Race Theory and qualitative methodology to understand how the act that sought to fulfill the “American Dream” for military families after World War II and helped build the American middle class was virtually ineffective for Black veterans. The study found that from the time the Black soldiers were drafted, segregation was a major part of their experience that continued as the soldiers endeavored to employ the G.I. Bill in educating themselves for a better life. Despite the overwhelmingly positive tales told by the dominant white culture about the G.I. Bill delivering on the government’s promise to seed prosperity, African-American soldiers’ stories differed greatly. The Black soldiers’ experiences were as negative as their white counterparts’ experiences were positive (2010, p. 72).

Generally speaking, America and its institutions have been biased in their treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. The literature, history, and experiences that mark the racial prejudice in the United States are innumerable and still partially untold. The news media are a prime example of this institutionalized system of bias. They have and continue to be dominated by an elite group of white owners and leaders.
As Edward Pease predicted nearly two decades ago, racial and ethnic differences have continued to be an issue for America and its news media as “new racial and ethnic rivalries emerge, and the economy continues to restructure, with jagged results” (Pease, 1994, p. 105). The U.S. Census forecasts that by mid-century, the U.S. population will have increased by 45%, with a large segment of the additional 147 million people being traditional minorities. Much of media effects research has considered how mass media communicates about racial groups and frames issues in racial terms. Most of the research has revolved around the public perceptions of media messages: their impact versus societal influences, elaborative qualities, influencing beliefs and behaviors, and influence on the most vulnerable – children and minorities. (Bryant and Oliver, 2009). Research on race in public discourse tends to fall into two categories: a broad look at how media communicate about racial groups and frame political issues in racial terms, or it focuses specifically on how politicians discuss race (Coe and Schmidt, 2011).

As it relates to journalism and diversity, Critical Race Theory highlights the importance of news media in society and how issues are covered and how they are covered resonates in a society already plagued by bias. According to a 2004 study, the role of racial and ethnic diversity has come to play a pivotal role in socially responsible news coverage (Rivas-Rodriguez, Subervi-Velez, Bramlett-Soloman & Heider, 2004). Theodore Peterson’s (1956) exploration of social responsibility theory found a direct connection between news media’s obligation as a member of society and its interaction with traditional minority communities. The basis of the theory as seen by Peterson is “freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society” (Peterson, 1956, p. 74). One of Peterson’s requirements for news media to be considered socially responsible is
especially important to racial and ethnic minorities in this country. It was media’s obligation to protect ‘a representative picture of the constituent groups in society’” (1956, p. 91). Thus, the perceptions of journalists who are racial and ethnic minorities are integral in diversifying the content of the news media outlets, giving a voice to a often-silenced minority and expanding the agenda for society’s views on difference. (Barringer, 1999; Hall & Stone, 1980; Stone, 1988).

**Framing theory.** Most journalists believe that the common processes and principles for the basic duties in journalism do not change in the face of diversity. Diversity, however, has become an integral concept in how those duties are employed with factors such as race and ethnicity in play. Reporting unique happenings in the world and telling the stories of society is greatly influenced—if not directly guided—by the framing that is innate as well as infused through newsroom interaction. As the phenomenon of demographic shifts in the newsroom continues, framing appears to be the consistent embodiment of organizational culture, staff attitudes, and personal beliefs and real or perceived messages from the audience.

At the theoretical and organizational center of news media is framing. The theory is part of an open secret about the true nature of selecting news and its impact. It was a goal of this study to understand the interaction between the framing and diversity messages and perceptions within the culture of the newsroom.

Framing is grounded in media studies surrounding political messages. In research by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), messages of a political nature through media channels are central to the study of public opinion. Researchers realize race is an important variable of a variety of political outcomes, from perceptions of and by groups to beliefs about key issues to actual voting patterns (Tesler & Sears, 2010). Mendelberg’s seminal study (2001) of even implicit racial appeals demonstrated that when politicians and other elite
information providers invoke race, Americans experience the political messages in terms of their own perceptions of race, showing the power of frames as an evocative element for cognitive processes both immediate and lasting (2001, p 4-5).

Scheufele (1999) identifies the study of news framing as it encompasses three primary stages: mental framing, group framing, and content framing. Mental frames are the frames individuals have as a result of processing the external or content frames perceived when consuming news. Our mental frame acts like a filter on incoming frames to help us organize and form ideas and opinions. Depending on the congruence of news frames to our own mental frames it may be a lengthy process to determine the salience of new frames that either alter or reinforce our philosophy and outlook. Group frames are the frames we gather collectively as a culture. They may be expressed as stereotypes, or frames we apply to the information we receive based on how we were raised, where we grew up, and our cultural beliefs.

According to media scholar Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text.” He added that by doing this, the writer or editor promote a particular problem and define it, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (1993, pp. 52-53).

Think of media framing as a frame of a window and not a mirror. Although it is a representation of events and people, it is not a direct representation of the world because some of the context is no longer there. Here we get closer to defining the problem on connecting minority reader perceptions with diversity in the newsroom. We must ask how much of the frame building and usage is based on the personal biases, preconceptions, beliefs of the individual news-gatherer, and the culture of the newsroom. Schudson believes that the primary factors in the distortion innate to framing are not simply personal ones. “They are socially organized
distortions built into the structures and routines of news gathering. Most of the subjectivity in
news is not idiosyncratic and personal but patterned and predictable” (2011, pp. 26-29).

Journalists do not make their decisions randomly. They depend on reliable shorthand,
conventions, routines, habits, and assumptions about how, why, and where to gather the news.
Intentional bias certainly exists in the news media. By discussing framing instead of bias,
however, we accept the possibility that news metaphorically might speak in more than one voice
and be heard by even more ears.

Research on results of framing has assumed a direct link between media frames and
individual outcomes. Shanto Iyengar, scholar of media framing, points to the link in episodic and
thematic framing. In a Political Communication article about how citizens are influenced by
framing as they strive to understand public issues, Iyengar is quoted as saying:

People exposed to episodic coverage of various issues—crime, terrorism, poverty, and
racial inequality—tended to attribute responsibility for these issues to individuals rather
than institutions or broad societal forces. Poverty, for instance, was viewed as a
consequence of human laziness or lack of initiative; crime as a manifestation of anti-
social personality traits. When people saw thematic frames, however, their attributions of
responsibility were much more likely to focus on societal and political actors—politicians,
policies, the economic context etc. In this sense, thematic framing encourages people to
hold society accountable and vice-versa (Feinberg 2009, pg. 2).

Douglas Kellner gives the audience more responsibility for creating its own perceptions.
“All texts are subject to multiple readers depending on the perspectives and subject positions of
the readers,” according to Kellner. In his chapter in the book Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism
and Media Culture (2011), Kellner points out the areas that influence or contextualize readings
including distinct classes, genders, races, nations, regions, sexual preferences, and political ideologies. Kellner added: “Media culture provides materials for individuals and communities to create identities and meanings.”

The concepts of framing held by Entman shine an even brighter light on the loss of minority journalists and the needs for diversity. In interviews conducted for Pew Research (2008), editors in charge of newsrooms said departing journalists are among the most experienced and talented. As many of these reporting and editing veterans go, they take with them the knowledge of their beat and their community, a deep loyalty to core journalistic values, and expertise so important to understanding stories and the people in them. “When an experienced editor leaves, the editing process weakens—and with it, a degree of the paper’s collective wisdom and judgment” (Pew Research Center, www.journalism.org, n.d.).

Realizing the omnipresence of framing in newsrooms and its power to mold and form public opinion for an audience, it is important to understand the process by which organizations develop these frames, how those frames are perpetuated and how the process is affected by diverse perspectives.

**Cascading Activation Model.** Individual journalists operate within an established hierarchical system. Entman’s Cascading Activation Model (CAM) shows the process by which information is introduced and decisions are made in an open system that explains the overall approach of news media’s framing of political events and serves as a macro model for general journalism processes inside individual newsrooms. Entman suggests framing in the political arena starts at the presidential level and cascades like a waterfall through multiple levels, including media framing.

Entman (2003) applied his cascading activation model to his study of how the White
House framed the events of September 11, 2001, because he wanted to explore news frames that came directly from the administration. Entman says journalists and individuals are more likely to agree with the frame that was applied to it at the White House if it is framed with existing congruent cultural assumptions of American people.

The top tier is labeled administration and includes the White House, the State, and other governmental sources of news in relation to all subject matter and specifically, in this case, to threats against the nation. The next tier is what Entman calls “Other Elites”; government employees like members of Congress, industry experts, and foreign leaders. Some elite media with far-reaching influence belong in this tier because they “exercise more sway over the spread of ideas than all but the most powerful public officials” such as the *New York Times* (Entman, 2004 p. 11).

The model shows the circulation of framing up and down the “cascade,” which implies that newsroom leaders and staff influence each other’s organizational and personal frames.

According to Entman, the CAM highlights the interactions of four important variables that influence the activation and spread of the preferred frame from the White House administration to other elites including news leaders, to news texts, and to the public: motivations, cultural congruence, power, and strategy. Entman theorized motivations and cultural congruence work internally to “pull” mental associations into individuals' thinking and that power and strategy, on the other hand, operate from the outside to "push" consideration of frames (Cascading Activation, 2003, p 419).

*Entman’s Cascading Activation Model*
Entman asserts that “top editors, correspondents and editorialists” influence the media’s audience second only to prominent public officials at the administrative level of his model (2003). News, as well, influences audience ideas and opinions, which in turn influence the way public officials and journalists frame the news. The result is that frames can be contested and challenged, which appears more often in opinion pieces (Entman, 2004). ‘Counterframes’ emerge in these instances. They are the frames that are found credible in the public sphere.
against those that originated with the elite. Entman calls it “framing parity” when a counterframe competes at the same level as a frame that originated at the top of the model and gives the audience an opposing perspective on the story. Achieving Entman’s idea of parity, however, is uncommon. The frames that are created at the upper tiers of this model and continue through the cascading activation model are frames that are culturally congruent to what the public already accepts as true.

Using the ascribed model of media framing set forth in Entman’s Cascading Activation Model provided an opportunity to understand to what extent is diversity a factor for minorities who lead newsrooms as they work within a landscape that has fewer of them, who have greater responsibility and greater challenges. Through the CAM approach, this research explored and organized the perceptions about information gathering and dissemination about diversity. This study was also an opportunity to compare the CAM macrocosm of societal communication to that of the newsroom environment in which minority leaders in the newsroom share a commensurate experience with the Cascading Activation taking place in the American political arena.

Communications professor Paul D’Angelo (2002) finds that the process of news framing is more conscious than Entman believes. D’Angelo asserts news framing is often used as a method of governing how individuals view people, situations, or issues, by becoming an active part of media strategy. In D’Angelo’s research, there is a more complex view of how news framing occurs and how it is influenced. He agrees with Reese (2001) who sees frames in general as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001 p. 7).

Handley (2010), used the CAM as part of research looking at United States President
George W. Bush’s popularized “War on Terror” and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Data from the study suggest that during periods of international coalition building, international protagonists may become a significant agent in the cascading activation process. In the “War on Terror,” reporters undertook an “international indexing.” They not only indexed domestic opinion, but also reported the range of debate among nations important to administration goals. Israel was framed as a strategic liability for Bush precisely when his administration was attempting to build an international coalition in support of its war on terrorism and invasion of Iraq. Consistent with the cascading model, newspapers internalized the domestic coalition’s frame only when the president did, but not before, and legitimized international concerns only when Bush did. When Bush reframed Israel from strategic liability to strategic partner, the papers reframed Israeli military activities from harming to facilitating the United States’ war on terrorism (2010, p. 454-55).

To further illustrate the power of the top-down model of information dissemination by the top tier actors, Hacker and Pierson (2005) looked at the framing that occurred surrounding the tax cuts during the President Bush’s administration in 2001. Unlike cutting the deficit, cutting taxes were not as high of a priority for most Americans. Before 2001, virtually no more than 10% of respondents to national polls said that taxes were America's "most important problem." When Bush entered office, the figure was just 5%. In fact, a large majority of Americans expressed clear hostility to the tax cut's size. Through concerted and repetitive efforts from the White House, opinion turned. Hack and Pierson found public opinion on tax cuts was deliberately shaped by political actors framing policy design to confuse voters, elevate surface support for tax cuts, and betray clearly expressed public priorities. (2005, p. 38).

When combining Entman’s (2003) Cascading Activation Model and other ideas of how
news frames and information are shaped and cycled through the various strata of society (D’Angelo, Scheufele, and Reese), this research was able to use the framework of CAM to compare and highlight perceptions about diversity and its value are held by minorities managers and non-supervisory staff members. Taking into account the phenomenon of job losses and the impact on the community of minority journalists, the following research questions were proposed:

**RQ1.** What are the prevailing attitudes toward diversity among racial and ethnic minorities in management or executive positions in the newsrooms?

**RQ2.** What are minority journalists’ perceptions of connections among newsroom diversity and framing behaviors in the newsroom as they relate to coverage of racial and ethnic groups?

**RQ3.** What pressures and challenges do minorities in the newsroom feel to advance the cause of diversity?
Chapter III
Methodology

To explore newsroom attitudes with sensitivity and using my years of experience within newspaper newsrooms and my knowledge and perceptions of newsroom culture as a minority and long-time newspaper reporter, designer, and editor, I looked to grounded theory’s research strategies and qualitative research techniques to allow me to obtain data that could be somewhat illusive. The quantitative results to linking newsroom diversity numbers and output are well documented (Adam and Cleary, 2006, and Dedman and Doing, 2005). What was missing is the deeper understanding that is achieved through techniques based in the elements of qualitative research.

As cited by Roy Sunday, Glaser and Strauss (1967) discovered grounded theory as a practical and structured method for research. For this study, grounded theory’s research design characteristics are paramount. They are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and the sampling of different groups—rank-and-file staffers and managers—to maximize the similarities and differences of information (Creswell, 2009, p.13). Grounded theory is predicated on the researcher’s interpretive process through analyzing the “the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings” (Gephart, 2004, p. 457). Although the body of research involved here rests under the oft-studied concept of newsroom diversity’s impact on readers’ attitudes about content, the goal of this specific research study was to look beyond the numbers and to understand personal perceptions and attitudes in the setting of a newsroom ravaged and seemingly blighted by loss of all personnel but specifically minority staffers.

In order to elicit deeply held beliefs and attitudes about the sensitive and sometimes uncomfortable subjects of race and difference, an approach was required that demanded
layered data that can be compared. Grounded theory methods and techniques do this and also provide the tools and structure to gather it. There is a natural congruence between researching people’s mindsets and the approach that promotes description and theorizing nearly simultaneously. In order to answer the questions raised by looking at the current changes journalism is experiencing and by examining the previous research and exploration into diversity in the news media, this study recruited minority participants in management and rank-and-file positions in news-gathering organizations. These participants addressed the top research question concerning the prevailing attitudes and perceptions about diversity for minority journalists who both have a seat at the table those who are reacting to diversity issues as staff.

**Data Collection**

This qualitative study, like many others, intended to look at differences in participants, their backgrounds, and their experiences to find commonalities that help the researcher understand a phenomenon or status. A total of 17 minority journalists participated in this study. Their ages and professional work experience cover more than four decades. The positions within news organizations range from a first-year online reporter to mid-level managers to a corporate vice president and most newsroom positions in between. All work or have worked in a newspaper newsroom, where the changes in the current journalism environment have been most profound because of losses in advertising, the medium’s primary source of income.

I interviewed the 17 minority journalists and categorized the participants into two groups, managers and rank-and-file staffers. Fourteen of the participants identified as Black or African-American. Two of them identified as Hispanic or Latino and one as Asian. The study refers to all participants using the term “journalists,” drawing no distinction between the categories or positions in the news organization. When differentiation is required, the groups will be termed
staff, non-managers, or non-supervisors for rank-and-file staffers and managers, supervisors, editor and executive to refer to the group of managers. The individual participants are identified by a code for the sake of anonymity. The letter “A” denotes a manager; the letter “R” denotes non-managers. The numbers are used as separate identification within the group. Appendix A gives a further breakdown of the participants’ news organization, its regional location, and its size.

The journalists participated voluntarily in the study. The majority of the journalists worked at newspapers in the U.S. One of them worked in the United Kingdom. As recruitment resources, I used member lists from minority-advocate organizations and a personal network of journalists. The recruitment process consisted of email and phone solicitations. As subscribed to by qualitative research, I produced an interview guide for participants who consented to the phone or Skype interviews, which last from 30 minutes to an hour each. The interviews took place from April through early June of 2014.

As I collected data from the observation and interviews, I began to code and categorize concepts for comparison and member checking as prescribed by grounded theory. The sample size allowed for comparison and member checking among the entire group. Codes were developed in vivo from data and from field notes and memos. Memos offered the opportunity for constant comparison of not only the data I collected but also the interpretations and concepts I made.
Chapter IV

Findings

The study found that minority journalists, while not all relishing a place in leadership, perceive benefits of minorities having a seat at the proverbial table, where policy and strategy about diversity issues are developed and supported. Minority journalists also perceive that diversity issues inside the nation’s shrinking newsrooms lag far behind other news media concerns.

The perceptions around the term “diversity” were broad and included a matter of background, experiences and socio-economics and class. The term “diversity” has been most often used with regard to race. It’s apparent that at the introduction of affirmative action policies, “diversity” was chiefly defined by race and gender. The term today, however, is more inclusive and encompasses ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religious and political preferences, age, education, socioeconomic status, and more. Each of the minority journalists included most of these categories when asked how they defined diversity. However, they did believe that while they were aware of all diversity, their tendency was to see race and ethnicity as one of the most important categories in a tight competition with socioeconomic status and age. As corporate executive (A9) said: “For certain communities and certain audiences, you rather get a Bowling Green graduate or Kent State or Dayton instead of Yale or Harvard. The assumption that a lofty, pedigreed school is better preparation for real-world journalism is not necessarily so. We have to relate and engage our community. That’s what newsroom diversity is about.”

The thoughts on age diversity was less about a range of ages but more to the point of recruiting typically young, technologically savvy—even if inexperienced—journalists into the newsroom. Participants saw great value in digital natives who have been raised in the digital era and who are adept at navigating the Web including social media. Participants also hoped to
replenish an aging newsroom. Job cuts between 2007 and 2009 hurt minorities and newly professional journalists—often the two were the same, according to minority journalists. One Midwestern newspaper photographer (R2) blamed the loss of age diversity on unions, which protect rank-and-file journalists. He said: “Back when I first started we did have that young to old diversity. In the 2000s everything kind of collapsed. And I don’t think we were smart then. Instead of encouraging some of our older people to leave and keep some of the young people we hired. I think some of the rules should have been augmented to keep some of the youth and energy that we had.

**Leading Themes**

One of two leading themes that emerged through this study is an unqualified perception that diversity, specifically race and ethnicity, along with diversity’s journalistic and social worth are on the back burner—a metaphor introduced by several of the participants—of newsroom concerns. As one former city editor (A8) stated: “It’s completely off the stove.” A newspaper sports journalist (R1), continuing the analogy, wondered: “I can only guess that it was even on the stove.” Every one of the journalists said diversity is less important than finances. They agreed that if there is additional costs associated with adding diversity to the staff or promoting diversity as a newsroom advantage and coverage focus, chances are great that those initiatives would have a tough time being funded. This belief is consistent with cuts to recruitment and retention personnel who were a part of the job losses in the newsroom.

The two categories of study participants—managers and rank-and-file staffers—were divided as to the degree of resistance those requests would meet. Those journalists with years of professional experience recalled newsrooms with recruiters who were charged with facilitating hiring strictly for the newsroom and who were directed to provide a diverse pool of candidates as
the push for hiring traditional minorities gained more traction in the 1990s. Most of those jobs have been folded into the duties of the department managers and editors. Minority journalists, who once relied on visits by recruiters at their respective minority conventions and job fairs, have come to rely on traditional methods of job searches and personal networks to get their feet in door or to find opportunities for promotions. With a dearth of minorities as hiring managers, this loss of official minority recruitment was seen as profound. Another top finding—with unanimous agreement among minority journalists—is the perception that diversity is indeed valuable and necessary even in the face of economic constraints and should be appreciated for its social worth to the community and as a part of good journalism and storytelling.

The commonalities that were found from this diverse group of journalists can be compared readily to that of Entman’s participants in his CAM (Cascading Activation Model) relative to minority journalists’ perceptions of people and ideas that inform and influence the policy and discussion surrounding diversity. The modules that compare to the CAM model of framing will be explained further throughout this section.

**Valuable and necessary.**

All of the participants gave at least one example in which they felt that they or another minority journalist—because of their status as a minority—was a benefit to better news coverage. In explaining better coverage, the participants pointed to the accuracy and a wider spectrum of voices for stories that otherwise might miss vital nuances about a specific racial or ethnic group or might completely exclude points of view from those directly affected.

It’s important to note that the examples for most of the participants were not directly requested but came often during an explanation of their definition of diversity, often beginning candidly with the sentence, “Let me give you an example.” The need for an example to help
explain the term diversity led to the idea that the value of diversity is so tied to its definition as to be intrinsic for minority journalists. The journalists appeared to think that the definition of diversity was incomplete or lacking if the perceived benefits were not offered alongside the explanation of the term.

A metro editor (A5) for a southern newspaper offered the example of a debate in his newsroom about how to cover and, more importantly to him, how to present the death of Maya Angelou in May of 2014. Angelou, an Black woman, was an iconic writer and poet, having been a United States poet laureate and one of only two speakers to read a poem at a presidential inauguration. For a daily, morning newspaper, the breaking news that occurs on one day will be published the following day. That fact prompted many sitting at their afternoon news meeting to think that Angelou’s death will be considered old news the next morning and thus unworthy of display on the front page. The metro editor recounted what he said at the meeting: “But the pain won’t be old. And what she meant to many people in our audience will last for long after tomorrow.”

During the interview, he lamented that he was one of only two minorities in the room that day and feared that had he not been there the outcome would have a been much different. That instead of a large footprint on the front page for an important Black and female figure, the highly regarded author might be relegated to a place of much less prominence forcing members of audience, specifically his city’s Black community, to question the newspaper’s ideology.

The executive editor (A7) of a Florida newspaper remembered “with great pride” the depth of coverage he was able to guide during a tumultuous time in the state. The story was that of the shooting death of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in February of 2012 and the subsequent acquittal of Zimmerman the next year.
Martin was a 17-year-old African-American high school student and Zimmerman is a bi-racial man of Hispanic descent. Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch coordinator for the gated community where Martin was temporarily staying, shot the unarmed teen claiming he did so in self-defense. He was released on the night of the incident prompting widespread anger and protests about the alleged mishandling of the case by Sanford, Florida, police. Weeks later, Zimmerman was charged with murder by a special state’s prosecutor. A jury acquitted Zimmerman on second-degree and manslaughter charges. (CNN.com, Timeline of events in Trayvon Martin Case, p. 1)

The editor (A7) concluded that the best way to get a more nuanced appreciation for the case and the story was to look beyond the alleged crime and to the perceptions within the communities affected by it. The editor said: “What did it mean to be Black or Hispanic in Sanford? And not just how the shooting has changed that experience. But ferret out the ghosts of a place and do it with sensitivity. Maybe another editor, who wasn’t a person of color, would have thought that questions needed to be answered. Maybe not.” He added that much of what they accomplish in the “360 degree coverage” came about because of the diverse staff, which had gained more Hispanics and Blacks in the recent years before the Martin shooting.

A wire editor (R4) gave the example of a first-person column he was asked to write following the violent death of a family member within his newspaper’s coverage area. The reporter: “I definitely had some insights that others would not have had. And I guess it helped that I could write about it and write it well. And I guess I had a known presence and some cred in the Black community. And, frankly, I think it was as much for the non-African-Americans as it was for those in the community.”
The Table: Being There, Getting There

Overall, minority journalists in this study do see benefits to having minorities at the proverbial table. Those benefits were in line to a somewhat similar study done 15 years prior to this study before the Great Recession and economic disruptions that plague the news media industry. In the study at the Unity: Journalists of Color convention in Seattle, Washington, four positive effects were highlighted (Rivas-Rodriguez, et al., p. 52). Three of those four also were the focus of minority journalists in this study: the newspaper or news organization’s stated sensitivity to racial bias, the coverage of minority groups—including but not limited to minority races—and greater job opportunity for minorities seeking jobs and those already working for the media outlet. Not alluded to by minority journalists in the current study was the fourth idea found in the 2004 research: minority leaders could influence how the news media think about minority groups. This leads me to surmise that while the first three suppositions are based on a leaders individual’s ability and control certain specific processes of business, the fourth benefit would require a change in others belief systems and cognitive responses. A reoccurring idea is that bias—in spite of years of training against it—still permeates newsroom culture. “The struggle is alive. Anyone who says that we’ve moved on isn’t aware of the situation. It may not be as overt as it once was but it is still apart of the industry as much as it is apart of American society.” one editor (A2) said. This supports the perception by minority journalists that other groups believe that the evolution of America in terms of tolerance and inclusion has somehow made promoting diversity unnecessary, an obsolete notion that faded as the country elected its first Black president. Minority journalists who believed the idea is wishful thinking at best and race-baiting rhetoric at worst did not validate the perception.
One former publisher (A3) said that hiring diverse leadership is the single-most important action a media outlet can do in support of diversity and to show its worth. Hiring someone, specifically a diverse someone, to lead your company shows a commitment, he said. A seat at the table for minorities—racial, ethnic, and all others—was more important among those journalists already in leadership roles. Those interviewees who were not in management positions were not as enthusiastic about a need for minorities at the table, and were equally unexcited about the prospect of their ascendance to a leadership role. A line editor (R4) said he was comfortable where he was and that he believed making the leap to management wouldn’t be easy and probably would not initially bring greater impact for diversity issues. “I get a lot out of what I’m doing here. I think I can influence reporters and I can manage up. I just have to ask myself ‘Is it worth it?’” These divergent views led to the idea that for minority journalists’ power and influence can be best understood once it is wielded.

**Credibility.** There was an expectation from non-managers that minorities in decision-making roles were not afforded the same level of power and, thus, aspiring to the table would be an achievement in title and little else. Several of the reporters and copy editors saw those minority editors and managers as supervisors charged with mostly menial editing and administrative tasks and not in position to hold sway over substantial change when it came to putting diversity on the front burner in the newsroom culture or thinking. The non-managers, however, did see some benefit to having minorities who could hire.

Mid-level managers and even executives were wholly aware of the perceptions others employees, including other minority journalists, have about their power and influence. A few managers mentioned that the chain of command was not always followed by staffers who went around or above those managers to discuss or get approval for their work from white managers.
The perception by those few managers was that staffers believed the direct supervisor who was a minority would not have to authority to give a definitive or final answer. The editor (A7) from the mid-south said, “When it happened to me I was a little upset, but mostly concerned that I wasn’t seen as a figure able to help my team. That would be the worst part for me.” One regional editor (A2) from the Midwest: “It’s the old idea of affirmative action. Sadly, it’s drilled into our considerations. Some think, ‘Oh, they needed a number, a quota, of faces at that table.’ And I’ll give the old answer. How I got here is one thing; how well I do the job is another.”

She (A2) and several others felt that their presence and their voices could affect change by prompting discussion about diversity issues beyond daily coverage of racial and ethnic issues. They felt they would be more likely to seek a diverse pool of candidates when hiring and more willing to look deeper into a minority candidates strengths and weaknesses for holding a particular position. A southern sports editor (A4) said: “Let face it. We’re human, and we feel more comfortable with people who we think are like us and, well, look like us. With more people who are minorities doing some of the hiring, I have to believe that the chances get better for more minority hires.”

Many negative ideas have been perpetuated as diversity became the focus of the national work force including news organizations. Participants believed those must be addressed in order to move forward. They highlighted several myths to confront including that idea that diversity creates a less capable staff, who were picked because they mirrored someone’s ideal picture of newsroom diversity. One metro editor (A5) said: “I want to move up. And I know that every step I take will have those who think I didn’t get there on my own merit. There’s little I can do, personally, except do the job well. Years of anti-affirmative action arguments have built that wall and unfortunately more than our [minority journalists] hard work is needed to tear it down.”
The idea of managers and executives guiding what is covered and how it is covered was a major point to discuss for both categories of interviewees. The two groups agreed that newsroom leadership influences coverage. The level of that influence was debated and led to the supposition that news coverage and messages that inform the perceptions of diversity were similarly influenced and guided by newsroom leadership. It was a matter of degree.

All of the journalists agreed that overall direction of the newspaper’s philosophy toward covering a specific topic or a geographical area and how many resources are directed toward specific coverage would be handled by leaders of the media organization through a top-down system. Most ideas, however, for stories to pursue would be equally influenced by reporters covering their specific “beats” and the public’s requests to know more about those things that directly affect them.

**Making policy.** The minority journalists perceive messages about diversity that come from leadership as policy and edicts to be followed and that indicate the company’s point of view and show a connection to its overall mission. These messages, whether requiring action or discussion, are often spread throughout the news environment without regard for individual experiences in the field and carry an air of oppression, most of the rank-and-file staff believed. One former reporter (R6) said:

> We were asked once to try and get photographs of all the people we talked to for our stories, and that we should try to make sure that we had as many different skin colors as possible. They called it mainstreaming. It had its moments. It was like a fad diet. You can start with the best intentions and even change how and what you eat, but you can’t live like that. It needed to be integrated into our work flow and, well, just become second nature without so much force.”
Speaking from the other side of the debate was the Midwestern regional editor (A2) for a wire service, who said: “At a point, the need to move forward supersedes some of the discussion and debating. The hope is that those gathered at that table of leadership are diverse in not only race and gender and age and what have you, but that they are diverse in thought and have weighed thoughtfully the impact their policies will have in the newsroom and outside of it.”

The minority journalists in both categories saw the path to leadership as narrow and rocky. As one editor (A7) said: “There’s no direct pipeline for getting these jobs. It requires someone who’s willing to grow a tough skin and take some risks.” The editor said that many possible top managers and editors are not willing to make geographic changes in order to position themselves for greater responsibility. He added: “I understand moving your family can be a tough decision, but there’s sacrifices and there’s benefits. The greater impact is being at the top.” The editor paraphrased a memorable quote from former New York Times city and culture editor Arthur Gelb: “As a reporter you can have 17 ideas and you can get around to two or three of them, but as an editor you can have 17 ideas and have 17 reporters go out and get those stories. And to come full circle, those stories could be about anything and everything including and hopefully community diversity.”

**Friends and Bedfellows**

The time frame minority journalists considered to show the arc of changes mentioned above and related to diversity is approximately over the last 10 to 15 years. Those years encompass both the highest rate of minority staffing in newspapers and the nearly 25% loss of total news media workforce, according to ASNE (2013) and the Pew Center for Research (2012). Also at the start of that period came a telling announcement from ASNE—arguably the preeminent organization for the diversity growth and diversity accountability in newspapers. The
organization decided to lower their expectations for minority staffing saying their previous commitment for U.S. newspapers to "reflect the racial diversity of American society" by 2000 would not happen. Thus, they would seek parity in hiring no later than 2025—a year in which some estimates predict minorities will make up 40% of the U.S. population. Twenty years ago, about 4% of newsroom employees were minorities, and the nation's minority population stood at about 15%, according to ASNE officials (Freedom Forum, 1998, para. 2).

Most of the minority journalist applauded the efforts of organizations such as ASNE, the major minority-advocate organizations (National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalist, American Asian Journalist Association and Native American Journalists Association). They believed this recalibration to be an opportunity to keep the idea of diversity fresh and make those in seats of power aware that someone—many of them colleagues and counterparts within the industry—is watching.

Each of the organizations mentioned above and others including the Society of Professional Journal (SPJ), National Newspaper Association (NNA), Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA), National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association (NLGJA), and Unity: Journalists of Color provide resources to aid in the furtherance of diversity issues and to offer sensitivity awareness for those covering the various minority groups. Journalists were aware of these organizations and their support of diversity, but perceived that organizations were often ignored by those in power and that more frequent expressions of the support and a more collaborative effort would be beneficial. One southern reporter (R5) said: “It goes without saying that the bigger you are, the stronger you are. People have to pay some attention to the loudest voice in the room.” The comment comes as Unity (originally made up of the four minority journalism organizations) has lost of two of its founding organizations. Both the NABJ and
NAHJ left the organization following tensions about how Unity doled out revenue among the member organizations following the conference held every four years.

Several journalists believed that these organizations are most effective when they are consistently promoting the virtues of diversity. They believed it was more important for the groups to be proactive as opposed to reactive. The same thoughts were assigned to media audiences. One reporter from the south (R5) said: “It’s certainly apathy, and it’s priorities and time. The readers are reactionary and very specific about it. If it doesn’t offend them they won’t say a word. If I could convey to them that they hold so much power. If they want more representation or more coverage or more anything, they’ll have to ask.”

**The Water Cooler: The Power of Peer Communication**

As we discussed, when considering the power of minorities in leadership roles, the top-down structure was found to be the most often used process for creating and altering newsroom culture and newsroom action. The reactions by rank-and-file staff and mid-level managers to messages about diversity delivered directly from the top were believed to be mitigated and informed by newsroom peers. Minority journalists reported participating in impromptu conversations where informal vetting of policies took place. The participants say that they would seek clarity from peers before going to supervisors or top management. This led to the belief that statements–even those that require change in behavior–that are not clearly and emphatically stated are left open to interpretation, misinterpretation, and even misappropriation by those with personal agendas.

Minority journalists also perceive peer engagement as an opportunity from further discussion especially when it comes to diverse peer groups. A reporter at a small daily in the Midwest (R3) said:
I don’t always agree with the way management has done things as far as with policies about diversity coverage. And certainly I might not have agreed with the policy itself. But it always causes a buzz in the newsroom. It spurs discussion. It makes white folks brave enough to ask questions and talk about things we all should have been asking about before. The very definition of diversity is something we have yet to really talk about. I believe everyone thinks if you’re African-American, all you think about is race.

**Framing Diversity: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

Minority journalists alluded to the importance of the approach leaders take in communicating about diversity issues. It appears clear that the perception is diversity carries the most influence as policy, training, and discussion beginning with and delivered from top news organization leaders. Participants, however, said that buy-in from staff is influenced by perceptions about the delivery method.

A Mid-south newspaper leader (A7) said: “It’s never good if it comes off as a wishy-washy. Diversity talk, discussions have to be pointed and direct. And it can, should never appear to be something that is a necessary evil. If we’re not enthusiastically promoting a new idea or new approach that we earnestly believe will have a positive effect for readers and for staff then why bother.”

Participants agreed, pointing to two ideas: First, staff should be able to relate directly to training as a part of their work, and second, there is measureable outcome. Employee buy-in has been identified as an important component of successful training initiatives, organizations should be cognizant of the potential impact that framing could have on employees’ attitudes toward training (Chrobot-Mason, 2004, p. 13-14).
Some of the participants say the negative inferences of Black reporters Janet Cooke and Jayson Blair are long-lasting. Then-*Washington Post* reporter Cooke, made up an 8-year-old heroin addict in a 1980 Pulitzer Prize winning story. Blair is the infamous *New York Times* reporter who fabricated and plagiarized several stories and ultimately led to the resignation of the newspaper’s first Black managing editor, the late Gerald Boyd. As syndicated columnist Clarence Page points out, however, for every Jayson Blair there are more non-minorities who have committed the same unspeakable journalistic sins and have not condemned every other white journalist by them (Tribune Media Services, 2003, para. 11). Following the incident at the *New York Times*, columnist Bob Herbert (an African-American), like this study’s participants, stated that diversity critics appropriated these incidents. Herbert wrote:

*Listen up: the race issue in this case is as bogus as some of Jayson Blair's reporting. Folks who delight in attacking anything Black, or anything designed to help Blacks, have pounced on the Blair story as evidence that there is something inherently wrong with the Times' effort to diversify its newsroom, and beyond that, with the very idea of a commitment to diversity or affirmative action anywhere. And while these agitators won't admit it, the nasty subtext to their attack is that there is something inherently wrong with Blacks.* (New York Times archives, 2003, para. 10)

**Marketing**

In remarks about the challenges to diversity and promoting the value in it, the participants often mentioned the need for celebrating the triumphs. As one columnist (R7) said, “The shouts of praise for the successes about diversity should equal the outcries of contempt.” An editor (A7) recalled an executive order by President Barack Obama to promote “diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce, making federal workplaces models that tap talents from all segments of
society” (EEOC, 2011, para. 2,3). He said, “It wasn’t a big deal for a lot the media, well, except for Fox. I think I even heard someone say, ‘What else would you expect.’ You know, implying that he’s Black and he’s trying to get more Blacks jobs in government. And I remember thinking, ‘I certainly hope so.’ ”

The order directed the federal government management agencies “to establish a government-wide initiative. The plans should identify strategies to remove barriers to equal opportunity in federal government recruitment, hiring, promotion, retention, professional development and training. Within 120 days after the government-wide plan is released, each agency must to issue its own agency-specific Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.” The editor (A7) continued: “That’s a plan, and that’s a commitment. There’s nothing wrong with announcing your commitments.” Others also saw the need for more public acknowledgement and celebration of “diversity done right.” They perceived the unwillingness to play up new initiatives and positive changes in newsroom throughout the organization and in public about diversity as a lack of transparency and even some semblances of uncertainty and even shame.

Summary

The framework of Entman’s CAM and the Critical Race Theory helped highlight the processes by which perceptions by minority journalists were informed and influenced. CRT’s approach to American society’s racial biases as being pervasive was in line with minority journalists’ perception that race and ethnicity were still the top issues when exploring diversity. The theory’s other tenet also connects directly to the idea that newspaper leadership, which is predominantly white, makes it difficult for minority journalists to ascend to the proverbial table. The CAM approach mirrored the ideology of top-down business models used in news production and, thus, the perception that leadership held the best promise for adding diversity into the
dialogue amongst other vital issues facing the news industry and promoting its value in newsroom culture.

During data gathering and analysis the previously mentioned themes surfaced and within those themes came the answers to the three research questions derived from the phenomenon of job losses in media newsrooms and guided by the previous research on diversity and its valued. Here are the results for each of the three research questions originally posed for this study.

First, when seeking to answer what are the prevailing attitudes toward diversity among racial and ethnic minorities in management or executive positions in the newsrooms, the study found the prevailing attitude was concern for the issues of diversity in the wake of economic hardships suffered by news media. In the last decade, there has been a decline in recruitment, retention and training surrounding diversity, which seemed to indicate a lack of value for diversity in newsroom culture.

Second, the responses for what are minority journalists’ perceptions of connections among newsroom diversity and framing behaviors in the newsroom as they relate to coverage of racial and ethnic groups were that the connections or links between news coverage and presentation about minority communities are perceived as real and examples were given as to how even limited diverse staffing directly guided positive news coverage.

Third, when exploring pressures and challenges do minorities in the newsroom feel to advance the cause of diversity, the managers perceive pressure from minority journalists from the newsroom population. He or she perceived that minority leaders—lacking autonomy—are still seen as diversity advocates ready to set policy that will promote diversity in hiring and news coverage. The minority journalists with a seat at the table also perceive that some others see
them as being relegated to the status placeholder not able to meet the usual standards the position requires and without real authority.
Chapter V
Discussion

Diversity is in trouble in America’s newsrooms. It is in crisis. It is at war. Like the news industry itself, it wages a battle against financial constraints, technological advancements and time. The crisis is not unlike that of the 1960s when media found themselves at the intersection of race and rights, and when 1968 Kerner Report found media in need of diversity. News outlets, in general, had continued American society’s systematic segregation of Blacks through negative, incomplete, or absent coverage in news reports. Today, believing as study respondents do that diversity is valuable, seeing demographics shift to a new majority minority–Hispanics–and acknowledging news outlets’ failures to meet parity within their communities, one important question is how much truly has changed, and another is what can be done to makes the necessary changes going forward?

The participants’ responses are a call for diversity to regain whatever value it has lost through cuts and expand its stature in newsrooms in order to gain a more diverse management, a more inclusive news staff and a broader and more relevant news product. Within their responses was a belief that diversity in newsrooms and in newsroom leadership was good for journalism’s telling of complete and engaging stories. It also was good for society, where media plays an important role in framing (Entman, 1993) stories and setting the agenda for audience dialogue. For example, the death of Maya Angelou—a Black woman who was highly respected and an extremely popular figure in the Black community—led to debate for a news team about the news value and timeliness of the death versus the communities outlook and awareness beyond the immediate news worthiness of the moment. This situation illustrates the multi-faceted goals of news media in regards to communicating with and informing its diverse audiences. As minority
journalists offered example after example of how each of them or their coworkers found a way to
insert diverse ideas into news production, it became clear that the benefits of a diverse staff and
leadership were numerous from simply broadening the topic to include more voices to setting the
agenda for a community’s awareness and outlook on national events.

In the news industry, the initiatives, the training, and the discussions that must be a part
of promoting the value of diversity have become less important than they once were and are
inconsistent at best. The need for more diversity in leadership will be the greatest catalyst for
change. All journalist agree with previous research that shows for diversity to be successful,
executive support is critical (Hon & Brunner, 2000).

This qualitative research trained its eyes on diversity during a troubling economic time. It
used minority journalists as the lens and captured a less-than-flattering picture of the value of
diversity for those leading newsrooms and working in them. Responses by interviewees indicate
that just beyond the surface of the everyday grind of producing news, is an awareness of
diversity issues. Along with this awareness of difference is the concept that racial discrimination
is an ever-present ominous cloud above the society and the news industry. I think, however, it
was important to hear that the expansion of what diversity constitutes was foremost in the minds
of African-American and Hispanic journalists. Society has burdened these groups with their race,
and has made it factor by which they are judged. To acknowledge that diversity must include
every difference in the same degree is integral in the diversity of thought that is needed as
America evolves into a society where class and socioeconomic backgrounds are becoming more
of what divides and unites its citizens.

**Affecting Change**

Mixed into the sharing of common perceptions about diversity and its value, were always
the need for solutions on how to put diversity back on the stove’s front burner. Some were so prevalent—marketing successes—that they were included in the findings section. Another is worth noting. News organizations must confront any issues that subjugate managers of color into token status.

Also, the journalists see a need for larger and more aggressive mentoring programs that would create a better pipeline for getting more young minority journalists ready to fill positions of leadership when they become available. Although most of the minority-advocate organizations have some form of mentorship programs, they tend to be poorly populated by mentors and completely voluntary for participants. The minority journalists believe mentors should be seeking reporters, copy editors and visual journalists who could be groomed to take seats at the table. This need for a pipeline to minorities in leadership was reiterated in discussion about framing coverage. As implied through the examples mentioned in the findings section, one of the benefits of diversity and diverse journalists in influential positions was a minority journalist being the lone voice for a particular point of view.

**Future Research**

This study did not set out to be a representative sample of all minority journalists, and such a sample was not achieved by the end of the study. It does, however, set a foundation for further research. As alluded to in the literature review and methodology section, this study is specific to minorities, and it, therefore, leaves room for a comparison to the dominant group culturally and demographically to broaden the look at newsroom culture and perceptions among all journalists. So further research must look at how do perceptions about minority leaders and non-minority leaders compare. Framing research continues with attention to perceptions about content by the audience. Lesser focus seemingly is placed on the cultural and social influences
acting within the development of minority journalists and how those influences might impact framing and overall news coverage of all communities. So the question for further research is how do perceptions of minority journalists directly influence framing of beyond minority communities?

As is noted in the findings, outside forces are looked to by minority journalists to champion diversity. Specifics, beyond mentoring initiatives, were few. Research can continue to look at what diversity initiatives and training methods are best suited to use within each group as perceptions about diversity can vary widely. The impact of framing of training initiatives becomes increasingly significant because training is the go-to method for learning about diversity and for managing it (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998).

One important question to ask going forward in the news industry is how developing and introducing diversity programs and messages to peer groups that might have a greater influence over the value of diversity experienced in the newsroom culture than leadership. To study the best way to articulate these messages is valuable for daily news production. Journalists reiterated the perception that the ship is steered by those at the table. The staffers, however, made the journey, richer and fuller. One reporter (R3) a Midwest newspaper said:

“Look, we know we aren’t running things. But we do have influence, inside and outside of our newspapers. That’s why we do what we do. Every word we write, every person’s voice we include in our stories is to engage and provoke thoughts and, in some cases, action. That’s the reader and each of us. We read each other’s stuff–sometimes it’s competitive. But I think how we write about a certain group and our sensitivity toward those groups has a definite impact on other reporters and editors.”
Conclusion

As noted nearly 40 years ago by the late Robert C. Maynard, African-American and former editor and owner of the Oakland Bee, “This country cannot be the country we want it to be if its story is told by only one group of citizens. Our goal is to give all Americans front door access to the truth.”

Remnants of a society that devalued minorities, the technological advancements that made everyone journalists, the continued loss of jobs within the media are the bad news. Newsroom cutbacks are a reality in the industry. The 2013 “Annual State of the Media” report from the Pew Center indicates that news reporting has indeed suffered. The report puts most of the blame on staff cutbacks that American newsrooms have suffered since the number of minority newsroom employees peaked in the early 2000s (ASNE, The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism). The good news is a more racially and ethnically diverse society, trained and skilled journalists who still have great stories to tell, and news organization holding on to and wielding hard-won credibility. With a growing Hispanic population and with the majority facing minority status in the not-too-distant future, the need to understand and embrace diversity in newsrooms is crucial.
Appendices
Appendix A

Interviewee codes

Listing: Code ID, position, race or ethnicity, location by region, size of media outlet

Rank-and-file staffers

(R1) Newspaper line editor (Asian), Europe, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 897,000
(R2) Newspaper photographer (Hispanic), Midwest, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 70,000
(R3) Newspaper reporter (Black), Midwest, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 70,000
(R4) National wire service editor (Black), Midwest
(R5) Former newspaper reporter (Black), Midwest/South, Avg. daily circ. respectively: approximately 340,000 and 75,000 while employed there
(R6) Former newspaper reporter (Black), South, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 130,000 while employed there
(R7) Columnist (Black), Midwest, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 340,000

Managers

(A1) Newspaper editor (Hispanic) South, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 45,000
(A2) National wire service chief of bureau (Black), Midwest
(A3) Former newspaper publisher (Black), Midwest, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 100,000 while employed there
(A4) Newspaper sports editor (Black), South, Avg. weekly circ.: approximately 5,000
(A5) Newspaper metro editor, Mid-south, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 82,000
(A6) Newspaper editor (Black), Western, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 422,000
(A7) Former newspaper editor/current managing editor (Black), South, Avg. daily circ. respectively: approximately 180,000/120,000
(A8) Former newspaper assistant city editor (Black), South, Avg. daily circ.: approximately 26,000 while employed there
(A9) Executive, national chain of newspapers and television stations, Midwest
(A10) Online editor (Black), Midwest, Avg. monthly visits: 900,000
Appendix B

Participant interview guide
Introduction/Consent
Background
School, Work (Training/Experience)
Daily work life (the routine)
Diversity
Defining
Influences and attitudes
Messages (to and from)
Challenges
Ideal situations
Closing

Introduction (5 minutes)
Thank you for allowing me to spend this time with you. Basically, I want to hear your opinions, what you think – good or bad – throughout our interview. Our discussion is for research only; it’s confidential and will not be shared outside of the research class.

Background (5 minutes)
Let’s start with some information about you and your work? Where are you from originally? Where’d you go to school? What brought you to the position you’re in now?

Daily Work Life (5 minutes)
So tell me more about work.
Is there a typical day, week at work? What’s it like?
Do you start at the same time most days?
Are there things that you have to get done each day or week? Public meetings? Meeting with sources? Cold calls?

Diversity (15 minutes)
I’d like to talk to you about diversity.
When you hear the word “diversity,” what comes to mind?
What has influenced your thinking on diversity?
Can you recall the first time you heard the word used and in what context?
What do you think the benefits and challenges are for pursuing diversity in newsroom staffing?
Tell me about your experience with diversity and diversity measures (taking in messages and sending them).
Have peers or higher-ups ever mentioned it to you? In what context? What did you think about that?
Do you think newsroom diversity has any influence on coverage? How so and to what extent?
In terms of newsroom staff diversity, what do you think about?
Describe a diverse newsroom?
Describe a diverse reporter?
Describe a diverse editor? Are the attributes the same as a reporter?
Would you say has diverse newsroom(s)?

Ideal Situations (10 - 15 minutes)
Since we’re talking about our perfect world, what would the perfect newsroom be for you?
What would it look like?
Describe it for me? How many people would it have? Any particular arrangement of desks and offices?
Who would be in charge? Describe them?
Tell me who the reporters and editors are? Describe them?
Is there an ideal situation in the field, when you’re out reporting a story?
Tell me about your best experience in the field.
Tell me about your worst?

Closing (5 minutes)
Again, I want to assure you that this interview is confidential.
Did I miss anything about diversity that I should be aware of, ask about or discuss with other participants? Anything you’re curious about?
And just quickly, can I have a little bit of biographical info.
Age:
Race:
Education level:
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