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Gatekeeping Blackness: Roles, Relationships, and Pressures of Black Television Journalists at a Time of Racial Reckoning

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GATEKEEPING BLACKNESS: ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND PRESSURES OF BLACK TELEVISION JOURNALISTS AT A TIME OF RACIAL RECKONING

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who gained his heavenly wings right as I started grad school. You called me every day right before my show went on the air or when breaking news happened… which seems like all the time. Oh, how I miss those calls. I love you and I miss you. I know that I am making you proud because you told me I always have.

I also dedicate this work to my granny, who I would give almost anything to hug again. And to Noah, my writing buddy we lost too early while finishing his doc degree, I truly needed those Zoom calls.

To my family including mom, sissy, bro, JB, and friends, you all have been my rock as I navigate this space to achieve a dream. We did it!

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I would also like to acknowledge the 29 journalists who are quoted in this work and the many others who take their time to speak to me. This work is for you.

ABSTRACT

Building on Du Bois' (1903) concept of double-consciousness, Critical Race Theory, and communications theories including Gatekeeping, this dissertation aims to provide understanding of the experiences of Black broadcast journalists at a racially contentious time in American history. In 2020-2021, following the deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, and during a global pandemic, a "racial reckoning" ensued throughout the nation. The reckoning, which continued through the writing of this dissertation, was a salient issue for news media. Through my positionality as a Black female forever journalist, I interviewed 29 Black journalists who were working in local television stations around the U.S. in 2020 to gain insight into their *roles*, *relationships*, and *pressures* within the newsroom, while telling stories for the Black community. Gatekeeping and Critical Race Theory were used to understand their relationship to predominately white newsroom structures and their colleagues. I used gatekeeping, Social Identity, Standpoint, and framing to explain how Black journalists navigated their relationships and communicated with the Black community online, such as Black Twitter, and offline in daily community coverage. Themes for *roles that emerged in the analysis were:* 1) Black journalists as representation for the Black community (past, present, future); 2) Black journalists as Gatekeepers of Blackness, against misinformation and negative coverage); and 3) Black journalists' dual identity of adhering to professional norms vs. embracing racial identity. Themes

for *relationships* were: 4) newsroom culture of management, news team, and industry, including their connections to official sources; and 5) relationships with the Black community. Themes for *pressures* were: 6) internal vs. 7) external pressures for Black journalists. I also discuss stress, exhaustion and burnout of Black journalists resulting from these pressures. In conclusion, through their experiences, double-consciousness is reimagined as multi-consciousness. I introduce the concept of *Gatekeeping Blackness, comprised of* 14 tenets, to describe the process in which Black journalists center stories about the Black community, leave out harmful stories while being mindful of journalistic ideals, uplift counternarratives of marginalized communities, and advocate for a more culturally diverse, anti-racist newsroom culture.

PREFACE

What brings me to this research is *purpose* and *passion*. I initially considered a career in music entertainment. I was on my way, as I had a full out-of-state music scholarship as a singer. But as fate would have it, I got bit by the journalism bug. In 2001, during a tour of the *Dan Rather Communications Building* at Sam Houston State University, I saw a plaque with the name of the highly coveted and competitive Dan Rather internship. This opportunity allowed one superstar student an elite opportunity to spend a summer in New York City to work with "the hardest working man in television journalism." For more than three years, I worked overtime volunteering and leading efforts with the J-school to earn this accolade. Thankfully, I got it, which is one of the many bright moments kicking off a 10-year plus career in TV news. In 2022, I am a doctoral scholar writing about TV news with Black journalists who share a unique commonality with me.

Overall, my experience in TV news was positive, but I witnessed, felt, and dealt with a myriad of things behind the walls of the newsrooms I worked. As a Black female journalist who worked in multiple roles, including production assistant, master control, assignment desk, producer, executive producer, and eventually senior management as an assignment news director, I approach this topic through a lens that is unique and insightful. I have a wealth of experience and stories, some of which I briefly share in the Appendix, but this dissertation focuses on the stories of Black TV journalists working in 2020-2021. Local journalists are usually not the ones to have their stories told, yet they

have an integral role in covering their communities. Black broadcast journalists' stories in local news are even more of a rarity in academic research and popular press. There are a few scholarly and popular press articles on the subject, but this work aims to give a much-needed and necessary critical-cultural theoretical analysis of the state of Black TV journalists in local news. This research is even more salient during a racial reckoning after the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which are unique events in our history.

Through this work, I conversed and connected with 29 journalists working in a field that I love and to which I will continue to use my gifts to contribute. Working in television news is one of those careers most people do not truly understand unless they have rushed in panic to the control room for breaking news or know that the assignment desk is not just a place for phone calls (it is also where the free food goes). There is a specific newsroom culture and code of ethics which exists among journalists. In TV news, on-air deadlines are the actual training wheels making you sweat at the idea of missing slot. Working in a television newsroom gives you insider status of a place that has been central to informing communities nationwide for decades. This dissertation provides insider and outsider status of Black journalists and their unique challenges of covering the Black community. This is their narrative through their words.

Personal experiences and things I have witnessed, and now study, brought me to this focus. In February 2020, a conversation with a close friend, Judi who is a Black female anchor was the *aha* moment. We talked about Black journalist Gayle King's controversial interview with former WNBA star Lisa Leslie after Kobe Bryant's death. In the interview with Leslie, a friend of Bryant's, King asked whether a sexual assault

against Bryant years earlier would tarnish his legacy. Interestingly, the interview was on my mind as I saw tweets criticizing and praising King for the interview. We shared our opinions about the duality of that moment as being journalists and Black women. Amazed, I said, “oh my goodness, I think we have just found my dissertation topic!”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIPOC ..... Black and Indigenous People of Color

BLM ..... Black Lives Matter

CRT ..... Critical Race Theory

DMA ..... Demographic Market Area

HBCU ..... Historically Black Colleges and Universities

MMJ ..... Multimedia Journalist

NABJ ..... National Association of Black Journalists

PIO ..... Public Information Officer

PWI ..... Predominantly White Institutions

SCLC ..... Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SPJ ..... Society of Professional Journalists

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> "The blacks have the needles, and the editors have the scissors. The blacks are saying tell our side of the story, and the editors are saying cut it, that's not the point we're trying to sell. And so, the needle's in your backside and the scissors are in your chest. You work in pain."
>
> Rev. Jesse Jackson, Address to NABJ National Convention, Atlanta, 1984

On February 4, 2020, *CBS News* aired an interview in which anchor Gayle King talked with former WNBA star Lisa Leslie about the legacy of Kobe Bryant after his tragic death in a helicopter crash. King and Leslie, who are both Black women, engaged in the one-on-one interview that was viewed by millions nationwide. Within the interview, King asked Leslie questions about her long-time friendship with the NBA superstar (Feldman, 2020). However, a line of questions overshadowed the friendship talk when King asked about the controversy surrounding a 17-year-old sexual assault allegation against Bryant. King called it a "complicated" aspect of Bryant's legacy; Leslie defended him. The anticipation surrounding that interview had already boiled over thanks to the early video release of King's questions about Bryant's involvement in that case. A firestorm brewed online, most notably amongst Black Americans.

Black Twitter was enraged with angry comments, while hashtags began trending about the interview. Several prominent Black celebrities openly criticized King and questioned her role as a journalist, including rapper Snoop Dogg who posted a video attacking King. Some tweeted in agreement, with posts such as: "Listen, Snoop (@SnoopDogg) just came through with a word! We the Black community, are sick of Oprah and Gayle! #RipKobe #Kobe." Many questioned King's line of questioning by calling it inappropriate, untimely, and unnecessary while the nation mourned Bryant's tragic death. In King's defense, journalist Jemele Hill tweeted, "She asked a question about Kobe. She did not interview MJ or Bill Cosby. Gayle King is a reporter…" (Hill, 2020). Hill, also a Black female, had entered the online debate over King's identity as and loyalty to being "Black," while also still doing her job as a journalist. The damage control from CBS News to defend King's position as a journalist was several days too late. It was later revealed that the news organization had released the controversial clip containing the questions surrounding the 2003 rape allegations as the *only* promotional video of the highly anticipated interview. Several days later, against her network's wishes, King released her own video statement on Instagram offering her take on the controversy:

> I've been up reading the comments about the interview I did with Lisa Leslie about Kobe Bryant. And I know that if I had only seen the clip that you saw, I'd be extremely angry with me, too. I am mortified. I am embarrassed. And I am very angry. Unbeknownst to me, my network put up a clip from a very wide-ranging interview, totally taken out of context, and when you see it that way, it's very jarring. It's jarring to me. I didn't even know anything about it. I started getting calls: "What

> the hell are you doing? Why did you say this? What is happening?" I did not know what people were talking about. So, I've been told or I've been advised to say nothing, just let it go. "People will drag you. People will troll you. It will be over in a couple of days." But that's not good enough for me, because I really want people to understand what happened here and how I'm feeling about it.
>
> (Gayle King, quoted in Feldman, 2020)

The video got mixed reviews from various outlets, including the Black community online and Black press outlets.

Gayle King's situation is one that is all too familiar for Black journalists working in mainstream newsrooms, while also balancing the pressures of the communities they come from (Mapp, 1979; Newkirk, 2000). Newkirk (2000), a Black female and former journalist, argues, "in reporting on members of their race, Black journalists know their work is being closely scrutinized by Black people—who sometimes hold them to an unrealistic standard—as well as by their white editors, who expect them to get from their communities what white reporters often cannot" (p. 151). In her book, *Within the Veil, Black Journalists, White Media,* Newkirk (2000) describes a constant battle that Black journalists face while doing their jobs in mainstream newsrooms: They must navigate different pressures to please mostly their white managers, while also struggling to tell the stories of their community in a way that will please those community members (Newkirk, 2000).

Gayle King's interview is an example of this struggle faced by Black journalists on the national scale. However, this is a pressure facing Black journalists around the nation working in local newsrooms (Newkirk, 2000; Ingram, 2020). It is a common topic

of sessions and conversations at National Association of Black Journalists meetings. There is even more pressure with digital news and the fast-paced spread of information online through social media. The purpose of this research is to understand how Black journalists work through the pressures of informing and conforming to expectations of the Black community. More specifically, this study examines how Black journalists navigate this space in the digital age.

Black Journalists in the Digital Age

> [@MrErnestOwens] One of these days we will have a serious conversation about how the hustle and prominence of Black Twitter has diluted the opportunity and access of legitimate Black journalists. And how white power structures capitalized off of the divide and conquer of such a community. (Owens, 2019)

Black journalists have traditionally been the gatekeepers of information involving the Black community through Black media. But with the prominence of Twitter, the role of journalists using technology to interact with audiences has shifted (Deuze, 2005; Molyneux, 2015). Marginalized communities, including the Black community's use of Twitter with issues such as #BlackLivesMatter, have challenged traditional journalists to create more equitable coverage of racial issues (Freelon et al., 2018). The voice of the Black community is important in political messages and democracy. Their use of social media and their roles as citizen journalists have influenced the way journalists cover topics such as police shootings (Walker, 2021).

In covering issues related to the Black community, the racial connections for Black journalists can be too much to bear. In 2021, The Associated Press published a story about trauma for Black journalists covering the Derek Chauvin trial (Bauder, 2021).

Chauvin, who is white, was convicted of killing a Black male, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota by kneeling on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds during an arrest over a counterfeit $20 bill. Chauvin was a Minneapolis police officer at the time. National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) President Dorothy Tucker warned, "reporters covering the trial may be susceptible to trauma tied to their own experiences or previous stories about encounters between police and Black people" (Bauder, 2021). Floyd's tragic death that was caught on camera started a national movement with hundreds of protests throughout the United States (Groppe & Phillips, 2020), placing the Black Lives Matter movement into national headlines once again. At the center of the protests and coverage, brands, corporations, and newsrooms started releasing diversity statements and rethinking their stance on racial inequities. The *Associated Press* released new guidance on covering race, announcing the "B" in "Black" to be capitalized in references to race when writing news stories and press releases (Associated Press, 2020). Wesley Lowery (2020), a Black journalist, penned an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* declaring that journalists were having a reckoning over objectivity, and it was being led by Black journalists. He argued that journalists for mainstream news outlets have long leaned towards a standard of objectivity that shut-out certain marginalized communities. Now, Lowery wrote, journalists at mainstream outlets were shifting the narrative to tell stories on their terms to shed light on issues that have plagued both the industry as a whole and those in it for decades. He argued that Black journalists are leading the charge to shed the "objectivity" norm to achieve "accurate and fair coverage of all communities, especially our own" (Lowery, 2020). He also argued that social media is allowing journalists to take back their power from management teams,

giving them the platform and freedom to be heard by audiences (Lowery, 2020). His Op-Ed also addressed a situation when he first started working for a newspaper in Boston and was on the scene of a stabbing on a story in a predominantly Black neighborhood. He was approached by a Black male who told him the "The [Boston] Globe doesn't have Black reporters" (Lowery, 2020, para. 2) and mentioned the newspaper did not write about that part of town. Lowery (2020, para. 3) wrote:

> His complaints and his skepticism were familiar, voiced for decades by black people both outside newsrooms and within them — that most American media organizations do not reflect the diversity of the nation or the communities they cover and too often confine their coverage of black and brown neighborhoods to the crime of the day.

A *Columbia Journalism Review* article quoted Lowery and other Black journalists in which they discussed their emotional difficulties with covering trauma involving Black people, growing workloads, and educating their co-workers on racism (Ingram, 2020). Reporter Karen Attiah said:

> Too often we have this idea that covering 'Black stories' means covering pain, trauma, and racism, which in and of itself, is not only taxing, but a limited way to look at the totality of what it means to be a Black person in America. We need more stories that center us, without having to constantly cater or explain ourselves to a white gaze. We are more than just our pain and trauma. (Ingram, 2020, para. 4)

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used as a major contribution of understanding the experiences of Black journalists. CRT has roots in Critical Legal Studies from

scholars such as Derrick Bell (2018), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and others who connect race to power in American society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Since its earliest years, CRT has been connected to the field of law, but has since been extended to education, information sciences, and journalism and mass communications. It allows scholars to explicitly tell stories about American history through the lens of race and power. It has been connected to media (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020; Pritchard et al., 2007). Pritchard et al. (2007) used CRT in their study using a content analysis and interviews about racial profiling in a mid-western newspaper. They found "invisibility of whiteness in discussions about the bases for story assignments" as well as "racial profiling" in the types of stories which were assigned to non-white journalists (p. 247). Journalists of color were assigned to stories about race, while white reporters covered topics of power such as politics and business (Pritchard et al., 2007).

"Double Consciousness": Black in America

Black journalists have maintained an integral role in journalistic media from mainstream newsrooms to Black press, where they have had to endure what W.E. B. Du Bois (1903) calls the pressure of "double consciousness." Du Bois describes it as the stress of being Black in America, arguing whether it is "possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (p. 9) Du Bois' much-cited concept speaks to the dilemma that I aim to research within this work. There is a unique pressure faced by Black journalists who exist in a society in which they work but also find themselves marginalized. This is referred to as the "Black journalist paradox" (Wilson, 1991). Black journalists must fit a mold to report on stories, including those on

crime in the Black community, while also facing competing *pressures* to both report top stories (work pressure) and avoid the shame of being labeled an "Uncle Tom" (Black community pressure) (Newkirk, 2000). Wilson (1991) argued "African American journalists have brought their skills, often legitimized by university degrees, into newsrooms only to find those perspectives unwanted and unappreciated" (p. xii). For several decades, research has specifically looked at the experiences of Black journalists (Bramlett-Solomon, 1992; Bramlett-Solomon, 1993; Dawkins, 1997; Hull, Walker, Romney, & Pellizzaro, 2022; Mapp, 1979; Meyers & Gayle, 2015; Newkirk, 2000; Somani & Tyree, 2020; Williams Fayne, 2020; Wilson, 1991). This study adds to the conversation by focusing on the unique pressures carried by Black broadcast journalists relating to the Black community as they do their jobs in a digital world. This double consciousness is carried with them every time they go into work, tweet, or represent their newsroom as they compete to fit within their mainstream outlets.

Newkirk's (2000) foundational work from 20 years ago about the experiences of Black journalists working mostly in mainstream newspaper newsrooms will be used as a guide through the process of my dissertation. Her work was conducted over several years through interviews, documents, and stories. I build on Newkirk's work by focusing on local broadcast journalists, adding the influence of technology, including Black Twitter, into the scholarship about Black journalists, as well as my own reflexivity. Also, I look to understand how Black journalists are joining in on conversations over social media in conversation with the Black community. I will also dive deeper into the offline connection Black journalists have with members of their audience who are not connected with the internet, as well as how they use their connections to communicate with the

Black community. My dissertation will also go into more detail about the reactions and perspectives from the journalists about this experience. This will be achieved through in-depth interviews with journalists. This work specifically aims to examine the experiences of Black journalist connections with the Black community. While some of the pressures from the mainstream standard will emerge as a major focus to the experience of the Black journalist, it is not the sole focus of this research.

Why Study Black Journalists?

Historically, there has been a complicated paradox in which Black journalists are faced with accepting mainstream journalistic values and avoiding "Black stories" to gain acceptance and advancement (Mapp, 1979; Wilson, 1991). In this journalistic culture, Black journalists have tensions in which they must choose between traditional news values or the accurate representation of African American life and culture (Wilson, 1991). For example, an African American man may commit a violent crime that's considered news based on traditional news values, but writing a story about it may not necessarily be an accurate representation of the African American experience in context to the underlying issues of crime relating to this population. Black journalists have sought to develop ways to serve both purposes. One way is to give context, although editors may remove it. Another way, which Meyers and Gayle (2015) found in their study of Black female television journalists, is to employ strategies "to increase diversity of representation and provide positive Black role models to counter the negative images" (p. 300). Black journalists employed several tactics when covering the Black community including finding diverse sources, avoiding stereotypical sources, balancing stereotypes, adjusting the outer appearance of sources, and educating co-workers (Meyers et al.,

2015). While the pressures of newsroom values exist for all journalists, Black female journalists specifically did not feel they should conform to certain values concerning race (Meyers et al., 2015). Meyers et al. (2015) only talked to Black female journalists and this work could expand it to look at Black males too. Despite norms of objectivity and group status, some studies show minority journalists do not show preferences to stories of their own race (Coleman, 2011). In experimental studies showing stories with pictures of different races to Asian American, Hispanic, and Black journalists, Coleman (2011) found minority journalists provided fair treatment to subjects in news coverage regardless of their race.

There is limited research on journalists of color. It is even more limited when working to understand the experiences of Black journalists. Previous work addresses representation, opportunities, pressures, identity, advocacy, and journalistic norms such as objectivity. However, the paradox Black journalists face is not necessarily connected within one body of work to better understand their roles, relationships, and pressures, particularly those of Black broadcast journalists in local newsrooms. To date, scholarship has not attempted to combine the different concepts to examine the experiences of Black broadcast journalists in local newsrooms. In related scholarship, Nishikawa et al. (2009) found Black and Latino journalists were likely to connect to professional values of journalism to make sure they did not take on an advocacy role. And Johnston et al. (2007) found minority journalists believe they are a bridge connecting mainstream news outlets they work for and their communities. They note, "journalists of color ability to represent their communities to the newspapers and to represent their newspapers to the communities…" (p. 111). The journalists who were from marginalized groups working at

four newspapers also discussed issues including diversity in management and the need to diversify coverage through connecting to the communities they served (Johnston et al., 2007).

The issues regarding journalists being a "representative" of their communities speak to the purpose of this dissertation, which explores Black journalists consistently having the pressure of representing two worlds: one of journalist and one as a person of color. This is not a new trend. Back in 1979, Mapp observed in his article, Beyond Numbers: The Role of the Black Journalist in the US News Media in *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* that "each day the Black journalists must undergo, in varying degrees, an identity crisis: Am I Black first and a reporter second? Or do I owe my primary allegiance to the newspaper (or other media)?" (p. 11-12; *parentheses in original*). Mapp's (1979) study listed themes to understand the roles of the Black news journalist by issuing a framework which include: (1) Black journalists should serve as links between America's Black communities and the predominantly White newsrooms; (2) there is a need for Black journalists to sensitize white reporters, editors and other news professionals to images being presented of Blacks in the media, stereotypes in particular; and (3) Black journalists desire to become a real part of the news organization, not just appendages whose only assignment is "Black" news and who can be cast aside when the impetus to cover race issues recedes (p. 12). While the findings are consistent within the research about Black journalists from other studies (Meyers et al., 2015; Newkirk, 2000) it puts more work on the journalists. There has been little change in the years since Mapp's work, as Black journalists working in network TV newsrooms face the same stereotypes their predecessors faced which include added pressures to look a

certain way (Somani & Hopkinson, 2019). Another study consisting of interviews with Black network journalists found that mentorship was important to Black journalists' growth. Most of the journalists said they had Black mentors who helped them navigate issues within their newsrooms, which had very little racial diversity (Somani & Tyree, 2020).

Until the 1960s, Black Americans were relatively invisible in media coverage unless it was related to crime news (Mapp, 1979). The 1968 *Kerner Report* revealed what many Blacks already knew: Black Americans were not covered equitably by the media and more Black people should have a seat at the table in newsrooms to help foster more equitable coverage. This report, commissioned by then President Lyndon B. Johnson, was the result of an effort to investigate causes of the urban riots in the 1960's. Seven years after the *Kerner Report*, to tell the stories of Black Americans and create more newsroom diversity, the National Association of Black Journalists was started with 44 Black journalists in 1975 (Dawkins, 1997). NABJ's mission is to hire and maintain Black journalists, create a stronger pipeline for retention throughout newsrooms, and promote equitable coverage of Blacks in media coverage (NABJ, 2021). NABJ is now the largest organization for journalists of color with more than 4,000 members. Perhaps in part due to the efforts of NABJ, Black journalists are now the largest minority group within newsrooms (Papper, 2019). Despite this, the struggles of Black journalists can still be felt. Studies show that Black journalists are aware of their race while in the newsroom and interact professionally and socially with peers from different backgrounds (Meyers et al., 2015; Somani et al., 2019; Somani et al., 2020). While African American and other journalists of color produce more nuanced coverage of Black communities they are also

assigned less desirable stories centering power in American society (Pritchard et al., 2007).

Black Audience Trust in Media

Mistrust by the Black community towards news media stems from historical and stereotypical treatment within coverage (Entman, 1990; 1992). News organizations have traditionally framed Black communities as filled with crime and violence that is not reflective of the real world (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Kerner Report, 1968). Framing in television news show Black Americans are likely to be considered newsworthy when connected to crime (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003). The lack of trust between media organizations and Black communities has existed for decades. This affects audiences with real world repercussions towards the Black community. News organizations are likely to frame Black males as violent and criminal (Entman, 1992); this, according to mass communications theories such as Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1969) and Cultivation Analysis Theory (Gerber, 1998), and can result in the portrayal being the perception of the audience— a perception even among many Black males themselves. Despite this rocky history, Black Americans outpace white and Hispanics/Latinos as having more trust in their mainstream? news sources (Pew, 2020). Also, more than 53% of Black Americans feel connected to their news sources, with an even greater percentage, 74%, supporting the media's "watchdog role" (Pew, 2020). This trust shows just how Black Americans feel towards news information sources. On the contrary, Kilgo, Wilner, Masullo, and Bennett (2020) argue that distrust in news organizations is a fixable issue for Black Americans. Through a survey and follow-up interviews with Black Americans, their study found trust was low, journalists in their community were

not visible or known, coverage lacked context, expectations fell short, and the intention of representation had to be present (Kilgo et al., 2020). This work also had practical implications for newsrooms which included hiring more Black journalists, providing positive stories, and connect with Black communities.

Who information comes from is also relevant to the conversation about trust within communities. Some studies show Black Americans are trusting of information from media sources who are Black. For example, in Chicago, the African American community trusted a Black-owned radio station to talk politics and issues, while even contributing to it financially despite the radio station being a commercial outlet (Squires, 2000). This shows how Black audiences connect and trust Black professionals in media settings. Other examples include accounts which appear to come from Black users online. Even foreign powers have taken note of the Black community by trying to pose as members of the community. Freelon et al. (2020) found sockpuppet (fake) accounts from Russian bots disguised as Black activists were prominent in the conversation within the Black community online. The authors found the accounts, which used images of Black people, were likely to be retweeted, shared, and liked, showing the prominence of racialized disinformation from sources which did not come from the community (Freelon et al., 2020). Information sharing and trust within the Black community is also important towards conversations such as elections.

Black consumers watch more television than any other ethnic group (Nielsen, 2020). African Americans are more likely to use Twitter compared to any other group and are also likely to spend at least an hour longer each day on their social media compared to the entire population (Nielsen, 2020). Trust translates to dollars, as Nielsen

(2020) estimated the buying power of Blacks in the U.S. to be $1.4 trillion in 2019 and is expected to expand to $1.8 trillion by 2024. Therefore, it is important to understand how stories are targeted towards Black audiences as they are an integral part of society as well as the communities in which journalists work.

Purpose of Study

As introduced throughout this chapter, Black journalists are a vital part of newsrooms and society. They have a historical importance in mainstream newspapers. This goes back to 1827 with Black newspapers, the pre-civil rights era which remains relevant today. However, they have a constant burden of being in the middle of two communities with dueling expectations, being Black Americans and being respected in journalism. This work aims to understand the *roles* of local Black journalists around the country as cultural storytellers, including the *relationships* they build with the Black community as well as colleagues in their newsrooms, and the continuous *pressures* they carry when covering stories for mainstream newsrooms. In connecting trust to the *role* of Black journalists, it is important to understand how Black journalists relate to Black communities and communicate with them either online or in-person. This is especially true as Black journalists are on the frontlines during some of the most controversial times in our nation's history. Black journalists hold a certain space as being gatekeepers (Berkowitz, 1990; White, 1950) for certain information to the Black community. They also have a certain standpoint as a member of a marginalized group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), however this is in conflict with how they can be viewed socially as a member of the press (Kreiss, 2019). Through a CRT lens, this study aims to investigate the current state of Black journalists through interviews of working journalists in newsrooms around

the country. Through these in-depth, semi structured interviews, some of the questions to be explored include the role of Black journalists as potential gatekeepers to the Black community and how Black journalists are spreading information while balancing various pressures due to their race. In the next chapter, I will review the literature regarding the paradox of the Black experience and the journalistic space to build a foundation of race and other obstacles within how Black journalists express themselves. I will also explore several theories including critical race theory, standpoint, social identity, framing and gatekeeping. This will give context to the experiences of Black journalists working through protest and the pandemic. It will also shed light on the conflicts in how they share stories with the Black community while balancing their journalistic roles and norms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

This chapter outlines the importance of why it is critical to understand the perspectives, identity, standpoint, and work of Black journalists. From Black press to mainstream news media, Black journalists have been an integral part of disseminating information to the audience, specifically, the Black audience. This chapter also outlines some factors of information flow and why the needs of the Black audience are important for Black journalists to address. It will address studies about literacy and information knowledge, which are integral in scholarship about who Black journalists address in their work, as well as their roles in spreading information in their daily roles as storytellers. This chapter will also connect the work of Black journalists to multiple theories and concepts including digital media, standpoint theory, social identity, critical race theory, gatekeeping, and framing.

In 2020, a myriad of challenges arose -- a global pandemic, nationwide protests following the deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police or due to their race, and a highly contested, divisive presidential election. While George Floyd's death being caught on camera was the catalyst for Black Lives Matter protests and outrage in all 50 states (Groppe & Phillips, 2020), the stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic further exasperated responses from tired Americans stuck at home. Many students and working professionals, including journalists, had to socially distance from both their traditional work experience and from other people, instead staying in their households as the nation grappled with the threat of the deadly pandemic. The impact of the pandemic

and the loss of Black lives at the hands of police proved to be too much for many. The election of Donald Trump, a businessman turned politician, to the presidency further instigated racial animosity as he used Xenophobic and racist comments that were harmful to the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community by calling the virus that led to the pandemic the "Chinese Virus" (Walker et al., 2021), and harmful to the African American community by calling BLM protestors "thugs." His attacks were not just aimed at the public, as he also regularly hurled attacks towards news media and individual journalists, primarily women and journalists of color. During his run for office and during his presidency, Trump regularly called the work of journalists "fake news" and launched Twitter insults at news organizations and journalists as "enemies of the people." News journalists functioned under these conditions of working in a space with increased mob censorship (Waisbord, 2020). Harassment and online trolling became regular concerns for many journalists, including Black journalists, who were covering the pandemic, politics/election, and BLM protests that were center stage in 2020-2021.

Newkirk's "Private Dilemmas, Public Strife"

While introduced in chapter one, I want to further build on the foundational work of Newkirk's (2000) book, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*, which investigates the struggles and dilemmas of Black journalists in mainstream newsrooms. This study aims to build on the work of Newkirk by considering the nuanced relationship of Black broadcast? journalists and the Black community. The book, which captures stories of Black journalists working in the news media, gives a snapshot of Black journalists in society. It uses interviews, sometimes prerecorded not specifically for her research, transcripts, and documents to weave together the story of Black journalists. My

work uses a more in-depth, critical, and scholarly approach to this work by using academic systematic processes for interviews, including getting IRB approvals. I used interviews with local television journalists, which were all conducted by me, Also, I am adding theoretical prospective including CRT and gatekeeping to understand the experiences of Black journalists in the study. Additionally, I conducted these interviews in a post-digital society with social media dominance, more than 20 years after Newkirk's original work. Most of all, I am adding the positionality of being a Black female journalist-scholar, applying a critical/cultural lens of understanding Black journalist experiences. This context is also important to understand at the time of "racial reckoning" in U.S. media and society following the unjustified deaths of Black males and females. The 2020 context of the Black Lives Matter protests following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor is important. Other disparities in American society, including health and wealth disparities further exposed by the pandemic, are also important to the context of this work, which makes this body of scholarship significant to the field of journalism.

In the chapter, "Private Dilemmas, Public Strife," Newkirk outlined the ways in which Black journalists juggle stereotypes in news coverage, carry resentment of dueling pressures, and work under tight scrutiny by doing their jobs in an effort to fit in. However, the expectations are contradictory when comparing the newsroom to the Black community. It is described as walking a "tightrope" whereby "the Black reporter is assailed from the pulpit and Black radio stations, his crime against his race consider far graver than the wrongdoing he exposed (p. 151)." Traditionally, there is a trust within the Black community that exists, in which they are not to address issues outside of their

community. Newkirk describes it as an immense pressure for Black journalists who operate within two worlds: One in which they are Black and are expected to be loyal to their community, and another in which are a journalist and are expected to be loyal to the profession. Each of those positions has its own pressures.

Newkirk, who is both Black and a former journalist with experience in Black press and mainstream newspapers, wrote the book suggesting, "the news media should require its reporters, Black and white, to tread ever more carefully in Black affairs, mindful of both current events and past injustices" (p. 160). Newkirk argues that "negative, sensational, and stereotypical" coverage of Blacks "occurs subconsciously or in accordance with accepted news values" (p. 160). While I plan to have more in depth discussion about these values, it is important to note the importance of this quote in connection to the work of Black journalists. It underlines their dilemma of functioning within a world where they must operate with "double consciousness" (Newkirk, 2000, p. 158). There is also a common thread that exists in which Black journalists were withheld from certain stories due to concerns they would not be objective. This constraint on assigning stories is not standard applied to all journalists. Newkirk gives examples of this, including the interview by Ed Gordon with O.J. Simpson following Simpson's acquittal of murder. When the interview, only granted to Gordon, was put on *Black Entertainment Television* (BET), there was criticism from white audiences about its fairness. White members of the media questioned the objectivity of the interview and Gordon's credibility; he defended the selection of BET and his credentials. Meanwhile, several newspapers would not allow Black journalists to cover Africa for fear they would be biased, but never limited white reporters from covering Europe for fear they would be

biased (Newkirk, 2000). These objectivity concerns regarding Black journalists are heightened when they report on prominent members of the Black community, including politicians, athletes, religious leaders, and others who are held to high esteem. Newkirk explains:

> Unless there is a major overhaul in race coverage a conscious attempt to eradicate the negative and pervasive stereotyping of black people the contributions of black journalists will continue to be made in environs considered hostile to most black people. So the black journalists in the trenches will continue to feel the pressure of double jeopardy, a situation that has contributed to a turnover rate that is double that of white journalists. (Newkirk, 2000, p. 160)

Diversity in Newsrooms

The lack of racial diversity in mainstream newsrooms has plagued the field of journalism since African Americans began to be hired in the newsrooms in the 1960s. While 40% of the U.S. population is comprised of people of color, only 17% of newsroom staff is not White (Arana, 2018). This is despite the American Society of Newspaper Editors' (now American Society of News Editors) pledge in 1979 to diversify its ranks, especially in news management (Arana, 2018). More than 10 years before that, the 1968 *Kerner Report* was released, and it called out poverty, institutional racism, and explicitly stated that newsrooms lacked racial diversity and did a poor job covering African Americans (Delaney, 2018; Kerner Report, 1968). In the report, a stunning admission from the commission described America as moving toward two societies, one white and one Black, in which the latter was stuck in a cycle of unequal treatment (Delaney, 2018).

The *Kerner Report* specifically faulted the media for lack of "adequate" coverage of the Black community and cited that failure as a cause for riots (Kerner Report, 1968). The report was part of President Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, otherwise known as the Kerner Commission, led by then-Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois. The goal was to investigate racism and understand the reasons behind a surge of dozens of urban riots in the mid to late 1960's. The 11-member bi-partisan board examined racism through its multilayered report, and in terms of media coverage, it noted: "By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problem America faces and the sources of potential solutions. The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world" (*Kerner Report,* 1968, p. 203).

The *Kerner Report* also details reaction from members of the Black community about their grievances with news coverage of their community. Mainly it addresses how Black citizens mistrust the "white press." In conducting the field research for the commission, teams went into Black neighborhoods to interview "ghetto dwellers" and "middle class Negroes" for their feedback. An excerpt found within the report from a Black community member stated: "The average Black person couldn't give a less of a damn what the media say. The intelligent Black person is resentful at what he considers to be a totally false portrayal of what goes on in the ghetto" (*Kerner Report,* 1968, p. 206). Through hundreds of interviews, the commission found three main reasons for the Black community's negative attitudes towards news media: (1) they believe the media are instruments of the white power structure; (2) newsman rely on the police for most of their information instead of Black citizens; and (3) they cited specific examples of bias ranging

from reporting on false arrests to the lack of reporting on white vigilante groups infiltrating Black areas (*Kerner Report,* 1968, p. 207).

The *Kerner Report* offered several findings and solutions to the lack of diversity and shortcomings within the riot coverage. "When the white press does refer to Negro problems it frequently does so as if Negroes were not part of the audience," the report stated (*Kerner Report,* 1968, p. 211). This directly calls out organizations as ignoring the needs of their Black audience. While the report goes on to mention the problem was due to mostly white news staffs, it also suggests a "top editor" or "news director" monitor news content closely for language and stories that would relate to Black audiences, and that "a Negro staff member could do this easily" (*Kerner Report,* 1968, p. 211). This speaks to the tone of the report relating Black journalists to either being gatekeepers to the Black community, or perhaps a bridge to provide information serving the community. The report also discusses the lack of Black journalists before calling for more Black journalists and Black newsroom management to be hired: "The journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, and promoting Negroes," the report stated (p. 211). While the report does not look at the Black press specifically, it mentions how the Black Press is also integral to the Black community. This addresses an issue the present research looks to further examine. At the time of this writing, that commission report is over 50 years old, and the possible solution remains the same: having more Black journalists can be a remedy to inadequate coverage of the Black community.

Black Journalists into the Mainstream

During the riots in the 1960's, there were virtually no Black journalists in mainstream newsrooms, so it was a common practice for news organizations to send

clerks, janitorial staff members, and other Black workers into Black communities to cover stories that they would not have white reporters cover (Dawkins, 1997). In many of these situations, these Black workers had no prior journalistic experiences, although some desired to be journalists. As these issues subsided, the need to have Black journalists was gone, so many newsrooms either went back to tokenism hires or did not hire Black journalists at all (Dawkins, 1997).

Years before NABJ was formed in 1974, a consistent issue facing the few Black journalists in mainstream newsrooms was the "blistering heat in the black communities they tried to cover, while white editors criticized them for being 'pro-Black'" (Dawkins, 1997, p. 8). The following comment by then-presidential candidate Jesse Jackson during an address to the NABJ convention in 1984 sums up the double bind faced by Black journalists:

> The African American journalist is trapped in this two-ness. On one hand, you are covering a community that is enraged, and fighting for freedom and power. You were born into it, bred into it. You're covering a community that is enraged, in anguish and pain. But you're reporting to another community that is resisting and usurping and disallowing the sharing of power. And then you're judged by the appraisers, the owners, the chief beneficiaries of the status quo, the editor and publisher. What a crossfire! (Jackson, quoted in Prince, 2018)

His address resonated with journalists who were working in newsrooms around the country and almost 40 years later it still seems to be a concern. With the constant pressures of being "pigeonholed," many Black journalists are carefully labeling themselves and opting not to pitch covering "Black stories" (Prince, 2018b). NBC

Nightly News anchor Lester Holt described his stance: "[T]here were periods of my career where there was just pressure to define myself as a Black journalist, and I pushed back at that because I knew I wanted to succeed and not be defined by my color. I think if any of us are going to succeed, it's going to be on a broad scale" (quoted in Prince, 2018b). While Holt acknowledged he is Black, he continued to add clarity that he wanted to be known for covering all stories and that Black journalists should not just be pigeonholed into covering Black stories (Prince, 2018b).

Meanwhile, another issue that has been happening across the decades in mainstream news media is Black journalists leaving Black press outlets to work for mainstream outlets, only to return (Newkirk, 2011). While the reasons for journalists to return to non-traditional newsrooms varied from lay-offs, to desires to cover more stories about the Black community, to digital newsrooms, it results in having fewer Black voices in editorial positions at mainstream news outlets (Newkirk, 2011). While the issues of diversity and newsroom equity may seem like a distant memory, Black journalists are still pleading their case for equal treatment in journalism (Lowery, 2020).

Black Female Journalists

There are additional experiences Black female journalists face related to the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" saying, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Somani et al. (2019) found Black female journalists faced extra pressures with their hairstyles and physical

presentation in newsrooms. In recent years, Black female journalists have started to speak up about their appearance including using phrases like #NaturalHairOnAir on social media to promote being on camera with their hair in its natural curly state (Castillo, 2022; Harrison, Walker, & Kerns, 2022). In her autobiography, Wanda Lloyd, a former editor at USA Today and the first African American executive editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser in Alabama,* wrote that her experiences in media as Black and female were a "two-fer" (Lloyd, 2020, p. 264). Lloyd (2020) said she had to learn "how to think and work like men" and be "racially bicultural" (p. 264). These are pressures Black women in media newsrooms experience further explained through intersectionality. Black female journalists report discrimination and bias towards them for not wearing their hair in more Eurocentric styles (Harrison et al., 2022). Meyers et al. (2015) found Black female television journalists prioritized race coverage and made efforts to select subjects who did not fit stereotypes in news media coverage. The journalists were unapologetic in their approach as gatekeepers to what information and sources were used. In questioning journalists, I asked about the additional pressure of intersectionality for them as Black, female, and a journalist. Standpoint, which allows people who have been disenfranchised to lend their voice, will also help to explore their opinions about these topics.

From Black Press to Black Twitter

Historically, the Black Press has been the voice of the Black community, which has consistently been ignored and mistreated by mainstream media (Kaniss, 1991). Despite this, mainstream media have used headlines from the Black Press to cherry pick stories for their mostly white audiences (Kaniss, 1991). Early Black Press had a mission to inform and advocate on behalf of the Black community, which was largely absent in

news coverage but when present was misrepresented and stereotyped. The first African American newspaper, "Freedom's Journal," was started in 1827 by Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm with a mission to allow African Americans to "plead our own cause" against the derogatory, racist rhetoric in periodicals at that time (Bacon, 2003). This newspaper was essentially activism, which even influenced some whites to be involved in antislavery and civil rights (Bacon, 2003). Soon after, more Black newspapers were created, which allowed the untold stories of African Americans to be uncovered and shared. In terms of evolution, the definition of Black Press or Black media has shifted from being based on ownership to who the media outlet targets (Williams Fayne, 2020). Through interviews with Black journalists who worked in Black media outlets, Williams Fayne (2020) found their definitions were more inclusive in describing the Black Press, by no longer defining it as owned by or advocating for African Americans, but instead producing content catered towards African Americans. This evolving definition allows for more understanding of Black press in a digital age. In a content analysis of Black news websites, Greenwell (2012) found they still aimed to be aspirational to tell stories of the Black community, only with a new atmosphere which was virtual.

Black Digital Spaces

Squires (2002) describes the Black public as those "who engage in common discourses and negotiations of what it means to be Black, and pursue particularly defined Black interests" (Squires, p. 454). Much like Black Press, Black Twitter is a voice for marginalized communities who share culturally relevant information in this public, digital space (Clark, 2014). Brock (2012) found "Where Blackness and tech expertise

was ascendant, Black Twitter was understood as the mediated articulations of a Black subculture" (p. 545). In calling Black Twitter "terribly" understudied, Brock (2012) observes it is best understood as a "public group of specific Twitter users" (p. 545). Steele (2018) concludes:

> The Internet does not create a unique experience regarding community interaction. Instead, like other communication technologies, the Internet has the potential to be used by marginalized communities to challenge, extend, and refashion already existent resistant communication practices. This potential is mitigated by issues of access, competence, outside control, and the affordances of the platform. In the case of African Americans, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are each used in ways that mirror offline dialogue within the community. (p. 122)

Freelon et al. (2018) argue Black Twitter social media users can elevate their voices to have a counternarrative to stories about marginalized communities that are ignored and misrepresented in traditional mainstream media. Black journalists come from these communities and have an invested interest in how their communities are covered. Marginalized groups are also able to voice their concerns, and air their grievances through Twitter. Citizen users from marginalized communities have used Black Twitter to disrupt mainstream media coverage through their usage of hashtags of socially and culturally relevant issues aimed at their communities (Clark, 2014; Freelon et al., 2018). Black communities have mobilized during several high-profile stories, including at the time of the shooting death of Michael Brown at the hands of Ferguson, Missouri police by using hashtags such as #Ferguson and #HandsUpDontShoot (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015;

Jackson & Welles, 2016), which eventually garnered the attention of mainstream press. In the digital space, Black journalists and Black Press are no longer charged with the sole responsibility of informing marginalized communities who are using social media to share their own stories (Freelon et al., 2016; Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020) These efforts are getting the attention of mainstream journalists but, in some cases, also created a space for online and offline activities (Jackson et. al, 2020). Florini (2019) adds that "Black digital networks have been crucial in the efforts for racial justice during and since Ferguson" (p. 137), also linking to earlier websites like Black Planet, which have been integral for sharing cultural experiences and even mobilizing during a crisis. In Florini's (2014) earlier work, she describes the cultural collective identities with Black users online, which creates a space for solidarity:

> It is significant that many Black users not only mark themselves as "raced" individuals but also choose to engage in a communicative practice that has traditionally served to create and strengthen a sense of collective racial identity. In a medium such as Twitter, where users could "pass," many Black users seem to be prioritizing the performance of their racial identity, and doing so by using mechanisms that have historically created and maintained group solidarity in Black American communities. (p. 234)

These are qualities which have attracted both journalists and scholars to study.

Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation

With the internet, messages travel at a rapid rate, causing words to lose context which can cause us to live in an age of information disorder (Wardle, 2019). Wardle (2019) describes disinformation "as intentionally false and designed to cause harm"

(para. 8); Misinformation as false information which is shared but "the person sharing doesn't realize it is false or misleading" (para. 9), and Malinformation as the deliberate publication of genuine information to cause harm. Cooke (2021) argues misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are used to spread racist ideals which are harmful to narratives such as Black Lives Matter. An example of racist malinformation happened in news media when mainstream media painted the picture of BLM protestors as mostly violent despite mostly being peaceful which detracted from Floyd's murder (Cooke, 2021). Cooke describes malinformation as "false information that is shared with distinct intent to cause harm, and in the case of racism, to maintain the status quo" (para. 3). Most of all, it is described as a subtle and ingrained in society which makes it tough to defeat thus, as Cooke (2021) says, we are in a "malinformation crisis." For this study, it helps to understand the experiences of Black journalists who are constantly working on stories in mainstream newsrooms. Understanding mis/dis and malinformation could be fruitful into the roles, relationships, and pressures of Black journalists this work aims to understand.

Informing Marginalized Groups

Journalists are in communities all around the nation, providing information about local, regional, and national news. They report on social justice matters and are expected to cover communities from every walk of life. In thinking about social justice and information, it is clear this issue reaches social, economic, and political depths in its relevance to our society. Poindexter and Stroman (1979) analyzed 67 studies over a 30-year span from major journals about marginalized groups' media usage, media exposure, and information sources and found that while African Americans were the most common ethnic minorities to be studied, mass communications research mostly studied white

audiences. However, studies which asked Black Americans where they get their information sources showed an important racial difference. The authors found members of the Black community were more likely to use "interpersonal sources for information" compared to those in the white community who were likely to use newspapers (p. 25). Information is powerful, but there are many different perspectives when thinking about power distribution, especially considering who has it and who does not have it. Elfreda Chatman (1996) theorized about information poverty in the sense that society has certain in-groups and out-groups, which hinders the information flow amongst marginalized groups. Chatman's work with those who are in poverty, imprisoned, and other marginalized groups found that sometimes information exists, but there were factors hindering the flow of that information. Chatman's work with janitorial staffers found that there were several roadblocks which served as pressures for why certain workers did not share information, including secrecy, risk, and deception. This research helped to form a theory to understand that sometimes people may have information but not share it, in fear of being judged or having a lack of trust.

Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) have historically been underserved, undervalued, and compared to a white standard. Bell (2018) labeled the marginalized groups who are undervalued, specifically Black people as "magical faces at the bottom of society's well" (p. v). They have also been subjected to fewer resources because of different standards set by institutions, law, and organizations. Critical Race Theory shows that racism is embedded in the fabric of U.S. society and that it is permanent. Gibson et al. (2017) argued that the library is a public space and a rightful space for people to gain information, which is a right that leads to further opportunities.

The authors, who are women librarians of color, continued their call for the American Library Association (ALA) to stand against the notion of neutrality, and instead take a position aligning with groups who have been traditionally left out. In 2020, following unrest after the deaths of Black Americans George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, the same group made an urgent call against neutrality, further supporting a stance towards social justice (Gibson et al., 2020). They argued, "it is becoming clearer, however, that institutionalized white supremacy harms us all, and we need a shared movement to dismantle it" (Gibson et al., 2020, p. 6). While this work is rooted in library and information science (LIS), it extends to institutions including journalism to confront racism within its ranks and reconsider ideals about "neutrality."

Information equity is critical to social justice research. Lievrouw and Farb (2003) argued those who can obtain information are likely to have more opportunities in society. From a vertical perspective, those who have more money, education, and status have priority to information, which can leave out others who are less fortunate. Meanwhile, a horizontal perspective likely shows that while everyone can have the same information, it depends on a person's resources to be able to use the information. This point of view shows that while two different people could have access to the internet, the way they use it and what they choose to do with it varies. Having equitable resources including the internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) are critical. Lievrouw's et al. (2003) research for information equity argues it is pertinent that vertical and horizontal perspectives are needed, and that information for all is a right.

Reprioritizing Audiences

When someone is willing to listen, they can learn from the experiences of others. For example, Black Language was considered negative, unworthy to be spoken or even taught despite being a cultural part of our society (Baker-Bell, Paris, & Jackson, 2017). However, through speaking and listening to the participants from a cultural sustaining pedagogy standpoint, researchers found this to be an experience from which others can benefit. Cultural sustaining pedagogy is a valuable tool, which also allows for critical literacy (Caraballo, Martinez, Paris, & Alim, 2020). By recognizing and reprioritizing the white standard, we benefit from someone's experiences. There are unique and rich perspectives from different lived experiences, cultures, and backgrounds to form cultural community wealth (Yosso, 2005). This was extended from cultural capital, which had a standard slanted to a norm that was white. Yosso's cultural capital wealth expands the notion that certain groups (mostly white) have precedence over what is worthy in society. It allows for those who have a different background to extend their experiences and add to the conversation. Jackson et al.'s (2020) work on the mobilization of hashtags during the Black Lives Matter movement emphasizes how different communities can use their voices on a social media platform to spread information about something they are passionate about. They (the social media users) were able to include their voices on the platform which also caught the attention of mainstream media. This allowed the story of Black citizens to be heard by outlets which, in turn, helped shape the story.

Framing is important to the conversations about society. Huber's (2009) work extends cultural community wealth by interviewing 10 Chicano students from a research institution about their experiences with opportunity, fellowships, and other relevant

topics. The study found the racist nativist frames that were embedded in the society about immigration and citizenship created a form of oppression within the educational system whereby students could not benefit from fellowships due to being labeled "other" (Huber, 2009). These frames included dominant discourse of immigrant communities as "criminal" or "dangerous." The study argued that it is important to allow someone from a marginalized community to challenge racist frames to move toward a human rights frame "advocating for the humanity of all communities to be recognized" (Huber, 2009, p. 709). Using someone's voice to add to a story is not only critical to telling an accurate story, but also a necessary part of journalism.

Centering CRT

CRT, a leading theory to understand the role of race and power in America, was theorized in Critical Legal Studies (CLS) allowing scholars to explain institution structure using race, theory, racism, and law (Bell, 2018; Crenshaw, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Since then, scholars have continued to use it in different contexts and fields, including communication (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020; Pritchard et al., 2007, Walker et al., 2021). The lens in which I will use Critical Race Theory for this work centers tenets of race consciousness, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and the hegemony of racial hierarchy. Crenshaw (1995) wrote about the hegemonic role of racism embedded in American ideology. She argues that throughout history, Black Americans have been stereotyped under the rationale that their conditions, no matter how negative, are "natural" and has "logic." This rule of thought perpetuates a hierarchal pattern of oppression which correlates oppositional categories with white vs black

images. Historical dualities, such as industrious compared to lazy, knowledgeable to ignorant, or law-abiding to criminal (p.113) persist.

Race consciousness will allow the explicit awareness and construct of race to be prominent in understanding the journalists' experiences. Critical Race scholars argue race is a social construct (Orelus, 2013). In an analysis of role of race and CRT scholarship, Orelus (2013) argued, "ideologically, White hegemony has normalized Whiteness putting it in a lofty pedestal while denigrating and misrepresenting Blackness through institutions such as the media" (p. 582). CRT has been used to understand the effects of microaggressions on African American students resulting in negative feelings of "self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 69). The study used focus groups to talk to Black students about their experiences at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's) to better understand the racial climate inside and outside of classrooms. Solórzano et al. (2000) found it was not a level playing field for Black students, who also felt silenced, and they had to find counter-spaces for support, which required extra labor. A counter to race conscious work would be colorblindness or color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) which allows people to claim they "do not see race" (a common phrase) to ignore race conversations or continue inequities. Through the interviews with Black journalists, CRT allows them to express their experiences with race, discrimination, and bias working in newsrooms with an emphasis on the institutional structure of journalism. In his writings about fictional stories as examples of those at the *bottom of the well*, Bell (2018) contends:

> …personal experience, and the stories of people on the bottom illustrates how race and racism continue to dominate our society. The techniques also help in

> assessing sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression. In fact, a great deal of the writing in Critical Race Theory stresses the oppressions are neither neatly divorceable from one another nor amenable to strict categorization. (p. 181)

Space for Counternarratives

There are unique opportunities to shift the narrative to listen to those who are traditionally unheard and shutout. Counter-stories allow for a different perspective to be told but this is primarily possible when using a framework which supports it (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical Race Theory allows for further investigation of institutions through the lens of race. It supports a position to tell stories outside of a majoritarian point of view. This majoritarian, or white, viewpoint paints a picture that is a narrow worldview shutting out others who do not fit a standard mold. Counter-stories, which can be told through personal narratives, third person narratives, and composites, give a more in-depth view to the conversation. This is how we hear about those who offer a different perspective that has typically been shutout. It is important to tell these counter-stories from different perspectives beyond when a majoritarian story is told, and it is also important to tell them regularly as a dominant discourse. Caine, Steeves, Clandinin, Estefan, Huber, and Murphy (2018) stated that narrative framing and social justice can co-exist, allowing a cohesive relationship to benefit society. Caine et al.'s (2018) framework allows for the participant and the researcher to benefit from the process of storytelling, which is a process that could help strengthen the stories of the Black community as told by Black journalists.

We should be critical in the media that is consumed, as it is a form of pedagogy in which people learn from media, but media can also learn from people (Hawkman & Shear, 2020; Yosso, 2020). Through Critical Race Media Literacy, we can further understand the role of the media in the framing of stories and how different populations are portrayed. It is important, as there are intentional works to shift these narratives. This knowledge could be a resource in allowing journalists, especially Black journalists, to understand how important it is to reflect on media messages and to be conscious of the media they are making (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Next Steps in Research

When I think about these factors considering marginalized groups, information equity, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Media Literacy, I think of how I can contribute to the field. While there is literature about information flow within the field of journalism, I believe combining this with information equity is important. Information equity addresses information as a right. The Black community has the right to have their stories told in an accurate way which deserves nuance. They also have the right to have their voices heard and their stories told with a critical view. This would be possible through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Through the lens of CRT, Walker and Anders (2021) wrote about the experiences of Asian American journalists who felt "othered" working during the pandemic as well as dealing with racism, xenophobia, and unfair treatment within and outside their newsrooms.

There are significant gaps within journalism literature about information and marginalized groups. For example, while reading through the literature thinking about topics such as racist nativist framing or critical race media literacy, it helped me think

about how journalists contribute to these factors but could also help combat it through their work and lived experiences. I see my work with Black journalists as adding to the conversation of narratives (Huber, 2009) and counter-storytelling. By researching Black journalists, it would add to the social justice standpoint through the lens of race in the conversation about their coverage. They would also be able to have a critical eye to find the stories which matter, such as stories about protests, despite calls to be objective. This work can also benefit from the work of Chatman (1996), who theorized certain communities do not share information due to a lack of trust. Journalists who are aware of these certain communities can connect with them to make sure those stories are told. This is especially important because these Black journalists are a part of the community which has been marginalized by society.

Journalists and Standpoint Theory

When describing the world of journalism, it is traditionally told through the lens of a majoritarian viewpoint (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Due to this major critique, standpoint theory is fitting to study Black journalists due to their position of being part of marginalized groups who could offer a counter narrative. They can connect with groups who are like them and can properly tell their stories as supported by multiple truths. Standpoint theory derives from Feminist Critical studies to critique the dominant view. The theory finds that those on the "edges of society" who have been disenfranchised give a certain epistemological viewpoint that differentiates from the dominant view. Studying groups who are marginalized, including women, racial minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community, allows for their voice to distinctively challenge power structures which make them better suited for having solutions to the issues. Orbe's (1998) work used the voices

of 89 marginalized members from several marginalized groups to inform their work about the importance of not just lending, but prioritizing the voices of those who are not heard to further balance power.

Durham (1998) argued standpoint theory is good for journalism and allows for journalists to connect with different points of view in society to rightly tell stories. In a study about three investigative journalists who worked on different beats with marginalized groups, it was found that the journalists told better stories by adding voices to them and advocating for groups that normally would be unheard (Avieson et al., 2017). This notion moves away from the space normally reserved for objectivity within journalism, which is a norm. Schudson (2001) calls objectivity the "chief occupational value" of American journalism, which has ties to the past and still exists today (p. 149). Research shows that the journalistic value of objectivity further reinforces racist and stereotypical images of Black citizens in television news (Entman, 1990).

Robinson and Culver (2019) found "clear distance between journalists' conception of their roles and everyone's desire for reporting that better represents communities of color (p. 382). In their study of white reporters from a Mid-western city, they found a passive and traditional approach to objectivity. In short, the interviews revealed the white journalists lacked diversity in their sourcing, did not build trust in the community, and lacked truthful stories about race (Robinson et al., 2019)

There is a historic standard of objectivity which exists in American journalism for the field (Donsbach, 1995; Schudson, 2001; Tuchman, 1972) This tradition is described as balanced, fair, and accurate within news coverage. Donsbach and Klett (1993) call objectivity the most "important and indispensable professional value" (p. 78) for

journalists which, even compared to other countries, U.S. journalists have an even stronger connection to it. In a survey, Boling and Walker (2021) found participants perceived that "race/ethnicity impacts objectivity" (p. 8) of women broadcast journalists of color on Twitter. This perception was apparent despite participants considering these same journalists could be objective when presenting the news. The present study further shows how journalists of color, specifically Black female journalists, are presumed to be biased on Twitter. This could confirm their concerns regarding feeling pressured online.

Standpoint theory underlines there is "no Archimeden viewpoint," but instead creates a space where "all truths are standpoints" to allow a fuller picture of the world around us (p. 5). This allows a special theoretical contribution for journalists to add to the great viewpoints of the world. Orbe (1998) outlined three factors as foundational to theorizing with Standpoint theory: (1) critical view from marginalized groups to be heard; (2) co-cultural groups must be included in these conversations; and (3) the views are included in the greater body of scholarship to add to theory.

Standpoint Theory: "Through The Gates"

Journalists have traditionally held the role as gatekeepers, that is gates in which information or "stories" flow to the public (White, 1950). While in that traditional role, it included a society which relied on newspapers, the "Big 3" Networks (CBS, NBC, ABC), and a series of patterns in which journalists report as the trusted authority. Foundationally, this system runs on a hierarchal one in which white males became and remained the dominant voice. These patterns also allowed for those on the edges of society to be muted (Orbe, 1998). Berkowitz (1990) found that there are certain patterns in which journalists pass information in newsrooms which, in many cases, can be

complicated because they are comprised of multiple gates. In expanding work from Kurt Lewin and other theorists, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) connected gatekeeping to media sociology arguing five factors which influence how information flows through newsrooms: (1) individual, (2) organizational, (3) ideological, (4) routines, and (5) extra-media. In connecting Shoemaker and Reese's framework with gatekeepers, I will connect standpoint theory more closely to individual and organizational factors to better support this project.

Individual characteristics of journalists include their race, age, gender, and background (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This posits that journalists as "gatekeepers" are influenced by factors that include personal characteristics such as gender. For example, one could argue that a journalist who is female could be more partial to certain stories about women due to their "individual" partiality of being a female and understanding a woman's plight. While Shoemaker and Reese argued that these different factors hold different weights, by adding standpoint theory, it could better support the individual factors of gatekeeping by adding nuance to the individual characteristics of a Black journalist. An example of this would be that of Meyers et al. (2015), which found that Black female television journalists felt more pressure to make sure they interviewed certain Black subjects with a certain appearance on television so they would not feed into negative stereotypes of Black citizens on television. They even gave Black men and women advice on how to look so they could be presented in a positive light. This is gatekeeping. As for standpoint, the journalists wanted to make sure to add more diversity and ample voices to their coverage. However, it could be argued through standpoint theory and gatekeeping, that these Black female journalists used their influence from an

individual level to make sure they were the "gates" to how other Black citizens were presented on television. If the Black female journalists were not conscious of these stereotypes they would not have served as gates to these issues or stories making it to air. While being a Black female adds an intersectional quality to this argument as well (Crenshaw, 1989), it underlines how important individual characteristics could be when added to standpoint theory. Black journalists also add the standpoint to which certain diverse voices were needed in the news coverage in the first place. Through this lens, standpoint and gatekeeping are fitting to work hand and hand when working with Black journalists.

Other factors through Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) framework for gatekeeping also arise when discussing standpoint theory, including extra-media, which are outside forces, newsworthiness, and organizational pressures. I will expand on newsworthiness because there are certain practices, and norms and routines which journalists continue to hold on to in their work to tell stories. Tuchman (1972; 1978) argued that meeting deadlines are a part of journalists' duties, so they must follow certain sourcing procedures, such as relying on government officials and law enforcement authorities who may be more accessible and therefore help journalists to meet their deadlines (Doyle, 2003). These patterns lend the field to quoting the same officials as the leading authority, which further shutout marginalized voices as worthy (Doyle, 2003). Meanwhile organizational pressures, which include the commercial interests of a news organizations, lead to the notion that certain practices must continue. This is foundational to the dominant voice that has continued to overrule the field of journalism. White males continue to dominate news management and the industry, thus influencing who has

priority to be heard from a commercial view as well as the editorial view. Commercial interests must be met, and organizational guidelines are set in which individual journalists must fit to have their stories on the air. Berkowitz (1990) found there are several gates stories move through to make it on air; these gates vary from management, newscast, day, and, in some cases, types of stories such as breaking news (which are often prioritized). However, in the sense of standpoint theory, Black journalists must be in line with organizational gatekeeping strategies, otherwise, other gates would streamline their work, such as White managers who have the authority to cut out certain parts of their (Black journalists) work in the first place (Shipler, 1998). Journalists of color believe more racially and ethnically diverse management teams would positively influence news coverage of race, create more opportunities for them, and reshape the direction of how news media thinks about minority groups (Rivas-Rodriguez et al., 2004). Management could be considered gatekeepers of what type of information journalists are assigned to tell and the angles of the stories. Through gatekeeping and standpoint theory, the standpoints of marginalized communities would be reconsidered despite significant pressure through the organizational level in which stories flow. This is especially true as journalists have newer, faster avenues to reach their audiences. For example, as social media allows more freedom for journalists to tell stories with increased diversity and audience, there are some extra factors to explore within this research.

In connecting gatekeeping to standpoint theory, it is important to also recognize how technology and social media has influenced roles of journalists to tell stories in the digital age. Technological advances, including social media platforms such as Facebook

and Twitter, are changing the gatekeeping roles of journalists (Deuze, 2005; Grygiel & Lysak, 2020; Walker, 2021). It is also allowing voices of marginalized groups, including those on Black Twitter, Asian Americans, and women to have a voice and influence mainstream media outlets with their messages being heard (Clark, 2014; Freelon et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2020). By using standpoint theory and gatekeeping, underprivileged voices from different communities can give a critical view of the social, economic, and political world around them through what Reese and Shoemaker would cite as "extra-media" or outside forces. Black journalists would likely connect closely to those on Black Twitter, further extending the gap of Johnston et al.'s (2007) study about diverse voices in newspaper journalism. This work would add to the conversation of how gatekeeping and standpoint theory could help further the credibility and need for Black journalists. It is also important to note that I have not found any studies which combine gatekeeping and standpoint theory from the view of journalists, further supporting the theoretical and practical needs of this work.

Through Our Frames: Taking a "Stand"point

Framing would be rich to further employ to this work. If journalists move conversations about underprivileged and marginalized groups through the proper gates, it is fitting to understand how this information could be "framed" in a certain way. While agenda-setting tells us what to think about through salience and repetition, framing tells the audience "how" to think about issues in stories that journalists present (see Entman; 1989; Shoemaker et al., 1996). Through standpoint theory, it could be argued that journalists from a certain background are likely to frame stories with nuance due to their connection with marginalized groups (Johnston et al., 2007; Avieson et al., 2017). For

instance, the way Black Lives Matter could be told from a dominant viewpoint could be different from Black journalists who identify with those from the Black Lives Matter movement. An example to further support this work could be the traditional role of the Black Press, which openly printed work to speak on the behalf of Blacks who were misrepresented or ignored in the mainstream press. Instead, the present is work would be from Black journalists who work in mainstream media.

Johnston and Flamiano (2007) interviewed 18 journalists of color from four newspapers and found the journalists felt as if their newspapers could improve diversity through connecting with the specific communities they came from. The authors found this was a solution that could only have been articulated through journalists of color (Johnston et al., 2007). The way these journalists articulated the importance of telling stories through a diverse standpoint, in which they could further nourish, shows how important that it could be for them to be at the helm of the stories for the audience. When journalists tell stories, they do so from a certain "angle"; when thinking about framing and standpoint theory, the journalists would be conscious of what they are putting out and how it could position certain audiences. This further supports Avieson et al.'s (2017) work, which was not from the view of minority journalists, but instead it was from the standpoint of journalists who were put into communities of the marginalized. The present work aims to understand how framing comes into play with journalists who have these issues top of mind and they are considering how these communities are framed or perceived in the public view (Meyers et al., 2015). How things are framed influences the way society looks at those elements. Previous framing studies show that due to media portrayals, audiences have preconceived notions about Black males as over-criminalized

(Entman, 1989), Black citizens as overrepresented on welfare (Status of Family, n.d.), and Black people as stereotypes into certain roles.

Entman (1993) argues if journalists had a better understanding of framing, instead of their reliance on objectivity, they would "be better equipped to construct news that makes equally salient-equally accessible to the average, inattentive, and marginally informed audience" (p. 57). How journalists connect with the Black community and other marginalized groups through their words, texts, and images is all part of framing. And from a technological standpoint, these factors would take place on platforms in which Black journalists can more easily communicate intimately with audiences from underrepresented communities.

Criticisms of Standpoint Theory

It is important to note that Black journalists have a dual position in the present research. They are part of a marginalized group, which means they are in a position of adding critique to a dominant view supported within standpoint theory (Orbe, 1998). However, because they are journalists, they also sit in a unique position of power in society, which could be considered elitist (Kreiss, 2019). This challenge is an especially interesting set of details that support the present work and its focus. The intersectional qualities make this work even more important as a power-dynamic in which Black journalists exist. It shows that journalists are at a border to choose their space and their position with conditions. But the question remains: Are they always able to choose or are there certain non-negotiables that exist for them? These are questions to be considered. It is a position that no one would understand unless they too held this position. Journalists are out for the world to see and critique, but they cannot hide their background. While

certain works used standpoint theory to expand to journalists of color (Johnston et al., 2007; Meyers et al., 2015), the present work will expand the intersectional qualities to further understand this line of inquiry.

While this work is rich for further exploration, it is not without criticism in that there are several limitations and criticisms of standpoint theory. For instance, while the point that "every standpoint is a truth" can be a strength, it could also be critiqued for the very same reason within a digital landscape crowed with voices from every background. Overall, the present work will draw clear lines to organize the design to show it is through the perceptions of Black journalists in their conquest to tell truth. Another critique for standpoint theory is that it is not normally reserved for journalists, as they do not necessarily fit the mold of a muted group since journalists are viewed in society as elitists who are gatekeepers, advocates, watchdogs, and give voice, due to their profession, to economics, social stance, and political prowess in the world (Kreiss, 2019). However, while journalists do fit this category by trade, Black journalists who are underrepresented in U.S. newsrooms exist at an interesting intersection. Minority journalists are in a unique position to tell stories of marginalized groups because they themselves are part of these groups (Johnston & Flamiano, 2007).

Buzzanell (1994) argues that one group is not the same; in other words, an individual who is part of a group or identifies with a group is not a monolith. I would agree, but this criticism allows me to critically deconstruct that there are different views from which a certain group can be viewed. Also, by using each Black journalist's standpoint about the industry in which they work, the world they live in, and communities they connect with, it would allow me to further build on this point to have

them (the journalists) explain how they fit into this society and industry in such a contested time. Black journalists come from different backgrounds, and while they may have certain shared or cultural values, my work will not aim to create a space to teach Black journalists to have the same views. Rather, Black journalists who are in mainstream newsrooms under white leadership can give voice and connect with their truth to give their standpoint as well as those in the communities they cover. This also shows that because of their standpoint, they offer unique criticisms for solutions to the issues facing society and those who have traditionally been shut out of mainstream society.

Research Questions

Through connections to theory, historical context, and journalistic norms, and values the following research questions will guide this project in understanding the pressures of Black journalists:

1. What are the perceived *roles* of Black local television journalists in who work in mainstream newsrooms?

   1a. How do Black local television journalists who work in mainstream newsrooms perceive their roles as gatekeepers of (mis)information for the Black community?

2. What are the most influential *relationships* for Black journalists who work in mainstream newsrooms?

   2a. How do Black journalists who work in mainstream newsrooms perceive their relationship with the Black community? Is it the same offline in the community or online such as Black Twitter?

3. What are the biggest pressures for Black local television journalists who work in mainstream newsrooms and aim to tell stories for the Black community?

4. How are Black television journalists who work in mainstream newsrooms coping at this historic time?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, I conducted oral interviews with 29 Black news journalists who were working in mainstream local news outlets at the time of the interview. While conducting studies that involve minority journalists, there is a richness in the process of interviewing those actively employed in the profession (Johnston et al., 2007; Meyers et al., 2015; Nishikawa et al., 2009; Somani et al., 2019, 2020; Walker, 2021). Interviewing is a process that is enriched with the human experience, which allows someone to recount their personal experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; 2017; Sloan & Stamm, 2010;). Specific to the present study, interviewing is a process that is certainly familiar to news journalists due to their profession, but it can also provide depth into historic constructs. In Feldstein's (2004) *"Kissing Cousins: Journalism and The Oral Interview,"* the author argues interviews are rooted in truth telling/seeking, understanding events, capturing witness accounts, and experiences from a firsthand source. This "source" shares their point of view through a one-on-one process with a certain objective of capturing social structures of events and preserving the past (Feldstein, 2004; Sloan et al., 2010; Tosh, 2010). An example is the 2020 addition to University of South Carolina African American and Civil Rights Museum in which long-form interviews, tapes, and work created by veteran journalist and documentary filmmaker Steve Crump about his experiences covering events for 30-plus years were added to the archives (Thompson, 2021).

For the interview process, I used guidance of the foundational work of McCracken's *The Long Interview* (1988). This work added clarity to the purpose of qualitative interviews as "one of the most powerful methods in qualitative armory," which is the most "revealing" instrument of inquiry (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). McCracken adds:

> The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can take us into the lifeworld of the of individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the experience the world as they do themselves (p. 9).

One of the characteristics of quantitative research is focusing on the sample size and generalizability to a larger population. Meanwhile, qualitative research aims to gain access to certain populations to have a more intensive understanding rather than generalize (McCracken, 1988). By selecting Black local television journalists, I was able to connect with them about their process of how they see and experience the world they are in and their perceptions within it.

Some historians are concerned with marginalized groups as they aim to be more delicate in their sourcing to consider the ethics of their interviewee (Feldstein, 2004). Through my interviews, I talked with journalists who are working in a sensitive time covering some of the biggest stories in modern history. Feldstein (2004), who is a former journalist turned scholar, also reveals a certain positionality in capturing oral interviews in both history and journalism. He found that during his award-winning career, he interviewed thousands of people under the daily pressures of being a journalist at a

network. "Kissing Cousins" is a result of the intersections of those works which overlap. The project looks at several examples, including former enslaved persons who share their accounts of horror. Feldstein mentioned how he captured the story about former enslaved persons from a certain perspective as a white man. Oral interviews are a way to capture "cultural authenticity" through the process of speaking to a person about their experiences (Tosh, 2010). Sloan and Stamm (2010) argue oral history "gives life" and allows a human to give a personal oral account of their experiences, successes, and failures, which help to shape the world. Interviews allow us to experience something through the lens of a person who experienced it (Sloan and Stamm, 2010).

In the field of mass communications scholarship, interviews are widely used in research. There are several different types of interviews, including informant, respondent, narrative, and semi-structured, which all have differences for the objective of the academic project (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). I used informant interviews, as these interviews are aimed towards getting information from sources who have a certain "lingo," connections, and knowledge base about a certain topic. They have expertise on talking about topics and can also connect you to other sources within their network. This is especially important for my work as I specifically aimed to talk to journalists about their experiences covering certain topics including police shootings, racism, newsroom structures, and other controversies in which they can give me a perspective of covering these topics that I would not have been able to capture from other research methods (such as experiments or a content analysis). Using the interview approach is consistent with other qualitative studies addressing the journalistic profession and its practices, including

Johnston et al., 2007; Plesner, 2011; Tuchman, 1972; Tuchman, 1978; Somani et al., 2019; Usher, 2014; Walker et al., 2021, Walker, 2021; Walker et al., 2022.

Usher's 2014 book, *Covering the New York Times*, came from the author's experience writing a dissertation while working in the business unit at the newspaper. In it, 32 interviews with journalists were conducted over the course of five months. While this project was rooted in ethnography, it allowed readers to understand some of the inner workings of the newsroom and hear the personal standpoints of journalists that you would not be able to read through a content analysis or other process. Tuchman's (1972; 1978) work also demonstrates the result of interviewing journalists to understand more about their processes including deadlines, how they work, sourcing, and more. Somani et al.'s (2019) *Color, Caste, and the Public Sphere: Interviews with Journalists from Networks 1994-2014*, is an account from the experiences of 23 Black journalists who worked in network television. Through this work, the author found that the Black journalists still faced many of the same trials and tribulations, including microaggressions and racism, as their predecessors (Somani et al., 2019). Findings from other studies from the perspective of journalists of color in mainstream newsrooms found that journalists thought more work needed to be done to improve diversity and their struggles with the "double-bind" of being a minority and being forced to cover "minority" topics (Johnston et al., 2007; Nishikawa et al., 2009). The interviews with journalists shed light on the pressures they faced, but the personal nature of interviews allow journalists to express themselves in a manner they would not be able to in another setting, process, or academic method.

Positionality

Using my experiences as a journalist and scholar, Black journalists were able to connect with me to share their insights about their professions and thoughts. To date, I have published four academic journal articles which center the voices of journalists I have interviewed. None of those interviews are a part of the present study, but seven of the journalists are. The interviewing process from the earlier studies informed the protocol to guide this experience, as did my experiences in broadcast journalism including management. I also drew from my positionality as a Black woman who is a "forever" journalist. This strengthens my work as it allows me to have a certain positionality in my research to both understand what Black journalists are telling me, while also relating to their experiences as a Black person. Plesner (2011) calls it "studying sideways." Instead of studying up or studying down as is often done in social sciences, it allows a researcher who has similar "professional experiences" to connect with their interviewee. Through my process, I extended Plesner's (2011) work through qualitative interviews. When "studying sideways," I draw from many of my personal experiences with journalists. For example, when they say certain industry words such as "VOSOT" or "B-roll," I was able to use my knowledge as a former television news executive producer and Assistant News Director to know what those terms mean without having to ask follow-up questions about certain terms for clarity. During the interviews, I had journalists give me responses such as, "you know how it goes?" or "you were a manager, so you know how y'all do?" At times, I had journalists asking me about my experiences in order to get my perspectives on different issues they were dealing with (outside of the interviews). This was studying sideways at its core, which allowed me the

opportunity to relate and connect to Black journalists in a unique way to add to this dissertation. While the interviews were professional, there were personal moments to connect on different topics and experiences they have. I also referred to my interviews as conversations, which put the journalists at ease and built trust with me as a person who was talking through their experiences to understand their roles, relationships, and pressures. My experience and previous research agenda in this area gave me insight into what types of questions to ask for my interview guide, or how to cater my questions to certain specifics since I do not have to ask foundational questions to understand journalist roles and routines. My positionality as a news producer for many years as well as Assistant News Director also allowed me to have insight into the types of topics that I would cover and tap into what I was feeling in those moments.

One of my first research papers in the doctoral at the University of South Carolina was concerning the shooting of Walter Scott, an African American, by white police officer Michael Slager in Charleston. I had firsthand knowledge of the incident, covered it for my TV station, and I had contacts with informants who covered it. The same firsthand knowledge also comes from my experiences from writing stories about Michael Brown's death an 18-year old in Ferguson, Missouri by white officer and the death of 17-year old Trayvon Martin who was killed while walking to home by neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman. In each of these incidents where the victim was a Black male, I remember writing about these stories and working with other journalists – Black and white -- about these stories, and even having conversations within the newsrooms and outside of them about some of these tragedies. Most of all, I remember the experience of witnessing Trayvon Martin's trial and the collective gasp in the newsroom

when Zimmerman was acquitted. It felt as if the entire newsroom was invested in the trial, which had gone on for days. We had crews reporting locally on the story, one of which included Stand Your Ground Laws and using The Castle Doctrine in South Carolina as a local connection. The conversations that followed the audible gasp in the newsroom were a firsthand account that only a person in a newsroom who had the kind of trust from a fellow journalist, or an ethnography standpoint, could hear or witness. This is a reason I connect so deeply with the process of interviews, and which will be reflected within the present work. While quantitative experiments and surveys allow us to take a deeper dive into larger numbers and media effects, it is something about the passion of journalists I admire. I admire it because I watched it for more than a decade, which allows me a certain positionality in this work.

I count my positionality as an advantage. In fact, several journalists I interviewed told me they responded to my personal messages when I requested to interview them because of my relatability to them. They told me they knew that I "understood" them and that I knew how newsroom culture could be. And while I speak of my positionality as a journalist, I would be remiss if I exclude my positionality as a Black female. My process to study sideways and capture the inner pressures and practices of journalists exists because I, too, embody these experiences. My identity as a Black female will also allow me to be reflexive in this process while writing about Black journalists. These are experiences that I share with participants.

As I reflect on my focus on race and to some degree, gender, I realize that academia still falls short on matters of diversity as seen with the connection of #CommunicationSoWhite, led by International Communication Association (ICA)

professors looking at communication diversity after a viral hashtag (Ng, White, & Saha, 2019). I also realize I am in a space which, in many ways, mirrors the space I occupied before as a journalist. However, now I can use both spaces to inform my work by interviewing journalists and using my lens to be reflexive in the process to add to it. I will investigate questions such as "What is it like being Black person in a newsroom post-Insurrection?" or "What are your experiences as a Black journalist in a mainstream newsroom?" The qualitative interview approach will allow me to uncover the types of truths or capture the "eyewitness accounts" and depth I looked for. In Chatman's (1996) work on information poverty, the author and theorist aimed to work with marginalized groups, finding that those on the outside do not share information for reasons including risk, secrecy, and trustworthiness. This theory of Information Poverty connected to the experiences of journalists who shared information with me, especially as they live in their world and sometimes share information with those they trust, but sometimes do not due to certain risks which may include being perceived a certain way. Through my perceived trust, I am able to tell their stories and share this information in this important work about their experiences.

Building the Interview Protocol

I interviewed 29 Black journalists who were working in local broadcast newsrooms in designated market areas (DMA's) around the United States at the time of their interview. Market sizes are important to understanding how large or small a market size is according to the people in that market. For instance, a large market would be New York city as it's #1, which happens to be largest in the U.S. On the other hand, the smallest market is Glendive, Montana, which comes in at market #210. I interviewed

both male and female Black journalists in different sized local television markets, not focusing on national networks (Somani et al., 2019; Somani et al., 2020), or one gender (Meyers et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to build upon Newkirk's work with a greater emphasis on the context of information and Black journalists' connection to the Black community. Local news organizations add to this understanding as they are within certain communities and have built-in trust within them. Studies solely focusing on the experiences of Black journalists within local television newsrooms are limited in academic and mainstream work. My dissertation differs from previous studies which examine all demographics of journalists, focus on journalists of color in all newsroom types, or look at newspaper journalists. I focus on Black local television journalists, which centers this work as an important in a much needed area which is understudied in academic research. This is all thanks to my chair and committee who asked me to narrow this area to be more specific.

My interview protocol was guided by an etic approach to use theory (Glesne, 2016) as well as an emic approach guided by previous work that I have done. This includes my work with journalists who cover police shootings and protests, while also building upon other studies with minority journalists. Seven of the journalists who I interviewed were part of an exploratory study using the questionnaire which included Black journalists I interviewed about Black protests. The journalists who fit the scope of this study were asked several questions which mirrored the area of this research and was used to help guide the questionnaire. It is also built on my positionality as a Black television journalist turned scholar. Part of this interview guide includes questions about

experiences or pressures from working in a newsroom. Questions from my interview protocol include:

- Do you believe Black journalists are more equipped to tell stories about the Black community?
- There are certain stereotypes of the African American community in news coverage and in the media. What are some of your everyday experiences as an African American journalist?
- How has your identity informed your coverage of racial events, for instance, protests following the death of George Floyd?
- When reporting on the protests, how are you covering issues of race? writing about racial identities in your coverage?

The questions had already been explored with journalists in my previous research, and I updated and reworked some of the questions to fit the scope of this study. The interviews were later added to this research, as well as additional questions, to include suggestions by my committee. By using some of these questions which have already resulted in fruitful data results, the question set served as an exploratory process whereby I believe the answers were more robust. Also, as part of this process I used the fluidity of the process of in-depth interviews to adjust the questions and ask follow-up questions to the protocol as needed. The full interview protocol can be found in *Appendix A*.

Recruiting

When recruiting, McCracken (1988) argues "less is more" as a thoughtful process in selecting participants (p. 14). I carefully selected my participants by seeing whether they identify as Black and/or African American. I took my time to go through social

media accounts to decide who I would contact for this project. It is a process which took hours of time to peruse their articles and tweets. After clearly identifying that they currently worked in a local TV news and they identified as Black/African American, I then contacted them using correspondence in the *Appendix*. I also used contacts for recruitment, which was important in my positionality and snowball sampling. In this process, I mostly looked at Instagram and Twitter to see if they explicitly self-identified as Black or African American, such as listing that they are a member of The National Association of Black Journalists. I also visited their television station website if I needed more validation, or to read more about their newsroom role and background. I questioned each journalist ahead of the interview to ensure that they identified as Black/African American and worked in local television news. Each journalist confirmed this to me, including two journalists who were in transition to national newsrooms at the time of the interviews. However, they still fit the scope of the study as local newsroom journalists centering the time of 2020-21 for this research.

I contacted journalists through direct messages and emails. I have a sample included in the Appendix. Due to the busy schedules of journalists, I contacted most twice before moving on to other options, however, there were a few journalists I reached out to only once. This happened after a journalist was in a market which had breaking news causing his or her schedule to become too busy, or if I had reached enough journalists within a certain demographic (such as years of experience).

Contacting journalists that I do not know can be a task that is unduly time-consuming. There is an emotional labor with qualitative interviews and research, especially with journalists who are already stretched thin with tight deadlines. I worked

around their schedules after securing their willingness to participate. At least three interviewees rescheduled, including one who was dealing with breaking news and another with a personal situation. This is expected in qualitative research using interviews as the researcher must be flexible in working with participants with busy personal and professional lives. Recruiting participants took persistence, time, and dedication. Also, I realize building trust is another major aspect of this process. In some cases, journalists asked me for an official email from a school-affiliated address or to have a conversation before they agree to do the interview. Also, with the concerns of privacy on social media, I did not recruit using a flyer as I wanted to be discreet in my recruiting goals.

I had conversations before and after all my interviews. Some of these conversations lasted an hour, which is not part of the protocol but is built into the process of me studying sideways (Plesner, 2011) with Black television journalists. These pre-conversations and post-conversations have allowed me to build community and trust with my participants. As a formally trained journalist, I realize journalists are the ones who typically seek out interviews for their stories and outlets which makes them more skeptical of being contacted by a researcher, so I used my experiences to build trust. I documented part of my process with notes and memos to help with my reflexivity of this journey. This will help to further build the richness of my qualitative research design.

Snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and informant interviews were used to recruit journalists who fit the criteria of this research (Lindlof et al., 2017). I used a range of journalists to get an idea of their experiences with using social media and their historical context for connecting with the Black community. In fulfilling my research design, I recruited a range of journalists by years, experiences, and markets. I recruited

journalists who worked pre-Twitter and some who have also worked only in an environment after the introduction of Twitter. This allowed journalists to speak about their experiences with social media across time. The journalists who agreed to speak with me had experiences ranging from those with less than 5 years of experience (early career), to those between five and twenty years (mid-level) and to those who have more than 20 years (experienced/veteran). This range allowed me to further interrogate their experiences and views of online activity, as well as gauge their connections with Black communities on Black Twitter. This will be fruitful to give context and add to previous studies as well as provide a framework for this current study.

For the sake of privacy, I gave the journalists pseudonyms, took out television station call letters, and, in some instances, I took out specific city references to protect confidentiality. For instance, if the journalist said "I work in Los Angeles where the crime rate is high and it's tough on journalists." I would redact Los Angeles and write [the city] instead. But if a journalist traveled to Ferguson, Missouri, on assignment, I left it in since it is an area where local journalists were sent into the area to report for their newsrooms. I explained to the journalists there was some risk for participating in the study, but it would be minimal due to using pseudonyms. Several journalists told me they were not worried about this, they trusted me that I would get the story "right," and that my experiences as a newsroom leader and Black journalist gave them comfort in being sensitive to certain topics. These issues were addressed within the Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms that I submitted. I received IRB approval for this study in May 2021 and I started recruiting in June. Here is an example of one of the responses I received on September 9, 2021, after emailing a Black journalist:

Hi Denetra,

I would be happy to assist you with your dissertation. I must admit, I'm impressed with the topic you have chosen to look into as it is a very important perspective and story to be told. It's often overlooked and taken for granted as I'm sure you can empathize with as a former newser and Black journalist.

Just let me know some times you have in mind to knock out the interview.

God speed.

[journalist name]

I actively recruited for this phase of the dissertation from May-October of 2021. As I started getting responses from journalists with certain backgrounds, I started to focus on Black journalists with different characteristics. For instance, once I realized I had several female journalists, I started to look for more male journalists to add to the study. This was also true for behind-the-scenes and on-air roles. As for the exploratory interviews, a great portion of which were used to build the interview guide and were eventually added to this scholarship, a separate IRB was used (but was also included in this one) in October 2020 and the interviews were completed from October to November 2020. It is important to note these interviews with Black broadcast journalists in local news helped me find early themes which were used in my proposal and eventually within this scholarship.

Participants

In the sample, 18 participants identified as women and 11 identified as men. Seven of the participants were from the exploratory study used as a guide for this research. While this study does not necessarily address issues involving sexual orientation, I would like to add

that two of the journalists identify as gay, which is important to adding depth to the identities of the journalists I spoke with.

The roles of the interviewees in the newsroom varied from behind-the-scenes to on-air. Several journalists had started their career in different roles including the assignment desk, production assistant, writer, editor, and other roles in production. Only one journalist moved from an on-air job to behind-the-scenes while others worked in dual roles such as producer/reporter, photojournalist/multi-platform producer, and reporter/anchor. I am not including multi-media journalists (MMJ) in this category as this is a role which is meant to encompass multiple skillsets of being a photojournalist and a reporter, sometimes known as a "one-man band," where the journalist writes, shoots, edits, and posts their own content.

There was a wide range of experience with the journalists. Twelve worked behind-the-scenes, including eight producers, one senior news manager and three photographers/photojournalists. On-air journalists included three MMJ's, reporters, anchors, one traffic reporter, and several anchor/reporters. Their experience levels were also diverse. One started her first TV news job shortly after Floyd's death and when I interviewed her, she had just celebrated her one year anniversary in the field. The journalist with the most newsroom experience had more than 20 years.

In terms of newsrooms and markets, two journalists had only worked in one market, while others were in their fifth or sixth professionally. All the journalists had local news experience, with a few having some national news experience.

All the journalists were college educated and formally trained as news journalists, meaning they graduated with a bachelor's from a journalism program or had a graduate

degree. Five had a master's degree, while two were in the process of getting or considering a Ph.D. Some of the journalists worked part-time as adjuncts at journalism schools. More than a third were Historically Black College and University (HBCU) graduates, while the rest graduated from Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Their location ranged across the U.S., while DMA size ranged from mid-market to larger markets – something that is important to newsroom culture and is not typically looked at in journalism research related to underrepresented groups, such as Black journalists. All of the journalists worked in markets which covered BLM protests and were affected by the covid-19 pandemic. Some of the journalists were just returning to the newsroom following the shutdowns caused by the pandemic, while others still had not physically returned to the newsroom. This was also important to understanding the experiences of the journalists. Several journalists started their current newsroom jobs and changed jobs in the middle of the pandemic. This is an interesting point about the journalists who were navigating pandemic, protest, and other life changes in 2020-2021. A table of participants can be found at the end of this chapter.

Data Collection

Eleven interviews were completed over Zoom, while 18 were conducted over the phone. All were recorded on two devices and transcribed. The interviews ranged from 37 minutes to 3 hours and 31 minutes. The average interview was one hour and 17 minutes long. In all, there was nearly a day and a half of interviews, totaling 34 hours and 15 minutes. This does not include the hours of conversations and correspondence that I had with the participants. In the past, I have seen several studies with news journalists argue that their interviews are "shorter" due to journalists limited time to interview and busy

schedules. My experience was different. In my shortest interview, which was right at 37 minutes, it was cut short for a personal matter. We planned to reconnect to finish the interview but did not have the opportunity due to scheduling. However, most of the important questions for this research were completed. Interestingly, I had several journalists who were off the clock but were receiving calls from their manager during our conversation. I bring this up to emphasize that journalists have demanding careers which can go into their personal lives. Also, one of the Zoom calls was interrupted due to a bad connection and disconnected. We were able to rejoin and continue the interview with no issues. Other journalists talked to me during their lunch breaks or while out on a story. Most of them scheduled time outside of work or during a commute so that we could talk without interruption. Scheduling and the process of completing these interviews are a process in itself that I could write about.

My interviews are usually longer due to the content of the interviews. I also believe I engage in conversation with the journalists to express themselves giving more context to the interview. There was more than 300 pages of transcription. I used Otterai to help transcribe the interviews and I listened to each interview at a slower speed to while cleaning the transcriptions, correcting mistakes by the service, and taking notes. Otterai is a virtual transcription company which allows researchers, journalists, and other consumers to upload audio files with speech and converts it into text. I organized the data into folders and started the process to divide the content by interview, label, and pseudonym to analyze. In describing the amount of information and files McCracken adds, “qualitative data are normally relatively messy, unorganized data. It demands techniques of observation that allow the investigator to sort and ‘winnow’ the data,

searching out patterns of association and assumption" (p. 19). Learning from my previous experiences with large amounts of data from my interviews, I organized them in folders. I coded manually, which is a process whereby I went over the interview transcripts, organized them into codes, categories, and eventually themes. I coded electronically through Microsoft Word rather than printing out the transcripts. Then, I put the data into groups using Microsoft Excel to help organize for the themes and quotes that I will use. A separate Excel sheet was used for each journalist as I separated salient points and quotes from the interviews.

I used Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) one of the "first methodologically systematic approaches to qualitative inquiry" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 41). As mentioned, I read over the transcriptions and listened to them before coding at least two rounds *In Vivo*, descriptive, and emotion & value coding (Saldaña, 2009). *In Vivo* was used initially to help organize and synthesize the data as it is part of the Grounded Theory process. *In Vivo* allows you to code with verbatim and/or using short phrases to preserve the actual language from within an interview. It is primarily used for "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74).

It was important for my interviews with journalists that I preserve their language as they describe their experiences. I used bolded text, underlined, and added notes in the margins of my coding process with an *In Vivo* label to organize my codes. My second round of codes included *Emotion* coding, which explores "intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions" that are expressed by participants or are inferred through the coding process (p. 86). I also used codes with *Values,* which aims to

understand “participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 89).

Table 3.1 Journalist Summary of Roles, Pseudonyms, and Demo

Pseudonym	Demos	Journalist Role	TRT
Rachel	F	MMJ/Fill-in Anchor	1:38:19
Tamia	F	Producer	47:38
Laci	F	MMJ	57:37
Faith	F	News producer	1:05:37
Nichole	F	Producer	1:01:53
Whitney	F	Reporter	58:42
Hailey	F	Reporter/Anchor-	50:57
Norah	F	Producer	1:22:09
Shontia	F	Senior News Manager	54:29
Zara	F	Producer	42:05
Tristan	M	Producer	1:18:29
Theresa	F	Morning Producer	57:33
Cameron	M	Anchor	36:55
Marie	F	Reporter/Weekend Anchor	45:05
Tiffany	F	Reporter/Weekend Anchor	56:08
Michael	M	Reporter	43:46
Giselle	F	Anchor	38:13
Joe	M	Photographer	52:37
Kyle	M	Anchor	3:30:40
Chris	M	MMJ	1:10:31
Tiana	F	Producer	1:56:01
Maxwell	M	On-air Talent	1:07:30
Lamar	M	Photographer	1:34:35
Eric	M	Reporter/Anchor	1:03:50
Luke	M	Anchor	1:29:25
Stacey	F	Reporter	1:14:24
Ryan	M	Photojournalist/multi-platform Producer	1:31:53
Renee	F	Reporter	58:45
Danielle	F	Reporter	1:29:25

CHAPTER 4

THEIR NARRATIVE: TRIALS AND TRUTHS OF BLACK BROADCAST JOURNALISTS

> Being Black doesn't turn off when you get to a newsroom…it's not like, 'Oh, well, I'm here now I guess I can take this Black mask off.' Like, that doesn't work like that. We are Black till the day we die.
>
> - Ryan, Black journalist interview

In this chapter, I will outline more about the roles, relationships, and pressures involving Black journalists in today's local newsrooms. My goal was to have conversations with the journalists to better understand their experiences in local television newsrooms during this historic time. Throughout my analysis of the interviews with 29 Black television news journalists, I will expound on the roles Black television journalists hold in predominantly white news institutions. The second section breaks down the relationships of Black journalists in the newsroom (management, peers), and outside of it (Black community). Then, I will delve into the internal and external pressures which are threaded throughout the interviews. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a closer look at how Black journalists center counterstories.

4.1 REPRESENTATIVE FOR BLACK COMMUNITY

The first section about roles lays out the historical importance of Black journalists. Interwoven would is the factor of trust, which resonates within other themes as well. Secondly, I will also detail more about the second theme of a journalist's role being a "gatekeeper." This gatekeeping role details how Black journalists both leave stories in, as well as leave things out, as a protective barrier for the Black community (Meyers et al., 2015). Within this theme, I will explain more about misinformation and how Black journalists are gatekeepers for issues they see as "bad" or "negative" coverage, such as constant coverage of crime with Black communities. This section will also detail more on the rampant stereotypes which exist that Black journalists work diligently to suppress. Wrapping up the section about the Black journalists' role is the overarching theme of journalistic norms which seemingly creates conflict within the Black community.

Historically Important: The Living Legacy

There is a great pride which comes with being both a journalist and being Black which resonated in all the interviews. It is a badge of honor for journalists to say they work in news media. The journalists I interviewed reminded me that they are "writing the first draft of history" and have done so for a long time. The journalists have a similar pride when identifying as African American and/or Black. The first research question aims to understand what Black television journalists perceive to be their primary role in newsrooms. They tell me they are a living, breathing legacy of the Black journalists who came before them. The interviews were filled with references the Black journalists made about the historical importance of having Black journalists in American society. There

were stories about the start of NABJ, local news personalities they watched growing up, and even the importance of the Kerner Report. I was told the story of Max Robinson, who broke down barriers to become the first Black anchor on network news. Chris said it was a historic time, but noted it did not come without controversy. Robinson faced barriers as his "Blackness" was hid behind a logo on air. He said seeing more of him, including his "afro" hairstyle would have added another layer to "assume the position of authority in the community." This was a position he thought was important for society to see.

Black journalists realized their role signified an important one in history showing the "blood, sweat, and tears" of those before them. Several of the Black journalists reminisced about watching certain personalities growing up. I could hear the joy in their voices recalling the sweet memories watching the morning news shows with grandma, dad, or mom. Amazingly, as fate would have it, a few of these youthful news watchers grew up to work with, and be mentored by, some of the Black trailblazers they admired. This was the case for several participants, including Kyle, Cameron, Giselle, and Lamar. Meanwhile, other journalists talked about the absence of Black television personalities when they watched. Stacey told me a story about how "fascinated" she was with watching TV news but was "struck" by the lack of representation of people who looked like her. Fortunately, she found a glimmer of positivity with the little representation which existed on screen. She said, "there was Black women who looked like me, here I am this little girl with pigtails. And I saw myself in those people." The "few" examples she saw was enough to plant a seed for a career she would grow to love. The only Black journalists Luke remembered seeing on the television news were reporting on sports. He said, "people who look like me were doing sports. And I wanted to change that." A

similar point was made by Cameron who told me a story about a school visit where he asked a group of Black boys to name Black male figures in the media outside of sports, and they could only name Don Lemon. Cameron wanted to inspire them to be future news journalists, while Ryan wanted to encourage the next generation of Black males to consider opportunities behind-the-scenes. He said there were so few Black males in TV news and even fewer who were not on camera. He wanted to change this. Chris, a Black male with more than 20 years of professional television experience, shared more historic context as to why Black journalists exist today:

> We all came about in this industry, because during the Civil Rights Movement, you know, all these all-white newspapers and networks and they found out, 'Hey, we can't get in to report on what King and what SCLC and NAACP is doing, because they don't really trust us. But how are we going to solve that? Well, I know this Black guy that literally was this, I know this Black guy who is an English teacher, I think he can be a good writer, he's never wrote for newspapers before. But if we get him, I bet you, they'll talk to him.'

Presently Thriving to Represent

Beyond this history lesson is a thread of stories from Black journalists who realize this is a history-making moment they are fortunate to document in real time. Tiffany, an anchor/reporter, told me, "I am the face of a Black person's prayers being answered." This powerful statement was an emotional one as she mentioned how it "brought tears" to her eyes thinking about whether a plantation or a slave picking cotton existed on the very land her newsroom was built. She said:

> There are people who lived in the southern part of the United States who only dreamed of seeing a Black person on television, not getting in trouble. Someone working on television, doing the news, and I get to be that face that they get to see…to present the best part of humanity from the Black culture on television.”

Giselle had a similar reaction, saying that being a Black woman in television “motivated” her to go “above and beyond.” She said, “because I know at one time I wasn't supposed to be here. I know at one time people will never have thought to put a Black woman on TV.” She went on to say that she is making a “positive impact, because my culture, what I represent, how I was raised, I’m able to put that on display through my storytelling.” This type of pride in culture was threaded throughout all the interviews. Black journalists knew their presence was an example for the Black community.

Connected to the historical importance is the expectation within the newsroom to give context to “everything Black.” Black journalists say they are often expected to be “in the know” about the Black community. They represent a foundational layer in the context of understanding certain things culturally in society such as figures, vernacular, and customs. They are expected by news teams to be on top of certain news even if it is not part of their “beat.” Shontia, a seasoned news manager, shared an experience when she was called out during her internship at a news station. The Black news crew working for the television station put her on the spot by testing her knowledge. It taught her a life lesson about being a Black journalist that she would never forget:

> I was going out in the field with a reporter, photographer, and I got in the vehicle. And he turned around looked at me, he said, ‘who is Jesse Jackson? And what does he do?’ And I was like, he's Jesse Jackson (laughs), what do you mean? And

> he said, ‘get out the car and go find out who Jesse Jackson is or, you're not coming with me!’ Because that's who we were going to go meet at the airport. And I had to do some quick, quick research. Because he was not playing. And he said, ‘what good are you as a Black journalist if you can't explain the history and you can only tell what's happening right now? But every right now has history, and you need to know it! Otherwise, you’re kind of useless.’

That moment changed her, and she was grateful for it. This is what resonates with some Black journalists as they navigate what it means to be representation for the Black community. Complimentary to being representative, this role connects context, grace, and a cultural understanding.

To Be an Example: Build a Future

At the time of the writing of this dissertation, it is contentious for a variety of subjects in the United States. All the journalists in this study are facing the reality that they are now writing history for future generations. I had an opportunity to hear about some of the most amazing stories these journalists covered including storms, elections, and protests. There were also weighty issues including the death of George Floyd, deaths of other Black males and females at the hands of law enforcement, the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, and a COVID-19 pandemic – all at a highly contested time to be a journalist. For these journalists, being Black in America also came with its own struggles institutionally and societally, something that was stated to me several times as I listened with an open mind and open heart to understand their stories. Rachel told me, “I feel like I’m doing my part in history by documenting it.” I was told several different iterations of

this same statement, highlighting history and the role of Black journalists to document it through their unique lens.

Black journalists knew it was up to them to be a positive example in representing the Black community. This is a role they felt very adamant about upholding. As history writers, the way they were telling these stories was also changing. Cameron, a Black male anchor noted the prevalence of social media, saying, "you tell history in a 140-character description. And that's the first thing that you do when you tell it." History was happening in a fast, concise way and the writers would get credit in real time. This also meant they needed to be flexible and evolve. Zara, who just finished her first year on the job in her first newsroom, thought representation for the Black community was "important" and "needed." She said:

> I do kind of sort of feel like I have that feel like that I do represent other African Americans in the community because it is like, I'm getting paid to make sure that people here know that their stories matter, you know, that they're getting the news and other information that they need, whether they're Black, white, but more specifically, African Americans.

Through this story, another element that was evident was that Black journalists see a future that is bright for them and others who want to follow in their footsteps. They realize that being "the only" or "one of few" in a newsroom motivated them to "work harder" to be a positive example for others. They want to make sure they are making a good impression so that the "next" Black journalist can have a chance. Eric, a Black male reporter said, "the way I act at the station, my behavior, the way I perform is going to impact the person that comes behind me. And I don't know if white people think like

that." Laci had the future in mind when she decided to be a journalist. She said she wanted "to give people a platform to be a representation of what Black women could do in our community for Black children."

4.2 GATEKEEPERS OF BLACKNESS

Within this theme is the point of being the protector and having a protective shield to defend, speak up regarding, and leave out content relating to, the Black community. There were several instances of journalists telling me about how they are actively correcting misinformation, malinformation, and disinformation. Essentially, Black journalists actively practiced gatekeeping. This is line with the research question (1a.), which asks how Black journalists perceive their roles as gatekeepers of (mis)information for the Black community. At least three of the journalists used the term "misinformation" as they are aware of this being an issue within their profession. In this case, they were correcting the information, but they took extra care to clear up issues surrounding information in the Black community. Vaccine hesitation and BLM protests were two of the salient issues the Black journalists talked about in current coverage.

Cleaning up Misinformation & Miscommunication

Kyle passionately spoke about field anchoring during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. Like so many others, he felt there was a clear distinction involving his co-anchors, who were white, and their biases about the protestors. Kyle decided to "correct the record" from falsehoods he said his team continued to speak on air. He did so on the spot after realizing how "tone deaf" they were to the anger of the Black community after Breonna Taylor's death, which was a buildup from a history of injustices. Kyle said:

> I'm gonna go find the action to give the people the upfront row seat of what's going on. And every time they would toss to me, of course, they're saying some misinformation bullshit. And you know what I did in a very subtle way? I corrected them on the air about what's going on.

His actions to correct what he called "misinformation" is something Black journalists did with their peers, managers, and the news audience. Correcting the behaviors of others became second nature for them. But the journalists felt their attempts to tell the truth ignited negative responses. Cameron, Kyle and Eric, who are all on-air Black males, talked about people assuming they knew "what side" or political stance they held. This was especially true with protest. Eric said, "As a Black man, I'm obviously going to be sensitive to this issue. And so, it would be easy for me. It will be easy for me in a tweet, in a conversation to appear bias." However, he said it was not his job to pick a side. He along with others said people's assumptions about their standpoint was typically wrong.

More than half of the journalists talked about vaccine hesitation in the Black community and how they wanted to put more accurate information out there. Kyle said, "misinformation spreads like Kool-Aid in a cup." Reporters pitched stories to news managers, and producers recalled several occasions putting vaccine hesitation stories in their newscast to try and clear up these misconceptions. Rachel and Laci were two reporters who did stories on vaccine hesitation specifically in the Black community. Faith and Nichole, both producers, did research to elevate this story in their newscasts. Faith said she noticed conversations over social media and decided to produce a special on it. Her in-depth segment aimed to answer, "why Black people are hesitant" while also helping them to foster an understanding. Faith said:

> In that same piece that I produced, I also want to speak directly to those people who you know, who are hesitant, hesitant because of malpractice in the medical industry, as it pertains to Black and Brown people historically… reasons as to why they should not live in that same fear, that same space that you know, that we once lived in, what's being done to remedy not only the fear of being misused and abused by the system, but helping them understand the science as well just kind of white and black. You know, you take the vaccine, you live, you help other people. So, that became a really big a major piece in my show that day, not because it was in the news cycle, but just because of how I do my news gathering.

This was gatekeeping in its rawest form. Interestingly, the producer realized that she purposefully selected this story to cater to a certain audience. This is part of the gatekeeping process from journalists which shows they are like gates in which information flows (Berkowitz, 1990; White, 1950). Nichole had a similar story as she selected a vaccine hesitation story about a campaign involving family members of the men who died in the Tuskegee Experiment. She told me, "They launched a campaign trying to encourage people to get the vaccine, you know, especially people of color, because that's one of the reasons why a lot of people aren't too fond of vaccines." She hoped to encourage more people to get vaccinated. While the journalists knew that it was up to the viewers to get vaccinated, they felt as if bringing those fears to the forefront with relatable information would alleviate some of their concerns. They believed that if viewers who were Black had someone they trust deliver this information, they would be more likely to listen. The journalists felt like this was something they needed to do to advocate on behalf of the Black community. Norah had a different take on the situation,

as she thought the spotlight on vaccination hesitation was unnecessarily being put on the Black community. She felt the conversation should expand to understanding "vaccine hesitation in all communities and all ethnic groups" and digging to find the "who, where, and why." Vaccine hesitation is one of the many examples Black journalists articulated to me that they were gatekeepers on providing information and correcting misinformation.

Stereotypes Persist

Another point that was prevalent within the interviews was how in tune Black journalists were to the rampant stereotypes that existed within local media coverage. Mapp (1979) called the "perpetuation of stereotypical images" a primary concern for Black Americans who entered the field of journalism (p. 11). Stereotypes were brought up by all the Black journalists, including stereotypes of Black men, Black women, Black families, and the Black story. The Black story was described as being one riddled with "poverty, crime, and struggle." While the Black journalists wanted to work to *turn* the page on this, many of them realized it was a historical, institutional issue embedded in news media which thrived in society. Despite this, they still worked to be gatekeepers on the daily trying to keep certain stories and images from making it on air. The more experience in the field of journalism, the more gatekeeping power a journalist perceived they had. Joe, a veteran photojournalist, talked about being out on the scene of a story and deciding whether to put "people on TV looking bad" or "talk to people who sound uneducated." He said:

> I can be like, no, I'm not talking to this person. And I don't. I can go on. I don't need this person. If I don't get the interview. Oh well, If I don't get any interviews oh well, whatever. So, I try to use my little power in that way.

I found it interesting he used “power” to describe the ability to choose or be a gatekeeper of content. This pushback against stereotypical images mirrors Meyers et. al (2015) work on Black female reporters. Like so many other journalists I interviewed, Joe reiterated that it was not compromising his ability to be a good journalist, rather a conscious decision to leave out the type of coverage which perpetuates stereotypes. This was a common action amongst journalists who took this role seriously. They were cognizant of this stereotype and believed their role was to change it. Kyle said, “I can't argue against how we perceive them…we meaning the news industry, TV news, local news, how we have done them a disservice at times because we show the stereotypical images.” Maxwell had the same sentiment:

> I will try my hardest to make sure that I'm putting them on TV, that I'm giving them some shine and some spotlight, you know, positive spotlight as much as possible. And of course, it's not something I would ever tell my managers, but I did it. I sure did. You know, if a Black person, if I'm on the scene of a story, and there's a soundbite that would embarrass a Black person… I'm not using that soundbite. You know, unless it's crucial and critical.

It is important to note how Maxwell wanted to spotlight certain people in the Black community while also trying to keep certain images out of news coverage. It is important to note he drew the line when something was “crucial and critical,” which is similar to Joe’s point. This is an important attribute in being a journalist.

But every decision about news coverage is not made out in the field. Tiana came to a standstill with news management about a stereotypical story that was circulating on social media in her DMA. The viral video was not being picked up by any of the

producers at the news station, so she was urged by the news director to place it into her show. Tiana said, “I'm not putting Black women brawling in the middle of Dollar General in my show! It just farther goes into the stereotypes of Black women going somewhere, not knowing how to fucking act.” In this instance, she talked about standing firm in the face of conflict. She was nervous about being reprimanded but believed this was a nonstory. She described her white male news director as “pretty progressive,” so he moved on after her then-executive producer, a Black woman, talked to him.

Black journalists also found themselves in constant conversation about stereotypes within video and images. Theresa pointed out to her news team that they never showed Black families on their channel. They blamed the lack of b-roll of Black families on file video they used from other stations. Even after she aired her grievances she mentioned, “we still never saw Black families” or even “Black mothers nursing.” This was important to her as a mother to have more responsible images of Black families on television.

Previous research has demonstrated that coverage of crime has often labeled people in the Black community as violent (Dixon et al., 2000; Entman, 1992; Mapp, 1979). While this is something spoken in theory, it also remains a constant in practice. Journalists were quick to point out crime as a major culprit of painting stereotypes of the Black community. Journalist after journalist told me that news organizations are quick to go to certain neighbors when “something bad” was happening. They knew the Black community beyond the newsroom was cognizant of it. Tamia said, “we only go into cover Black communities when there's tragedy. And I'm like, there's more to the Black community than tragedy.” Listening to the Black journalists talk about going into the

Black community only when something was wrong showed their disdain towards the current media structure. They knew these images stained the minds of millions of Americans. Tristan said, “whenever you hear Black man, you automatically think crime. That's just, it's not fair.” When thinking about how this related to trust, Marie, an anchor/reporter with nearly 20 years of experience said:

> They don’t trust the media. They definitely don’t trust the media. They think that the media is lying that we don't cover stories in the Black community. These are again, things that I've heard, that we don't cover stories in the Black community. That we only care when it's something bad. You know, that the people that are on TV are not really Black. Like, we're not really a part of the Black community.

This was echoed across several interviews with Black journalists. While the role of the Black journalist was to be representative, build trust, and be a gatekeeper it also served as a reason for mistrust in the Black community. The element of trust is multilayered amongst the Black community.

4.3 A TRIED-AND-TRUE JOURNALIST

“Be the voice,” “advocate,” “watchdog,” service, inform, educate, and “truth seeker” were commonly used words that Black journalists used to describe their role. Their descriptions are not any different from the textbook definitions we learn about when theoretically and practically describing news journalists (Deuze, 2005; Schudson. 2001). This is foundational work that is learned on college campuses and reinforced in today’s newsrooms following the same traditional structure, only now they are working with newer technologies and shorter deadlines. As Chris put it, “literally you wake up on a deadline.” Beyond deadlines, being a journalist also means there is a certain

responsibility to hold the "powerful accountable." This identity, which comes into play with being a news journalist, transcends color lines. Only, there are additional layers intertwined into the consciousness of Black journalists who are a marginalized group in society and newsrooms.

Local News… Rules

> Tristan: I feel like there needs to be a push, a bigger push, for local news. Because those are the people who are really in the communities, in the neighborhood, who are telling the stories that people, a lot of times, people on Twitter and Facebook and stuff are complaining that we aren't telling. We are. You're just not watching it. There's no other way to put that.

The journalists were passionate about being local news journalists connected to the community. Tristan, as well as others, talked about how "our local journalists are out there on the scene." They are the ones who break stories before those same stories are picked up by national news outlets. They do the groundwork and make the contacts. Several journalists pointed out how they were proud to be a "local journalist." For on-air personalities, this basically meant they were local "celebrities in a box." Maxwell joked how they deal with the stress of a celebrity but could not just "fly off to Miami" or "Jamaica" if they were having a bad day because they did not have the money or vacation time. Local journalists felt they were closer to the community and earned the right to connect with them. However, local Black journalists believed national outlets, blogs, social media sights, and network opinion shows often gave them a bad reputation. Several journalists told me about how they were proud to serve in a local capacity and "chose" to do so. Michael said:

> I think local news is more important to the average person than national news. That's why I continue to work on the local news level, because, unfortunately, in my opinion, people are more concerned about broader things that really don't have an effect on their day to day lives. Like, we're more concerned about the presidential election than we are about the elections of council members.

Faith talked about the differences between local news and national news, saying that a lot of people get the two conflated. Hailey drew upon the differences between being a local news journalist and being a national journalist. She said, "the role of local journalists are more community oriented and focused." Hailey said, "my role as a local journalist is figuring out what the problem is, and hopefully solving it." Finding solutions to issues affecting people in the community is a goal for local journalists who have a chance to build relationships. Michael confidently explained why he was honored to be in local journalism and community:

> My role on a day to day is: I spend time in trying to tell the stories, especially being a Black man in my community that affects my community. The people in my community, one of the advantages is that when you're somebody who's been around as long as I have, you do get people to open up a little bit more because they trust you. And that's regardless of the race.

Black First, Journalist Second

> I wake up every day and you as well, you know, I am very aware every single day of my Blackness. And so, it's hard, it will be hard for me to try to separate my Blackness from a story. –Eric

There is a tug of war for Black journalists working to do their jobs, while also feeling as if they are held to the standards of being in between two worlds. The most common example was being stuck between protestors and police. It proved to be a tough space for journalists to be straddling the fence of professional career and personal identity. Many talked about the emotional rollercoaster they continue to ride as they were in the protests as both "Black and a journalist." Renee, a newer journalist, said, "[What] I'm realizing more and more is like, it doesn't matter what you have on, what you're wearing, or who you represent, you are still Black." While journalists knew they could not shed the color of their skin or identity as a Black person in America, their time being in the protest was tough as they had a job to do. Not only did they describe the job of a journalist to be "neutral" and "fair," the journalists also talked about it being their journalistic duty. Ryan said:

> For all the chaos or whatever, the issue of being a Black journalist in that time period is even more so because you understand the plight of what they're going through, but you're also doing your job of being, you know, and being behind quote unquote enemy lines.

Journalists mentioned an odd duality of this battlefield of community versus cops. They told me confidently that before being a journalist they were Black. This statement was on repeat. One journalist even mentioned how they can change a career, but their identity was permanent. This answered how journalists perceive their racial identity compared to journalistic role. In the moment of protest, they watched chaotic moments unravel right before their eyes. Danielle talked about the moment she saw another Black journalist get arrested after an online allegation from a prominent figure:

> Look, she's, she's protesting. [Saying] that this journalist is protesting with them. And I felt like, okay, there were other people who were from other stations who are not Black who were there, and they were not accused of protesting with everyone else. And so, that was another time where I felt like you're holding her to a different standard.

Black journalists say they are continuously targeted and watched by the public and officials so they were aware of how much they must be extremely careful what they do, say, and tweet. All the journalists I interviewed were very conscious of making sure they were not perceived to be protesting in the middle of all the uprisings from summer 2020. They were also very conscious of not wanting to appear to support the protestors either, despite what they may have felt inside. Journalists continuously talked about their disbelief in what they were seeing. They also mentioned the diversity of the crowds. Several of the journalists talked about how it was important that the audience tell their story. One mentioned that it was their first time covering a protest. Renee said how important it was, "keeping myself out of it, and allowing these people to share their stories and experiences." Like so many others, Lamar talked about the importance of presentation for Black journalists especially covering protest and their social media habits:

> Obviously, I support Black Lives Matter 100%, but as a journalist, I have to make sure that, because I have thousands of followers, there are a lot of people that follow me, Black, White, Republicans, Democrats, leaders, governors, officers, federal officers that I made, 18 years of building my character up.

Being Black is top of mind, but being a journalist is a close second. Theresa, a seasoned producer, articulates how her identity as a Black woman influences her storytelling, "when I pitch stories, I pitch from I am a Black mom, I'm a Black mother. I'm a Black woman, those things are first. So being a Black woman, those things kind of hit me first before I go into my journalistic person." This "journalistic person" for Black journalists took a backseat to their personal identity especially during times of crisis.

Objectivity: Still the Norm

The shadow of objectivity persists for Black journalists. This is in line with previous work which shows journalists of color do not show preference to their own race (Coleman, 2011). While many were seemingly moving the ball forward to progress out of this archaic norm, the element of being "neutral," unbiased, and objective still came up. While some journalists openly spoke about this practice of neutrality, several others mentioned how bias was "human nature." One thing I did find throughout the interviews was how several Black journalists worked to make sure they kept their bias in check. This too was a conscious decision. It was also mentioned to me that if they were not careful, a colleague, manager, or viewer would be quick to do so for them. Black journalists believed they were being policed to the "objectivity" standard more than anyone else in the newsroom.

When it comes to being unbiased, Theresa said she practices being fair. Her only concerns are when the story involves something personal to her or something political. To remain in line with being impartial, her technique is to either remove herself from the story and have someone else write it or to have an Executive Producer read it over when she is done. Other journalists talked about the notion of objectivity as one that is expected

of them. Whitney sarcastically mentioned the notion of objectivity leaning towards a standard of white norms. She said the "old school objectivity mentality" was "ingrained in me." Journalists mentioned having to defend stories they tried to pitch but were told it was not a story that appeals to the news audience or that was too narrow in who it affected. Journalists also mention having to constantly defend stories about the Black community, while having to get the "other side" to the story. Laci talked about how a "Black story" is pretty much everyone's story.

The journalistic notion of being objective was magnified when it came to protest and conversations about Black Lives Matter online. Journalists were careful about what they tweeted, posted, or replied to online regarding protests. This was the ultimate test of self and professionalism for journalists. The standard of being unbiased, fair, and objective proved too much for some journalists who felt the weight of the moment in 2020 with a "racial reckoning" happening right before their eyes. Many of them thought of loved ones as well as themselves as potential targets or racial discrimination and they were hurting. Maxwell told me the experience of seeing things unravel but treading lightly with outwardly expressing his emotions was "difficult." He posted about it online:

> I said, please pray for us journalists, because this is very difficult for us. Because you all are talking, you all are talking it out, you all are engaging conversation on social media, you're talking with other people about it, you're out there protesting if you want to, we can't do any of that. I just felt, I felt muzzled. You know, I felt silenced. Because I felt so strongly about what was happening. And not only could I not say anything on a personal level, but when I reported on it, or something like it, I had to do it in an objective way, and appear to not take a side

> when I just felt like this, when in reality we felt like this is just a human rights issue.

This tone of feeling held back and silenced resonated amongst several conversations I had with Black television journalists. At least four others penned notes to their followers about their emotions and having to hold back in the name of their professional careers. The rest were cautious about the social media content they tweeted or posted. Mainly, the journalists retweeted facts from other journalists and news outlets, or they made a post on *Blackout Tuesday* – a day (June 2, 2020) when many people posted only a blank/black screen or a message on their screen in support of BLM which felt less controversial. Another thing to note is that while journalists who were behind-the-scenes knew they had a little more leeway compared to on-air talent, they too were careful about what they posted. This concern was mostly connected to current news management or future professional opportunities that may be compromised. Norah said about posting, "I haven't given as much of my opinion, as I would love to. Obviously, I'm a journalist, and I wanted to remain neutral, objective." She, along with so many others, found it increasingly challenging to withhold their opinions because they were writing and seeing the disturbing reports about racial violence daily at work. Then also seeing it on Facebook and Twitter with their diverse group of friends and associates who did not hold back their opinions on either side of current issues.

One of the most emotional interviews was with a Black female reporter who was on the frontlines of the Black Lives Matter protests. Stacey said she was reporting live on air when she was confronted by a Black protestor. It caught her off guard when on live television the interviewee said, "You're a Black woman. On their side, you ought to be

ashamed!" To make matters worse, it happened a few days later with another Black protestor while she was out on assignment,

> [he said] Our community loves you. How dare you not come out and say whether or not George Floyd's death was wrong? How does it make you feel? And, I was so hurt that I said, I am hurt by his death. And that wasn't good enough for him. And he kept berating me, he wanted me to take a hard stance, you know, so that's interestingly, when your people, when your own people, they don't even understand your job. They don't even understand what you do. That hurts. But you have to be objective, and you have to report the story. And, and I got to tell the story. Even as a Black woman**.**

Being confronted while out in the field was not a rarity for Black journalists who were tested on their level of objectivity. Laci was another journalist who was confronted while reporting during the protests:

> I had somebody you know, saying, I'm gonna find you, you B-word Get out of here, you're a traitor, all that during the protest. And I was like, [Laci Smith], I work at [the station], you know where to find me!

Being a journalist also means the changing industry, deadlines pressures, and shrinking newscasts while news holes are continuing to grow. Distrust from news audiences was something that several journalists thought of as a conflict not just facing Black journalists, but a dark cloud overshadowing journalists at large – especially those who stand for the ideals of journalism to hold truth to power and serve the community. Journalists blamed this growing distrust on the rhetoric from the last presidential administration. Some of the journalists blatantly called out "Trump" and his growing

base of calling news organizations “fake news.” It especially affected local news journalists who are on the frontlines in communities they live. Many of them felt as if they were lumped into national news outlets such as MSNBC, CNN, and FOX, which the news journalists knew had a different delivery/agenda compared to their local newsrooms. Admittedly, while news journalists knew distrust existed within certain groups amongst society, I was told it had grown to new heights during Trump’s campaign and subsequent rise to the presidency. Giselle named dis/mistrust as the biggest issue facing journalists. She stated this politicization was much different from when she started in journalism. For the first time in her career the conversation around campaigns was not on news coverage but instead on safety. She said, “journalists are out there doing their job and reporting the facts. They're people lingering around on your live shots, yelling fake news, telling you, you're reporting something incorrectly.” When I interviewed Stacey, she had just covered a Trump rally where he pointed to the local journalists covering the rally to say, “they're spewing nothing but lies. That's a lot of fake news.” She blames him for putting “a target on the media's back” to break public trust.

Trust is seen as a foundational value for journalists to be able to communicate, inform, educate news audiences on the happenings in their communities and the world around them. This fracture of trust is one that is paramount to news journalists and communities. As it pertains to the Black community, journalists feel that while the Black community at large is not Trump’s base, his rhetoric against journalists seemingly moved into a mainstream concern across society. This affected their role as journalists.

Serving All Audiences

Black journalists feel they must appeal to everyone. Some told me they should be Black enough to connect to the Black community and safe enough to fit into newsroom culture. This applies to appearance (look, hair), tone, and personality. Black journalists worked diligently not to be labeled the "angry Black woman" or "angry Black colleague." Eric said he was always hyper-aware of the "well-known stereotype that African Americans are aggressive." Starting early in his career, he was extra diligent to make sure his tone was not too "aggressive" or "combative." Several journalists talked to me about appearance, whether they were on-air or behind the scenes, as important to fitting a certain look for the audience. One major point was the issue with Black women wearing their natural hair. Two of the participants talked about having locs (dreadlocks) and several others spoke about the freedom of certain standards for Black women's hair. This was important to fit a certain mold to be professional enough to fit in television.

In television newsrooms, consultants are hired to come in, give recommendations to news teams about their ratings, news coverage, and give feedback to on-air talent. Their jobs are also to talk about the demographics of the news audience and the best ways to target viewers. Rachel talked about a meeting in which the consultant told her newsroom a contradictory message. An excerpt of her story:

> You guys can really increase your viewership among Black people in these certain areas. You can really go for it! Okay, and they're like, well, you cannot tell stories that are only specific to the Black community, because that's not your target audience, you have to tell stories that are important to everybody. And then hopefully, you know, Black people would want to watch them, too.

Rachel went on to say she left that meeting visibly upset and the consultant caught up to her to ask what was wrong. She responded to him, “this doesn't make any sense! You cannot have a situation where you are telling us you want us to invest in Black people, [and] we are not able to tell Black stories.” Her sentiment is one that is shared amongst Black television journalists across the nation. They told me how they are supposed to be the eyes and ears for the Black community but need to get permission to physically work on stories which are catered towards them. The gesture to engage the Black community felt like an afterthought but it was mostly performative. Then journalists say when they speak up, they are told excuses about catering to the “target audience.” Laci said,

> I can't tell you how many Black stories I pitch, and they'll be like, Ah, it's not Black History Month, or they'll be like, our viewers won't care about that. They will if we teach them to, you know, like, it's a Black issue, but it's also a humanity issue. Or eh, are we telling this person's side as well? It's not about them. This is a story about Black history in our area. Like, you know, they try to try to like, they just don't always have context. And it makes it hit a little differently.

I asked who the target audience was. Whitney summed it up, “the white suburban mom with two kids with the white picket fence.” I was told this is who managers push stories to, no matter how “trivial.”

4.4 NEWSROOM CULTURE: RELATIONSHIPS

This section aims to understand the relationships of Black journalists, in the newsroom and their community. It is a complicated one between the newsroom culture of management, colleagues, officials, and the Black community whether personal or professional. I found Black journalists are being policed from officials, mainstream

community, Black community, as well as their peers. For instance, when they cover stories in the community that activists or community leaders do not agree with, they will confront them. Kyle talked about this, “and she called herself confronting me.” This after he called out misinformation which was being spread from a local activist and politician. He said it felt personal to get the story right because it was a complicated story about taxes which directly affected the Black community. In fact, he took time out of his personal schedule to work through the details so that he could accurately tell the story for the news audience. My aim is to understand the most influential relationships for Black journalists working in predominately white newsrooms.

Management matters

All the journalists I spoke to believed that management matters. I was told by several journalists that their relationship with management was important. It would probably be labeled as the most, or one of the most, important relationships in the newsroom. Being included in the conversations was a major plus for the temperament of Black journalists. Journalists felt more supported when they had news management include them in conversations involving news coverage of the Black community. It was especially important to news journalists as they know the biggest decision-makers are not Black and there are rarely any “Black voices” on the cutting room floor. Marie said, for the first time in her 18-year career, she was asked her opinion in what felt like a genuine way:

> During the George Floyd nationwide reckoning, the same news director came to me and asked me how I felt about our coverage. [He] meant, if I felt that we were covering things fairly. How'd I feel as an African American about the way we

> were saying things and I felt incredibly honored that he trusted my opinion enough to even ask me that. And I felt for the first time actually in my career comfortable enough to be honest about what I saw.

She said that conversation led to more open and honest conversations about the station's news coverage about African Americans. This was important as she was the only Black female on air. Marie educated her news director about some other issues which concerned her about the way non-Black journalists covered stories, things that were offensive, and what she thought could be improved. This is in line with several studies showing how journalists of color center their expertise to educate colleagues in their newsrooms (Flamiano et al., 2007; Meyers et al., 2015; Somani et al., 2020). Eric said he was asked to join the interview process as the station looked for new managers. He was enthusiastic that his General Manager asked him, which was a first in his 15-year career. Several Black journalists said they were also included in decisions and gave feedback about the protest coverage in 2020. This trickled over into other stories as well in terms of how African Americans were being portrayed in local news coverage. This gave several journalists hope. They credited the current racial climate as the catalyst for these changes.

Despite this progression, this was not everyone's experience with news management. Whitney talked about calling her news management to the carpet with an incident involving Black History Month, whereby the promotions manager and news director told her and another Black journalist (the only two) what stories they were assigned to report on for the project. Whitney said, "the fact that she emailed us directly, did I have a problem with that? Was it ignorant? Absolutely." Despite this, her biggest issue was being left out of the loop until the coverage was already set in stone. She

eventually called a meeting with management to discuss her concerns with the approach and how she felt certain demographics were being overlooked. She was far from being the only journalist who talked to management about this issue or other issues regarding their coverage of the Black community. It was happening often with journalists who did not feel valued or heard. Stacey told me she noticed a difference with how management treated her. She said, "I listen to managers praise my colleagues who don't look like me for subpar work. But when I go above and beyond, I don't even get recognized." This was a point which existed with many of the journalists I spoke with. Lamar, who had nearly 20 years of experience, told me that he speaks up to management in front of the news producers, but he does so strategically. He recommended "seasoned" journalists do most of the heavy lifting when dealing with news managers. He said, "you got to have a backbone when you go into your managers, because you don't want to go at them in a way that'll cost you your job." Seasoned journalists were more comfortable speaking up about things and they also had more leverage. Many said it took years of experience to grow into this space to gain a stronger voice and earn more respect from news managers.

Management Ranks: Diversity still lacking

Diversity is still an issue within the management ranks of local television newsrooms. When it came to diversity within the ranks of newsroom management, not one of the journalists I talked to currently had a Black news director, only one currently had a Black Assistant News Director, and a few had one Black Executive Producer. Out of the entire group of 29 journalists, only one person had at least two Black managers. Most of the newsroom management teams consisted of mostly white males, while white females were the second largest demographic in current leadership roles. Management is

apparently an important factor because, even when I did not bring it up, the news journalists talked about it. Diversity in management was a recurring subtheme throughout my talks with journalists and the current state of journalism. Marie said,

> There are more white men in this industry than there are women, and those white men are still making the most decisions about the station. You know, who's on air, how much those people get paid. So, there is still inequity, when it comes to journalism across the board it's not a level playing field.

Journalists shared their experiences with disparities, such as lower pay compared to their colleagues. A journalist told me a story about a white male before them in the same exact position that started off with $30,000 more than they were offered for the same role. They had comparable experience levels.

One of the concerns amongst Black journalists with their management teams was the lack of cultural understanding which was displayed. Journalists felt that all-white management teams curated what stories should matter and how they should be told. Nichole felt she had to tiptoe around the details surrounding Ahmaud Arbery's death. She mentioned it was being reported nationwide that he was shot and killed while jogging. While this seemed like a well-known fact, in Nichole's newsroom, this fact caused controversy. She said, "I literally wrote in a headline Ahmaud Arbery was jogging and was told I cannot say that because we don't know that for sure." Management told her to change this because it was not known what he was doing when he was killed. This decision made her feel uneasy. The journalists were asked whether they felt having more Black managers would change things:

Theresa: to the point where you know, seeing more color in the newsroom, and management positions, those things would be helpful. They would change a lot as far as the questions that are being asked and the direction, the way that we present our news goes in.

Giselle: There's a different layer to that. A part of it comes from management, and it not being any representation or people of color in management. So they can't relate. So, it's like you can't blame them. They just don't know that walk of life. And they don't think that way. And so, that's why representation matters. That's why diversity matters. That's why it's important to have people from all backgrounds that are in a position of power in the newsroom, so that what you are reporting is reflected in the people that are watching, and people that are empowered to make those decisions are knowledgeable enough to do that.

Faith: I think Black people are kind of like the cool kids now in journalism. People want to hear their stories. They're used to go into their birth communities. As like, Hey, here's look, here's our, here's our race, our diversity hire, here's our here's our race. Here's how we're you know trying to do better with race. I don't think that that's enough. I think that a lot of the institutional issues in newsrooms are still present. Regardless of how many people are being hired. Until there are, you know, rainbow coalition of color around the executive boardroom table. That's just kind of how it's always going to be.

> Stacey: I will have someone fighting for the Black experience, fighting for Black stories. I'm working in a newsroom right now that has absolutely no Black managers. And it's really unfortunate, because I find myself advocating and just fighting in these meetings when it's a story that matters to us.

Having more Black managers is important to underrepresented journalists in newsrooms. Rivas-Rodriguez et al. (2004) found that journalists thought having more managers who reflected their race and/or ethnicity would positively influence coverage of minority groups, create more jobs, and be more sensitive to racism. This work adds to that research by specifically asking Black journalists if these management hires would make a difference. I was repeatedly told that it would.

It is embedded into newsroom culture that their DMA's (Designated Market Areas) are mostly white. And if the DMA is in a predominantly Black market, the suburbs which are usually majority white, becomes the "target" area. This is something that most of the journalists mentioned to me in one way or another. Because of this, it is a challenge to tell mostly white managers to buy-into the thought of telling stories for the Black community. Many journalists expressed that it is not necessarily the manager's fault, as it is how they see the world. Instead, they offer an alternative with hiring more management of color. While most of the Black journalists thought this would be important, getting the right management was the key. A few Black journalists thought it would not make a difference at all. Whitney talked about fit and values being major factors as the traditional norms are still in place:

> I think that the right Black managers can alleviate that problem. But I think at this point, a lot of the older Black managers are coming from a point where it's fight

> or flight, fight or flight for themselves. So, they're still playing by the rules. I think it's really going to take, you know, the millennials, the Gen Z'ers once we get older to kind of flip things around if we get into that manager seat. (pause) No offense to the Gen X's.

Black journalists realized that after the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, there was this commitment to newsroom diversity during this time of "racial reckoning." One of the biggest efforts they experienced was the hiring of more Black and brown colleagues. At least half of the people I interviewed moved to new newsrooms in the middle of the pandemic (which is a normal thing with contracts). For a few, there is a cloud that people would automatically connect being Black and getting hired as just a "diversity hire." Eric said his station had just hired a Black male Operations Manager on an all-white management team. He said it was diminishing to hear "grumblings, among people saying that, oh, he was just hired because he was Black." This was frustrating to Eric, who said it is already tough to work in spaces where your talent is whittled down into "skin tone." Tiana says when she was hired, her news director told her they needed more diversity on the team. Once she was hired and became the "only Black producer," she constantly worked hard so that she would not be labeled as the "diversity hire." She also noticed a more focused initiative from her parent company when the organization's president visited her newsroom to talk about its commitment to hiring more Black news managers. Tiana said, "it's like damn, it took for a girl who was minding her business to get killed in her house and a man crying out for his mama for nine minutes on the ground for y'all to want to hire some Black people in the management? I don't like the pity you know." It was an issue she felt torn about. While she wanted a more diverse management

team, she did not want the person to be "thrown in" as a façade, then labeled incompetent, as she knew that her company would not invest in the long-term support system needed to sustain people of color in management positions. The only manager I interviewed felt support was important. However, she had to pull it from within to advocate for herself. She said, "any little failure can be pointed out easily for a Black manager." Luke knew this issue far too well. He said, "from my experience, when we had a Black manager for everybody, there was always something wrong with him. So, it got to the point that they nitpicked literally everything." He later mentioned that news director's contract was not renewed, and he was let go. Norah talked about having a short amount of time to connect with the station's only Black female manager before she left. The balance left with her:

> I would say one of the good things about her was that she would really try to help balance, you know, our coverage when it comes to stuff, like that. She would make sure that we weren't you know, always painting these pictures of Black people committing crimes, so that's not the case. Since she has left, you know I don't, feel much of that balance anymore.

Another journalist also experienced the loss of having "the only" Black manager leave them behind. While the majority of journalists did not have a Black news manager, for the ones who did it was a noticeable difference when they left. Whitney called the departure of her only Black female manager "isolating."

The Power of Management

While Black journalists were gatekeepers they were mostly "gatekept" by news management. Television news managers have significant control on what stories are

selected, which pitches are worthy, whether to air something, and the angles in which stories are pursued for air. While Black journalists know they are one of a multitude of gates, they expressed the biggest "gate" with the most institutional power was news management. Nichole, a producer in the South, said:

> You know how it is to be the spokesperson for all Black people at your station, you know when you're the only Black person in the room but usually that Black person is not management so we only have a voice to a certain extent.

Something important to Black journalists is getting management to "buy in" to their ideas. This allowed them to do stories that they felt were important to tell. In some cases, even franchises, which are special topic segments, are catered to the Black community, which generated sponsorships. This was especially salient amongst Black History Month coverage. One journalist who was successful in getting a franchise catered to the Black community (outside of Black History Month) said the best way to get managers to listen is to talk about ratings. She said, "they love to hear about ratings going up and helping the numbers." Joe said he knew that having a Black news director changed things, at least from the outside appearance. While his current newsroom did not have any Black news managers, one of the competing stations in his DMA did. He said:

> I don't work in the building, but it's like, on air, you can tell a difference. With like, you know, Black people on air. And again, like I said earlier, Black women getting to wear their hair, like they should be able to, with curls and stuff like that. You know, the representation is there. But of course, I'm on the outside looking in and seeing that.

The issue of pitching stories generated a lot of conversation which was guided by the Black journalists through their passion of talking about their experiences. While Black journalists wanted to cover more stories related to the Black community they did not want to be "put in a box" by management to only do so. It was important to Black journalists that management saw them as multi-faceted and not just assign them to certain stories due to their race. Tiana elaborates on an observation involving a Black and Latina journalist in her newsroom.

> Like she should only be covering the Black stuff because she's Black. [Nina] needs to be covering the Latino stuff because she Latino. Now I understand you wanting to send Nina into a community where you know, English ain't the first language right here. I get that she speaks Spanish. But to take her off a story that she pitched that may be related to Breonna Taylor and then give it to Adrianne because you want, that's not okay. So, I do think like, Black journalists, especially reporters, and anchors are held to that.

White Peers: Ally or Aggressor

Beyond the relationship with news management is the relationship amongst peers who work in the newsroom. The last two years have been an adjustment as many journalists have worked remotely or had changes in their daily routines connected to scheduling due to the pandemic. For some, they appreciated not being in the newsroom with some of the issues which exist with colleagues. Despite this, relationships amongst co-workers were important to how journalists perceived their profession.

I heard stories about allyship from white peers, which were few but were important to journalists. Two journalists specifically told me stories about how their

white colleague encouraged them to speak up about an issue to management. Meanwhile, there were also stories about microaggressions which ran rampant amongst the journalists. One instance, a journalist talked about how her co-worker asked her about her summer plans to eat "watermelon" when she went back home to the South. When the Black journalist joked back in a southern twang, that same co-worker commented it was "ghetto." Taken aback by the comment, the journalist realized she was not in the space to have the conversation she truly wanted to have. Stories of microaggressions also included asking Black females to touch their hair or inquire about their style. Whitney shared a story from her first ever live shot when the news director and assistant news director called her afterwards. She thought something was wrong; instead, ~~she was told by~~ the manager, "who was a white woman tried to compare her hair to mine, she was like, 'Yeah, like, you know, sometimes my hair is curly, too. Sometimes it gets kind of wild.'" This move made her wear a more Eurocentric hairstyle for the next five years. Now she is finally more comfortable wearing her hair in a natural state. Kyle talked about constant microaggressions he receives from his white female co-anchor who was supposed to help mentor him into his role on the desk. He confronted management about this issue saying, "I swallow my rage every day, because I'm between a rock and a hard place. I have to learn from this very person who is causing me strife. That's the Black story." He talked about how tough it was dealing with the constant microaggressions.

Black journalists talked about being policed by their co-workers who were watching them. Norah spoke about an incident where she posted something online about the insurrection and another producer, who was a white male conservative, told her not to pull out the "race card." Tristan said while he mostly felt comfortable in his newsroom in

the Midwest, the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6, 2021was a defining moment whereby he and the only other Black journalist in the newsroom shared a moment. Another point included Black journalists found themselves overworking so they would not be labeled as "lazy" but felt like the same standards did not exist for their white counterparts. Norah talked about how a white reporter who pitched a story about the Tuskegee Airmen but failed to research who they were or even how to pronounce it properly. She said this was not only a lack of cultural understanding, it was also a mishap as a journalist for due diligence before pitching a story. Meanwhile, Black journalists say they are always expected to know the answers and do their research. They were often called upon in meetings to be the expert on "Black" issues on cue. In response to this Theresa expressed, "I am not the only Black person in the world. I am not the Black mecca of answers. You know, some things are as simple as Google."

Maxwell shared a moment of unity whereby journalists throughout the newsroom spoke out against a bias directive from management about social media. It started with a Black female anchor and Black reporter who felt profiled. This grievance grew amongst the newsroom to white colleagues who also jumped in to speak up to management. This instance showed unity resulting in the News Director changing course and backing off what the team felt was an unfair, targeted policy.

Black Peers: Confidant, Co-conspirator or Co-existing Colleague

Relationships with Black colleagues is important as they could be a confidant or co-conspirator. On one hand, Black journalists find community in leaning on one another to understand each other's plight, to support each other to keep going. They get advice from each other, they vent to one another, and they confide about the daily

microaggressions and hardships. They relate to one another as Black television journalists in a shared space that is unique to their experience. Theresa said, “we openly talk about it” and run situations by one another to ask, “do you feel like how I feel about this situation?” This response is important to Black journalists who feel isolated within newsrooms but depend on this community. This community of peers spills over into watercooler chats within the newsroom, out in the field with Black journalists who work for the competition, or even online whereby Black journalists find a communal space of encouragement from other Black journalists nationwide. Several reporters talked about working in markets where they worked in predominantly white DMA’s and found camaraderie with other Black reporters working at the other stations in the market. They would build group chats and share experiences with each other as they timed out contracts at the stations. They would even hang out as friends finding commonality in each other while working in places which were far from their homes.

While most of the relationships are positive, some Black journalists find themselves on an island. There were stories where some Black journalists tried to enlist the help of the other Black journalist to speak up about an issue but were turned down or ignored. In some instances, they found other Black journalists expected them to just do the work without being the squeaky wheel and put their heads down. Faith talked about this; she noted, “you do have Black people in the newsroom, they're pulling you aside telling you to get it together because these people gonna think that x, y, z, versus encouraging you to be open and get the help you need or the guidance you need or the mentorship you need.” They did not believe it was necessarily ill-intentioned, but par for the course in some Blacks feeling the need to be model citizens to fit the mold of

newsroom culture. Stacey said she pitched a timely story related to the death of Chadwick Boseman with a local connection a few days after the *Black Panther* star's death. News managers turned her down stating the story would be "dated." Since the entire management team is white, she was hoping the producer, a Black female, would speak up in her defense about the importance of this story for young Black children. Instead, she said this happened:

> It hurt me because even a Black producer said it was dated. And what's interesting about her is, she's new to our staff. So, she's still trying to impress them, and she's trying to keep her job. I don't really know her that well. But when I see her, I want to tell her that you got to use your voice sis! Now is not the time to be siding with anybody.

While she did not get the support from the newer producer, another more seasoned Black journalist texted her in the meeting to "advocate" for that story. She eventually got a chance to do it.

These are the islands Black journalists feel like they are on and battles they are having to fight to tell certain stories. In this case, Stacey wanted to further humanize the death of the first Black superhero, an important figure for so many, including Black children.

Dependence on Officials: Rocky, yet Real

The Black journalists said that their relationships with officials were evolving. I had several tell me they had good relationships with police, some politicians, and Public Information Officers (PIO's). I was also reminded by a more seasoned journalist that police and PIO's lie, and that it is up to the journalist to "hold their feet to the fire" to find

the truth. Most of these relationships were with more seasoned journalists who built trust over their years of coverage on certain issues (Doyle, 2004; Tuchman, 1972). They tipped journalists off about stories and gave more access to details for stories many of the journalists were working to cover. In some markets, law enforcement did not give much pushback for protest coverage. In others, it was tough for Black journalists who felt as if they were "stuck in the middle" between protestors and police. In one situation, a journalist talked about management being pressured from outside law enforcement agencies to remove videos and other content online. This was because the agency felt the videos were incriminating to how they treated protestors. This is in line with previous work on television journalists who cover protest but feel pressured to connect with officials (Walker, 2021). Marie said:

> The nationwide reckoning started to happen, we started to hear more of that, more of their truth, in the sense that we were being akin to police, like we were being treated and, you know, accused of working and being on the side of law enforcement, it was as if it was no longer a good thing to be a Black journalist, because we were also being accused of, you know, lying and being bias and all these things.

An impossible dilemma for journalists who were navigating this tough year while working in the thick of it. Norah talked about how she felt the impact on a personal level:

> It has not been the easiest year for a Black journalist. And I would think personally, for me, especially last year, it was rough, because, you know, my brother is a police officer, and my dad is a retired police officer. To kind of see like the rhetoric behind you know, cops was kind of, you know, it was hard. You

> kind of started feeling like, I don't want anybody to just see my brother and assume that he's, you know, a bad cop because he's Black and he's a bad person because he's Black and he's a police officer.

Other journalists talked about having close friends and acquaintances who worked in law enforcement. At least one of the journalists did a story related to how Black police officers felt being in the middle of protest. Their relationships with law enforcement and other officials were tested in real time. It was evident they were still digesting the dynamic of being in this situation. Kyle spoke about the position Black journalists are in when it comes to the Black community and police. He said, they "got their shit" with police but need them when something happens. In reference to a journalist's relationship with the Black community he stated, "it's a double-edged sword. It's kind of like how they view police, right?" These stereotypes, which created this space for a "double-edged sword" as mentioned by Kyle, described through other interviews, and theorized by Du Bois (1903) leave room for more inquiry to understand the Black journalist's relationship with the Black community.

4.5 (RE)BUILDING TRUST WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY

> When I get to an area where there's a lot of mistrust, and that's almost anywhere, but I found myself often more in Black communities doing this. I am really cognizant of how I spend that equity that I get in time, that is where people will not give you the time and the opportunity to speak and to present their true selves to you so that you can expose the world to what's truly going on in their community, how they feel, what this all means to them.
>
> –Chris

The connection between Black journalists and the Black community runs deep. While the relationships with management, peers, and officials were important, the relationship with the community appeared to be the most complicated. Mainly, some of the journalists are balancing personal versus professional values. Being genuine, spending time to build trust, and being a person who listens to everyone with the same respect are recurring points journalists intimately shared with me. Chris called it "earned capital," which is the belief that "we earned it, we earned capital through what we do, we earn favor in the area." He described this as the favor of Black journalists who regularly report on matters in the Black community and have a relationship would likely be able to cover tough topics like the George Floyd protests. Most of the journalists I conversed with shared stories on the importance of their relationship with the Black community. It was something they were personally proud to have. For Cameron, there was a reason for this complex relationship:

> Too many times journalists have let down the Black community. And that goes back to your representation. There hasn't been a Black voice in the room to say, 'No, this is the way the story needs to be told.'

I was told relationships with the Black community are heavily dependent on the inner workings of newsroom politics. This is a product of the institution of newsrooms being predominately white, targeting white audiences, and having white management teams which historically excluded the Black community in news coverage. This had a profound effect on the status of Black journalists' relationship with the Black community. They expressed *newsroom culture* was foundational to the way the Black community perceived news media. For Shontia, a news manager, the inequitable treatment of the small and

close-knit Black community for decades in her market was detrimental to the relationship. She blamed the decades of previous coverage and erasure of the Black community in news coverage. She said:

> I've sent a couple of them out to get sound within their Black community. And I find it odd that nobody wants to talk to you. The reason why people don't talk to you, there is a reason why people don't talk to cops, because they don't trust them. Same thing goes for journalists.

Whitney talked about a previous newsroom which was much different from her current newsroom. She said, “every day, I was telling Black stories, because it was Black people, the newsroom was Black, the community was Black. You know, you have no choice but to tell Black stories, because it's our community.” This was a rare scenario. She had a great relationship with the Black community who kept her busy with story ideas. Several other journalists talked about the support of the Black community when time is invested in certain markets. For other journalists, receiving a stamp of approval when they go out to cover stories in the Black community was meaningful. Hailey said:

> Whenever I interact with people from different neighborhoods, Black neighborhoods, specifically, it is so refreshing and like brings me joy, because random people I've never met will turn to me and say, I'm so proud of you. Like they know me because I understand. It's like this sense of pride that there's a Black woman on their TV screen, delivering them the news.

This was indicative of trust for journalists. It was reassuring them that they were doing a good job. It also meant they had an endorsement from the Black community they aimed

to connect with. Trust is important to maintaining this relationship. I asked Black journalists whether they felt the Black community trusts news media. Whitney said,

> I feel like it depends on the generation. But overall, I would say I feel like the Black community isn't fond of news media. I feel that they, like the Black community may want more in terms of just, you know, just I guess, truthful coverage.

Generational Gap

For Black television journalists, their perception of the treatment and values amongst the Black community shifted amongst generational lines. The perceived respect level, trust level, and values varied depending on the age and/or generation of the audience. Black journalists said it was a different energy for them when they pulled into certain areas offline compared to communicating with certain communities online. Reporters go out on stories daily in different neighborhoods around their coverage area. They get to experience an up close and personal view of what people in different communities think about them. They spend time with people and talk with them about different issues. For some situations, it is a feeling or intuition that is mostly implicit regarding the inner thoughts of the news audience. In other situations, journalists who are out in the field are explicitly told by viewers what they think about them. I was told that people were not shy to share how they feel. Tiana said the issue about who watches television news is not, "… just a Black thing, I think this is just generalized younger thing." She blamed the constant COVID news on deterring "younger viewers" from watching and causing them to believe "news sucks." Joe said he mostly gets positive treatment from older generations of Black women and men out in the field who watch the news and "treat you right," but he

believed younger audiences “might not rock with us like that.” Maxwell also talked about these values affecting Black journalists’ relationship with the Black community. He said:

> There's a disconnect generationally, with television news. I mean, these kids don't watch TV, news, they don't watch cable TV at all, really. You know, they're streaming. So, that's another disconnect that we have, you know, and that's not just the Black community is. But for the Black community, I think there's just not enough content that they want. Not enough representation.

Black journalists that I spoke to told me people still depend on them in the community as a trusted source. They were also aware of this generational connection amongst the Black community. Giselle said loyal viewers get worried when a trusted anchor is not on screen:

> The older generations like they look at the news faithfully to the point where if somebody is on vacation, they're like, Oh, my God, do they still work there? What's going on? Like, it's like they took a day off, It's okay! So, I think it depends. I think the younger generation is not so crazy about it, but I think the older generation are more faithful and more loyal viewers.

As for Black journalists’ relationships, there were major places of importance to build community and equity at the heart of the Black community. In every market these places would be: “churches,” “community centers,” “barbershops,” and “beauty shops.” Chris had just visited the barbershop the day before our interview. He told me he does “barbershop talk” but sometimes he just listens to people “talking about news stories.” He said his connection to people in the barbershop is credited to his “authority” as a trusted figure in the community. This is the type of community time Black journalists described

as “on the clock and off the clock” relationship building. Kyle also mentioned having great relationships with his barber who helped him pass along great stories. These spaces are integral to Black journalists building their network in important spaces embedded in the Black community.

Black journalists said relationships with local activists, lawmakers, and influencers in their coverage area who were Black, connected, and “in the know” was integral. These were people who could point Black journalists in the right direction when working in a certain market. More seasoned journalists said these are the people newer journalists should seek out as they could help generate story ideas and contacts for Black journalists who aim to have a relationship with the Black community outside of the typical stories. However, there was a warning when it came to certain lawmakers and activists who some warned would have their own agendas. Black journalists also took their connections online to social media. They follow certain pages on Twitter and Instagram, but mostly on Facebook, to connect, find stories, and sources.

Black Journalists & Black Twitter

When I asked about Black Twitter, I got some giggles while a few journalists brushed it off saying they do not pay too much attention to Black Twitter. Black Twitter was described as “real,” “honest,” “loud,” “tough,” “funny.” It was described as an important space for the Black community. For Theresa, it is a place showing “how Black people have kind of come together to make their voices heard.” Journalists I spoke to were usually a bystander or observer. They use it mainly for the jokes, entertainment, and thought-provoking conversations. Overall, journalists told me it was mostly used by national outlets to find local connections. Black local journalists were careful in how they

used it to build community. One of the things Nichole appreciated about Black Twitter is the freedom to say what Black journalists cannot say. She said, “no one wants all of me as a Black journalist. They want what's palatable. But Black Twitter is gonna be Black and be everything they feel.” Most agreed Black Twitter is not the place for Black journalists to spend too much time trying to fit into. Tristan talked about how he mostly follows other Black journalists who share “concerns in our newsroom, the concerns that we just have as a growing journalist being Black.” He mentioned veteran journalists will join in the threads to offer advice about how things “get better.” Outside of the larger framework of Black Twitter, I was told there is a community of journalists present. Giselle said:

> There's like a village amongst the Black journalists on Twitter. It's like it's all like Black Twitter is a whole country. Right? And then you have different states. And you have one state that's like the journalism Black Twitter, if that makes sense. And that's what I kind of look at with Black Twitter with journalism like a village. So, somebody tweeting about having a hard day or being called out of their name or not being treated fairly, you know, there's always that fellow Black journalist on Twitter sending you a word of encouragement, or retweeting what you're saying and telling people they got to do better.

Tristan talked about how Black Twitter was misunderstood and felt if it “wasn’t as gatekept the way it was” in understanding the complexities of why “we don’t really trust society the way other people can.” He was referring to some of the shared pains of being Black in America:

> A lot of times the way that we act. It's more than just slavery. It's more than just systemic racism. It's literally because of all of our different experiences. And a lot of times it's a shared experience that no other race, no other ethnicity. No other person can really relate to besides ourselves. You know, and that's not a knock to anyone, that's not a knock to anyone at all, you know. Just like my personal pain isn't your personal pain, some pain is shared. And some of that pain, some of those experiences can only be shared within the Black community.

Most journalists did not want to get caught up in something on Black Twitter that could go viral. Many felt that being too involved in some of the daily conversations was not journalistic. This is an interesting point to be further explored. Despite this, there were very interesting points which embodied the complexities involving the critical nature of Twitter. While Black Twitter is an important tool for the Black community's voice, Black journalists talked about the multitude of opinions fueling cancel culture. Rachel was the only one to bring up the Gayle King interview and was not prompted by me to do so. She said:

> What happened with Kobe they found a one 30-second clip and turned on her. I think it was like the month prior to prior they were like calling her Auntie Gayle. Yes, Miss Gayle because of the way that she handled the R. Kelly interview. And then it was like, the very next month, everybody hated Gayle King. You know, and she was like, you know, they called her everything, she was a bed wench for the white man, and she wasn't a good journalist, and all that type of stuff. And it was like the same people were just so happy with how she handled that R. Kelly interview.

Black journalists talked about the dynamics of social media and connections to the audience. The journalists realized that a lot of the people they encountered online were different from the audience they encountered in person.

Hometown Dilemma

Black journalists realized the line got even thinner when it came to people who they knew. Most of the journalists said even their family did not understand their profession. Nichole agreed that beyond the lack of interest in television news, "they just don't understand what we do." This was spoken to me on various occasions. It got more complicated for journalists who were reporting, anchoring, or producing on their hometown turf. At least a third of the journalists were currently working in or had previously worked in their hometown. This gave them the extra pride and connections to the Black community. It also meant they were given more personal criticism about how poor of a job their news station was doing in covering the Black community. Theresa called it "our responsibility" working in a "Black market," an area where she was born and raised. She said, "[the reason] I wanted to come home so badly is because like, these are my people, this is my community." Her entire family lived there, and it gave her great pride to work in her hometown. But with this joy came conflict. Sometimes they were asked about things they had no knowledge of, such as when stories were in shows they were not a part of or posted online at the station website or social media pages. Theresa said her family was quick to call to complain or she would get a text from a friend during her show asking, "why did you guys do that?" She constantly received suggestions, but the toughest part was that "they hold *you* responsible!" Norah talked about an experience

in her hometown where people in the community told her that after a devastating storm the "news really didn't go to the Blackest part of the city." She disagreed:

> It wasn't true. Again, because, obviously, I knew what our coverage was. It wasn't true. But could we have done more? Yes. I felt that's kind of, you know, where I was with the situation like, you know, let us know, where we need to be. Reach out! You know, tell us what you're saying and we'll be there. We've been there. But if there's more than we need to do, let us know. And then I would be in the newsroom saying, you know, well, I'm hearing that this community is, you know, suffering from this. This is happening here. So maybe we should go check this out.

This is part of the situation where she felt stuck. While trying to convince family and friends that her news team was covering the storm, she also worked on the inside to convince her news team to do more. This reflects Newkirk's (2000, p. 160) "double jeopardy" for Black journalists in which they work to please the newsroom and their community. Norah said:

> It's almost a gift and a curse. To kind of be the middleman, I guess, in that situation…rightfully so. Right. Like, I'm not saying that. It's bad for sure. But I think there is rightfully so, pressure from the Black community for Black journalists to be advocates for them.

While Black journalists' saw there was a pressure for them to cover stories accurately, they realized they were expected to be advocates, which made them feel like the "middleman." This made them feel as if they had to choose. Nishikawa et al. (2009) found journalists who were Black and Latino were cautious about taking on the advocacy

role. However, in the interviews that I completed, Black journalists seemingly took on the role, but still walked a fine line to still be professional.

One of the biggest pieces of advice Black journalists urged people to do is to communicate with them about stories they wanted to have covered. Several journalists told me they cannot cover what they do not know. To further show just how close journalists' words were to one another in forming these themes, I want to share another quote from a producer balancing her hometown expectations and journalistic values. Norah was a producer in her hometown:

> I found myself a few times kind of trying to both defend my station, and then also push my station to do something, you know, I would have to defend them against what the community says that we weren't doing. And then also let the station know – okay, we probably need to do this.

Working to cover the Black community is important to Black journalists. The Black journalists I spoke to come from a variety of backgrounds including middle class, upper middle class, and socioeconomic challenged backgrounds from all across the nation. They knew there was not one story to be told that summarized the entire race, and that people should not generalize about the Black community. Hailey said, "the Black experience is so vast, it can be so different." She went on to say, "I can't relate to someone that's grown up in the projects in poverty. That wasn't my experience. That was not my story. So, I cannot pretend like I know exactly what they've gone through." All of them thought working to tell stories for the Black community, being a representative, and rewriting the narrative for the Black community were all important for them being in television news. It also motivated them when times were tough. This motivation also

carried over to feeling like a pressure or responsibility, which I will explore this further in the next section.

4.6 PRESSURE VS RESPONSIBILITY

Throughout this chapter, I described the different experiences of Black journalists within their roles and relationships. My aim here is to understand how Black journalists perceive the pressures they have in newsrooms around the country. The biggest pressure was internal. Black journalists were typically overachievers working in a field that was dominated by white males. They felt the pressure to work "twice as hard" as their co-workers. Renee said it was a feeling of walking in knowing that "every day, you have to sort of prove yourself or prove why you belong here." They also wanted to be an example to the Black community. Theresa said, "I feel like the Black community is like watching me as I work." She wanted to make sure that she wrote things fairly about the Black community, which constantly made her feel pressure while at work. Meanwhile, Cameron told me he did not have many pressures and worked through a lot over the years. But, he admitted to finding balance in this racial climate was a challenge:

> The pressure of balancing with what happened last summer, and telling people your own story, but also being mindful that your viewing audience is literally split in half as to what side they're supposed to be on. And you're just trying to tell people, there's no side, there's the side of how you treat people. And there's a side of how you don't.

His point is the struggle in which Black journalists must balance. They are charged with appealing to white audiences, in predominately white newsrooms, but expected to use

their Blackness to connect with the Black community. However, the expectation to appeal to the entire audience is a mounting pressure. Tiffany said:

> I don't want it to be I'm Black and all my stories are, you know, about the people, for the people. I'm doing it with fist raised in the air. It's not that. I think you can get your information from a bunch of different places. But I try to be careful about how I present myself and even the news, because I want to appeal to that wide audience because that's where the ratings come from.

They must think about serving a Black community, while having the fear of alienating or being accused of being unfair to the white audience. While they must appeal to all, Black journalists tell me they are expected to be the experts on everything Black. And while they have expertise, they cannot be aware of everything all the time. Many of the journalists expressed frustration with expectations of knowing what is personally happening in Black communities both locally and nationally. However, this was compounded with the other knowledge and daily events journalists feel they must balance. While many of the journalists express that they appreciate being included in the conversations about how to better cover the Black community, they express that Black folks are not a monolith and cannot possibly represent the entire swath of the Black community. Theresa said that while she has dealt with this since being enrolled in college journalism classes, it is still a challenge:

> Challenging to be the only person of color sometimes in an entire newsroom and not really understand why, even though it's something that I've dealt with, for quite a while, you know, from college, being in college journalism classes on it, that's difficult to still be somewhere and be the only person of color there. It's a

> challenge because it also means that not only am I speaking for myself, but I'm speaking for every person who looks like me. And that's a lot of pressure.

Since there were not many representatives in the newsroom, it was left up to them to deliver. However, this meant double-work and over-exhaustion. The expectation to do this extra work as underrepresented journalists within this space is highlighted amongst authors over decades (Johnston et al., 2007 Meyers et al., 2015; Newkirk, 2000; Somani et al., 2020). Luke was one of many journalists who volunteered to cover stories with the Black community. He said, "it's a Catch 22 where I'm tired of being, quote unquote, the one that has to bear the responsibility." This responsibility took a toll.

One of the journalists said she works in a local FOX station and there's only "one anchor who backs me, because she is who anyone in that station asks about Black issues." She said this was a tremendous pressure that she shared with that anchor because they were the only two people who cared. Nichole called it a responsibility now that she is in this position to "show out for my people." Laci explained why she feels pressured:

> If I don't push who else is going to? And if I push too much, then they shut down and they don't want to do the stories. We're supposed to be grateful for them doing the minimum. They put more effort into the Puppy Bowl than they did Black History Month. And I had stations that didn't even do a little Black History Month special. So, like, yes, I do feel pressures.

Cameron, a male anchor, said while he does not want to necessarily call it a pressure, he realized the white male anchor is not expected to do the same community outreach he does. This was an internalized pressure to show support for the Black community. I found several other journalists held on to these same internal pressures. While several did not

call it such, these are the emotional and other silent physical labors Black journalists feel the pressure to deliver. Cameron spoke about being inundated with events in February including sweeps, but also, MLK marches, dinners, breakfasts, and a string of other hosting events for several local organizations including the Black Chamber of Commerce. He said:

> You know, they don't ask anybody else because they're like, 'Oh, we need the Black guy to do it' and it's not necessarily the station that asks me that. It's the community members that ask me that and I feel obligated to do it because I represent us on that level. So, I put it upon myself to, you know, as much as possible, say yes to those types of events.

Black journalists want to show up, be present, and give back to the Black community at almost any expense. It is a priority to them, and it is worth every sacrifice. However, there is a tremendous emotional labor Black journalists are balancing as they also must conform to the pressures of doing it all.

External Pressures Are Heavy Too

Some of the other pressures Black journalists face are external, including the many opinions they deal with daily. Several of the Black journalists talk about the outside forces which work to influence the newsroom. Zara, a news producer with a year of experience said, "I've been cussed out by viewers, both Black and White, because I'm not presenting or I'm not doing what they expect the news to do." She said her area is full of Trump supporters who will call often, but the Black people in the community are quick to call too if they think the coverage is unfair. Journalists told me stories about viewers calling them racist terms inside and outside of the newsroom, having the n-word keyed

into their vehicle, or being confronted out in the field. There were so many stories about being mistreated in certain (upper-class) neighborhoods. Tiana also said viewers call the newsroom "talking crazy to you" and people will respond to their Facebook posts with derogatory "fake news" comments. The journalists saw this, and while some brushed it off, others felt it was an undercut to their work.

Maxwell talked about how management assigned him to a story, and he was ridiculed online about it. He said, "the Black community was upset with me for doing that. So, there's some pressures." This is reminiscent of other Black journalists who do not have full control over what stories they are assigned but must deal with the fallout. This sentiment is described throughout this manuscript. While many are using gatekeeping skills, albeit limited, to filter content, final decisions are dependent on the entire institutional structure which is predominantly white. When I asked about pressures, some of the Black journalists wrapped it up into this statement:

> Faith: it's threefold, I think, Black people are held to a standard by white people in the newsroom or non-Black people, because of prejudices they've seen through media, television, books, history school, their own experiences that they have not really put a label to yet. They've never been told that that's racist. And their bias, we're also held to the standard by other Black people who are trying to protect us from being labeled, but it doesn't, it's not helpful. It just adds more pressure. And then we hold ourselves to those same standards, as well, and beat up on ourselves when we shouldn't.

Laci also eloquently wrapped up this immense field of pressure from different directions that journalists had to balance:

> From society from, you know, myself, from, you know, co-workers from management, because if something happens in the Black community and I don't know. Oh, what were you doing?

She went on to say what most others communicated to me about having internal and external pressures from many levels. As described here and within the 29 interviews…it is complicated. Hailey put the weight back on the audience:

> …With broadcast journalism, you're just under this microscope all the time, especially women, I mean, people have something to say about your makeup, your weight, how you dress, what color mask I'm wearing, it is just it's endless. So, the pressures really come from, ironically enough, the people that I'm serving.

4.8 COUNTERNARRATIVE: THE BLACK STORY IS NOT JUST STRUGGLE

Journalists by trade are more than storytellers who want to advocate or be watchdogs for the community. They also take pride in telling stories for communities they serve. Through the language of Black journalists who I spoke with about their experiences, I want to be thoughtful in how I describe their perceptions about telling the Black story. For instance, instead of pressure, I found counternarratives for Black journalists are a responsibility. This work meant spending time getting "earned capital," which is trust. It is going to grocery stores, parks, and other community areas to invest yourself into the community no matter how small. It is intentional and it takes commitment. This act of service also meant talking to people and listening to them no matter who they were, their social class, or where they were from. Many of the veteran journalists were experts in this area. They could literally write a book about it as they

were professionals of the craft. I could write an entirely separate paper on their stories alone to draft counternarratives.

This theme is important in so many ways, mainly, as the Black journalists realize that historically, stories about the Black community are focused on poverty, crime, and struggle, but they are changing this. Today, Black television journalists are dedicated to telling a counternarrative about the Black community one story, one edit, and one tweet at a time. This is that majoritarian narrative which has prevailed, but Black journalists aim for it to no longer persist. While speaking to and lifting up people who live in certain communities is important, they also realize the weight of telling stories about Black success, wealth, business, and more. These stories can "give authority" to certain Black figures such as Black doctors, judges, lawyers. Additionally, they can give life using their respective platforms to share the good news. Chris said it is up to Black journalists to center Black people as authorities in any field. He used the example of the Huxtables from *The Cosby Show* being the only Black doctor and Black lawyer that some people could name. He thought this was an unfortunate and untrue space for people to believe as truth about people in the Black community. In his intentionality, he had a list of Black doctors he regularly calls to interview for stories, and he re-centered them as authority. These were the types of actions which were important for Black journalists to shift the narrative beyond context into content with intent. Centering new sources to give new authority was one of the many ways Chris and other Black journalists were enforcing counternarratives:

> To be able to, to expose that portion of what the truth looks like, so that people aren't unfamiliar. And don't walk around with this mistaken belief, that the only

> Black people that you meet are Black people who either need help, or who are in danger.

Telling a counternarrative meant going beyond gatekeeping to purposefully craft stories and use language for the benefit of the Black audience. It becomes a responsibility of intention beyond a role, it becomes the craft. Michael articulates:

> It's treating the person whose lives in a half a million or $2 million home, doing that story, but then doing a story for somebody [else] who both cases African American, and then somebody who rents an apartment, and in a bad part of town, just barely getting by, it's just giving them the same, you know, just attention, regardless of what, who they are.

He was very thoughtful in his quest to spend time and build community in telling stories. Michael said there is no pressure from management about whether to cover stories about African Americans, as it not a priority unless it dealt with something "wrong." Much like him, Giselle also mentioned how every person is worthy of respect,

> The same respect that I give the janitor is the same respect that I give the CEO and that's my approach. I listen to everybody, everybody has a story. It's the ones that are often dismissed and overlooked, it's those people that are often dismissed and overlooked that I listen to the most, because those always turn out to be the heavy hitting stories, and they actually have something, they just don't have you know someone to actually listen to them. And that's where I come in.

Several journalists told me these are some of the stories which are the most important and compelling. These were the stories where Black and other underrepresented people trusted Black journalists most. Chatman (1996) theorized how certain marginalized

groups did not share certain information or receive information but connected through trust. Black journalists were a catalyst against information poverty as theorized by Chatman (1996.) Maxwell told me about a story he did about a Black woman who made history in maintaining a community garden. He talked about how this story was so emotional that his white news manager asked him to get more content and do the story as a package. Tristan told me about a story which was repeatedly ignored by the newsroom, and he reached out to the family of a young designer with a disability. This was his favorite story of all time, and he was proud to tell it. There are countless stories that are left behind and ignored by newsroom colleagues who are too busy to engage or do not feel these stories are worthy to be told. These are the stories Black journalists are taking inventory to tell. They tell me these are the stories which have been emailed into the newsroom and no one takes time to read or respond. I was told some of the best stories are the ones which slip the cracks of emails and calls to the station. Several journalists told me the best stories also come from just responding to a person who contacts the station or may even be near the scene of another story. The deadline driven nature of television news to meet deadlines and rush from a scene is where many news journalists say others are missing out on building these connections. Some of the journalists thought their peers needed to just slow down to listen and talk people, mainly, as they were missing out on great stories involving communities on the outskirts of society. These are people who they felt were ignored. Systemically ignored by journalists. But for many of the journalists who I spoke to, they were the people who they invested personal time to listen and talk to so their voices could be heard. The best part, they felt honored and determined to tell them. Luke said:

> Whenever I do a story, it is usually about someone who feels disenfranchised, or somebody who feels that the rug has been pulled underneath them. Those type of stories, I kind of tried to have sort of a human appeal. Hidden gems of stories.

These hidden gems are like diamonds. Black journalists are working hard to find them to redefine Black stories. The journalists I spoke to are determined to change the narrative and tell more ethically responsible ones. Earlier in the chapter, I wrote about the disdain Black journalists have about crime and stereotypes. Counternarratives are the remedy to this issue they know is ingrained in American journalism about the Black community.

Serving marginalized communities is a commitment from journalists around the nation. While telling stories about the Black community is pertinent, Black journalists talked about being of service to *all* communities, Whitney said:

> Since I started in journalism, it's always been about serving marginalized communities. So whether that's the LGBTQ, whether that that's low income households, whether it's people of color, it's always been about serving marginalized communities, because, I mean, it's difficult and they want, they need somebody to at least listen to them. And I feel like if I could give someone a leg up, and help them do a little bit better in this world, then I've done my job.

Service gave journalists a feeling of purpose. This feeling of being advocates also resonated within these conversations. This carried over into labels which some of the journalists told me mattered. Examples that I was given included how many reflect on the counternarratives around certain wording which has a negative connotation such as "housing development" vs "hood" or "inmate" vs "incarcerated individual." A growing number of journalists are speaking up to change the narrative around how certain words

are framed. Framing is important to understanding how audiences think about certain topics (Entman, 1992).

One of the questions I asked was whether Black journalists felt as if they were better served to cover the Black community. While this is not a research question, it gives context. While most journalists said yes, a few mentioned it was not quite that clear cut. Tristan said, "Yes, and No. Yes, because no one can tell about our experience better than our own experience." He went on to say that on the other hand people have motives and sometimes that motive is just to get the story done. There were a few journalists who I spoke to about how some non-Black journalists may be better prepared due to their interest. A few journalists mentioned how someone seeing that you are Black can get you an interview, Tristan said from his experience, "Black people are more willing to talk to you if they see that you're Black. That's just the God honest truth." Other journalists agreed but said the caveat goes beyond getting people to talk on camera. This was the bare minimum. It was important to capture a story which made a change. A story with a solution was the aim. Black journalists also said while most of the time they were able to land interviews with the Black community, they felt at times they were not able to get interviews with non-Black community members for the same reason. Ryan mentioned that he appreciates when stories about the Black community are assigned to him as the only Black newswriter in his newsroom because he "understands the plight of being Black." However, he was careful in communicating it is not something that should pigeonhole him into being the "token." This idea of tokenism is sprinkled throughout many parts of these conversations with journalists being the only or one of few in their

newsroom. Tokenism is an issue that Black journalists thought about and did not aim to be labeled. Despite this they were committed to using their privilege to tell Black stories.

4.9 BEYOND THE STORY: BURNOUT AND EMOTIONAL TRAUMA

Journalism as a profession covers a lot of traumas including car accidents, crime scenes, and incidents involving death. It is compounded for Black journalists who cover racial trauma which could be triggering. One journalist likened it to the traumatic minute by minute career like emergency services or law enforcement, without the training. Journalists cover these traumas daily and a lot of times go into rolling coverage days or weeks on end without incident. I was told the emotional toll is a burden often too heavy to bear. With the weight of 2020 and beyond, some journalists have since sought services to address their mental health as well as physical and psychological needs. Stacey told me "I just started seeing a therapist." She said:

> I will tell you about it, but it's still so new. So I don't have I'm still kind of trying to navigate seeing a therapist. If I can be honest with you. Yeah. Um, but yeah, I need, I need to talk to somebody who understands or somebody who could help me navigate these feelings that I'm feeling and why I'm feeling this way. And, and the depression area, I really believe that there is some low-grade depression there. Because it is traumatic. And imagine the people at home who are watching it. But imagine when you have to cover it. When you see it up close.

Other Black journalists cope by leaving their stress of the job at the door. A male anchor told me, "You got to remember what's work and what's personal." Cameron said with the range of tragedy they experience, if you don't separate work from home "…you'd be

crying yourself in a ball in the corner." This was advice which was important for how he dealt with this work.

The emotional toll connected to the experiences of Black journalists is important. Seeing deadly incidents like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor brought up traumatic experiences for many of the journalists who were in the middle of dealing with their own trauma. Tiana said:

> This year has been such an emotional draining year. And then at certain points, I feel like I couldn't even really address the way that I was feeling just because I got to walk into work. And when I walk in here, I'm supposed to just be, you know, I'm supposed to be even keel. So it's like just bury it. And then it goes back into like, like what, like just experiencing, you know, messed up stuff at a young age and just getting numb to it. Then it's like you put that coat back on, like, all right, shake it off. I'm straight and let's go. But, that's not healthy.

The emotional journey, burnout, and exhaustion already existed for Black journalists who were working through a pandemic. With racial incidents happening all around them, they had no escape and the situation was compounded. I had several journalists talk about the emotional impact covering Black death weighed on them. I had journalists telling me how they would stare at crime scene pictures from the [Breonna] Taylor crime scene. One journalist told me she could not get those images out of her mind. She worked in the market where this tragedy happened and had an even closer connection to the story of seeing this Black woman killed at the hands of police. This was also the case for Black journalists who watched the video of George Floyd dying under police officer Derek Chauvin's knee. While some journalists opted not to watch the video in full, others had

no choice but to hear or see parts of it in the newsroom which had it on repeat. While their boundaries could not be enforced with some things, journalists really started to reflect on their decisions. Eric said:

> I have therapy and I set boundaries. Because there are times where, you know, being in this pandemic. I question, how much longer can I do this? You know, am I seeing the impact of our work, you know, do I still enjoy this? Like, those questions have come up so many times during this period.

Black journalists talked about coping mechanisms they used to deal with the stress. Several said they finally got a therapist while others depended on their faith, and some buried their pain. Going to the gym and sleep were also outlets. Finding coping mechanisms to deal with the variety of emotions was a salient point to how Black journalists are digesting this contentious time. Theresa was one of the many journalists who mentioned how writing about this heavy content "can take you to a low place." Her coping dealt with using sick days or personal days for mental health. She also mentioned that she shuts off the news and social media as protection. She said, "constantly having stuff pounded in your head about shootings and killings, and the negativity and the heaviness and the discrimination and the racial inequalities" was too much. Perhaps surprisingly, she became "an advocate of turning off the news, even though I work for the news," as important for self-care. For journalists, unplugging was growth and self-preservation. Hailey urged Black journalists to "take inventory" of how they are doing:

> There was also obviously this level of like, personal feelings, because these are Black people that this is impacting, but it felt like I didn't really have this space to deal with that, because I needed my head in the game for work. So in a lot of

ways, I neglected my own mental health during that time. And I just got to the point where I wanted to crawl under a rock, like, I felt so tired.

On top of their jobs and seeing things play out in real time, journalists had to be empathetic. Here I was talking to them about some of the most devastating stories in modern history from BLM protests, Pulse nightclub rampage in Orlando in which 49 people were killed, Trayvon Martin's death to the eventual trial, and, of course, the current pandemic. I was told they had to be human enough to be empathetic to those grieving, even though they felt the need to grieve but held back due to the adrenaline rush of live television. However, it was important for them while interviewing grieving families, victims, and even witnesses to be a great listener to tell these stories right. Journalists say they are counselors, missionaries, and some admitted to comforting and even praying with families. They connected with people at some of the toughest parts of their lives. They were compartmentalizing in the midst of tragedy. When the cameras turned off and the adrenaline died down, they cried, and they were angry. They felt as if most people did not understand the profession, the constraints, and the goals of journalists. Ultimately, something as normal as deadline pressures could be their breaking point.

Burnout for journalists is a real thing as several talked about how others left the business, while some considered leaving television themselves. Eric talked about the dwindling numbers of Black males in business. He said:

I have a concern. Not just for Black journalists in general, but I'm concerned about Black male journalists and retaining them in this business. I'm really concerned about that. Although we have many coming in. I just, I don't see many.

> I don't see those same individuals sticking around like I am one of the few Black men in my age group experience level that is still in this business that I am that I know personally. Personally, we came in together. I am one of the few. And it's hard. It's a hard business to get into. And it's a hard business to stay in. I myself have had to leave to catch a break. But some people don't go come back. And I'm just really concerned.

Renee said "reminding myself to be human everyday" helps to keep her going. She added, "remembering God's love and grace" was also important for this process of healing to continue along this path.

Despite these challenges and pressures Marie said, "this is a good time to be a Black journalist." She urged all to "rise above the challenges that we've had before and tell those stories in a way that only we can." This message wraps up the multi-layered emotions and expressions from Black television journalists who are navigating historic times.

4.10 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Through my interviews with 29 Black television journalists, I realize this historic time requires a lot of healing and patience for them to navigate. It is a contentious time which is unparalleled in the culmination of time and space for American history. They are centered in real time to deal with a "racial reckoning," seeing Black lives lost at the hands of those who they are asked to work alongside while also being shoved and pepper-sprayed. Meanwhile, they are told they are "traitors" by the audience they try even harder to serve. This work extends work by several scholars and authors (Dawkins, 1997; Newkirk, 2000; Johnston et al., 2007; Nishikawa et al., 2009; Meyers et al., 2015;

Somani et al., 2020; Somani et al., 2019) which all aim to tell stories about Black journalists through a variety of lens. But this work is the first of its kind to use only Black television male and female journalists who are working in local newsrooms during a post-digital time and aiming to center a crucial race conscious lens of CRT.

Throughout this chapter, I have told the story centered around the sentiments of Black television journalists who are tasked with the *role* of being representatives of Black journalists' past and present. They also aim to be the storytellers of the Black community while on the cusp of being asked to maintain the majoritarian view of white management teams who demand they cradle "target" audiences. Black journalists are balancing the *relationships* of newsroom culture and Black community, a feat too high to climb. These challenges contribute to the internal and external *pressures* Black journalists are left to deal with as they navigate the passion of their journalism careers. It is a true balancing act which stretches beyond Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness concept. Black journalists have a multitude of consciousness which stretches internally and externally through complexities this work breaks down. In my next chapter, I will tie in their expressions which were communicated to me for future implications theoretically and practically for Black journalists as a guide to build on with this body of work.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING BLACK JOURNALISTS' EXPERIENCES

> It's definitely providing the perspective that you don't get from not being a Black man. You speak with duality, speak with you know, a double consciousness almost like W.E.B. Du Bois talked about. And because you speak with it is almost a triple consciousness… you're a Black man, you're an American, and you're also a journalist. And I think that part is really, you know, really important.
>
> -Ryan, Black male journalist, interview

Being a journalist is a "hard job" and a "thankless job" according to the journalists in my study. Being Black brings "unique" and "cultural" nuance to one's experience. Being "Black in America" means you exist in a society where history floats in your subconscious that your ancestors were bought into slavery, lynched, beat, stolen, lived through Jim Crow, red-lined, systemically oppressed, imprisoned under the *13th Amendment*, and continuously discriminated against in the land you call home. This is the burden Black journalists carry through their storytelling. While they may not think about these issues every moment, it is the dark cloud hovering over them in newsrooms which are not reflective of them or the communities they come from. Nor does it give voice to the latter. A certain lingo they may use, references to understand things, and even context or writing about certain topics or issues is something they carry regardless of background.

This is all the superpower of the Black journalist. It is here where multi-conscious for Black journalists exists, and it is a framework I aim to build on.

In Lani Guinier's (1990) *Of Gentleman and Role Models*, she theorized the *gentleman* (a gender-neutral term of qualities of a lawyer's role) argues both sides despite "culture, gender and race" being situated in the white male perspective. In extending this work, applying Guinier's framework to journalists in this study situates one of a multiple consciousness. Her work argues "multiple consciousness allows us to operate within mainstream discourse" and "within the details of our own special knowledge," "producing both madness and genius" (p. 96). Her experience as a Black female civil rights attorney can be extended to journalists as much as the field of law can be extended to the institution of journalism, as both consist of the institutional power structure maintained mostly by white males. Using Du Bois' double-consciousness (1903), Guinier paints a picture of the multi-layered experiences of working in a predominately white male institution of law which upholds certain professional standards. It is one which provides "insider privileges" and "outsider consciousness," leaving those in this space as "an explorer and translator of these different identities" (Guinier, 1990, p. 96-97). This is the space where Black journalists exist. They are navigating the spaces of newsroom culture upheld by their mostly white newsrooms, while balancing the Black community's demands to be covered more accurately. As told to me, Black journalists are constantly balancing their "insider" and "outsider" spaces while telling stories. This is occurring while attempting to keep their careers as "objective" journalists intact and, at the same time, not appearing biased towards the Black community. Guinier (1990) states:

> For outsiders, who do not experience the world through colorblindness or gender neutrality, multiple consciousness is a cultural norm. Those with outsider consciousness live with the peculiar sensation of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. We are outsiders precisely because of, not in spite of, our race and gender. In our insider roles, we are still outsiders. As a result, we experience colorblindness, gender neutrality, and individual perspective as unfamiliar, mainstream, existential luxuries. "Neutrality" feels very different from the perspective of an outsider. A race-neutral, gender-neutered perspective is apparently enjoyed, to the extent it exists at all, by gentlemen: those with a white, male perspective, those in the majority, and those gentlemen surrogates to whom the majority grants insider privileges. For self-conscious, second-sighted outsiders, multiple consciousness centers marginality and names reality. (p. 97)

Multi-consciousness for Black journalists centers on their intersectional qualities of being Black, being a journalist, and being American, among other attributes such as their gender. Guinier argued that acknowledging her multiple consciousness working with clients was “liberating” and made her a “more skilled advocate” (p. 97). However, in the field of journalism, advocacy can be tricky. Similar sentiments were presented amongst journalists who did not specifically *call* themselves advocates, but practiced advocacy in their work in order to be sensitive to sources within their stories (Walker & Boling, 2022). Previous studies show journalists of color are cautious to be labeled or seen as advocates for minority centered stories (Nishikawa et al., 2009). However, one difference is the timing of this work. There are now sensitive topics currently on the news agenda, such as police brutality, and journalists do not call themselves advocates, but instead they

center the voices of the Black community. Also, Black journalists realize there is no neutrality when reporting on race and racism, but they are in a difficult position.

5.1 DISCUSSION

Through the experiences shared with me from 29 Black television journalists, this work gives a renewed insider viewpoint which builds on previous studies involving journalists of color and their efforts to cover minority related issues (Johnston et al., 2007; Meyers et al., 2015; Nishikawa et al., 2009; Somani et al., 2019; Somani et al., 2020). My work found some journalistic norms still exist, because of traditional management structures. However, these norms are being challenged as Black journalists are taking charge to uphold their values and be heard (Ingram, 2020). This work also brings new insight with a fresh lens on the state of the Black broadcast journalist, as it is the first of its kind to center local broadcast journalists in the digital age, specifically in 2020, and it is done so by a Black female journalist-scholar. Summer 2020 afforded Black journalists' opportunities and leeway that they realize they would have never had otherwise. They had more freedom to push the envelope when it came to conversations, appearance, and opportunities in their newsrooms. However, it also came with a price. Their expertise was at a premium, and with the extra emotional labor involved, there was a mental overload. Somehow, they persisted and continued to do the jobs they love for a field they love even more. In the next section, I will discuss more on what my findings mean theoretically and practically for local Black journalists and the newsrooms they work.

Newsrooms Systemically Flawed

Black journalists realize the newsrooms in which they work still have a ways to go when it comes to stories involving the Black community. This was echoed throughout the interviews of journalists who knew their newsrooms needed a top-down reconstruction of values to provide more worth, including time and resources to underrepresented voices. Black journalists knew this new culture needed to be explicit to re-center conversations on race and exercise race consciousness in their reporting. They also knew that, historically, newsrooms had built a culture which put them at a disadvantage as a journalist on the inside and as a Black American on the outside. Black journalists talked about building more trust through "earned capital," but needed more time to grow relationships with the public, and the Black community. However, the issue comes with shrinking staffs and growing news holes, which is the time allotted for news content over the air. As expressed within the interviews with Black journalists, the value and importance of diversity is not solely on those who are Black. It is built on an understanding, foundationally embedded in the newsroom structure. Beyond this, it must be systematically built into the fabric of the company/organization which would then transfer into the body of journalism. While a 2021 RTNDA survey found local TV news is more diverse compared to newspapers, smaller and mid-sized markets still have work to do. Local television newsrooms are at 27.2% journalists of color, which is about 12.2% less than the percentage in the overall American population (RTNDA, 2021). A more equitable workplace is the responsibility for all journalists. It is also supported by Chris:

> Unquestionably, studies have shown us that diverse teams, not just in television, but diverse teams everywhere, usually build better teams and more successful teams. In any circumstance. When you take that diversity out of the team, usually what you do is you inadvertently place limiters on and you get teams that only see that they don't see the perspective of what it is they're doing no matter what it is, they're doing enough to open-up to affective change into ideas that will promote the effort and the mission of what they're doing. Oftentimes, what that takes is someone at the top who is versed and people who are in decision making positions, who are diverse to really expose that team to growth.

Black Journalists in "Double-Bind" 2.0

More than 20-years after Newkirk's (2000) book was released some of the issues, specifically in *Chapter 5*, are still relevant today. Specifically, that Black journalists are in double jeopardy or have double consciousness as Black and Americans while working to navigate newsrooms. My work extends its contents including an emphasis on digital media and experiences at a heightened time of racial incidents in news coverage. She called for a "major overhaul in race coverage -- a conscious attempt to eradicate negative and pervasive stereotyping of Black people" (Newkirk, 2000, p. 160) as a solution to relieve the pressures of Black journalists. But, as told by the Black journalists in this work, this point is not yet realized, and they still carry these burdens. Black journalists realize that they represent many facets of the world we live in and while they want to and aim to paint positive pictures of Black Americans in coverage, there is still a fine line to walk with their current roles. This pressure could be a factor to burnout and early exits.

The idea that "Black folks are not a monolith" is something I heard throughout the interviews, and if someone did not say it specifically, they made sure to mention it through their words in describing the diaspora in which Black folks exist. Black journalists are left to the wolves by a traditional structure that is fragmented by a dark, ugly past towards Black Americans. Yet, they are expected to be the bridge and translators of those same communities in which they want to address and blend in.

Objectivity… still…still the Norm… Sometimes

In some instances, Black journalists believe neutrality is a myth and objectivity is still the norm, but that depends on the topic. While some journalists realize the issues with objectivity, through their journalistic expertise they continue to practice it. This is especially true for newer journalists. Newer, less experienced journalists are often more excited about landing their first journalism job and will tend to play it safe. Meanwhile, the more seasoned journalists with more than four years of experience demonstrated different opinions regarding this field. The new journalists' naiveté carries them from day-to-day, holding on to the promise of objectivity and the promise of holding those in "power to account." More seasoned journalists were likely to speak up and told me stories about how they were not as bold in their earlier years as a journalist but felt they earned the right to state their opinions. These experienced journalists said this was their responsibility and they urged others to speak up as well. When it comes to objectivity, Black journalists also noticed double standards which existed for them that seemingly disappeared for their manager's self-interest. For instance, I was told their managers would ask them to put in stories which had a personal connection to them or their family. Having a flaky or inconsistent objectivity rule flashed as a lack of integrity for journalists

who felt like they always had to check their bias or face reprimand. This felt like unfair and *biased* territory to them.

> Black Journalists are publicly airing years of accumulated grievances, demanding an overdue reckoning for a profession whose mainstream repeatedly brushes of their concerns… writers and editors are now openly pushing for a paradigm shift in how our outlets define their operations and ideals.
>
> -Wesley Lowery, June 23, 2020

Lowery's (2020) article in *The New York Times* argued that Black journalists were reclaiming and pulling back the norms of objectivity, but for Black local broadcast journalists this argument is much more nuanced. Their careers hung in the balance of politicized local newsroom culture and traditions. However, the time during this study was allowing Black journalists to be more free beyond their usual practices in the newsroom. Black journalists drew the line on being neutral or objective when it explicitly related to racism. This was seemingly led by Black journalists covering the pains of their own community and many times seeing themselves and their loved ones reflected in the Black lives lost. Black journalists were also very cautious about what and how they tweet, which was demonstrated in their conversations with me. Black broadcast journalists were also working to tell more accurate stories about their communities (Lowery, 2020) as the gatekeepers of information (e.g. Meyers et al., 2015; Shoemaker et al., 1996; Walker, 2021; White, 1950). Following a content analysis of major news organizations' Facebook pages, Kilgo et al.'s (2020) study called for an industry-wide adoption on how journalists report on racism and racists. Robinson et al. (2019) called for *active objectivity*, a process requiring "journalists to defy institutionally entrenched

routines and ideologies of production, as well as the structure of relations with sources, audiences, and other social institutions" (p. 388). Black journalists are reimagining objectivity with their usage of being more thoughtful in having diverse sources and considerations with how they present information to their audiences. Mainly, they are centering Black Americans into their coverage whenever they can, despite barriers from their mostly white management teams.

Black Audiences Matter

Contrary to previous work that Black journalists were hesitant to pitch Black stories in fear of being pigeonholed (Prince, 2018), the journalists in this study did so on a regular basis. One reason could be the racial climate of 2020 and 2021. They also focused on telling Black stories with nuance and care in order to convince their colleagues that the Black community should have stories told about them more equitably. Newsrooms as a whole should understand that Black audiences matter. For Black journalists, this is an action which goes beyond performative slides, sprinkled in *diverse* hires, "things will change" emails, and visits from corporate leadership full of empty promises. They want to see actionable steps which permeate from the top of the company throughout. This also meant diverse voices at the table from all walks of life and not limited to the same race, gender, sexuality, identity, and ethnicity that have always made newsroom decisions. Black journalists are not just advocating for Black voices, they are advocating for diverse voices across the board. Several of the journalists mentioned the need for more accountability from management teams and newsrooms in regard to diverse hiring practices. Nearly all the journalists mentioned that there was a need to have a newsroom which reflected the community they were in. No journalist I spoke to said

that their newsroom staff or the stories told by that staff mirrored the communities they were in. For most journalists' I spoke to, it was a daily or weekly struggle to get Black stories on the air. Black journalists' opinions about being in Black communities is in line with Kilgo et al.'s (2020) report on what Black communities think about journalists in mainstream newsrooms. They felt like the coverage of their communities was incomplete and that they did not trust journalists to cover Black communities properly (2020). However, their study about news distrust found this issue was "fixable." Through my work, I talked to Black journalists who see both sides from a position of standpoint and social identity who also feel this can be achieved.

Centering Black voices means that there must be an intentional and measurable goals for newsrooms to follow. This means hiring practices must be audited and stories should be audited too. Arguably, this would be tough to do with limited resources, but it is intentional work that should be done. While clear social media policies were widely missing from management teams, journalists believed they should center free speech for journalists, while also being fair across the board. Black journalists mentioned how #BlueLivesMatter supporters who work in newsrooms were free to tweet their rhetoric in peace. All 29 journalists I spoke to were overly cautious or had some reservations about tweeting #BlackLivesMatter with concerns of repercussions, ridicule, or being labeled as biased. A future recommendation is for newsrooms to have clear mandates across the board for journalists with equal, measurable, and clear directives about social media habits. Even though journalists' decisions and identity on social media is heavily dependent on "individual branding strategies and professional boundaries" (Bossio & Holton, 2018), they often struggled with decisions about what to share and on which

platform due to concerns of a perceived bias from the audience. This bias has been previously reflected in a study about audience perception of women of color journalists' social media habits (Boling et al., 2021), so journalists who are from marginalized groups are justified in their concerns of what and how they tweet.

Much like Huber's 2009 study on Chicano students, this study demonstrates that there is plenty to learn by giving a voice to those who are unheard. These Black television journalists say there is power in changing the narrative through talking to people in the Black community. Centering Black stories meant there are journalists who work in and build trust within Black communities beyond negative coverage. This should not just be the burden of the Black journalists of the newsroom, but instead must be a goal for the entire newsroom to mobilize regarding race-driven stories. Re-centering a new purpose and priorities for all journalists shifts the narrative for Black journalists and other journalists of color to have the burden lifted. Newsroom management should allow Black journalists to center Black stories, sources, and experiences beyond Black History Month, Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Day, and Juneteenth, which are the expected, and sometimes only, days for Black stories to be told. Several journalists expressed an interest to include their personal expertise into the decision-making process. Their standpoint, supported by Orbe (1998), will help to center Black voices in the newsroom coverage in an authentic way.

In 2020-2021, Black journalists became relevant to the newsroom in part because the newsroom needed them to cover protest—much like Black journalists were needed during the Civil Rights Movement and other times of racial strife (Kerner Commission Report, 1968). During her interview, Faith told me Black people were the "cool kids in

journalism." There should be long-term investments in sustaining Black talent on and off-screen. This work elevated the opinions of Black journalists in several positions in local newsrooms, which is important to the day-to-day gatekeeping process for what gets selected to go on the news. As several journalists told me, they knew they related to the audience in a unique way. When it comes to pitching stories, Whitney said:

> It's not that we're not allowed to tell certain stories, it's just that it's more difficult to pitch it, it's more difficult to get it approved, it's more difficult to get it on TV. And so me as a night side reporter, if I want to do to me what is a simple story about Juneteenth. It takes me two and a half weeks, because they every single day, they have something else for me to do.

While there are steps journalists can take to reach the Black community, there are also steps the Black community can take to be reached. The journalists suggested that the Black communities in the areas they serve should be intentional about communication. If they already are, then continue to speak on behalf of their cause. For instance, community leaders should tell journalists what they want covered and help them report more accurately and truthfully by reaching out to them and being accessible for interviews. This also means that the relationship should be mutual with Black journalists to build community through a renewed and patient trust. These communities should not let history distract their rights to have their stories told, and they should continue to connect with a diverse group of journalists throughout that television market. These stories can go beyond television, as journalists should be encouraged to share the story through their different platforms, including social media accounts and websites. Most of all, know this is a relationship which will take time so it would take some patience.

Lessons to management teams

This study also revealed lessons for newsroom management teams. Perhaps most importantly: Do not expect Black journalists to know everything about the Black community. As one journalist said, "I am not the Black mecca of answers." It is short-sighted to think that all Black journalists and the Black community are the same. As Tamia told me:

> I feel like not all Black journalists, are, like, fit to talk about the Black community because they're I mean, we're not all one just person it's like we all I mean, yeah, we have some shared perspectives but not we don't all think alike we don't all come from the same background. So, it just depends on the journalist to me.

Additionally, management should provide Black journalists with open and private spaces to share their opinions free of repercussion and ridicule. Then, maintain this space across the newsroom by creating spaces for this type of culture and conversation to occur on many different topics. When Black journalists talked about the best managers who were white or non-Black, these managers were always the ones who they felt listened to them and created a space (such as an open-door policy) for Black journalists to connect. This means that while Black journalists believe more Black news managers are needed, they understand this is a structural issue which history shows will not be fixed easily. Beyond just hiring more Black journalists is the importance of retention of those once they hired. Therefore, the investment to create culturally relevant open communication in management is important.

This dissertation does not suggest that Black journalists should only be assigned to "Black stories." Rather, Black journalists see themselves as representatives of their

community who take great responsibility in telling accurate, well-rounded stories about people who they relate to. They offer counternarratives as a responsible truth to stories which have taken center stage. Every journalist, regardless of background, should be versed to tell these stories free of stereotypes and as much bias as possible. For instance, when the story about Breonna Taylor's death was pitched by a Latina reporter but taken from her and assigned to the Black reporter, this is not what Black journalists mean when they say equitable treatment to cover marginalized communities. It is to be intentional and open the lines of communication for *any* journalist regardless of race, who is passionate and prepared to tell certain stories about the Black community. This is structural change which will not put the burden on the backs of Black journalists and other journalists of color. Black journalists want "full membership and participatory status in their profession, not simply the illusion of influence" (Wilson, 1991, p. 154). He said:

> It's not just a seat at the newsroom lunch counter they seek, but a role in both determining the menu and in preparing the meal.

Black journalists want support, open communication, acknowledgement for past pains, and more equitable treatment (such as pay and opportunities) for their labor. They want to feel valued for their time and talents. Most of all, many expressed to me that they simply want to be given the benefit of the doubt. One of the ways this is done is by having teams which are honest about microaggressions and bias which exist within the ranks of this field. While this dissertation examines the gatekeeping practices of Black journalists, they tell me it is undeniable that news management hold the most visible gatekeeping power. Some of this gatekeeping, which I was told also felt like

microaggressions, included the out-of-date standards put in place about Black journalists' hair. Although these journalists are quietly working to monitor content and context when they can.

Black journalists suffer when there is no Black leadership. They sometimes feel "isolated" when they do not have a representative in the ranks of management. Only one person I interviewed had a current newsroom that had at least two Black managers. Most of the journalists did not even have a Black manager at all. This research demonstrates that Black managers must be supported, and this is an effort that must be intentional and understood all the way to the corporate level. It is an institutional pitfall with grave penalties for the pipeline to hire, retain, and promote Black leadership. NABJ has consistently talked about this issue and called action to have it addressed, and this research shows Black journalists working in local newsrooms believe this area is still a problem. It is the same critique for journalism which has existed for dozens of years, since the Kerner Report.

J-Schools in the Academy: #CommunicationSoWhite

Newsroom culture starts in the classroom. We cannot blame newsrooms alone for the culture that exists to value certain voices over others. Journalists are typically taught these foundational values about journalism ethics somewhere. All the journalists I conversed with had college degrees, including several with master's degrees and one who was working on a doctorate. Nearly all of them had a journalism major or minor in either the undergraduate or graduate level. They were formally trained journalists taught by journalism school faculty. I was told so many stories about these experiences, both good and bad, which helped to shape them as journalists. The academy should take a look in

the mirror to address issues of inequity within its ranks. One of the anchors told me how a professor said he spoke "too Black" to be on television. Newkirk called news "a mirror of white entitlement rather than a guide for racial enlightenment" (p. 159). The way we fix journalism is to also fix the structural issues within the academy. One cannot exist without the other. This is true from the #CommunicationSoWhite hashtag which finds a lack of diversity in the field of communication (Ng et al., 2019). In 1991, Wilson called for educators to create "multicultural perspectives" structured within their classrooms and teach to include "inclusive multicultural news sources" (p. 154). The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC, 2022) shows diversity and inclusiveness as one of its nine standards for schools. It outlines points on written plans for under-represented groups for curriculum, recruitment, retention for students. We should ask whether we are reflective in preparing future journalists and media scholars for the diverse world they will enter?

Context and Counternarratives

Black journalists want to do positive stories about the Black experience, and not just stories about crime, death, and poverty that traditionally feature that community. This is what has challenged many of them to be journalists in the first place. Many of the Black journalists come from these communities and they still have a special place in their hearts to get the stories right. However, they must balance this with the ongoing newsroom structures and the internal and external pressures they are balancing from day to day on the news grind (Shoemaker et al., 1996). Instead, it is best to incorporate better, more diverse storytelling into the story selection. In addition, we should incorporate them into the sources, production, and overall news structure.

As one journalist stated: "…for months after the George Floyd, people recognized that media was an opportunity to voice concerns." Black journalists realized they wanted to tell these stories, with many volunteering when other co-workers felt unsafe or uncomfortable to cover the protests. Many of the journalists were working around the clock, including one journalist who worked almost three weeks straight with no days off. There are generational shifts in their audiences which are evolving, but they do not believe journalism is dying. As mentioned to me, they allow people to have a "larger platform" and to get solutions to their issues. Journalists know they have connections in communities through certain sources and by trade have a certain respect level in society. They are working to continue telling their stories and including more positive stories about the Black community. They are also continuing to acknowledge shifts in technology including Black Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The former is something Black journalists are working to figure out where it can fit in their daily routine, as some actively use it, while others see Black Twitter as a tool for entertainment or a storytelling resource for national outlets. However, Facebook is heavily used as a more local-based, community centered spaced platform for journalists. The differences in the platforms and how Black journalists are using these platforms for sourcing and stories with marginalized communities would be fruitful to explore.

Mental health, burnout, and exhaustion are important areas which also came out of this body of research. As a forever journalist and now journalism scholar, I recognize how much tragedy and trauma journalists are accustomed to experiencing daily. This is all under the strict deadlines and guise of journalistic norms and routines. In this field, we ask journalists to separate from the story and be fair, and not feel. But we must ask

ourselves whether these are responsible emotional traits to put on journalists in high-stress situations? They are telling society's most traumatic stories in real time. They are also sometimes in violent or dangerous situations armed only with cameras and cellphones. All of these factors combined with the trauma of Black journalists seeing Black death and the historical pains of brutality should be discussed more and through praxis. There should be action steps in addressing this manner. Journalists are left to figure out whether they can afford therapy or need a mental health day to deal with these issues. NABJ called on news organizations to help their employees cope (Bauder, 2021) but more should be done, especially as the journalists I spoke to did not have direct access to those resources. While at least two of the journalists talked about having a therapist. There needs to be a more salient move to prepare journalists and address their mental health issues. My hope is this work will shine a light on the experiences of Black television journalists which could turn into more nuanced work in this area.

5.2 GATEKEEPING BLACKNESS A MODEL

It has been more than 70 years since the first gatekeeping study from White (1950), which suggested that news journalists curate information for the public. In 2022, this work continues to support this theory through a lens of culture, race, gender, and technology. Gatekeeping is being done by journalists who are correcting misinformation and miscommunication. Gatekeeping is being done by Black journalists on social media who are deciding what their organization should post and what details should be included. Gatekeeping is being done by Black journalists out in the field and in the newsroom who decide who they want to talk to and whether certain images are suitable for telling the stories of Black communities. Gatekeeping is being done by Black

journalists working in television news to create a more responsible equitable news product in positions which include being on the air, producing, out in the field as a photographer, news manager, and beyond. This work adds more nuance to previous work using gatekeeping about minorities such as deadly highly publicized police shootings (Walker, 2021) and Black female journalists (Meyers et al., 2015) by recognizing a more defined role of Black television journalists in local newsrooms. It is through this work using the structures of gatekeeping proposed by Shoemaker et al. (1996), White (1950), Walker (2021), and Meyers et al. (2015), and race conscious literature of CRT (Bell, 2018; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2020), double consciousness from Du Bois (1903), multi-consciousness from Guinier (1990) that I introduce a more defined process in which Black journalists work. Through my work with Black broadcast journalists who are working in local newsrooms, I propose *Gatekeeping Blackness,* which aims to:

1. Center everyday stories about the Black community as important
    a. Identify nuance in the Black experience
    b. Redefine objectivity
2. Create culture in predominantly white spaces without being tokenized or pigeonholed
3. Acknowledge historic journalistic wrongdoing in coverage
4. Exist as *representatives* of Black community (past, present, & future)
5. *Build equity* into Black audiences online and offline
6. Use a lens of culturally relevant expertise to influence content
7. Combat mis/disinformation

8. Draw from personal experiences and insight
9. Spend time in community for *earned capital* of trust
10. *Gatekeep* harmful, stereotypical stories and images about Black community, while being mindful of journalistic ideals
    a. Suppress oppressive images
11. Uplift counternarratives as the new "Black story"
12. Advocate against systemic, harmful newsroom culture
13. Balance ideals as a journalist while balancing the outlook of "two audiences"
14. Maintain a safe space to navigate "Blackness" as relevant and worthy

Gatekeeping Blackness means to center stories about Black community, be mindful/leave out harmful stories while being mindful of journalistic ideals, uplift counternarratives of marginalized, socioeconomically depressed, and underrepresented groups, and to advocate against newsroom culture and to deal with this while balancing passion for one's journalistic rigor.

In 2020, following the deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests broke out across the nation. This combined with a global pandemic, COVID-19, created a space where journalists were in the middle of reporting for their newsrooms and choosing to be diligent in reporting for the Black community.

Study Limitations

This study had limitations that I must acknowledge. For one, I interviewed Black journalists about their experiences with connecting with the Black community, which could be sensitive for Black journalists to acknowledge or even articulate at this time. Some journalists may not feel comfortable talking about this topic at a time of heightened

racial tensions in the nation. I found this to be the case, but they were so willing and open to unload the emotional burdens to me about their experiences which included the challenges of 2020 and 2021. I would also add it was a benefit for Black journalists to explain with deep conviction how they communicate and connect with Black communities. This was explored in the results section in more depth.

This study is not generalizable, nor does it aim to be. It is to fill theoretical gaps of technology, gatekeeping, journalistic norms, and identity which exist for Black journalists at a very controversial time. In fact, it fills a large, understudied gap in communications research. Black journalists deserve to have their stories told, and this work extends other work in a way which is fruitful to Black journalists. This study will add to this conversation and scholarship with practical implications to allow Black journalists the space to recognize the pressures.

5.3 FUTURE IMPLICATIONS & DIRECTIONS

This dissertation is one part of the journey for my future research trajectory as a journalist turned scholar. I am passionate about continuing to understand the experiences of Black journalists, other journalists of color, and journalists who cover controversial topics related to culture. I hope to expand this project with the experiences of Black managers in television newsrooms as well as share more about these experiences of Black journalists in a practice-based setting. This work is not generalizable, but it helps us take a snapshot of this moment in history to understand the experiences of this group who are writing history while living it. Other future projects could look at the differences amongst behind-the-scenes and on-camera talent gatekeeping and other practices or potentially be separated by gender or across other underrepresented groups. A finding

from this work which would be a practical and important next step would be understanding more about the emotional labor, burnout, and exhaustion of Black journalists. Ethnography work could also be helpful to understanding this line of work.

Black journalists' voices are the center of this work. Without them, I would not have a dissertation. They bravely shared their stories without compensation and trusted me to tell their narratives with confidence it would be done so correctly. This is a big big, responsibility, which I share. While I am passionate about the safety, work, and opportunities for all journalists, I unapologetically present the narrative of Black broadcast journalists at this pivotal time in history. They are usually the storytellers who report, write, and help make the news for the communities they serve, yet the complexity of their experiences and stories are often not told. My dissertation aims to uplift their work and worth, which oftentimes falls by the wayside. This work informs newsroom leaders and institutional powers about the concerns of Black journalists. It could also explain the moral distress, turnover rate, and burnout. Not all the Black journalists were unhappy with their newsroom. In fact, a few were very happy in the current space they were in, but all the journalists agreed that some changes could be made to increase diversity, newsroom culture, and most of all a better platform which encouraged positive Black stories. This work serves as an intellectual, critical, cultural, and reflexive validation beyond the watercooler chats or tweets from Black journalists that their experiences of newsroom culture and identity are confirmed. Journalists can explain the internal and external pressures through this shared space of their experiences. This would be through the lens that I lend as a Black female journalist who worked in several newsrooms around the country relating to many of the experiences they shared. Lastly, it

could also be fruitful for journalists to understand the double-consciousness from Du Bois reimagined by Guinier (1990) as a "threeness of race, gender, and marginality" (p. 96) and connected to the journalistic lens of this body of work. In closing, Guinier (1990) wrote:

> …To the extent that we are role models, it is not because we become gentlemen with race and gender added. To be a role model is not just a privilege, but a responsibility to those who come after us and to those whom we follow. (p. 106)

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This list of questions was used as the protocol to ask Black broadcast journalists about their experiences in local newsrooms. Follow-up questions were used in some cases for more clarity or to have the journalists expound on a certain point.

Demo/Background Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself? Your background? How do you identity ethnically, racially?
2. Why did you decide to be a journalist?
3. What type of journalist would you consider yourself to be? Do you have a certain beat?

Journalistic Role/Practices:

1. What are your beliefs about the roles of journalists?
2. What do you think the journalist's role is in telling stories?
3. Role of race?
4. If you could name one thing which makes your job as a journalist difficult, explain what that would be?
5. How has technology influenced your relationship with the Black audience?
6. Do you ever feel conflicted with reporting on certain stories for your newsroom? Why or why not?
7. Does management have a role in this?
8. Do you believe as a Black journalist that you are held to a different standard in the newsroom? If so, please explain.
9. Do you think if you had more Black managers things would be different in your newsroom?

10. Have you been able to tweet about Black Lives matter outside of your work? What is the reaction?
    a. Do you think it is appropriate?

Race and Coverage

1. Do you feel any pressures (responsibility) to cover stories related to the Black community?
2. How do you believe journalists/news media is/are perceived by the Black community?
3. How do you believe you are perceived by your Black community?
4. Have you ever decided not to air a story based on race?
5. How has recent racial incidents/deaths of Black males and women George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery affected your work?
6. Do you feel as if you can cover these stories fairly?
7. Has anyone accused of you of reporting in an unfair way?
    a. Any directives from management?
8. How would you characterize expectations / pressures from your management team?
9. How would you characterize expectations from Black community?
    a. Black Twitter?
10. Have you tweeted about Black Lives Matter on your account outside of mentioning it in a story?
11. Has there ever been coverage of a police shooting that you thought was covered unfairly?
12. How has your (self identified identity from first question) informed your work? How has your identity informed your coverage of the Black community?
13. Do you engage with Black Twitter? What are your thoughts about it?
14. When reporting on the protests, how are you covering issues of race? writing about racial identities in your coverage?
15. Do you believe journalists of color are better prepared to tell stories about the Black community?

16. There are certain stereotypes of the African American community in news coverage and in the media. What are some of your everyday experiences as an African American journalist?
17. Have you been subjected to the stereotypes of different ethnic/racial groups in society?
18. Has NABJ or any other group supported you in this time?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi (insert future participant name),

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Denetra Walker, and I am a doctoral student and instructor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. I am emailing you with hopes you will consider participating in my study with Black journalists about their experiences working in a digital age. My research is centered around the experiences of Black journalists, race and media. I am inviting you to consider participating in dissertation research about Black journalists and their relationship with the Black community. The interviews will be with me, a former producer & television news manager now studying the work/experiences of journalists of color.

Before returning to grad school, I worked for several years in television markets around the U.S. as a television news producer and most recently worked at the NBC affiliate in South Carolina as the Assistant News Director. Now, my hope is to utilize my experiences to increase newsroom diversity, understand/research experiences of journalists and educate future journalists. This work is my passion.

My previous work involves journalists who cover protests, police shootings and other research with journalists of color who are covering the protests and the pandemic. If you choose to participate, I want to assure you my work will be confidential, if you chose. You will have the option to choose a pseudonym or I will assign you one. The

results of the study may be published or represented at academic and organizational professional meetings, for example at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).

I appreciate your time. Please, let me know if you have any questions about this study or my work you can email or call me for more info: denetra@email.sc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Denetra

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT DIRECT MESSAGE

Hi ----, I hope this message finds you well! My name is Denetra Walker and I am a doctoral student/instructor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. I am reaching out to you with hopes you will consider participating in my study about the experiences of Black journalists. I read your piece in (example: USA Today), and I want to extend how much I respect your work and bravery to share your experience on the national platform. With your experiences, I believe you would be a great addition and I would love to hear your insight. I am inviting you to consider participating. The interviews will be with me, a Black woman who is a former news producer & TV news manager studying the work/experiences of journalists of color. I can assure you my interviews are confidential. I appreciate your time. Please, let me know if you have any questions about this study, you can email or call me for more info: Thank you for your consideration! –Denetra

APPENDIX D

A BRIEF AUTHOETHNOGRAPHY

> Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
>
> -Ralph Waldo Emerson

BRIEF INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING

The above is my favorite quote since I found it back in 2004 while looking online for something powerful to write during my first internship. I was writing thank you cards and needed something strong for the lasting impression. I made perforated business cards with my contact information and left personal handwritten notes for the newsroom staff. My favorite quote would be the cherry on top to leave the proper lasting impression signifying that I was forging my own journey and leaving my unique mark on the world around me.

I have always worked extremely hard and have been fortunate to also land some great opportunities. I came in early, stayed late, pulled extra shifts, and became the best producer I could be. It was not an easy road, but it was one which I proudly embraced. Moving away from home was tough, not necessarily for me but it came with the cost of trying to convince my family that this TV thing was worth it despite the pennies it paid. I also missed more holidays with family than I can ever count. My family could not

understand why I had a degree and was being paid the same as other people working in industries without a degree. But somehow it was worth it.

Working in several newsrooms was quite the experience. I remember staring at mugshots, wondering why we received so many and why were people so diligent that we put them in our shows. It would eventually be something I purposefully started being conscious of and started to communicate with other journalists about. Eventually, when I worked in television news management, I had clearer expectations about having back-to-back mugshots in the shows. I recently talked about crime coverage in the Black community by journalists for a podcast and I shared how I started to be more selective in putting mugshots on the air. Now, as I reflect, I realize that I was gatekeeping, which is one of the main points of this research in understanding the world around us.

MANAGEMENT GATEKEEPERS TOO

I have always wanted to work in management from the moment I first saw what a news manager did. When I interned at FOX 26 in Houston, Texas I met my first Black female news director. Her name is Kathy Williams, and she would be the first and only female news director that I would have the opportunity to meet until many years later (when I met Rashida). I remember sitting in Kathy's office sorting resume tapes for candidates in one of their open on-air positions. I remember the way she led the newsroom, and I also remember the diversity of that newsroom. It truly is the most diverse newsroom I had ever seen. I moved around to several markets, but no newsroom ever compared to the wealth of diversity from management through the ranks that I witnessed in Houston. This station was also the place where I met and talked to the only

Black General Manager that I've ever personally known. He even took the interns to lunch. As of the writing of this work, he is still the GM there.

Once I realized I wanted to be a news manager, it never went away. I tried out for the part as an undergrad when I made schedules and helped run newsroom operations for the school's station, KSHU. Then, I made it into the real world where I held several roles, where I eventually made it to Assistant News Director. I was so proud of my accomplishment. I remember the station flying in candidates for the nationwide search from all around. I was the right fit. I proudly took this title and my new corner office as a badge of honor which I worked towards for years. This position had a huge learning curve, but lucky for me I was a fast-learner and an experienced producer and leader. I remember filling out FCC reports and going through dozens of pages of documents for the quarterly government updates we had to file on behalf of our newsroom report. This included writing about our public service which also included the listing of the state's oldest public affairs show, *Awareness*, which is hosted by Black journalists for the Black community. I helped lead Black reporters and anchors who worked on this show and I made sure to build flexibility into their schedules.

Making Decisions: My Personal Account

A major purpose of this dissertation is the gatekeeping power of Black journalists. I will share one experience I had with gatekeeping during my role in news management. The story involved former police officer Michael Slager and a previous complaint with a citizen. Slager, a 33-year-old a white male, was under investigation by the North Charleston Police Department after he shot and killed a 50-year-old Black male, Walter Scott, during an arrest. A new development in the shooting story was all over the news:

cellphone footage from a bystander caught the deadly encounter on video (Knapp & Bartelme, 2015). In the initial story, based on Slager's account, Slager accused Scott-of reaching for his (Slager's) weapon. I remember the day this story broke. There were the usual press conferences and journalists spoke to police and PIO's, which is standard. However, a few days later when the cell phone video was released, it changed our entire coverage plan. It also changed the framing of the story. I helped lead the newsroom through continued coverage including from other stations within our same news organization to coordinate live shots.

After the video was released by Feidin Santana, Slager was arrested, and the North Charleston Police Chief changed gears, admitting that he saw the video and it "sickened" him. The video showed Slager shooting Scott in the back as Scott was running away from him. A few days later, a Black man came forward with allegations that Slager used excessive force on him a few years prior. However, those allegations had been dropped. But it light of the fatal shoot, the man and his lawyer were holding a press conference so that he could tell his story to the media and public.

On this particular day, we had several reporters working on stories related to the story. Midday, one of the reporters had a story fall through. I assigned the reporter to write a VOSOT from the live press conference from the feed to *front*, which means repurpose for on-air. This was supposed to be the journalist's story to write about the previous allegations from another Black man who had an encounter with Slager. Several hours go by and I am called into the newsroom. The reporter is asking me what they should do or whether they should do the story because one of the anchors said it was "not newsworthy" or "credible." I called a quick meeting to hear everyone's grievances and

concerns. The reporter told me this was their day's work, but they were fine not to report it for the show as long as I was okay with them not having a story for the day. The producer wanted an answer and wanted the content in the show to fill time. The anchor thought this story was not credible and wanted to kill it. The question remained: What should we do?

These are the types of dilemmas which happen daily in newsrooms. In this situation, I told everyone that I considered their opinions and appreciated their thoughts about whether we should air this story. It was pressing because we were minutes away from the show starting. In that moment, as the assistant news director, I had the final call. I decided that it was important for news viewers to hear about previous allegations from a man who filed a complaint against Slager, even though there were never charges or a formal investigation. These are the types of decisions news managers make in real time to decide what should go on the air and what gets left out. This is what gatekeeping looks like. Another manager perhaps would have made a different decision about the credibility of the person holding a press conference. But I did not. I thought he deserved to tell his story and to let everyone decide for themselves. While I did not call this gatekeeping at the time, I knew my decision-making mattered.

These experiences would later shape my research trajectory for grad school and would eventually become my thesis, *Fatal Force: A Conversation with Journalists Who Cover Deadly, Highly Publicized Police Shootings* (Walker, 2018). Scholarship based on the research has won several top paper awards from Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC), and became my first published article, *There's a Camera Everywhere: How Citizen Journalists, Cellphones, and Technology*

Shape Coverage of Police Shootings (Walker, 2021). This research would also continue to be instructive as we analyze media performance after the death of George Floyd other Black Americans killed by police or because of their race and during the Black Lives Matter protests. And it is instructive for this dissertation research.

POST INTERVIEW PERSPECTIVE

During the interviews, when journalists told me things such as, "I am very aware every single day of my Blackness," it is something I share. I also know what it is like to feel "stuck in the middle" of trying to achieve high marks as a journalist and work as a gatekeeper to keep negative coverage of Black communities at a minimum. Hearing their stories now is my confirmation for many of the things I felt. Now it is supported by these theories and a group of Black journalists from all walks of life. I mentioned this in the *Preface*, but this work is my passion and purpose.

As I close, I want to share that several of the journalists were beyond gracious in sharing intimate experiences in the newsroom. They trusted me. Some of these conversations had tears, anger, disgust, hurt, and, at times, happiness. I was right there with them. I understood. But hearing their stories was the biggest gift for me. So many other journalists asked that I share this work beyond my dissertation. I really plan to do this. That is the plan. Ryan said:

> I'm personally just very thankful for you and look forward to, you know, the results of the research. I hope you're able to get, you know, as much comprehensive, you know, work from what I said, from what anyone else said and really showcase some of the plight of Black journalists.

Another journalist asked me to make sure I go beyond my dissertation and get this published as a book. I am not sure what exactly will come of this work, but I am honored to tell their stories. My hope is to make some change in newsrooms and classrooms.

PROCESSING MY POSITIONALITY

My positionality creates a space where I am thoughtful with how my work as a scholar in my critique of the institution of journalism. I realize that while I have insider status, I also have outsider status. My attempts to study sideways gives me unique lens of a Black woman journalist scholar who has held multiple roles in several television newsrooms. It is a lens which gives this work more nuance. There could be critiques that my work mirrors my sentiments to the profession and the microaggressions that I may have faced while working in journalism. It is through this body of work that I have further validated my experiences of newsroom culture through the stories of Black television journalists. I can craft a story from the storytellers in a way which extends beyond theoretical value but also provides practical insight.