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COLOR, CASTE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Black journalists who joined television networks from 1994 to 2014

Indira S. Somani and Natalie Hopkinson

Broadcast network newsrooms are powerful gatekeepers, setting cultural standards and attitudes for America at large via the stories they tell and the images they project. In 1968, the federal Kerner Commission chastised American news media for ignoring race, and seeing through the “white man’s eyes” and speaking from “the white perspective.” Grounded in critical and cultural studies and organizational theory, this study analyzes the experiences of 23 post-Civil Rights generation black journalists working in broadcast newsrooms who continue to struggle against anti-black cultural norms and attitudes at great physical, psychological and financial cost.

KEYWORDS African-Americans; broadcast journalism; critical theory; cultural studies; Kerner Commission; television

Introduction

Network television newsrooms are particularly revealing sites to examine the degree to which color and caste continue to dictate values in both the private workplace and the public sphere. Network television newsrooms straddle the worlds of entertainment, corporate America and public knowledge. As private, independently operated businesses, they illuminate workplace organizational and cultural practices. As news media companies present prevailing notions of “reality” to millions of viewers, they are powerful gatekeepers setting cultural standards and attitudes for America in the larger public sphere. They help to determine what is “normal” and acceptable to mainstream America in the stories they tell and the images they project. This study seeks to unpack these power relations from the perspective of a small group of broadcast professionals whose bodies and minds are the source of these images. We interviewed 23 young black journalists who came of age with the legal protections promised by the Civil Rights Movement, including federal workplace protections for women and racial minorities, and the advice of the 1968 report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, which urged the racial integration of the nation’s newsrooms.

This study illuminates the struggle of post-Civil Rights black broadcast journalists to live comfortably in their skin. Participants reveal how anti-black cultural norms are re-enforced by colleagues and superiors. Despite the existence of legal protections, these journalists suppress, and in some cases, erase their black identity to conform to hegemonic white norms about culture, hair, skin color, grooming, age, sexuality and class. The broadcast journalists accept that conforming to white supremacist cultural norms are the only route to career advancement. Many thrive by denying parts of their cultural and physical selves. This conformity comes at a psychological, monetary and physical cost. While

these racial attitudes prevail in many, if not most corporate American workplaces, the broadcast newsrooms' power to normalize anti-black aesthetic standards have widespread implications for shaping perceptions of reality as well maintaining America's racial caste system.

Theoretical Framework

More than a century since DuBois (1903) described black Southerners as a "segregated, servile caste with restricted rights and privileges," skin color remains among the most reliable markers of social status in the United States. Americans of African descent have spent more time living under the specter of slavery and legally sanctioned discrimination than outside of it. This caste system has maintained racial disparities in virtually every facet of life—determining levels of wealth, health, incarceration and access to schools, neighborhoods and jobs (Anderson et al. 2012).

Race is a social construct. However, the history and ongoing legacy of slavery, racial segregation and economic exclusion have empowered this construct to help determine individual and group experiences and opportunities—and to shape culture. While acknowledging the fundamentally constructed nature of race, this research addresses the elements of the black experience rooted in appearance such as hair texture and skin color. While many individuals live between racial boundaries that are blurred, this study is focused on the boundaries that are visible and have clear consequences in the broadcast newsroom and society at large.

Television news was just emerging as a dominant medium when Habermas ([1962] 1989) described the evolution of the public sphere as a locus of debate and decision-making located apart from both the gears of the state and the private home. As the television medium became widely adopted, it came to command a dominant position in popular culture, a pulpit used to reflect, dictate and challenge attitudes in the other spheres. Television was just one arena critical and cultural scholars addressed whilst developing theoretical frameworks from which to challenge prevailing power relations in society (Crenshaw 1991; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1992). Television news images serve as narratives, or signs that point to controlling values, or what Barthes (1957) described as "mythologies." These images created an unconscious organizing schema, hardwiring our associations about who is good and bad, worthy and unworthy, safe and dangerous. Psychologists have revealed how these dominant images create implicit associations of African descent as less than human (Goff et al. 2008). These associations bolster "implicit biases," which serve as false shortcuts to understanding non-whites (Staats and Patton 2014).

Colorism

Tharps (2016) credited Alice Walker defining colorism as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color." In other words, the privilege and preference of light skin over dark skin, which prevails in both the black community and American society at large. Vedantam (2010) cited in *The New York Times* said, "Dozens of research studies have shown that skin tone and other racial features play powerful roles in who gets ahead and who does not. These factors regularly determine who gets hired and who gets convicted and who gets elected." For example, the dark skin has been associated with criminality, which has become a stereotype in American society

(Knight 2015). Social status attached to skin color (colorism) and hair texture is a global phenomenon with roots in slavery and colonialism in which the white-skinned, straight-haired ideal signals power and privilege (Monroe 2016; Parameswaran and Cardoza 2009; Shrestha 2013). Furthermore, the “colorism” that is attached to same-race people also reflects the “unconscious and unspoken biases,” also known as “implicit biases- that favor lighter skin” (Knight 2015).

White Privilege and the Other

Race remains a defining characteristic of our social structure and continues to be used to determine how labor is divided within organizations (Ashcraft and Allen 2003). The organizational communication scholars Conrad and Poole (2002, 351) note: “As people internalize the values and assumptions of their societies they also internalize its class, race, gender, and ethnicity-based hierarchical relationships.” These perceptions then become the “social construction of inequality.” This inequality “results in favoritism and privilege for some groups and disadvantage for others” (Allen 2011, 14).

The construct of “whiteness” is the primary beneficiary of this hierarchy. Whiteness refers both to the pigment of one’s skin, and to the unearned privilege connected to white identity, whether one is conscious of it or not (Allen 2011; Mellinger 2013; Rosenblum and Travis 2003). Whiteness as a construct consolidates its power through outright exclusion, and dictating whiteness as the ideal. Whites see “their identity as the hidden standard for measuring other groups” (Allen 2011, 86). White privilege upholds institutionalized racism and society’s expectations about a person’s skills and values depending on their race (Tatum 1999).

However, as postcolonial theorists have pointed out, whiteness gains its privilege only when presented in contrast to supposedly inferior “Others.” Edward Said’s (1979) *Orientalism* discussed how the social construction of the “other” was actually about the construction of the dominant culture in the West, “... human societies, at least the more advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with ‘other’ cultures” (204). “Others” can also include all women, including white women. In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir (1952) wrote, “but in man’s eyes woman often appears in spite of everything as an *absolute other*” (259–260), suggesting that women are “the original Other.” Melin-Higgins (2004) studied newsroom culture and found “the dominant journalist culture is masculine and the dominant journalist culture consists of male journalists who have defined the doxa of journalism” (197–198). These notions of “other” further illuminate how the participants in this study were judged against white male cultural norms that dominated their workplaces.

Race in the Newsroom

Wilson, Gutiérrez, and Chao (2013, 129) noted the critical role of a news organization in interpreting the social world when it comes to race. “The gatekeepers of news reveal how consequential they regard non-Whites in American society by determining the way in which they are interpreted to the general audience.” Like many elite realms, the field of American journalism has historically been a bastion of white male privilege. For example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) did not admit an African-American member until 1965 (Mellinger 2013). Scholars have demonstrated how newsroom

culture and policies hew to norms of white masculinity and patriarchy, as well as marginalize women (Chambers and Steiner 2009; Freeman 2016; North 2009; Ross 2004). In a study of female television news anchors in the Midwest, Barnes (2005) noted that women journalists described experiencing patriarchal attitudes toward assignments, and that they were unfairly judged by their looks.

This issue of race in the newsroom was addressed at the highest policy levels during the Civil Rights movement. After a spate of urban racial uprisings before and after the 1968 assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., President Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, later known as the Kerner Commission, to better understand why racial tensions came to a boil. The commission found daily newspapers, staffed with all-white newsrooms, primarily spoke to and served the interests of a white audience. The newsrooms failed to address broad swaths of the black population legally restricted to certain run-down parts of cities. The commission wrote:

Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and a white perspective. That is no longer good enough. The painful process of readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now. (National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorders 1968, 389)

The Kerner Commission made a series of recommendations. They included: expanding coverage of the black community; integrating black life into news coverage; recruiting and promoting more black journalists; promoting accurate and responsible coverage of protests and race-related news; and training more journalists in "urban affairs" (National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorders 1968, 21). The Kerner Commission report remained a watershed in understanding the corrosive impact news media can have on race relations in society. However, the commission lacked the authority to enforce its recommendations, which came up against strong headwinds of newsrooms' calcified organizational culture.

In the past decades, slow strides have been made toward inclusion. However, by the early 1980s, African-Americans had made little progress in penetrating upper management of television news. At CBS, 10 of its 219 producers were black, at ABC 6 of its 206 producers were black and at NBC approximately 12 of its 200 producers were black (MacDonald 1983). In June of 1999, the National Association of Black Journalists reported that black journalists held 5.36 percent of the nation's newsroom jobs (including print newsrooms); the previous year all minorities held a total of 11.55 percent of US newsroom (including print newsrooms) jobs (Diuguid and Rivers 2000). In 2014, the black television news workforce reached 10.4 percent (Papper 2014).

Research Questions and Methodology

This study examines the experiences of black journalists who persisted in entering the field of broadcast journalism and analyzes the challenges they faced when they got there. We conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of black journalists who held editorial positions either in front of or behind the camera in network television, and graduated from college between 1994 and 2014. A producer can be a broadcast journalist who decides the content of a newscast, for example, what stories to put into a newscast and the order in which the stories should be presented. The role of a producer for a network television magazine show such as "Dateline" or "60 Minutes," includes: researching possible story topics, pitching ideas to managers, writing the script and deciding what video to use.

The reporter or anchor typically collaborates with producers to develop the story and script and conducts the field interviews that appear on air.

The following were the research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: To what extent do the journalists feel they were able to represent black culture both as individuals and in their work?

RQ2: What if any pressure did they feel to correct false notions and stereotypes about black cultural identity?

RQ3: What if any pressure did they feel to conform to whiteness as an aesthetic and cultural ideal?

Clark (2014) noted that studies of minority groups and media representation typically are approached through content analysis or case study. He also noted qualitative methods have much to contribute to this body of work, because they strike at the heart of cultural production norms. In the classic study “Social Control in the Newsroom,” Breed (1955) showed how journalists are socialized into conforming to unwritten newsroom policies, which in turn shaped office interactions and content. Those who adhered to these policies earned respect by superiors and colleagues, advanced in their careers and kept their jobs.

We conducted in-depth interviews with broadcast journalists who worked in large television network newsrooms, because they had the largest audience and thus had a greater footprint and influence in shaping wider cultural norms. The network headquarters and major bureaus for ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox are located in New York and Washington, DC. The network headquarters for CNN is located in Atlanta, also with a bureau in Washington, DC. By focusing exclusively on black broadcast journalists, and in most cases interviewing them away from their job location, we aimed to shed light on one dimension of organizational culture through the lens of black voices that often are drowned out. In addition, focusing on broadcast journalists who are working on network news programs means they are catering to the entire population of the United States—a mass, broad audience. The respondents felt more comfortable speaking about their experiences outside their workplaces, so that they could speak freely about the racial tensions and biases they felt in the newsroom.

The career development office at a historically black university suggested possible participants for the study. The snowball sampling method described by Berg (2007) was used to find other participants. In-depth interviews were recorded with each participant either in Washington, DC, New York City or Boston. With two exceptions, the interviews took place at locations other than their work places to protect their anonymity. In Boston, pre-arranged interviews took place at the National Association of Black Journalists’ conference in 2014. Respondents first completed a written questionnaire stating their education level, years working in network television, job title, age, salary, gender—and their skin tone.

Respondents were identified by their skin tone (light, medium or dark) throughout this study. We also asked them to identify themselves by their income. This became a shorthand for class and social status. It also allowed us to make some rough correlations between income, shade of skin, their position before or behind the camera, as well as the way they experienced race in the newsroom. The sample is too small to be definitive about these matters; however, these data points seemed relevant given the cited literature

on color and class. Identifying speakers by income highlights the distinction between caste which is immovable, and class, which can theoretically be transcended in America. In-depth interviews each lasted approximately one hour. Following Lindlof and Taylor (2011), we conducted a “line-by-line” thematic analysis of the transcripts. The participants were of ages 23–42, with 13 women and 10 men. Fifteen of the subjects lived and worked in the New York area; six people were based in DC; one in Atlanta and one in LA. Of the 23 participants 4 had their master’s degrees, and the rest had their bachelor’s degrees. The study included: 2 senior producers, 4 producers, 7 associate producers, 1 assistant producer, 7 correspondents/anchors, 1 assignment editor and 1 desk assistant who had between 1 and 19 years of network experience. Eight people identified themselves as dark-skinned, 11 identified themselves as medium-skin toned and 4 identified themselves with a light skin tone. All but one of the correspondents made above \$200K, while the lowest paid job was the desk assistant making less than \$50K. The producers’ salary ranged from \$50K to \$200K. To clarify, correspondents were “on-air” positions, 6 of the 23 people interviewed, while everyone else worked “behind the scenes.” Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their anonymity.

Results

Skin Tone

The authors gathered information concerning participants’ gender, skin tone, job titles, salaries and years of experience in television news. None of the correspondents, those in front of the camera, identified themselves as dark-skinned. Of the seven “on-air” participants, two identified as light-skinned (one male and one female) and five identified as medium-skinned (three males and two females); all seven had experience levels that ranged from 12 to 16 years and were the highest paid in this study with most salaries above \$200K. Eight of the participants identified themselves as dark-skinned and all worked “off-air.” By simply examining the differences between the “on-air” and “off-air” participants suggested a link between light-skinned privilege and access to jobs in front of the camera. This would be a good topic of further empirical inquiry. Participants who were in higher paid positions with more years of experience, regardless of whether they were male or female, dark-skinned or light-skinned, were more comfortable speaking out against a racial issue, or in the coverage of a story that involved an African-American among their colleagues. However, the authors would not necessarily conclude that gender made a difference in how willing these journalists would be to stick their necks out regarding race as opposed to playing it safe out of concern for their careers. Also, those who identified as dark-skinned journalists did not appear to have more obstacles in career advancement, although they all worked behind the scenes.

Black Identity

The respondents gave a range of responses to the question: “Besides your skin color, how do you present yourself as African American?” The question was an attempt to gain insight into how each journalist identified themselves. Some defined how they represent black culture in terms of their spiritual lives in the black church, family origins and the geographic areas where they call home. Some spoke of being of mixed racial heritage. Some

respondents cited a history of slavery, the arts, seeking to improve the experience of African-Americans, feeling a special responsibility to provide accurate coverage of black people, and feeling a sense of collective victory and collective defeat. Nearly all the women discussed hair, which is expanded on later in this section.

Leslie, 34, was a light-skinned national correspondent who made over \$200K per year. Leslie said she aims to keep all traces of her black identity out of her work,

How do I present myself as African American? I do not, because assimilation is the goal. I try very hard not to. I don't want to come across the wrong way—it is not distancing of my culture. It is an acknowledgement that life is much easier if people can forget that you are black. So, it is an effort to help them do that.

Later in the interview, Leslie elaborated:

It is a constant process. It is daily. It is every single interaction of not being too black. So, the way that I am **naturally** [emphasis added], the way that I am, if I were left to my own devices, if I was on an island I would be a very different kind of person than I am professionally. So, I always say that I am bilingual not in terms of language but in terms of like culture. I think every professional black person is bilingual in that way. So, it is daily and it is constant if not reminding people that I am black. Suppressing certain things so that they can see me as a **human being** [emphasis added]. That is the ultimate goal. I just want them to see me but I am aware that there is a barrier there. So, I do not want to draw attention to the barrier. (Leslie)

Scholars have theorized racial identity as a “mask,” most notably Fanon (1952) speaking of black colonial subjects who sought to master and perform the ruler’s culture to distinguish themselves from the inferior black masses. Leslie felt compelled to hide behind a mask obscuring her “natural” identity. Only wearing this mask would help her professional colleagues and audiences see her as a “human being.” She hoped colleagues and audiences forgot her status as the “Other,” characterized by Chuang and Roemer (2015, 1048) as outside “the dominant cultural order” (De Beauvoir 1952; Melin-Higgins 2004; Said 1979).

Other black journalists felt uncomfortable with backhanded praise for mastering what white colleagues defined as “white” culture. Amy, a 33-year-old, dark-skinned senior editor/producer, was covering a national political convention when she started dancing to a rock band she liked. A co-worker remarked: “You’re the whitest black girl I know.” It was intended to be a compliment, but Amy did not take it that way. To her, the comment negated her blackness, or defined black culture in a way that made some elements of mainstream American culture off limits. Edward, a 31-year-old medium-skinned producer based in New York, had a similar experience when a co-worker remarked: “You’re like a very ‘white black person.’” It was meant as a joke, but he also took it as an attempt to limit the range of ways for him to be authentically black and separated him from his supposedly less worthy black peers.

Several respondents felt shackled under the cloud of negative media images of black people. Diuguid and Rivers (2000) noted that racial stereotypes are a particular burden for black workers, making it harder for them to be seen as just as competent and committed as anyone else. For James, a 26-year-old, dark-skinned associate producer, who made \$50K–100 K, based in New York, overcoming stereotypes meant wearing a tie every day even though it was not required as a producer. “I have a personal rule that every day is a shirt

and tie. ... I have never come into the newsroom without a tie, because I want people to take me seriously." He believed this clothing choice conveyed that he was "competent and committed" to his job as associate producer. It could also communicate to his colleagues that although James was young, he still took his job seriously. However, in comparing himself against other black male broadcast journalists, he seemed to attempt to separate himself from stereotypical features. He cited Bryant Gumbel as a black male role model he respected for his "calm and respectful" manner. He contrasted Gumbel with black male broadcast pundits Roland Martin and Al Sharpton, whom he described as "abrasive" and "yelling and screaming," characterizations commonly used to stereotype black men.

Laura, a 25-year-old medium-skinned associate producer who made \$50K, said navigating the office meant trying to not come off as the stereotypical "Angry Black Woman" [and] it was "definitely trying to make sure that my personality isn't perceived as too strong, or too brash, trying to make myself seem a little demure."

Black hair. Attitudes and expectations around facial hair for black men and hairstyles for black women were also a proxy for racial attitudes in the broadcast newsrooms. Nearly all the black women interviewed described feeling pressure to straighten their hair to win acceptance and career opportunities. As Patton (2006) noted, straightening naturally kinky or curly black hair was seen as assimilating and joining the dominant white culture. However, transforming kinky, curly hair into straight hair came at great expense and damage to the scalp. Scientists have begun to understand the impact of chemical straighteners that create hair lesions and burns on older women, as well as their effect on black girls who begin chemically straightening their hair before puberty (James-Todd et al. 2011; Stiel et al. 2016; Wise et al. 2012).

Respondents noted that high-profile, on-air talent was expected to have a consistent look every day. Executives have told Margaret, a 38-year-old black national correspondent, that she needed to "work on her hair." That goes

far beyond straightening. [That means buying] extensions, going to the hair salon at least twice a week. I mean, I put a lot of money and effort into it. ... I do think that [hair is] one of the areas in which African-American female correspondents probably feel like they are bearing a heavier burden.

Conversely, as White (2005) noted, wearing black hair in its natural state can be an expression of self-love and acceptance, and personal liberation. Several of the black female broadcast journalists expressed joy at their hair in its natural state. "I would love nothing more than to wear my hair natural," said Margaret, a 38-year-old light-skinned correspondent who wears a weave each day on the air. "That would be like the joy of my life." But she said she never would have gotten as far in her career with curly hair. "I have worn a weave for the last ten years, because I do not want to damage my hair by straightening it and coloring it constantly." Leslie, 34, another network correspondent felt the same. "When I go on vacation I wear it [hair] naturally and wear it curly and I love it. But I would never be allowed on the air like that."

Another black woman respondent who worked behind the camera expressed pride at her hair's natural flexibility, texture and vitality. Jessica, a 23-year-old, dark-skinned assistant producer based in New York, glowingly described her crown:

My hair is very very big. It is called a 'twist out.' It is almost like an Afro but you twist it a bit more, so it gets more layering, wavy full effect. It is pretty coarse, very well moisturized. I am proud of that.

Although she worked off camera, she let that pride show only in small, controlled doses:

I have strategically selected what weeks or what days I am going to do my hair and straighten it, so it has maximum exposure. So if I know certain producers are in town, if I know there are big meetings happening, I will wear this dress. I will straighten my hair, wear this dress and be 20 minutes early.

Laura, 25, a medium-skinned associate producer based in New York said straightening her hair gave her more confidence:

There is definitely a sense of trepidation when you're wearing your hair curly. I mean I think I definitely feel sort of more confident when my hair is straight and subconsciously better prepared to talk to executives or anything like that.

That feeling that straightened hair makes navigating the workplace easier was often explicitly reinforced from advice from mentors (many of whom were also black women) and offhand comments from colleagues. When Renee, a 30-year-old dark-skinned producer in New York, straightened her hair instead of her usual natural look, it drew unsolicited commentary from a white male colleague. When it is straight, "he'll come by and say, 'oh, I like your hair better this way'."

The issue of black women's hair became a news topic in its own right in 2007. Renée, 30, a dark-skinned associate producer, recalled being assigned to cover the uproar that ensued when the white male radio personality Don Imus derided the winning Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy headed-hos." "I was the first person picked to be on it, because, you know, I guess they wanted someone who could relate, who could know all the sensitivities and all the good language to use." Renée welcomed the opportunity to help the network correct the stereotypes and racial epithets that were perpetuated by Imus' comments.

Black man's facial hair. Vince, a 32-year-old medium-skinned network anchor who makes above \$200K, immediately complied when management ordered him to get rid of a goatee, because they claimed it made him look "angry", "aggressive" and a "60s militant." According to Vince:

In this business, you have to sell the prerogative to make decisions about your own face. You sell the prerogative. We are paid very well, some would say obscenely well for the work we do. But they buy a lot. They buy the decisions to decide the color of your hair, the length of it, your style, your image, they buy your personal plans. Now I can't vilify them because we sell it.

Vince was the only male participant to speak about his facial hair. The other male participants either did not have facial hair, or worked "behind the scenes" as a producer, where facial appearance was not an issue. However, Vince's eagerness to please management complies with "Volunteer Slavery" concept that is discussed later in this paper.

History of hair wars. The Imus story could have been a good opportunity to prompt deeper introspection of the issue of black women's hair and the way it has been explicitly

policed and regulated in newsrooms for decades. In the 1970s, when Melba Tolliver, a reporter with the ABC affiliate in New York, WABC-TV, covered the White House Rose Garden wedding of Tricia Nixon, she was told to change her hair from an Afro or to stay off camera, because it “did not look feminine” (Newkirk 2000, 82; Terry 2007). Tolliver disobeyed this order and was eventually told by upper management to straighten her hair, because they worried they would alienate the audience who could link her with members of the radical Black Panther movement (Newkirk 2000, 82). In 1981, Dorothy Reed was suspended for two weeks without pay from her job as a television reporter with the ABC affiliate in San Francisco, because she wore her hair in cornrows. After a public protest with management that made its way into the media, Reed reached a settlement where she was allowed to wear her braids but not with beads. She was eventually let go from the station when her contract was up (Newkirk 2000). More recently, former CBS and NBC television news anchor Libby Lewis noted how “perceptions of beauty, such as skin color or hair texture, shape the hiring practices in the television news industry” (Wilson, Gutiérrez, and Chao 2003, 218). Stations enforced hair and dress codes that penalized Lewis from working in her natural African-American state. When she wore her hair natural, superiors called her “unprofessional” and that she needed to “Anglicize” her hair (Wilson, Gutiérrez, and Chao 2003, 218).

Black hair texture is protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A 2006 compliance manual for the act’s Title VII barred employers from targeting workers’ ancestry, “cultural dress and grooming practices ... accent or manner of speech,” as well as “physical characteristics associated with race, such as a person’s color, hair, facial features, height and weight.” According to the manual:

Title VII prohibits employers from preventing African American women from wearing their hair in a natural, un-permed “afro” style that complies with the neutral hairstyle rule. Title VII also prohibits employers from applying neutral hairstyle rules more restrictively to hairstyles worn by African Americans. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2006, 47)

However, employees who try to pursue appearance discrimination claims in the courts are rarely successful, Trautner and Kwan (2010) concluded in a study of resistance to appearance norms. Trautner and Kwan’s analysis of appearance discrimination cases from 1970 to 2008 found that despite the language in Title VII, the courts gave employers wide leeway to regulate the bodies of their employees. Courts allowed them to use hairstyles, makeup, body shape and sizes to determine hiring, promotions and firing. Such workplace policies were explicitly gendered, favored youth, whiteness, heterosexuality, ability and economic privilege (Trautner and Kwan 2010). Scholars found that black women in particular had little recourse in the courts. Onwuachi-Willig (2010) argued that the courts failed to protect black women from workplace attacks on their hair, because jurists do not understand the biology of black women’s hair and the physical burdens and costs associated with acquiescing to white beauty standards.

“Volunteer Slavery”

A contract is not necessary to enforce dominant cultural values in network newsrooms. Former *Washington Post* journalist Jill Nelson’s 1993 memoir *Volunteer Slavery*

spoke eloquently of the tug of war between serving one's self as a journalist, serving mostly white newsroom bosses who have ignorant views of black people, and the black community who considered black journalists complicit in the stereotypical portrayals that prevail in the public sphere. Conrad and Poole's (1998) work on organizational theory applies here. Organizations exert control and/or power through its informal communications and by maintaining surveillance of its members. Often, this surveillance is not explicit or overt. "The explicit written rules and regulations are largely replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives, and means of achievement, along with a deep appreciation for the organization's mission" (Tompkins and Cheney 1985, 184). Members of an organization internalize the interests of the dominant groups and employees discipline themselves (Allen 2011). As members learn the codes and become more disciplined, the "hierarchy is maintained so smoothly that dominant and submissive behavior seems natural" (Vannoy 2000, 6). Thus "disciplined members want on their own what the organization wants" (Allen 2011, 30).

Nancy, a 39-year-old, medium-skinned female anchor, who makes more than \$200K, asked for and was denied permission to wear braids. She eventually paid to install a weave to avoid "killing" her natural hair. Submission was an easy choice when the threat of firing was constant; her servitude was "volunteer." Nancy recalled one boss at a Southern station ominously telling her: "You should be grateful for what I have given you.' You know, very evoking of a very ownership mentality."

Leslie, the 34-year-old network correspondent, similarly drew parallels to bondage. "I often feel owned that is not a reference to slavery. But I often feel like I do not belong to myself. I do not control my time."

However, Vince, the 32-year-old medium-skinned network anchor, mentioned above in the section on Black Men's Facial Hair easily complied with the request to shave his goatee. Unlike the female participants in this study, he did not feel his identity was threatened by removing his facial hair.

"Black" Stories

Journalism historian Clint C. Wilson II (1991) described it as the "Black Journalists' Paradox," the ways in which Dubois' double-consciousness theory plays out in mainstream newsrooms. The following DuBois (1903) passage explains his theory of double consciousness:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it 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.

That is, the tension between wanting to be a journalist who happens to be black, versus a "black journalist," and whether it is possible to choose between the two. Wilson (2000, 97) wrote:

Implicit in this question is the dilemma that black journalists face in seeking to reconcile their desire to fulfill personal professional ambitions by gaining acceptance of peers and superiors with the responsibility to fulfill the information needs in society. While many assume they may [be] compatible and complementary, history has shown they are not.

Meyers and Gayle (2015) produced a study where African-American women journalists used specific strategies to ensure that racial stereotypes were not used in the news stories they produced. For example, some of the television journalists tried to “improve the appearance of their sources before they appeared in front of the camera” (302). Some would avoid using sources that reinforced a stereotype of an African-American, and instead, they would take the time to try and find another source, such as a white source.

In this study, the television journalists did not discuss their sourcing techniques, but instead talked about the value of being assigned a “black” story, regardless of whether it advanced their career. Some, like Leslie, a 34-year-old light-skinned correspondent, embraced being called on to cover black stories. “At least I feel I do them right. But I do not want to be the ‘black correspondent.’ I want to be the ‘the everything’ correspondent who does a lot of black stories.” Laura, a 25-year-old medium-skinned associate producer, said, “I’m not mad at working on these [race-related] pieces, but I recognize that I get assigned to them disproportionately.” Vince, a 32-year-old medium-skinned anchor/correspondent, covered many stories involving black people. He believed it was a situation in which race played to his benefit to getting people to talk to him in the field. Leslie, Laura and Vince did not fear that it would harm their careers by being assigned to these stories. Black stories were assigned regardless of the skin tone, gender or income.

Treatment in the Field or Newsroom

The black broadcast female journalists faced additional intersecting layers of paradox. Amy, 33, dark-skinned female producer, who makes more than \$100K per year, often cannot tell where offensive behavior she encounters can be attributed to her gender or race:

I have had high-level members of Congress make inappropriate statements to me that you would never say to a man. I know that for sure. But I do not know if the things that are said are, because I am a woman or because I am black.

On one field reporting experience, Nancy, a 39-year-old medium-skinned correspondent who earns above \$200K, found that the answer is sometimes both. Knocking on the door of a private house to get a comment from someone accused of a crime, a resident of the house called her a “black bitch” and sprayed her with a hose.

Ellie, a medium-skinned 36-year-old producer with 14 years of experience, earned less than \$100K and resisted attributing her treatment to her gender or race. As the only person of color in her unit, she was spared layoffs but transferred to another department. Her new supervisor assigned her to coordinate food—a task beneath the dignity of an experienced producer. She felt humiliated by colleagues’ complaints about the quality of the lunches she organized. One of them mocked her as “mommy.” (“Mammy” is a slur lobbed against black American women once confined to slavery and jobs feeding white people (Harris-Perry 2011).)

"That is just an example," Ellie said. "It is not actually race. But to me, because I am, black race always plays a part. It always still comes in. I cannot outright say: Oh, they are being racists. But I feel it sometimes."

All of the broadcast journalists interviewed acknowledged difficulties in navigating the newsroom as people of color. However, many described a sense of mission larger than their own individual or racial identity. Nancy explained: "I have a drive, a determination and will. [I am someone] who loves the business of journalism, who is in love with the creative process and who honestly believes that we are the gatekeepers to society." Vince, the 32-year-old medium-skinned anchor, said part of building trust with an audience is showing your true authentic self.

That's what I'm trying to get to. Being comfortable in your own skin. Then you don't have to pretend to be one thing or the other. I think that is dangerous if you prepare a person for them to meet and they see that you're somebody else.

However, for many of the black journalists interviewed in this study, biased perceptions and default standards that privilege white biology make the task of showing up to work in their natural bodies nearly impossible.

Conclusion

This study reveals that at network television, some of the racial biases against black broadcast journalists still exist. A majority of the participants talked about appearance, and this self-reported issue took center stage in our findings. On one level, this study is about a generation of African-American men and women who faced many of the same challenges their predecessors faced. Each participant demonstrated how they navigated a cultural minefield based on stereotypes and ignorance of black culture by the dominant group. The generation born in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s continued the age-old DuBoisian struggle to represent their visibly black selves and advance themselves as individuals within the corporate newsroom culture. The in-depth interviews revealed the compromises black broadcast journalists made to maintain their position as cultural producers that broadcast reality to our living rooms each day.

The Kerner Report predicted that the inclusion of women and minority journalists would improve the coverage. While some strides have been made in including black journalists, mere inclusion did not tackle the institutionalized racism and sexism maintained through socialization of the newsroom. As more women and people of color entered newsrooms, organizational culture had trapped them beneath a white male gaze that dehumanized and devalued them. Whether they were on or off camera, participants felt pressured to change their bodies to become closer to whiteness.

Newsroom expectations regarding hair texture were just the most visible manifestation of white privilege and white supremacy that continued to animate broadcast newsrooms. These broadcast journalists were all well-paid white-collar workers. However, achieving these prestigious, well-paid jobs did not exempt them from the grips of racial caste that restricted their ability to express themselves freely through their natural bodies. Those values required black women to physically strip their blackness away to be accepted as "human," in the words of one highly paid respondent. These dominant narratives of what "looks" normal reinforced a global caste system that venerated whiteness as

the norm. These narratives unconsciously and reflexively dictated the decisions made by them both as individuals and as a society.

This study probed the values, beliefs and attitudes of a small, but critically placed group of professionals, young black broadcast journalists, who produced these images. Their bodies were regulated as part of the performance of power. Their professional encounters negotiating their relationship with the general public and among their newsroom peers determined what was aired on television as public knowledge. It was through this tightly focused lens that we can see how race is weaponized both as a construct of power, and as well as a biological problem in need of a cure.

This study also suggests a direction toward change: including non-white aesthetics in broadcast newsrooms could be a powerful influence toward full, mainstream acceptance of people of color. Newsroom managers need to develop a wider understanding of the history of oppression and resilience that allowed blacks to develop a unique culture in the United States that is worthy of being celebrated and not hidden. To achieve true inclusion and dismantle the caste system, the dominant white culture must educate itself about the physical and cultural lives of people of color. Their whiteness and unearned privileges must be made visible, and steps must be taken to untether them from the prevailing “norms.” The viewing public could support such efforts to disrupt these hegemonic structures and false hierarchies through ratings and advertising. Despite the efforts made to include people of color, this research revealed that social pressure could be more powerful than laws. Therefore, the unwritten rules that govern a society, in workplaces, schools and communities, are where the true battle for inclusion must be addressed.

The sample of 23 journalists gives a qualitative sampling of some of the experiences that black post-Civil Rights journalists face. This study would be greatly complemented by more empirical surveys focused on a larger pool of black journalists working in smaller markets and local stations with regional nuances. That would allow more inclusive and definitive conclusions about the experiences of black journalists. Our data collected point to promising lines of inquiry into the differences between the experiences of black journalists by gender, allowing for a more intersectional analysis.

This study also did not address the respondents’ personal narratives, or socioeconomic backgrounds in depth. More ethnographic data on the lives and newsroom practices of these journalists would also be a promising area to explore in a future, longitudinal study.

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