



Journalist Fellowship Paper

The Chiriseri Test: Questions you should be asking about diversity in your newsroom

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Introduction

My older sister and I usually agree on everything. That's to say when I disagree with her, I do so very quietly and usually when she isn't listening. COVID-19 changed that. Sitting in my apartment on the Upper West side of Manhattan in early 2020 I heard an ambulance leaving or pulling into Mount Sinai Morningside hospital almost every four minutes.

You might say, 'It's New York; there are always sirens.' This was different. No one needed to tell me COVID-19 was real. My thoughts turned to my family back in South Africa and Zimbabwe. I picked up the phone. With my mom and older sister on speaker I explained how they needed to buy sanitizer and masks – now, before prices went up – but most importantly I said calmly that they should start social distancing to get ahead of the situation and protect themselves.

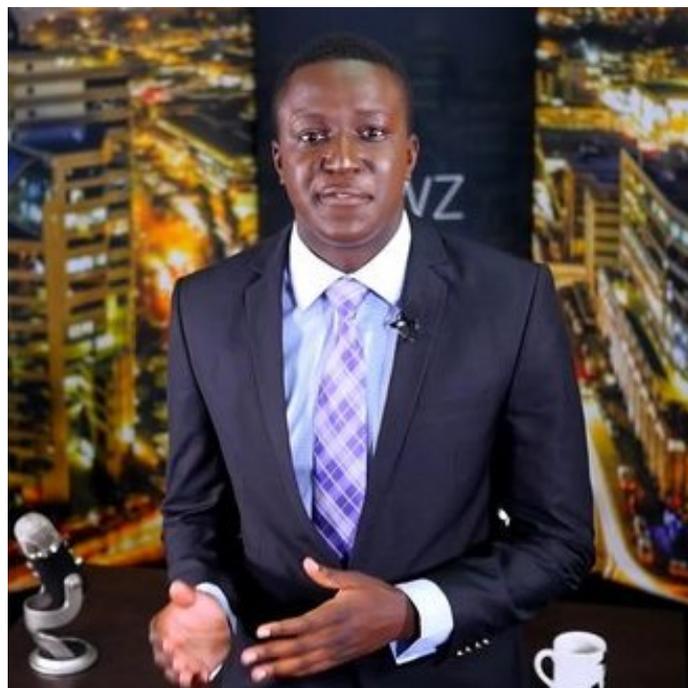
Like I said, my older sister and I agree on everything. Or I disagree quietly. But this time I had to disagree loudly. She said the virus was mainly affecting Western countries – white countries – and not a problem likely to affect Africa. This time, I had to disagree loudly.

When my reporting trip to New Orleans was cancelled due to COVID, I was shocked to hear a number of my African-American interviewees had similar sentiments: this was a virus that was “getting the whites”.

I felt like I was in a bad apocalypse movie. I checked the news again. I saw white reporters, white writers, white experts, white super spreader events like Spring Break in Miami. If I were to go by what was on the news, for all intents and purposes

this was a white virus. Despite falling asleep to the constant wail of sirens I may have believed it myself. Except the virus had killed my friend, and he was Black.

[Zororo Makamba](#) was a childhood friend. He was also a brilliant journalist and fellow filmmaker who'd spent a few days in New York to celebrate his recent engagement. He felt sick when he arrived back home in Zimbabwe. Within a matter of days he'd passed away. He was the first recorded COVID-19 death in Zimbabwe.¹



Zororo Makamba hosting his news talk show, Tonight With Zororo, where he discussed controversial but critical issues in Zimbabwe. (Credit: Instagram/Supplied)

I've always advocated for diversity and representation as a principle but in this moment I understood that diversity, particularly in journalism, is not a "nice to have" – it's a life and death issue.

¹Roberts, S., 2020. *Zororo Makamba, 30, Dies; Zimbabwean Television Host (Published 2020)*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/obituaries/zororo-makamba-30-dies-zimbabwean-television-host.html>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

As the pandemic progressed, the real consequences of a glaring lack of representation were made even more apparent: the news was not reflecting the realities or voices of Black people or “[people of colour](#)” (POC) and that void was filled with misinformation.² A lack of news representation met with inequality in other systems – like health and housing – and the result was that Black communities were hit hardest in the U.S..³

This much I know: without Black people in your newsroom in 2021, you can no longer expect to speak for or to them.

² Shoneye, T., 2021. *As a black woman, I hate the term 'people of colour'*. [online] The Independent. Available at:

<<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/black-women-people-colour-racism-beyonce-coachella-black-lives-matter-a8316561.html>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

³ Uncredited, April, 2021. *Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*. [online] Centre for Disease Control. Available at:

<<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>>

Change takes time

History has taught us that change takes time. The inclusion of Black and POC in newsrooms is no exception. Four decades ago in the U.S., a pledge was signed calling for newsrooms to equally reflect the populations they were reporting on.

Writing in *USA Today* 50 years later, veteran journalist and activist Paul Delaney explained: “The American Society of Newspaper Editors (now the American Society of News Editors) pledged in 1978 to push for a newsroom workforce that reflected the racial makeup of their communities by the year 2000; when that goal was not reached, ASNE leaders set a new deadline, 2025. Its officials now concede that even that deadline will be missed.”⁴



A woman holds a sign at a BLM protest outside Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City. (Photography: Zoe Ramushu)

⁴ Delaney, P., 2021. *Kerner report at 50: Media diversity still decades behind*. [online] Usatoday.com. Available at:

<<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/nation-now/2018/03/20/kerner-report-50-media-diversity-still-decades-behind/1012047001/>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

The 1978 pledge came 10 years after the 1968 Kerner Commission had declared: “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.”

So it’s been more than half a century since diversity was placed on the U.S. news agenda, but its newsrooms still fail to reflect the communities they report on. And, yes, while it could be argued that change takes time, 2020 taught us something else about ourselves. On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organisation [declared a pandemic](#): offices around the globe were closed, flights were grounded, and barely anyone could leave their homes. We all adjusted within weeks.

Newsrooms adapted to report on one of the biggest stories of our time in a matter of days. New systems (and training for them) were paid for. Makeshift home studios were suddenly acceptable on national and international television, and so too the spontaneous appearance of children and pets. News conference now entailed staring at our colleagues in tiny boxes on Zoom.

We did it because we collectively agreed that these changes were necessary. Even if the changes were inconvenient, not perfectly executed, or downright unfair for some, we jointly understood that it was for the greater good and for our survival.

So is diversity.

A solution, not a challenge

Declining trust, dwindling audiences, depleted ad revenue streams: journalism was in crisis long before the pandemic. Many newsrooms were already operating in survival mode, focused on efficiency. That same focus has overridden diversity as a priority, according to the findings in Reuters Institute's latest diversity report, *Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change*.⁵

Editors reported looking for single hires that can fulfil multiple roles to keep costs down and run a leaner, tighter ship. Hiring freezes and unions, they said, made it even more difficult to restructure newsrooms, or to hire new staff with diversity in mind. And although this may seem practical, it's a mistake. Diversity is actually a key solution for a number of journalism's problems.

Misrepresentation, underrepresentation and transparency

Trust is fundamental to the relationship between journalists and their audiences. Increasingly polarised rhetoric highlights to audiences that The Truth is relative and objectivity itself is questionable. It highlights that the news is generated by actual human beings, with past and present lives, implicit biases and personal beliefs. I'll go as far as to say many are fully aware that [objectivity has been and still is white](#).⁶

The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 found that Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely to say news organisations cover them unfairly.⁷ A Pew Research Center survey conducted Feb. 18-March 2, 2020, found that 59% of

⁵ Cherubini, F., Newman, N. and Nielsen, R., 2020. *Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change*. RISJ. p17

⁶ Alamo-Pastrana, C. and Hoynes, W., 2018. Racialization of News: Constructing and Challenging Professional Journalism as "White Media". *Humanity & Society*, 44(1), pp.67-91.

⁷ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2021. *Digital News Report 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>> [Accessed 30 July 2021]. p35

Americans say that the news media do not understand them.⁸ White Americans felt misunderstood too (61%), but Black and Hispanic Americans (of whom 58% and 55% felt misunderstood) cited very different reasons for why they felt misunderstood. “White Americans ... are far more likely than the other groups to say the problem stems from political misunderstandings, [whilst] Black Americans are far more likely than the other two groups to feel that the misunderstanding is based on their race or some other demographic trait.”

It's one thing to feel that the news media doesn't understand your malleable political views, it's another thing entirely to feel misunderstood because of your immutable nature.

The Reuters Institute Trust in News project found Black interviewees and other POC in the U.S., UK, and Brazil were most likely to express concerns about racial minorities being covered in stereotypical and damaging ways.⁹

While the road to solving political polarisation of news media is long and complex, the road to helping Black audiences feel understood is simple – put someone like us in the newsroom and let them write in voices we recognise.

Misrepresentation is a sure way to lose audience trust. A close second is underrepresentation: the absence of coverage is just as relevant to many communities. As the Digital News Report put it: “One possible factor influencing perceptions of fairness is the amount of coverage devoted to particular topics. This

⁸ Gottfried, J. and Barthel, M., 2020. *Black, Hispanic and white adults feel the news media misunderstand them, but for very different reasons*. [online] Pew Research Center. Available at: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/25/black-hispanic-and-white-adults-feel-the-news-media-misunderstand-them-but-for-very-different-reasons/>> [Accessed 3 August 2021].

⁹ Toff, D., Badrinathan, D., Mont'Alverne, D., Ross Arguedas, D., Fletcher, D. and Nielsen, P., 2021. *Listening to what trust in news means to users: qualitative evidence from four countries*. [online] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/listening-what-trust-news-means-users-qualitative-evidence-four-countries#sub3>> [Accessed 3 August 2021].

is also a perception – and likely a perception of prominence rather than volume, since no one can consume all available news coverage. Nonetheless, there is evidence that a lack of coverage of an issue is strongly related to perceptions of unfairness.”¹⁰

When I heard about COVID-19, my thoughts turned to my family not because they are Black and I work in the diversity space. It was simply because I am a part of their community. When I interviewed a colleague whose project [memorialises the work of journalists killed by the cartel in Mexico](#) and asked her how gender and race play a role in Mexican journalists’ safety, it wasn’t because gender and race were on my checklist but because of lived experience.¹¹ These are natural questions to someone who is Black and female, and understands that danger means something different for her than it does for a white male in a foreign country.

If you don’t have diversity in your newsroom, the gaps will show in the substance and variety of your coverage. Underrepresentation and misrepresentation should be crucial concerns for news organisations that are trying to cultivate trust, prove their value, and build relationships with the audiences they serve.

What audiences want in exchange for their trust is transparency. Level with them, like the *Los Angeles Times* did in a series of articles documenting the lack of diversity they’ve shown over decades. We’re sorry, we messed up, we realise how many people we’ve wronged and hurt by our actions, we will do our absolute best not to do it again by putting these measures in place, the [LA Times said in short](#).¹²

¹⁰ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2021. *Digital News Report 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>> [Accessed 30 July 2021]. p36

¹¹ Ramushu, Z., 2021. *This project remembers slain Mexican journalists for their work, not their deaths*. [online] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/project-remembers-slain-mexican-journalists-their-work-not-their-deaths>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

¹² The Times Editorial Board, 2020. *An examination of The Times' failures on race, our apology and a path forward*. [online] Los Angeles Times. Available at:

The series was commissioned in response to a hashtag started by journalists on staff, [#blackatlat](#).¹³



(Screengrab: Twitter)

Expression of remorse, unequivocal admission of guilt, recognition of the harm caused, a clear path to making amends and a promise that it will not happen again. This is the definition of a full apology that may prompt audiences to consider trusting again. This is the level of transparency, self-reflection and critical thinking required of journalism in 2021. You won't be the first newsroom to do this – it's already been done – but it's not a party you can be late to without looking weak, opportunistic and creating discomfort for everyone involved.

Trust in news is a complex and multidimensional issue, but when it comes to fundamentally understanding, not stereotyping or misrepresenting or underrepresenting Black and POC audiences, the first solution is getting more of us in the room. There's no exact equation that says Transparency = Trust, but it's a

<<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-27/los-angeles-times-apology-racism>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

¹³ <https://twitter.com/hashtag/blackatlat?lang=en>

great place to start. If the *LA Times* delivers on their pledge consistently, it may well lead to renewed trust with wider audiences, including the young.

This is not your grandfather's audience

To engage an audience of Gen Zs and Millennials, it is worth spending time thinking about the cultural influences they have grown up with, and how that shift in culture challenges the core tenets our newsrooms were founded on. Most respondents in the Digital News Report surveys thought news outlets should try to be neutral on every issue (66%), but “some younger groups think that ‘impartiality’ may not be appropriate or desirable in some cases – for example, on social justice issues.”¹⁴



BLM protest where clergy gave speeches outside Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City. (Photography: Zoe Ramushu)

These young minds are binge-watching hit Netflix series like [Unbelievable](#), about a rape survivor's struggle to be heard by existing institutions.¹⁵ They're holding chatroom discussions on Ava Du Vernay's [When They See Us](#), which brutally corrects

¹⁴ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2021. *Digital News Report 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

¹⁵ Gajanan, M., 2021. *The True Story Behind the Netflix Series 'Unbelievable'*. [online] Time. Available at: <<https://time.com/5674986/unbelievable-netflix-true-story/>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

the record on the Central Park Five.¹⁶ Long-running pop culture offerings are evolving to stay relevant: consider *Law and Order: SVU* which started in 1999 and has now begun to integrate issues of race and implicit bias into storylines, or the *Real Housewives* franchise which is hurriedly diversifying its casts and conversations.

In 1967, the [Loving v. Virginia](#) case was a landmark decision that made interracial marriages legal.¹⁷ Interracial relationships are such a norm to today's young people, it has its own vocabulary – [swirling](#).¹⁸ They are more interested in exploring the nuances of racism within interracial relationships in movies like the Oscar-winning [Get Out](#).¹⁹

Your young white audience all heard Shuri in Marvel Studios' *Black Panther* call the only white man allowed into Wakanda a "[coloniser](#)".²⁰ Some laughed, others didn't, but most were sure that the words coloniser, racist, enslaver were not how they want to be remembered in history.

Social justice, racism, diversity, and inclusion aren't just buzzwords for young Black, white and brown audiences. They are idealistic and see your "impartial news" as lacking in authenticity, and perpetuating the status quo.²¹

¹⁶ Darrisaw, M., 2021. *Everything You Need to Know About Ava DuVernay's Central Park Five Netflix Series*. [online] Oprah Daily.

¹⁷ BBC News. 2020. *Loving v Virginia: Lawyer in famed interracial marriage case dies*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54559609>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

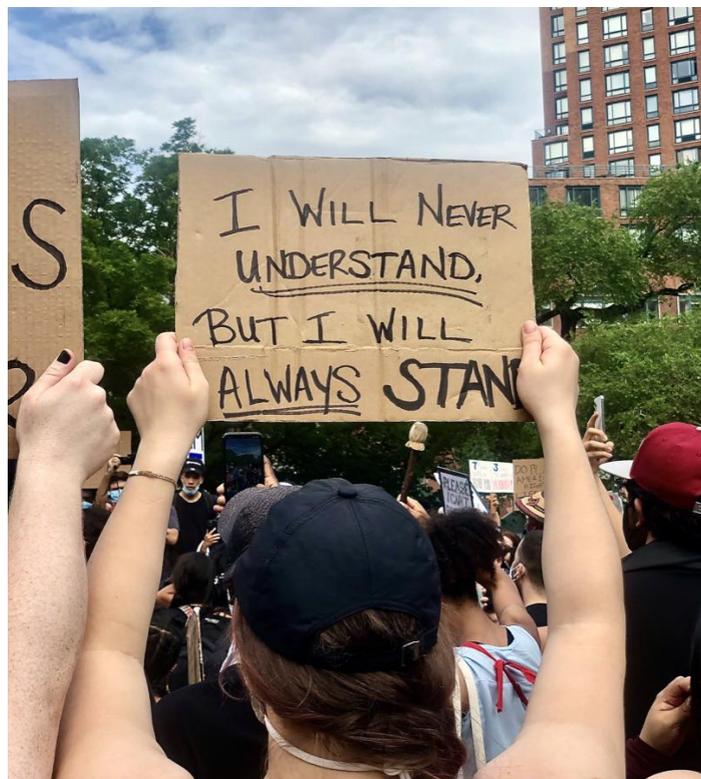
¹⁸ Onlineslangdictionary.com. n.d. *What does swirl mean? swirl Definition. Meaning of swirl. OnlineSlangDictionary.com*. [online] Available at: <<http://onlineslangdictionary.com/meaning-definition-of/swirl>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

¹⁹ Wilkinson, A., 2017. *Get Out is a horror film about benevolent racism. It's spine-chilling.* [online] Vox. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/2/24/14698632/get-out-review-jordan-peepe>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

²⁰ Stidhum, T., 2018. *5 Iconic One-Liners From Letitia Wright's Shuri In 'Black Panther' - Shadow and Act*. [online] Shadow and Act. Available at: <<https://shadowandact.com/letitia-wright-quotes-shuri-black-panther>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

²¹ Marchi, R., 2012. *With Facebook, Blogs, and Fake News, Teens Reject Journalistic "Objectivity"* - Regina Marchi, 2012. [online] SAGE Journals. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0196859912458700>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

Young audiences are consuming more politicized content but they aren't taking a zero-tolerance stance on racism just because of this. It is also the world they grew up in: schools are more integrated, so are social spaces. Rihanna isn't considered a "Black musician", she's just a musician. They didn't grow up in a world with just one Oprah, one Michael Jordan and one Michael Jackson. So if "representation" at your outlet equates to running a handful of stories about Black crime or Black sportsmen winning their games, and nothing in between, you are not reflecting the world that today's young people live in, and they will not engage with you.²²



BLM protest in Manhattan, New York City. (Photography: Zoe Ramushu)

Diversity is either working for you, or against you

I am convinced that the seachange in culture is so radical – see #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter – that if you're not actively using diversity as a problem-solving

²² Griffin Jr., R., 2021. *As March Madness rolls on, so will the myths of Black athletic superiority*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/mar/29/black-athletes-genetically-superior-myth-sports>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

tool in your newsroom, it will soon become a problem. It's not enough that your homogenous newsroom staff attended implicit bias training, read extensively on the issue, have a circle of "best Black friends" or "marched with Martin Luther King".

If you do not have diverse voices in your newsroom who are empowered to participate meaningfully, it is only a matter of time before your outlet will mess up. You are risking losing portions of the audience you are fighting so hard to hold onto; you are risking cancellation.²³

In summary, diversity in newsrooms is no longer "just" a moral decision to ensure all audiences have equal access to accurate information with which to make decisions in their best interest. It's also a key solution to regaining the trust, building wider audiences, reaching a younger demographic, and retaining the audience you have.

Change begins with diversity becoming a key priority for media owners – right up there on the agenda with audience growth and revenue diversification. Beyond that, there is no sure-fire route to making your newsroom a diverse space. However, I have proposed a list of questions to ask – the 'Chiriseri Test' (my maiden name) – which I believe may guide more newsrooms towards their own unique answers.

²³ Romano, A., 2021. *What does "cancel culture" even mean in 2021?*. [online] Vox. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/22384308/cancel-culture-free-speech-accountability-debate>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

The Chiriseri Test

Fashioned after the '[Bechdel Test for films](#)', the 'Chiriseri Test' for newsrooms aims to ask thought-provoking questions about diversity in your newsroom instead of offering a one-size-fits-all solution.²⁴

This test is not perfect, and it's not supposed to be. Like its predecessor, its virtue is in its simplicity and how easy it is to apply.

The questions are:

- Do you picture your entire newsroom when you think about diversity, and not just specific members of staff?
- Does everyone feel empowered to pitch or greenlight stories that are important to their communities?
- Are they able to tell stories from the perspective of their people in a way that resonates for them, and not with a homogeneous approach?
- Do you use diverse sources for all your stories – not just the ones about gender and race?

Do you picture your entire newsroom when you think about diversity, and not just specific members of staff?

Do you have a diverse staff? Diverse in race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and ability? Most of us can rattle off a roll-call for diversity, and can attach faces to the titles as if reciting their ABCs. And a few of us may be thinking of that one gem in the office that ticks all the boxes. This is not diversity.

²⁴ Le Vine, L., 2018. *The Bechdel Test, The DuVernay Test, & More: What You Need To Know*. [online] Refinery29.com. Available at: <<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/06/201674/bechdel-test-duvernay-women-representation-movies>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

Many people see the diversity question as a Black and white one – and, in many ways, it definitely is. In typical American fashion, the U.S. has managed to keep the spotlight of racism and inequality framed on their own experiences: particularly around the murders of Black and POC by law enforcement.

The reason so many #BLM protests sprang up in other countries was not just because people wanted to show solidarity, but because this dialogue felt familiar: it created a space to breathe, to speak, and be heard for many marginalised voices who feel drowned out around the world.



Protestors kneel and chant at a BLM protest in Manhattan, New York City. (Photography: Zoe Ramushu)

Consider the example of the UK, with its small [Black population of under 4%](#).²⁵ Here, racism is often left to fly under the radar, and reports on the topic tend to be [a little self-congratulatory](#) when it comes to racism, inequality and diversity – because they

²⁵ Statistics, O., 2018. *Population of England and Wales*. [online] Ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk. Available at: <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

are not disproportionately *murdering* Black people.²⁶ But you do not need to physically choke a Black person on the street for eight minutes and 46 seconds in order to be part of the problem. Choking out minority voices, barring us from telling our own stories, or standing by and watching it happen gives legitimacy to the Machine we are working to dismantle.



BLM protestors in Manhattan, New York City. (Photography: Zoe Ramushu)

So, yes, many people see diversity as a Black and white question – and it definitely stems from discussions about [structural and systemic racism](#) – but this is not just a Black and white issue.²⁷ Diversity also has to do with caste in India, rural versus urban communities in Nicaragua, and Russian language versus Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan.

²⁶ Walker, P. and Parveen, N., 2021. *Racial disparities in the UK: key findings of the report – and what its critics say*. The Guardian.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/31/racial-disparities-in-the-uk-key-findings-of-the-report-and-what-its-critics-say>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

²⁷ Staff, I., 2016. *11 Terms You Should Know to Better Understand Structural Racism*. [online] The Aspen Institute. Available at: <<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

Fellow journalists from homogeneous white and affluent countries like Finland told me they often felt guilty bringing up issues about diversity because their countries are doing well on various other global success indicators. They felt they didn't have the "right" to complain when there were people who were worse off in other countries. When you actively think about what diversity looks like, you know who the haves and have-nots are in the communities you report on: like the Sámi in Norway. No country is exempt from answering the diversity question. You know whose voices have been systematically silenced. These are the voices you need in your newsroom. As my Finnish colleague said: "Because our differences may not be as great, we have every reason to do better."

Consider this quote from Soledad O'Brien, written in a *New York Times* opinion piece published on July 4, 2021:

"The thin ranks of people of color in American newsrooms have often meant us-and-them reporting, where everyone from architecture critics to real estate writers, from entertainment reporters to sports anchors, talk about the world as if the people listening or reading their work are exclusively white."²⁸

Who are your "thin ranks", who is your "us"?

Does everyone feel empowered to pitch and greenlight stories that are important to their communities?

If you are hiring for diversity at lower levels then when your junior reporters pitch stories about their communities to a non-diverse editor, they are less likely to be

²⁸ O'Brien, S., 2021. *Opinion | Soledad O'Brien: A MeToo Moment for Journalists of Color (Published 2020)*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/04/opinion/soledad-obrien-racism-journalism.html>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

greenlit. Eventually that junior reporter will begin pitching stories that their editor is most likely to greenlight and we are back to square one.

According to *Changing Newsrooms 2020*, most newsrooms could demonstrate an increase in diversity in lower level jobs, not in decision-making positions.²⁹

Figure 6. Self-rating of diversity performance at different levels of the organisation



Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following. My organisation is doing a good job with diversity at a _____ level.
Base: 124.

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Power is a key factor in the diversity equation so even as you hire diverse individuals into decision-making roles, they need to feel they have the authority and the support to greenlight stories from diverse communities. Make sure the memo they receive – directly or indirectly – isn’t “play it safe” and “just be grateful to be here”.

At the same time, diversity hires shouldn’t be burdened with solving all your diversity issues, answering all the diversity questions or – worst of all – be called on to explain on behalf of the organisation when there’s been a diversity error. This is the unofficial unpaid second shift that a lot of women of colour carry. It is not our

²⁹ Cherubini, F., Newman, N. and Nielsen, R., 2020. *Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change. p15*

job to carry the brunt of inequality and create change; this should be the initiative of those who have traditionally held power.

Don't wait for a crisis before you hire and empower your diverse staff or you run the risk of being accused of deploying "emergency Blacks".³⁰ That was the case for *The Washington Post* and *MSNBC* who went on a hiring spree after the backlash following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent BLM protests.^{31, 32}

Are they able to tell stories from the perspective of their people in a way that resonates with them?

The first step is getting people with unique perspectives into the newsroom, and the second step is changing the culture by ensuring they are empowered and in decision-making positions. Once they're in place, it's not simply a case of recognising their differences, but appreciating and using them.

Even after hiring with diversity in mind, does your publication still read like it was written by an all white, male, middle-aged, middle-class newsroom with chocolate sprinkles as bylines?

If you are hiring for diversity and don't expect the voice of your publication to change as a result, you are not hiring for diversity. We all want to be hired to add value and be valued, to bring our perspective and to contribute more than just skin colour and a tick box.

³⁰ A term coined by Black South Africans on Twitter when a reality show, *Love Island* had to bring more Black contestants on the show after massive backlash.
<https://www.voice-online.co.uk/entertainment/2021/03/02/love-island-south-africa-is-getting-some-more-black-cast-members-soon/>

³¹ WashPostPR, 2020. *The Washington Post names Krissah Thompson managing editor for diversity and inclusion*. [online] Available at:
<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/2020/07/28/washington-post-names-krissah-thompson-managing-editor-diversity-inclusion/>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

³² Grynbaum, M., 2020. *Joy Reid Takes Nightly Anchor Slot at MSNBC (Published 2020)*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at:
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/business/media/joy-reid-msnbc-anchor.html>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

Take the example of Nikole Hannah Jones, who recently turned down a lecturing position at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and [accepted a position at an HBCU Howard University](#).³³ On Twitter and other platforms her decision was called a masterclass in standing in your power and associated with the popular quote, “go where you are celebrated, not tolerated”. When you hire diverse individuals expect that they will bring change with them across the board – not just by adding stories about diversity, social justice or gender.

When hiring diverse voices don’t expect us all to write on issues of diversity. Yes, some journalists specialise in the tough, triggering and emotionally taxing work of specific beats like gender, race or social justice. However, others are hired and ghettoized into these roles. You need diverse voices telling all stories, across beats. Whether it’s architecture, finance or mining, diverse voices bring their perspectives and lived experience to every story and this is how reporting is transformed.

While discussing this in a group recently, a colleague anxiously asked, “How are we supposed to know if someone wants to write these types of stories [race, social justice] or not?” My response was, “In the same way you know what a white male should report on when he’s hired: you ask them.”

Do you have diverse sources for *all* your stories?

When reporting on any story, in order to understand the themes and issues, the significance and varying perspectives of that story, you need a wide range of sources. This will help to ensure your story is not one sided, viewed through an outdated lens or simply wrong. According to the Digital News Report 2021, news organisations

³³ FOREMAN JR., T. and MORRISON, A., 2021. *Tenure struggle ends with Hannah-Jones charting a new course*. [online] The Seattle Times. Available at: <<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/nikole-hannah-jones-she-will-not-teach-at-un-c-chapel-hill/>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

looking to tackle a decline in trust among their audience should reflect on how they cover certain groups.³⁴

This requires having diverse sources in all stories, not just the ones about gender, race or specific communities. The voices of the sources and experts you choose to amplify are an integral part of how audiences perceive and consume the news.

COVID-19 was not a story about diversity but the [caucacity](#) of the pandemic coverage contributed to a mixed reception amongst Black and POC communities, to their detriment.³⁵

Some newsrooms start and share a database of diverse sources across industries, others set targets and track the voices used in every story. In addition to the BBC's 50:50 initiative, organisations like *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden and the *Financial Times* in the UK use AI to keep track of the gender diversity of experts and sources.³⁶

To journalists who complain about the unavailability of diverse sources across industries, I say: do the work, leave your desk. Ask your sources who else they know in their field when you use them. Ultimately, you need to get out more. Mukti Jain Campion, founder of Culture Wise production company and producer of many radio documentaries with diverse voices, said: "We need to find ways of getting people to move out of their comfort zones and have meaningful engagement with communities they don't know... [reporting] is only as good as the the questions you ask and the sources you seek out, both of which are far better developed through longer term relationships and deeper understanding of different communities."³⁷

³⁴ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2021. *Digital News Report 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>> [Accessed 30 July 2021].

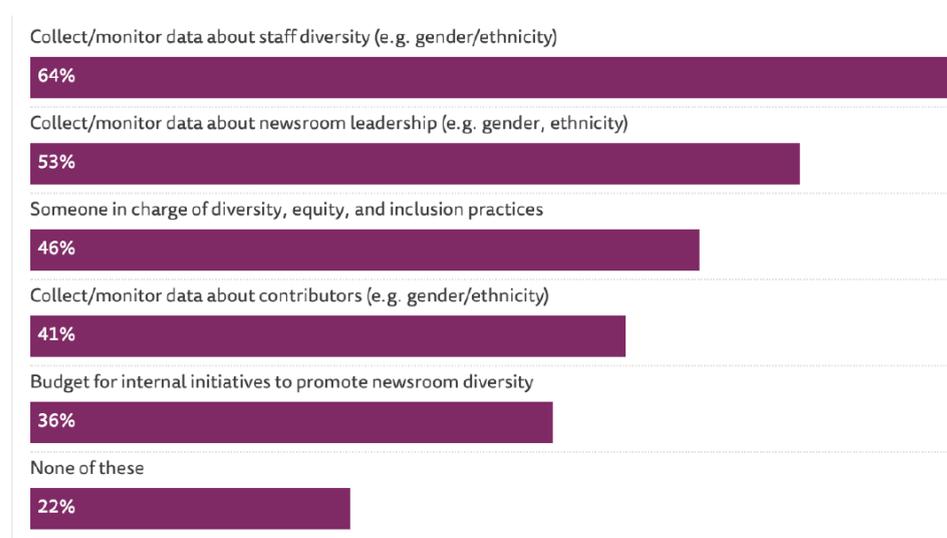
³⁵ Urban Dictionary. 2018. *Urban Dictionary: Caucacity*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Caucacity>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

³⁶ Cherubini, F., Newman, N. and Nielsen, R., 2020. Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change. p15

³⁷ Campion, Mukti Jain *Look Who's Talking: Cultural Diversity, Public Service Broadcasting and the National Conversation*, Guardian Research Fellow, Nuffield College, Oxford, 2005. p109

Her research on cultural diversity in public service broadcasting found that there tended to be a “knee-jerk response reporting that happens when a community is suddenly brought into the headline”. We saw this during the BLM protests, when reporters lacked the community ties required to access the voices to adequately cover the story.

Figure 4. Top diversity initiatives



Q10. To the best of your knowledge does your organisation do any of the following? Select all that apply Base: 121.

Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change. p14 (Screengrab)

To get more journalists out into communities more frequently, the BBC has created satellite offices for staff. It’s a great example of changes being made at an institutional level to facilitate the work that must also be done at a personal level.

Conclusion

The Chiriseri Test is a beginner's guide to asking more intuitive questions about your newsroom. If your answer is "yes" to all of the questions, then you're on your way. If your answer is "no" to any of the above, then I'm afraid you haven't started.

A landmark 2015 McKinsey report concluded that it is "increasingly clear that companies with more diverse workforces perform better financially". That is the carrot.³⁸ In 2020 a pandemic showed us how a lack of diversity can take lives. The BLM movement, and associated cancel culture, showed us that the appetite for change is so vast that the stomach thinks the throat is cut. Those are the sticks.

We've also had a great practical trial run in making changes to our work systems. We've learnt that, when called upon as a collective, we are well able to adapt and adjust – as long as we believe the changes are beneficial to us all.

In the same way I had to disagree loudly with my older sister back in 2020, I feel the need to disagree loudly with media owners in 2021 – those who say we are facing too much turbulence to effect a radical change right now. I've seen us change rapidly in 2020, and the move to representative newsrooms and coverage can't wait another 50 years.

We have the carrot, the sticks, and the case study for change. There is really only one final question to ask: what are we waiting for?

³⁸ Hunt, V., Layton, D. and Prince, S., 2015. *Why Diversity Matters*. [online] McKinsey & Company. Available at: <<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>> [Accessed 4 August 2021].