More than two decades ago, Brislin and Williams wrote in the *Journal of Media Ethics* that the news industry should see diversity as part of its ethical canon. That same year, 69 percent of newspaper editors and broadcast news directors surveyed called diversity an ethical issue (Medsger, 1996, p. 7). Even though diversity has come to be viewed as a crucial part of accuracy and professionalism, actual diversity in appearance at least is more than uneven. Investigative Reporters & Editors Executive Director Doug Haddox noted that IRE/NICAR had only one staff trainer who was a person of color despite the organization’s commitment to diversity (2018), but just months later NPR correspondent Cheryl W. Thompson was named the first African American to chair the IRE board of directors. As newsrooms struggle to define identity with reduced staffs and rising social media, ultimately media organizations will live by the reality “you are what you hire,” as coined by the Nieman Foundation’s Ann Marie Lipinski (Lipinski, 2016). News organizations must be diverse from top to bottom in order to fully engage media users, but two things must happen. First diversity needs to be fully embraced as an ethical issue, and second, culture must change. Having some non-White leaders heading organizations and companies is progress, but those individuals cannot “single-handedly disrupt underlying racist structures” (Alemán, 2014, p. 84).

If ethics broadly is concerned with how we live our lives and what we value (Jaksa and Pritchard, 1994, p. 3), then nothing could be more relevant to a discussion of ethics than the way people relate to, perceive, and share stories with those who are different from them. The impact of these stories stretches from shaping international relations to helping create empathy for a next door neighbor (Craig, 2006, p. 9). Alasdair MacIntyre believes that people come to know who they are through stories with interlocking narratives (1984, pp. 214–216). Each person’s very identity is created through these stories. “The pervasiveness of news and ‘mediated experience’ as the source of stories thus makes journalists in a sense, co-authors of moral meaning in contemporary society” (Lambeth, 1992, p. 87). Diversity needs may be erroneously downplayed by arguments that accurate reporting eliminates bias; these arguments perpetuate assumptions of white normalcy because journalism practice itself can silence and exclude.

If one segment of society is ignored, vilified, or even inappropriately sanctified through mass media narratives, then under MacIntyrian logic, those marginalized and the community as a whole is harmed. That harm becomes even more obvious when political leaders spew racist
venom. President Trump, in a series of Twitter rants about ethnic minority members of Congress, viciously described U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings’s home district as a dangerous, rat-infected place where no would want to live. CNN Anchor Victor Blackwell, a Baltimore native, gave an impassioned response identifying the many times the president had used the word “infested” to refer to black and brown people (2019). Having an African American man already in the anchor desk ready to give such a reply is significant. Over the last two decades, broadcast news organizations particularly have moved toward a commentary approach to news allowing for more opinion, but other legacy and online media are taking this approach as well. The Guardian is having its commentators take centerstage online and in podcasts offering more personal perspectives. Aditya Chakrabortty didn’t just explain why former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s thinktank report was problematic when calling for immigrants to assimilate; he described the racism he encountered when immigrating from India as a child (2019).

Advances in social media and these national/international news sites with a single point of view can also end up creating polarizing views of the world, with few seeking perspective outside their tribe (Kakutani, 2018). However, this partisan media polarization may be perceived as an American phenomenon. European research has not shown the same results, and little study has been conducted on this kind of single-source effects on polarization in other parts of the world (European Parliament, 2019). Regardless of whether single-viewpoint media or multi-view media are involved, tribalism certainly is a global concern.

Polarizing language itself and racist assumptions in global media remains a consistent challenge. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, London’s Turkish-speaking immigrants developed what Aksoy (2006) calls a transnational identity to cope with the “us” versus “them” language used by both politicians and journalists. Dominant culture television stations vilified the Turkish- and Arab-language media. The immigrants consumed more English-language media than their white counterparts, in addition to Turkish- and Arab-language media, just trying to understand the complexities of the crisis. Aksoy found that they became more distrustful of all news media, including Turkish- and Arab-language media (2006, p. 927). The result was a media-created ethical dilemma for a vulnerable population struggling to create an identity outside popular narratives. The dominant culture media’s tendency toward simplistic, over-generalized interpretations of Islam, the role of women, and jihad have created a “clash of civilizations” narrative and thus contributed to international public policy on war (Ahmad, 2006, p. 980). The opposing frames journalists tend to use in describing conflicts contribute significantly toward increased polarization, therefore reaffirming public perceptions of powerlessness (Jameson and Entman, 2004, p. 38). The “Operation Trojan Horse” false story in 2015 Birmingham, England, is not surprising but disturbing. A fake letter showed up at a Birmingham school purporting to be between Islam extremists planning bomb attacks called “Operation Trojan Horse.” British tabloids broke the Trojan horse story at the same time as they did revelations that food chains used halal meat and British-born jihadists headed to fight in Syria. Portraits of extremism in some newspapers, including the Daily Mail, bolstered the Conservative government and justified promotion of “British values” in immigration policy (Poole, 2018). Even though the letter was quickly debunked, television crews camped outside schools and attempted to interview “anyone who looked Muslim” asking their opinions on extremism (Shackle, 2017). Pigeon-holing brown people is not an isolated incident. In the United States, immigration policy protestors are at times asked by broadcasters seeking “man on the street” perspectives from people of color, “Are you an American citizen?” (Alemán, 2010). These examples illustrate the ethical failures that come with polarizing images and the harms that result.

When considering ethics and diversity, there is a need to separate cultural relativism and cultural pluralism. Cultural relativism holds no universal or common norms and in essence
esposes: I am good if I do not tell you that you are bad. By its very nature, cultural relativism eliminates the need for ethical debate because it assumes that all judgments are equal (Shaw, 2003, p. 94). By contrast, cultural pluralism allows an array of moral options within parameters of mutuality, or acting with respect for the interdependency of all people (Christians et al., 1993, p. 57) and basic values are shared across societies (Bok, 2002, pp. 13–16). Those values are lived out in different ways in different cultures and subcultures, but identifying commonality provides a starting point for dialogue and connection. Calls for understanding and identifying universal norms should not lead to totalitarian results, but rather a support for cultural diversity (Christians, 2005, p. 6). The “live and let live” rhetoric common in cultural relativism becomes in reality “you go live over there” because it denies opportunity for interaction. Relativism simply is impractical because it fails to recognize that injustice or oppression exists, as well as making true relationships among people of differences impossible (Bok, 2002, p. 45). Interaction, relationship, and diverse connections can only occur and be effective within a culturally plural environment as opposed to a culturally relative environment.

DIVERSITY WITHIN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

The meaning of diversity varies across nations, with some purporting to value diversity even while passively thwarting it and others fully dominated by a single ethnic or religious group. Regardless of local national structure, key strategies for successful diversity are consistent: analyse existing structures, set strategic goals, create infrastructure to enact those goals with a plan toward long-term success, then assess and hold management accountable (Best Diversity Practices, 2009). As the media landscape undertook seismic shifts over the past decade, professional media organizations who had earlier embraced the concept of diversity were left with the gloomy initial data and lofty pledges that they started with. Infrastructures were overhauled for survival, not inclusion, while management and staff were trimmed to the bone.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors reported people of color represented 22 percent of the newsroom workforce respondents, but could not generalize nationally, much less to other media types, because its survey only had a 17 percent response rate (ASNE, 2018). UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc., had been formed in 1990 in the United States to bring together four major ethnicity defined organizations, the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Asian American Journalists Association, and the Native American Journalists Association. Together, these groups hoped to highlight inequities of popular news media and facilitate true diversity. But financial difficulties and personality clashes led to UNITY’s eventual demise in 2018, at a time when its presence was needed more than even earlier (Delaney, 2018).

The World Press Photo Association surveyed more than a thousand top photojournalists worldwide. Recognizing the limitations of any kind of survey requesting a common definition of racial categories, the study found half considered themselves White, a fifth described themselves as Asian, less than 5 percent as Latinx or Hispanic and a very small fraction as Arab or Black (Hadland and Barnett, 2018). To counter this, World Press Photo, based in Amsterdam, has hosted workshops worldwide and collaborated with Everyday Africa to develop the African Photojournalism Database, which highlights the images of talent that might be otherwise overlooked (Pixley, 2017).

Television journalism in the United States has fared far better than newspapers overall at increasing its ethnic minority presence. RTNDA recorded TV newsroom diversity in the United States was at an all-time high in 2019 with stations averaging a quarter of their staffs as persons
of color. The number of general managers and news directors is on the rise, which is an important step towards shaping policy. Reports noted, however, that the American population itself has 38 percent minority representation (Papper, 2019). While the narrowing of diversity gaps is encouraging, having some ethnic minorities in visible positions may create a false front, which becomes particularly problematic because it fuels dominant culture assumptions that racism is neither systemic nor pervasive, and may even relegate racism to past history (Heider, 2002, p. 20).

The blame for lack of parity has been spread throughout media institutions, to a variety of standard newsroom practices, and to education. Students must have internships in order to successfully enter the industry, but many internships are unpaid, thus creating a significant economic disadvantage for those already facing economic challenges. Lower starting salaries in broadcast journalism are an often-cited problem for ethnic minorities leaving university saddled with student loans (Iqbal, 2004, p. 10). Mercedes De Uriarte (2003) believes parity has not occurred primarily because numerical integration has been confused with substantive intellectual diversity. Newsroom demographics are not diverse because newsroom culture and news values have not been diversified effectively: “Newsrooms moved forward assuming that they could just find and add minorities without experiencing discomforting cultural change” (p. 36). Once persons of color arrive in management positions, many find that their opportunity to influence news policy is limited by prevailing conventions. Nearly 60 percent of news executives of color reported that they believe they must censor themselves when expressing opinions (Woods, 2002 p. 24).

At the same time, ethnic minority journalists report that editors regularly reject their story ideas because they are perceived as biased. The principle of journalistic balance becomes defined as using traditionally accepted sources with predictable conclusions, and accuracy becomes defined as consistency (De Uriarte, 2003, pp. 72–76).

While the mainstream media struggle to recruit and retain people of color, ethnic media organizations, including Spanish-language media, are highly effective at reaching ethnic minorities. Research examining a cross-section of ethnic groups in the United States has shown:

Forty-five percent of all African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American and Arab American adults prefer ethnic television, radio or newspapers to their mainstream counterparts. These “primary consumers” also indicated that they access ethnic media frequently. This means that a staggering 29 million adults (45 percent of the 64 million ethnic adults studied) or a full 13 percent of the entire adult population of the United States, prefer ethnic media to mainstream television, radio, or newspapers.

(Bendixen and Associates, 2005, p. 8)

Yet when national mainstream professional organizations have held conferences and structured dialogs on diversity, the ethnic press is rarely invited to participate and then in very small numbers (De Uriarte, 2003, p. 5).

So, ethnic minority groups are finding creative ways to reach their local communities. ABTN (The Aboriginal People’s Television Network), launched in 1999, is the first North American network created by and for indigenous communities and airs coast to coast in Canada. Just 56 percent of its programming is in English with 16 percent in French and the remaining 28 percent in Inuktitut and other indigenous languages. The company’s research claims 72 percent of Canada’s age-over-18 indigenous market tunes in regularly across different mediums (APTN, 2018). Meanwhile, Comcast’s Telemundo is going head to head with Univision for the North American Latino market as it has successfully garnered the bilingual youth who navigate between cultures. Telemundo recognized its market wanted more action drama than telanova because the life experience between generations was different (Hagey, 2018). In Bolivia, La Pública built
both journalism and social activism networks, beginning with a simple blog then expanding to a news network with podcasts and even an interactive map to chart remote areas. Student journalists from communities without Internet connection are trained at Indigenous University and find innovative avenues to share their stories (La Pública, 2019).

Hyperlocal news without strict objectivity requirements is not a new phenomenon but it has come under the research category most recently with the label “participatory journalism.” Information is shared based on first-hand experience with the author as witness to events and struggles. Cultural relevance becomes a news value greater than the traditional hard news emphasis on conflict, traditional power sources, and timeliness (Borger and van Hoof, 2016). However, critics of participatory journalism may dismiss it as a legitimate news form because its topics and sources are “soft” or less verifiable. In researching five Dutch hyperlocal news products, Borger and van Hoof found in their content analysis that these products themselves did not present diverse viewpoints, rather than views of a single perspective. As was similarly noted in RTNDA’s 2019 study, Spanish-language newsrooms did not include diverse ethnic staff members. Notably though, these products have increased their market penetration because of the dearth of coverage beyond the dominant culture from larger media organizations.

Research in the area of newsroom diversity must consider more than just horserace figures on the losses and gains of journalists of color. Research must examine specific models of recruitment/retention success and clarify how newsroom culture itself must change in order to meet organizational goals. Research must illustrate how journalists of color throughout the management chain can be given appropriate voice to define news outside dominant culture frames. However, the actual success of diversity efforts will remain limited unless the culture of media organizations changes internally to reflect the diversity of communities covered.

HOW DIVERSITY IS PORTRAYED

Perhaps one of the best ways to redefine news culture is through research applying inter-cultural communication scholarship to the ways that the media – from the local weekly sports reporting to national advertising campaigns – gather and disseminate information across diverse groups. Improving professional practice will foster more ethical responses to cultural conflicts and provide the whole community with better understanding of all its parts.

A danger in reviewing the intercultural communication literature is in failing to understand how analysis and categories are made within this academic field. Accuracy is a vital ethical requirement in any research, from journalism to social science. To examine communication trends, intercultural scholars are careful to frame constructs about ethnic groups accurately in the context of tendencies and sociotypes. Sociotypes involve cultural predispositions towards certain activities and behaviors that generally are neutral and defined internally by an ethnic group or are backed by empirical data. For example, asserting that African Americans in the Northeastern United States tend to be Democrats would be an accurate sociotype supported by the research and voting trends (Triandis, 1994, p. 107). Stereotypes by contrast most frequently come from outside the culture, are framed in absolute terms without acknowledging individual difference, are often overly simplistic, and are most frequently negative. If the stereotype is framed as intending to be a positive statement, such as “all Asians are smart,” the assertion frequently is dismissive of other attributes and makes unsubstantiated generalities (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 161). Stereotypes then are inaccurate and inappropriate generalizations; sociotypes gain validity because they are defined internally, recognize individual difference, and are supported by verifiable evidence.
The power stereotyping has should first be addressed in the form of privilege because understanding the power of privilege is fundamental to understanding the ethics of diversity. Peggy McIntosh identifies white privilege as an “invisible knapsack of unearned assets … of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.” She argues those with privilege “are not taught to recognize their own privileges” and, if acknowledged, they “deny the resulting advantages” (McIntosh, 2000, pp. 115–116). Simply put, the world’s media culture is led largely by those with privilege, who ultimately define the narratives of those without privilege. Stereotypes that emerge from those narratives, regardless of intent, perpetuate distrust, misperception, and oppression. A common dominant culture response to avoid stereotyping is to claim colorblindness: The observer asserts that he or she does not see color or ethnicity, only the individual person. However, the assertion is flawed because color and ethnicity are part of identity and denying that identity is a problematic part of white privilege. As Bhopal Kalwant explains (2018), neoliberal society created the myth of post-racism to debunk the very real need for addressing racial inequity.

Philomena Essed argues that white privilege leads those in the dominant culture to assume that nearly everyone makes decisions, including ethical decisions, in the same way, and given the same set of circumstances would come to the same conclusions (1991, p. 189). By extension, that means many dominant culture news managers may assume that all people would select the same news stories. Heider, who studied local television news, determined that news directors tended to believe they were adequately covering their communities, including ethnic minorities, if they had high ratings. “Even if trying to appeal to a large audience has a pluralistic sound to it, it still comes down to a news philosophy that is based on the principle where the majority rules” (2002, p. 29). The result then is coverage of minorities based on what the dominant culture may find interesting, such as festivals and holidays. This practice helps create the illusion that non-European groups are primitive and their cultures belong to the realm of past history.

If particular cultural groups are portrayed only in limited settings, then their entire existence in popular thought becomes limited to those narrow portrayals. Heider calls this incognizant racism: Systematic exclusion and stereotypical inclusion may not be deliberate but nonetheless results in racist news coverage and false narratives (Heider, 2002, p. 51). In football game coverage, overt racial slurs would not get past Federal Communication Commission legal restrictions, much less any ethical consideration. Nonetheless, sports media research has consistently shown that stereotypes of African Americans are persistent. Billings (2004) examined 162 hours of college and professional football coverage with over 3,800 characterizations of White and Black quarterbacks. While stereotypes connecting race and intelligence appear to be abating, African Americans still are most frequently described as successful because of athletic prowess and White players as failing because of their “lack of innate ability” (pp. 207–208). Incognizant racism occurs subtly but still perpetuates false narratives.

Coverage of Manchester City player Raheem Sterling further illustrates this point. The Jamaican born footballer received racist taunts during a match in Chelsea outside London, verbiage that led to the expulsion of some fans from future events. Sterling shrugged off those taunts as “expected” considering the way British media portray white and black athletes (Johnson, 2018). The Daily Mail praised his teammate Phil Foden, who is White, for buying a two-million-pound home for his mother then slammed Tosin Adarabioyo, who was born in London to parents who hail from Nigeria, for spending two million pounds on a house for his family. The tabloid stated the 20-year-old defender “splashed out” money for a mansion despite not having at that time started in a London Premier match (Joseph, 2018). The implication clearly being that the Black athlete simply didn’t deserve nice things.
Simultaneously, crime coverage disproportionately identifies black perpetrators more often than white criminals, resulting in a “blind spot” in the public consciousness. The fact that mass shooters and serial killers are most often white is a story significantly under-discussed worldwide (Itay, 2018). Perpetuating the media myth of the “armed and dangerous” black man has led to de-legitimizing the lives of African Americans and justified brutal police assaults that go unpunished (Chaney and Robertson, 2015). The distinctions between “terrorist” and “domestic terrorist” labels are used loosely to distinguish in coded terms a perpetrator who is not white, and thus an implication that one is more threatening than the other.

News coverage itself is not a neutral mirror when it comes to how immigration “crises” are portrayed. Sociologist Brigit Anderson (2017) argues that this is because migrants themselves are not the primary media consumers, and therefore the business model of news is designed to appeal to the dominant culture. In a world with limited resources, migrants are seen as the “wrong kind of people,” thus a threat that can be pushed outside the social contract (p. 22). Research by the European Ethical Journalism Network found that media coverage of immigration to be divisive, sensational, and anxiety-fuelling (White, 2018). When an Afghan 15-year-old migrant murdered his girlfriend, a 15-year-old German girl, the German national media was in a quandary to determine whether to identify the victim or the perpetrator, actions rarely taken in the nation’s crime news stories. Germany, like the Netherlands and Sweden, take a reform approach to crime, therefore journalists tend to see identification a privacy violation that hurts the opportunity for a criminal to re-enter society. The German Press Code states to avoid mentioning ethnicity unless it is essential in a crime story. But public anti-immigrant sentiment was running high and news organizations were accused of hiding an “ethnic problem” in the town Kandel by not stating names and immigration status. The German tabloid Bild identified the perpetrator by name and picture, without parts of his face digitized as was common. Other media identified him as Afghan and within days far-right, nationalist marches were held. Notably, when a German man had murdered his wife and two children in Kandel two weeks earlier, the story never made it outside the local news outlets (Patterson and Smith-Fullerton, 2019). These immigrant stories perpetuate a narrative that Germany, which has one of the lowest crime rates in the world, is somehow becoming less safe (Bennhold, 2018).

These coded types of racism create complex narratives that are more subtle than covert, but equally harmful. One of the most glaring concerns is the way black and brown faces tend to be significantly overrepresented in news images showing the “face of poverty.” Gilens’ research found that only 27 percent of the poor in the United States were African American at that time, but African Americans made up 63 percent of the news images of poor people (pp. 516–517). When the images involved working-age younger people, more than half were African American. When the images involved the elderly, only one in five was African American. That meant that the unsympathetic poor – those who might be perceived as able to work – received a considerably disproportionate share of the images. He argues that these images link “being poor”, and “being Black” together tightly in Western psyche, creating an inaccurate public perception of what it means to be either Black or impoverished (1999, p. 68). This conclusion was further validated in a 2002 study comparing television viewing with attitudes on race and poverty. The more news that research subjects chose to view on American television, the more likely they were to attribute poverty amongst African Americans to lack of motivation instead of lack of economic opportunity (Busselle and Crandall, 2002, p. 269). When Newt Gingrich challenged then U.S. President Barak Obama as he sought a second term, Gingrich called him the “food stamp president” drawing on the racist and false perception that blacks disproportionately outnumber whites in receiving federal assistance. Gingrich’s assertion was dismissed as factually inaccurate by news organizations, but only a handful called it out as racist (Elliott, 2012).
These news portrayals create an echo chamber even within popular television programming. Isabel Molina-Guzmán argues that while Latinx images have become more common on shows such as *The Office* and *Modern Family*, these depictions still rely on stereotypes that amount to “hipster racism” which is filled with jokes that make white audiences comfortable (Molina-Guzmán, 2018).

Stereotypical portrayals become all the more demeaning when other positive media representation is absent and the ethnic minority experience becomes even more invisible. Journalist Darla Wiese, an Okanagan tribal member, remembers as a child seeking out every popular image of Native Americans she could find, even ones belittling her heritage: “Though no one in my family watched sports, I sought and learned the ‘Tomahawk Chop’ all for mainstream cultural validation” (2006). Wiese said incognizant racism through the absence of valid Native images may not be deliberate, but nonetheless those negative images fill voids when no alternatives are available. Oklahoma student Sara Mae Martin, who is Choctaw and Lakota, says her high school mascot makes her feel “like my race is being used as a prop” (Beck, 2005).

The NCAA created new rules that prohibit schools with “hostile or abusive” Indian mascots from hosting its championships and bowls, just as schools in states that fly Confederate flags are prohibited. If schools determined to have offensive Native mascots participate in playoffs, they are barred from displaying Indian nicknames or logos (Wieberg, 2006, p. C3). This may relieve some burden on media organizations who must decide whether using official team names in sports coverage is an overt act of racism. Native American groups estimate that more than 2,000 sports teams across the United States have eliminated Indian mascots since 1970; however, approximately 1,000 teams choose to continue the practice (National Congress of American Indians, 2013) meaning virtually all U.S. mainstream news organizations are still left with the choice of how to cover these sports teams. Since 1994, the Native American Journalists Association has formally called for all news organizations to stop publishing or broadcasting all Indian mascot names and images. Public polls on mascot names have been widely disputed because of faulty self-reporting and lack of clarity about who can accurately self-identify as a Native (Florio, 2016). Two of the most offensive mascots remain in place: Cleveland Indians’ Chief Wahoo and the Washington Redskins. NAJA argues news organizations do not increase accuracy by identifying teams by Indian mascot; the school or city name achieves the same purpose:

> Our complaint about mascots is that they are racial slurs and stereotypes that are comparable in meaning to the ‘n-word’ and which should be offensive to all thinking people. We count team names such as Indians to be stereotypes and team names such as redskins, squaws, and red men to be slurs. However, to say one is more acceptable than the other is simply to bargain with racism.  
> (NAJA, 2003, p. 6)

Notably, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018) and the state of Maine (Williams, 2019) both responded to psychological research on the use of mascots and its impact on First Nations youth. Maine banned indigenous-themed sports teams and mascots outright and the Ontario tribunal has actively urged communities to make changes following a settlement in the city of Mississauga. How indigenous people are caricatured remains a concern in sports coverage.

**BLACK/WHITE BINARY**

The mascot struggle reflects the experiences that many cultural groups have in the United States, particularly with a dominant culture tendency to frame all ethnic minority experiences by comparing it within a Black-and-White frame. A body of literature, particularly within legal and
10. DIVERSITY REQUIRES ETHICS CHANGE

historical research, has developed surrounding Critical Race Theory and the Black/White Binary (Alemán, 2014; Hutchinson, 2004; Karst, 2003; Perea, 1997).

Like other paradigms, the Black-White one allows people to simplify and make sense of a complex reality…. The risk is that non-black minority groups, not fitting into the dominant society’s idea of race in America, become marginalized, invisible, foreign, un-American.

(Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 70)

This binary means, for example, that at the turn of the last century, Chinese immigrants wanting a voice in state courts and Native Americans attempting to gain rights within and outside reservations had to place their experiences and desires for justice within a frame comparing them to the struggles of African slaves seeking U.S. citizenship and voting rights (Davis, 1997, pp. 234–235). Creating a binary frame impacts relations amongst all ethnic minority groups, while at the same time placing White dominant culture as the primary cultural frame contrasted against all others on a pigment continuum. Research is needed to explore the binary systematically, but media critics have long recognized the trend.

The Black/White binary frame creates three significant communication concerns for the mass media: (1) ignoring or downplaying sections of the American demographic, those whose ancestry originates outside Europe and Africa; (2) emphasizing a continuum with Whites at one end and everyone else at another, thus encouraging an us/them perspective with the “us” being the dominant culture; and finally (3) ignoring relationships among various ethnic groups.

The result is news coverage of the changing American demographic portraying Latinos as “The New Cool Kids,” with news articles educating the dominant culture about Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez (Del Rio, 2005, p. 2, pp. 12–13). The Latinidad identity nonetheless draws from three continents, and involves a myriad of economic profiles, and internal distinctions. The Cuban exile, the Spanish immigrant, and Salvadoran economic refugee are all lumped into a single category along with Asians Americans and other Native Americans. Each ethnic group’s experience and marginalization must be considered distinctively. Just as African Americans are not likely to be asked to produce a green card or have strangers accuse them of destroying the nation’s automobile industry, few Asian Americans are likely to be berated by strangers for having too many children or being on welfare (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, pp. 69–70).

As stated earlier, in order for news coverage to change, the culture of news itself needs to change. Mexican American cultural critic Sonya Alemán (2010) explains that journalism education itself is steeped in whiteness. Diversity is most often an add-on to a curriculum that needs a paradigm shift. In her structured observations of reporting classes, she found story ideas favoured the experience of dominant culture students and the very definitions of what makes news is one cast by a traditional powerful white male perspective. Issues not perceived as impacting “the larger community” tend to be ignored. This method of story identification taught in j-schools and common in newsrooms privileges existing contacts and relationships. These methods deny power differentials among groups and ignore systemic problems.

IMPROVEMENT POSSIBLE BUT AT A COST

The primary reason why U.S. news coverage of the nation’s ethnic minorities has not improved is simple: to make substantive changes costs money and time, and in the news business, time is money. Ethnic minority coverage is better, considering both the perception within minority
communities and the facts judged by content analysis, in places where resources are devoted to those communities. Providing resources means at least in part sending journalists to spend time within ethnic cultural groups: That means time to build relationships with sources while not working a particular story. Reporter Lourdes Leslie Medrano spent a month in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area just listening to people as she prepared a series on the “Faces of Islam” before and after the September 11, 2001, attacks. She went to mosques and sat with women as they prayed. She visited Muslim schools and eventually developed relationships with the family of two of the students (Whitehouse, 2002, p. 17). The time spent both to build relationships and then develop the story allowed Medrano Leslie to create images that both validated the Muslim community and explained its richness to those outside it. She wrote:

Aminah, it’s time to pray,” Adam called out to her the other day as he and his mother, Fatma Ahmed, knelt on prayer rugs…. “It’s like eating,” he said. “If I don’t eat, I’m hungry. If I don’t pray, I feel empty.” As an observant Muslim, Adam said he was saddened by the Sept. 11 hijacking attacks and is angry at those who carried it out, supposedly in the name of Islam. “Islam does not stand for this kind of atrocities,” he said. “This is a religion about making peace; our greeting is ‘Peace be upon you, As-Salaam aleikum.’”

(2001, p. 1A)

The story showed a family’s daily life in a way accessible to many cultural groups, but developing the relationships to get to the story meant that Leslie Medrano was not producing high volumes of copy while working on this one.

Recognizing that not all people within any group perceive time in the same way, Western culture, and by extension Western media culture, tends to emphasize a product-oriented, time-driven approach to doing business and gathering information. On the other hand, many ethnic minorities come from what has come to be called collectivist societies. Within these societies, resources including information may be shared with those within a group or where a relationship already exists, but not with strangers (Triandis, 1994, p. 166). That means for an individualistic Western journalist, relationships become a by-product of good reporting because the relationship develops as information is shared. By contrast, ethnic minority sources may be quite reticent to share in-group knowledge with a stranger whose motives are unknown, particularly when past experiences have been negative. Requests for information also involve white privilege. White journalists, like most White Americans, tend to presume that “every interaction is a blank slate,” said Intercultural Communication Scholar Judith Martin (quoted in Whitehouse, 2002, p. 21).

Those from marginalized groups may approach such encounters quite differently – with all the cultural memory of previous oppression.

Focusing on meeting deadlines and quick story turnaround tells those in ethnic minority communities that their experiences are unimportant. One reason ethnic minority journalists may continue to leave the field is because they are forced to capitalize on relationships like commodities, and to do so at a rapid speed. The very nature of accepted news practice may run up against cultural ethical norms.

Research is needed to both quantify and qualify the impact Western-style deadline emphasis has on how collectivist ethnic minority communities are covered. The ethics of source exploitation needs careful exploration, particularly within the context of individualist and collectivist societies’ interpretation of relationship, as well as study of how these factors impact minority journalist retention.
RESEARCH NEEDS

Triandis argues that anyone seeking information across cultures cannot escape bias, including ethnocentric tendencies toward using our own culture as the standard of comparison. Simply saying “I will strive to be unbiased” is not enough. Triandis’ ethical recommendations for cross-cultural researchers’ techniques to avoid bias (1994, p. 85) can be adapted to the practice of journalism:

- Explanation of the differences among cultures should be embedded within the descriptions of similarities. Cultural differences can and should be considered, but recognizing that ethnic groups are part of the larger community. A predominantly African-American church is still a church, like others in most communities. Its religious practices do not need to be portrayed as foreign or quaintly odd.
- Multiple methods of gathering information are used. That means listening to multiple voices within a community over time and recognizing diverse leadership within diverse communities. No one person can speak for all people of color, or for an individual ethnic group within a community.
- Qualitative information through interviews is used to clarify and explain quantitative reports. De Uriarte offered an example of this in her description of African-American men in prisons.
- Conclusions reached about a culture are sociotypes consistent with how those within that group would define themselves, and stereotypes are removed.
- The information is gathered in an ethical way, meaning that the sources are treated as people with value rather than merely a means to getting a story.

Unfortunately developing these techniques, just as developing complex stories, takes time and is therefore expensive to facilitate and apply in practice.

The very language used to describe experience becomes even more problematic. Postmodern cultural critic Jean-François Lyotard (1988) suggested that marginalized peoples face differend, where key terms have different meanings from one group to another. The concept of Auschwitz means one thing for a Jewish Holocaust survivor and another for a Holocaust denier (p. 9). If the survivor chooses to respond with strong empirical proof, the human angst gets lost in the data. If the survivor offers a hard-told drama of experience, then the universal evidence is called into question. Similarly, Native Americans struggle to explain the differend over mascots, tomahawks, and eagle feathers, and Hawaiians struggle with the differend of island sovereignty (Heider, 2002, p. 50). Delgado and Stefancic emphasize that European Americans balk at the suggestion that the descendants of slaves might seek financial reparation, when no slave or slaveholder is living and the practice was made illegal well over a century ago. The result then is that the very concept of justice is differend (2001, p. 44). Yet the nature of privilege denies that differend even exists. A white television news director told de Uriarte in her research for ASNE: “A story is story. I would hope diversity issues would not come into play” (p. 89). The result of differend is that journalists and their ethnic minority sources may use different words, languages, or codes, and that difference results in misconceptions and even the negation of the minority experience. If a primary function of media is to give voice to the voiceless, then journalistic models should be created to give voice with a new language offsetting differend and offer evidence through research of the models’ effectiveness.
Polarization in language becomes an increasing concern when groups with different viewpoints must rely on news media to get information on each other. When that happens, the news coverage itself can escalate conflict.

Therefore, despite the journalistic conventions of objectivity and removal of bias, the media presence contributes to conflict. Similar accusations come in nearly every racial conflict. Additional research is needed to document how basic journalistic forms, such as quote or sound byte selection, contribute to conflict because the very foundational practices of journalism are created and defined by privilege. Journalism academics have long maintained that media conventions do not change because they are comfortable for those who control them (Gans, 1980; Schudson, 1978). Schudson explained in 1995: “Standard practices are not, of course, neutral inventions. They have biases of their own” (p. 83). Those standard practices, the biases that formed them and the biases that they produce, need careful examination to offer additional evidence of impact and opportunity for revision.

Notably, this chapter has focused on ethnic diversity with limited reference to class, gender, and religious diversity, and no reference to a host of other factors, including sexuality, disability, or geography. Each of these and other diversity concerns requires intense and careful consideration. Just as the experience of one ethnic group cannot be equated to the experience of another, the issues facing ethnic diversity cannot be superimposed upon all marginalized peoples. Therefore additional research needs to identify and explore carefully each group’s concerns beyond that which has been outlined in this chapter.

Finally, research is needed to explain the financial prospects of doing better diversity coverage. News organizations frequently cite better coverage of ethnic minorities as part of its ethic and stated commitment to covering all of the community served. However, real change may not occur until there is extensive and widely publicized evidence that such coverage is profitable, so profitable that the effort needed to create culture change is worthwhile. Otherwise, the news about ethnic minorities in the United States will continue to look as it has looked: with festivals and crises, with stereotypes and marginalization, with statistics without context, and most damningly, with diverse people required to frame their experiences in a way that makes sense to the dominant culture, or to face no coverage at all.

REFERENCES


