

SUBSCRIBING TO ETHNORACIAL IDEOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY
IN NEWSROOM CULTURAL PRACTICES

by

James Thomas, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Ana M. Juárez, Chair

Augustin Agwuele

Gloria Martínez-Ramos

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ABSTRACT

Ethnoracial ideology is implicit and embedded in American cultural practices, often unconsciously framing social relations and inequalities as the “inevitable” or “natural order” of society. Rather than being framed as an explicit form of goals or intentions, ideology in this sense acts as the fundamental structure governing power relations that goes unimagined or unmentioned. In this thesis, I explain how the ethnoracial ideology of multiculturalism was manifested in the practices of a newsroom in Austin, TX. I also analyzed how the variously challenged or unwittingly reproduced various elements of these ideological practices. Finally, my research suggests various ways in which the station can continue to improve upon their practices to work towards their goals of ethnoracial inclusion and diversity.

ONE. INTRODUCTION

Ideology and Everyday Life

This thesis examines what the ‘given’ or ‘natural’ appearing processes are as it relates to racism and the reproduction of ethnoracial ideology in a newsroom and its’ newsroom practices.

When I get up on Monday mornings, like most working American students my age, I know I’ve got five days of work and school to look forward to before the weekend. I might engage in any number of discussion topics with friends or co-workers ranging from sports, music, politics, and even food. Every one of these topics contains possible preferences or stances of some sort: favorite sports team, musical tastes, political ideology, party affiliation, and favorite food styles. These conversations are often what get me through the week at times, helping me find meaning and continuity in my interactions.

In our everyday lives, our affiliations to politics, for example, are often tied to conscious decisions to think of these preferences as part of our identity. Ideology takes the form of many titles in American society: socialism, capitalism, existentialism, just to name a few. They are explicitly articulated and situated social, religious or economic ideas that people identify with. Often times, they are linked with an overt set of goals. We may wear a sports jersey knowingly affiliating ourselves with that city and teams player(s). We may embrace lifestyles such as vegetarianism or diets like the paleo-diet to say something about our knowledge or feelings about the food we eat. Regardless, these choices are *conscious* and overtly articulated.

However, I wouldn't have my sports team or political party to identify without unspoken structures to arrange and sustain their everyday functioning (e.g., if a seven day week did not arrange sports games schedules the way I am used to seeing them arranged). The way this foundation is maintained is systematic and the result of human choices, even if people do not openly speak about them as such. What I have just described would fall under what some would call an *unconscious* form of an ideology – a broader, less explicit form.

Indeed, ideology does not necessarily have to be an overt set of goals, easily articulated and stated upon request. Ideology can shape our perceptions as a set of assumptions or truths that are explicitly understood as the 'given' or taken-for-granted elements of life (Makus 1990, 499). In Stuart Hall's theory of ideology, consensus and meaning in life is built on a process of complex constructions and legitimizations (Hall 1982, 65). What Hall calls 'the ideological' is that consensus and order which appears to be the 'natural' and 'inevitable' (Hall 1982, 65).

By contrast, those falling outside of the naturalized order appear deviant or strange (Makus 1990, 497). In stigmatizing those on the outside, dominant society pushes conformity and thereby reproduces the social consciousness. This tension between those on the outside and inside lays out the question of who has the ability to define who.

For example, in my Monday morning scenario I did not even question why there is even a sequence of seven days in a week. I merely took it for granted that Monday *is* the beginning of the week and that Sunday *is* the end of a week. However, no matter how naturalized this structure is in my mind, there is no self-justifying mechanism or

immutable law dictating a seven day week; this arrangement is the result of a decision or set of decisions.

Questioning an underlying, 'natural' order by, say, suggesting that we have a four day work week instead of seven would undoubtedly make one appear deviant or outcast. Further, to actually change that backdrop -- to make a week four or five days instead of seven -- would significantly alter the fabric that shapes many of our day-to-day processes. Calendars would have to be re-written; businesses would have to change operationally in some sense. In short, the entire context that surrounds the other conscious affiliations one embraces would be fundamentally altered. Thus, the 'given' elements which seem to be apolitical often act as their own form of uncontested ideology which supports a consensus.

Ideology and Doxa

In the realm of social science, this idea of an unconscious ideology is embodied by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of doxa (Lane, 2000). Doxa is the unimagined norm, the generic understanding which is not even up for debate in a social context, often disguised as "common sense" or an uncontested truth (Lane 2000, 93). Two opposing teams on a basketball court may hold differing affiliations or views as to which team is better, who deserves to win a championship, etc. However, both teams would not argue over the fact that the game is worth playing to begin with. This is an unspoken assumption underlying the two teams that helps uphold the process of playing the game.

Furthermore, Renato Rosaldo has described in detail how some of the most deeply held values or ideological processes of a society are often not expressed explicitly.

Indeed, these values are part of a bigger cultural logic that underlies the day-to-day practices, no matter how sordid or reprehensible others may see them as (Rosaldo, 1989). And as Bourdieu and Hall both explained, entrenched ideological processes can function unconsciously and in ways that appear to not even be ideological.

Racism and Multiculturalism

Ideology plays a particularly influential role in how racism in the United States is reproduced or challenged in a given social framework. What we leave unimagined about the social structures that surround us, what we accept as normal or given, and our position in these structures can often help determine how we act with respect to issues of ethnoracial relations. In short, we live within a socially conditioned racial doxa. In the United States, authors have argued that there has been a post-Civil Rights shift away from the *overt* racial terminology of white supremacy (Melamed, 2006; Kim 2008). In its place, these authors argue, an ideology termed multiculturalism displaced the older overt forms of racial ideology (Kim 2008, 12). Authors such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, in his work *Racism without Racists*, have described in detail how white Americans live a “white habitus” of social networks that reinforce these embedded ideologies in ways that avoid overt racially discriminatory language (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 16).

Multiculturalism was intended to dismantle and move past systems of racial inequality and oppression but has instead had the effect of erasing the history of racial inequalities and displacing movements for racial equality (Kim 2008, 37). Indeed, the language of multiculturalism operates along describing differences in economic and social outcomes among ethnoracial groups much in the way of a cultural pathology

(Melamed 2006, 6). Moreover, this ideology casts the subordination of non-white citizens as the “just desserts of multicultural world citizens” with the exploited “other” presented as simply a victim of their own “monocultural deficiencies” (Melamed 2006, 1). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has explored a phenomenon in white respondents’ answers to questions about racial minorities pointing to perceived cultural “deficiencies” rather than analyze structural problems in the lives of racial minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 41).

Multiculturalist ideology casts “benevolent” actors such as multinational corporations and news agencies as intervening to give political or economic goods to people who cannot provide the means to achieve these ends themselves. Multiculturalism masks structures of inequality or dominance as instead being a matter of cultural difference (Kim 2008, 37). Although it is intended to move past systems of racial hierarchy and injustice, it actually perpetuates these processes both domestically and abroad (Kim 2008, 37).

An example of multiculturalist ideology in everyday American political rhetoric is the discourse on schools and inequality in educational outcomes. The dominant multiculturalist discourse on lower-income schools suggests that there is a culture of dependence, culture of poverty, or an overall lack of cultural value of education in these often urban settings (Hairston 2013, 237). Even when the school discourse acknowledges structural constraints, the focus shifts to individual or cultural maladaptations of prejudice rather than focusing on the discriminatory structure itself. (Hairston 2013, 238). Thus, what go unimagined or under-examined in the discussion are structural and political forces that undermine poor community’s ability to capitalize on opportunities regardless of individual drive.

Authors have documented white Americans' tendencies to hold beliefs that justify racial privileges of whites and inequalities of blacks and Latinos while being convinced that they themselves are not racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). In a similar way, white respondents were able to affirm their belief that racial inequality was the result of the black or Latino subjects own personal or cultural failings (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 85). Meanwhile, the respondents gave pre-emptive accounts of having black friends to counter any potential accusations of being racist. Thus, racism was perpetuated in rhetoric while nobody was willing to be labeled racist – continuing ethnoracial inequalities while moving away from the discourse of overt racist terminology.

Media, Race, and Project Overview

The media plays a significant role in how ethnic and ethnoracial representations are reproduced or challenged in American society (Ferguson 1998, 1). Authors have studied at length how American media has treated the black and Latino growing populations as a 'problem population' (Wilson et al 2003, 26). Indeed, American news media have approached confrontation coverage of ethnoracial relations from a perspective of "us versus them," posing racial minority actions as adversarial and threats to the 'natural' social order (Wilson etc al 2003, 119).

While there is extensive data and research on how ethnoracial representations are displayed via the media, there is little ethnographic research on how cultural practices which shape production in the newsroom. There is little doubt that many news journalists see themselves as objective agents on a mission to provide information about events.

Often, however, rearing and socialization are as much a part of their consciousness and analysis as do the institutional confines of their work (Dorman 1987, 215).

Over the summer of 2013, I shadowed reporters, editors, managers, and other newsroom employees to learn more about the newsroom cultural practices that guided the way journalists shaped the news. Furthermore, I studied the ways that the ideology of multiculturalism was reproduced or challenged via practices of the workers and the stations subsequent news representations.

As I found in the scarce literature on newsroom ethnography, ethnoracial ideological assumptions can work to legitimize inequalities in the culture of the newsroom (Graf, 2010). Certain news workers seen as being more ‘ethnic’, for example, might be put into a position to cover stories viewed of lesser importance such as an ethnic festivity in the area (Graf, 210). However, the issues conceived as “bigger picture”, such as the debate over the national debt, would be allocated to those news reporters whose roles are seen as more generic or individualized (Graf 2010, 212). These studies gave me an idea early on of what I might look for when shadowing reporters in a newsroom.

Diversity as a Strategic Euphemism

I opted to invoke the term “diversity” to guide my research. Recently, authors have studied how the word diversity can be a malleable concept which can be used strategically by workers to foster greater ethnoracial equality or simply reinforce existing social tendencies (Unzueta, et al, 2012). This is particularly true when the concept of “diversity” is presented as an ambiguous concept or is not clearly reinforced through workplace practices.

Other authors have noted that the term ‘diversity’ is a useful term to explore how Americans can hold contradictory views on race and racial justice in the U.S. (Bell and Hartmann, 2007). Often these contradictions can arise from assumptions, specifically arising from unspoken norms about ways race structures American life (Bell and Hartmann 2007, 896). These unspoken norms rest upon white dominant worldviews and the ability or willingness of people of color to adapt to those dominant worldviews (Bell and Hartmann 2007, 907).

This research showed diversity to be an effective term to gauge dominant ethnoracial assumptions and who was seen as ‘deviant’ or ‘the norm.’ Indeed, what the station included as ‘diverse’ would be my barometer for researching what was a ‘problem’ in the processes of news production and what was ‘normal.’

Methodology

I chose KEQL, a small, local news station in Austin, TX to conduct my research. KEQL was launched in 1999 as a station only available to subscribers of a cable package in the central Texas region surrounding Austin, moving as far north as Waco, TX. The station was a small operation, employing around 70 people. KEQL was unique in that it was not associated with larger national corporate affiliates¹. Management touted its hiring of local personalities and graduates to get their start for their careers at KEQL. About one-third of the employees at this station attended the University of Texas for their undergraduate studies, while the rest of the employees hailed from various parts of Texas and regions of the U.S.

I was given permission for 9 weeks of shadowing and overall data collection at KEQL. In order to learn more about the cultural practices of the newsroom, I undertook three methods of collecting data.

My primary method was participant observation. I undertook over 50 hours of observation in my time at KEQL. The vast majority of these observations took place on ride-alongs with photographers and reporters who were shooting stories. The rest of the time was spent with editors, producers, and control room workers inside the station.

I conducted eight interviews with workers in varying positions of the newsroom but mostly producers and photographers. I also gained insights from control room workers and the director of the station. Towards the end of my stint at the station I conducted brief surveys with the stations' employees.

Overview of the Station

Each day I shadowed I would enter near a parking garage where the security desk oversaw all entries and exits of the building. Eventually, after a week or so, I was given a badge to come and go somewhat freely as I became more comfortable with the staff. I typically interacted with one of three regular duty security guards.

On the second floor were producer, photographer, assignment editor, and directors desks. These offices were next to the meeting room. This also was where most reporters and head producers sat in cubicles. Often the meeting room door was where other producers, assignment editors, and most reporters would have quick access to talking to either the director or head producer. One of the first things I noticed was that the majority of people sitting in these spots were white employees. They had easy access

to congregate near the director and head producer. As I looked further away from the director's office, the gender of the workers in cubicles became predominantly female and the ethnoracial dynamics become more black and Latino. Behind all of the cubicles was a small hallway that led to the master control room where two employees, Karl and David, typically oversaw the flow of the "news wheel" (to be discussed in chapter II).

On the third floor was the space designated for shooting daily news reports and the backdrop designated for the station's weekly political show. Workers on this floor were almost exclusively white and male. This floor is where I got to witness recording of anchors reading the news or live footage of political commentary. Next to these two areas on the third floor was a smaller master control room where a lot of editing and re-arranging was done to news reports shot in the station before they went on air.

In observing and interviewing, I was constantly aware of what my perceived race and gender had on people's behavior towards me. While most workers at KEQL assumed I was white, I did have encounters where an employee would ask "what" I was. These instances were reminiscent of Omi and Winant's Critical Race Theory and its understanding of race as a social construct and lived reality (Omi and Winant, 1994). Further, I often found that someone's questioning of my ethnoracial identity would create a momentary state of assessment regarding how they would go forward in interacting with me.

For example, when an employee was asking about my identity, it often preceded some sort of joke or casual story centered on the race of someone else (or myself at times). The comfort that someone felt in making these jokes around me often dropped

considerably when they learned of my diverse family background and experience; my parents are of mixed Anglo and Hispanic heritage and often people in the U.S. assume that I am white based off of my light-skinned phenotype. I explore this phenomenon briefly in Chapter 1 and further in Chapter 3.

On a given day I interacted casually with anywhere from 15-20 people. On a personal conversational level I interacted with around 5-7 people.

Notes on Ethno-Racial Terminology

My use of racial or ethnic markers is specified by the participants' answer to a demographic sheet filled out after interviews. In the case that there was no interview with the person, I classify the person racially or ethnically based on terms I have experienced growing up. To give an example, in the case where an individual does not overtly state a preference in an interview or demographic sheet, I called him or her black, white, Latino, or Asian-American based on perceptions from my own social experience. I recognize that this subjective classification creates problems, but they are problems I continually make note of grappling with in my research and try to control for continually.

I should also be clear that when I use the term 'race' or 'ethnoracial' with regards to collecting data or commenting on a situation in my observations or interviews, I am not making a particular biological statement about an individual or group of people. Race has been shown to be a biological myth genetically (Omi and Winant 1994, 10) and at no time do I make use of this term to imply anything of the sort. Instead, I am using the term race to refer to a social reality and legacy that exists in the United States today. Further, I

use the term ‘ethnoracial’ to include the complexities of ethnic and national identity that go parallel with racial identity.

Racial categories and the meaning of race are given meaning by their specific social contexts and histories (Omi and Winant 1994, 11). The meaning of race is shaped in personal practice and collective action throughout society. For example, while it is true that there is no biological category that is meaningful we can derive from the terms ‘black’ or ‘white’, it is true that those labeled ‘black’ or ‘white’ by society are arrested or jailed at disproportionate rates and this becomes a social reality affecting the lives of both social groups.

Further, race is a part of discourse in American society, allowing us to institutionally communicate and coherently shape our perceptions of reality (DiAngelo 2010, 3). Discourses are shaped by social and historic forces, usually in the interests of specific groups of people in power relations (DiAngelo 2010, 3). Scholars argued that discourses that are intended to challenge ethnoracial status quo relations, such as “color-blind” or “multiculturalist” ideology can be co-opted by the dominant interests (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Thus, race as a social construct and its terminology are useful in exploring how ideologies are reproduced or challenged.

Organization of Research

This work is divided into four chapters overlooking my experience at KEQL. Throughout these chapters, I expound on the cultural practices that appeared to reproduce or challenge the ethnoracial ideology of multiculturalism.

Chapter one discusses the structural differences between KEQL and other affiliate stations and how this structure, coupled with the director's personal philosophy, created the landscape for what he called a unique philosophy to constructing news and representations of ethnoracial minorities. I will discuss how the news model worked to further his cause while also creating room for different kinds of inaccurate portrayals to be reproduced. These portrayals bear striking resemblance to some of the problems of multiculturalist ideology.

Chapter two will be devoted to discussion about the directors' terms "philosophy" and "diversity," and how these concepts were understood in varying ways by workers. I examine the strengths and weaknesses of this philosophy with respect to countering multiculturalist ideology. In addition, while management was confident that its' structure provided freedom to pursue counter-images to overt ethnoracial imagery in affiliate news, employee discourse on the effectiveness of this goal was mixed at best. Further, I investigate the presence of a newsroom diversity council that was purported to handle the issue of diversity and inclusion of ethnoracial minorities. My research shows how their activities were not conducive to furthering management's goals of challenging inaccurate portrayals of ethnoracial minorities.

Chapter three will be devoted to discussing systematic differences in how white and non-white employee differences in and similarities in behavior were seen and spoken of. There were many significant moments at KEQL where I noticed the inclusion or exclusion of viewpoints of non-white voices in the newsroom. Where and when voices were included or considered legitimate for input depended heavily on the content

involved, and I will discuss how my interviews corroborated my participant observations on these practices.

Chapter four analyzes the results of a survey conducted towards the end of my time at KEQL. I will contrast these findings with the rest of my research and use these results to propose a set of policy recommendations for the news station to more fully attain management and employee goals regarding representations of non-white citizens in the news.

Chapter five will include a review of the major points of each chapter, a discussion on the limitations of my research, a set of policy suggestions for KEQL, and my own personal reflections on the time I spent at the station.

TWO. SUBSCRIBER BASED NEWS:

PROTOCOL VS PRACTICE

Differing Structures of Producing News

The structure of doing news broadcasting in the United States is primarily based on the model of profit for shareholders, and revenue based on advertisements. This model is often referred to indirectly as *Advertisement-funded media* (Wilson II et al 2003, 43). Media critics have observed that this model constrains the spectrum of chosen viewpoints, representations, and symbols used to represent communities to an audience (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). The images portrayed more often than not serve to reinforce the viewpoints of dominant members of a society (Wilson II et al 2003, 43).

Indeed, stories that are not necessarily representative of a population are chosen in spite of a group or an activity's prevalence (or lack thereof), leading to inaccurate characterizations. For example, throughout the 1990s, murder rates dropped 20% while coverage of murder rates increased 600%, thus inflating the perception of danger (Glassner 1999, xix). Authors such as Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman have written extensively on the advertisers' role as those providing the subsidies as outlets compete for their patronage (Herman and Chomsky, 16).

At KEQL, both management and hourly workers assured me that the station embodied a unique structure of doing news. This structure broke from the advertiser based model in fundamental respects: its subscription-based funding mechanisms and a 24-hour news cycle. This structure allowed management to employ a fundamentally different philosophy from ad-based media. In my time at KEQL, I observed that while the

subscriber-based model succeeds in some of managements key goals, it often reproduces ethno-racial ideology in American culture.

Structures form recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or even limit the choices and opportunities available for individuals to act upon (Barker 2005, 15). These structures can encompass workplace operations and economic classes to even the social formations of race. Media critics have observed since the 1980's that there are structural causes that influence the imagery represented in the media. The imagery is largely influenced by and based on capitalist systems of profit and growth (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 16). Most of the major news outlets in the United States and their affiliates are owned by large corporations, often referred to as the "Five Sisters" (Saffire, 2004). In turn, news corporations rely principally on advertisement-derived revenue to support the functioning of the business of the news cycle. Thus, part of the product that comes from news-commoditization is the very advertisements that run in between news segments.

If a news station runs a story that offends consumers, often advertisers will pull their endorsements to the stations and take their spending elsewhere. Consumer feedback and the profit motive are at the heart of decision making for what programs go on television. This process lays the ideological foundation for the formation of consensus and the spectrum of actual representations.

Staff Testimonials

In my very first meeting at KEQL, the director assured me that the station was built on an entirely different philosophy from "the guys across the street," or ad-based

news stations. The other stations, he reiterated, were doing what he called ‘irreparable damage’ to low-income and non-white members of communities by focusing incessantly on crime and other such tactics to fill their hourly news cast and tease consumers into watching past advertisement breaks. From the director’s standpoint, crime stories were often chosen for several structural reasons:

“These guys like to do crime stories. I get it, it’s cheap, it fits their business model. They have a bottom line to meet and I’m not gonna bash that. But it does irreparable harm to these communities. But it’s fast, it’s cheap, and it’s easy.”

The Director found this focus on crime problematic for people of color primarily because, as he put it:

“Crime is a racialized phenomenon in the news. You don’t see crime framed as a white-collar issue. You don’t even see poverty framed that way. It’s put as though it’s a black and brown problem. So this kind of coverage by the guys across the street creates this irreparable harm.”

The way the director explained it, this Subscriber-based nature of KEQL allowed him to fight inaccurate portrayals of ethnoracial groups. KEQL was available via subscription to a cable company and was thus included as a package for receiving cable service. KEQL did not operate as many other affiliates, a specific news corporation in itself. Consequently, KEQL was not as dependent on advertisements as big affiliate stations. This allowed less pressure to produce stories that conformed to the desires of a specific consumer group or towards the goal of corporate advertising revenues. The director assured me that while ratings were important, the station was not intended to turn a profit for the cable subscriber. To the contrary, he informed me that the station was a cost to the cable station.

Indeed, contrasted with the prevalence of crime in the local affiliate's news, the directing manager assured me that the station barely ever touched crime stories. I heard this sentiment echoed by many other workers at the station when I conducted interviews. Instead, the directing manager and middle management spoke repeatedly about what they termed "the philosophy of solutions based news." "Solutions based news coverage" was motivated around presenting ethno-racial and gender groups in different lights from what ad-based stations did. One manager told me:

"We try to present people in ways you wouldn't normally expect to see them portrayed and normalize them. Like, we had an entrepreneur here in Austin who was running a construction company up the road and it was a woman. So we decided to do some story on her and not mention it as a woman business owner or anything. We just presented it as normal that there might be a woman business owner."

Further, the 24-hour nature of the news cycle at KEQL allowed the director to implement his philosophy into news production. Compared to the local ad-based model of set hours and times ("10 and 6" as was repeated often), KEQL had full 24-hour availability. The Director repeatedly emphasized the importance of this factor in news production by affirming his flexibility and attention to detail in news selection and production. Since there was no pressure to cram certain compelling stories (e.g., crime) into a tight time frame, there was less pressure to find the cheapest, sensationalized stories in enough time to meet looming deadlines. One reporter commented:

"I don't have to get the story about the bus crashing and make it sound really terrible. Like, at least a few times a month you see one affiliate cover some story about a school bus wrecking and it's like "Tonight at ten, Horrible Bus Wreck! Are your kids safe?" but we don't have to resort to that. We probably would mention it in a small reel and maybe mention if someone was hurt, but that's it maybe."

Thus, as workers describe it, the main aspects of their model entail a lack of dependency on ad-based revenue and a 24-hour format that allows the staff to build the story flow around.

Framing a Philosophy

When I sat down to interview the director, he explained to me that his overarching philosophy emanated in part from his own past experience and social values. He spoke at length about growing up in the Jim Crow South and seeing “terrible things,” and later experiencing the “horrors of the Civil Rights movement” in Austin during the Vietnam War. Ultimately, in his words, this led him to take up broadcasting because he recognized huge social injustices that he wanted to correct. Out of this feeling, he insisted, came his groundwork for avoiding crime stories. Further, the philosophy led him to push his workers to seek out diverse voices for information in structuring the news to counter what some scholar argue is an imbalance in viewpoints (Gunter 2009, 43, Hays and Guardino, 2010.):

“What I have done is create an environment where we use what I call ‘purple people’. This means not deferring to official sources for all things. We talk to many aspects of a community, specifically the people damaged the most by the model of the other guys: people of color or people with low-income.”

Indeed, the station's very procedural handbook had protocols that echoed his very words. Station employees were instructed to “reach out to talk to someone other than a White male,” especially if the community is made up of predominantly more groups than White males (KEQL Handbook). Thus, the director's philosophy and the official handbook overlapped in a very key regard. In an interview with one participant, a 56 year old white news editor named Don, I heard this same sentiment echoed:

“I would reach out to the NAACP, but I was told by one local informant, this influential Black lady I came to call upon, that in the African-American community here, (the NAACP) was a political organization. She told me that it doesn’t always represent the interests of the community at large. So I try to broaden my base for insight to more local groups without other national ties.”

A young white-male photographer, Christoph also invoked this philosophy when I interviewed him. Further, he also explicitly connected the medias racialization of crime:

“But think of the influences that crime stories have on our society. I mean, crime usually occurs in lower socio-economic areas and usually that is black or Hispanic people. And that’s usually all these other affiliates do like KXAN. Well I mean, that’s not all that happens out in those communities, they have art, they have other great things but you never see it. So that does a lot of harm to the perception of these communities.”

When I discussed covert and subliminal racism with the news Director, he seemed aware of this phenomenon. He talked about the additions of on-ramps to Interstate 35 running through downtown. His comments were coated in sarcasm to drive home the point of injustice, explaining that the city constructed the ramps heading into West Austin first because “that’s the one that takes White people with money to buy plane tickets to the airport, because they got places to go.” Meanwhile, he informed me, the other ramp dealing with the lower-income part of the city was not constructed for another 10 years. Thus, management at the station seemed to have a grounded understanding of structural racism and privilege.

The subscriber based model allowed the director to implement a journalistic philosophy that stressed attention to doing investigative reporting with awareness of systematic social injustice. Further, the director exhibited ethnoracial awareness in sources and viewpoints. Needless to say, I was excited to hear such a progressive

awareness of ethnoracial awareness coming from the top of a news station, as well as echoed by other workers in the news station. However, while this philosophy carried much potential to counter dominant images reproduced by affiliates, I would find in my observations that blind spots still existed in reproducing the ethno-racial ideology of multiculturalism.

Effects of Implementation

Though the philosophy set out by the Director was a breath of fresh air, I was eager to see how this worked in application. On many ride alongs with photographers and reporters, as well as during informal discussions and interviews, I was privy to seeing and hearing about how the restrictions of time, scheduling, circumstance, and personal attitudes shaped the news. Many people at various levels of the station seemed aware of the over-arching philosophy and its protocol to avoid crime stories. However, there were various ways in which reporters or assignment editors either confirmed or deviated from the social and ethnoracial justice element of the director's philosophy.

The first ride-along I went on was with a young male photographer named Christoph, who was assigned to cover a community center promoting STEM education in Central Austin. That morning there was an astronaut delivering a speech to the children about achievement and overcoming adversity through hard work. Christoph told me early on that "it's the first Hispanic astronaut to tweet in Spanish from space, so I guess that's sort of important," followed by a chuckle and a head-shake. This was the first moment I felt what I would be aware of as a sort of shared White space¹; it felt to me as though Christoph's laughter after the statement derided the situation.

As we set up the camera inside the community center, we watched the astronaut take the stage. He began to give a speech talking about his humble beginnings in southern Texas, providing images via Power Point about how he got into college and worked hard to achieve his goals. While Christoph took shots of the speech, I observed the children in the seats. Most of the children were either Latino or black, though there were some white children. Before I knew it, Christoph alerted me that it was time to get going outside to set up for an interview.

The speech had not finished, so our only available interview was with the center director herself. Christoph asked the head of the program some questions about what the center does and why they had the astronaut there that day. The head of the program discussed how some of the children were involved in STEM training (Science, Technology, Education, and Math) for an after school program where they got involved in hands on activities. However, her main point was that this astronaut was a man from their background that could show that big dreams can be achieved.

We promptly left the center and headed back to the station for the 2 o'clock staff meeting. Christoph reminded me that this was simply a VOSOT, which would only run around 1-2 minutes on the hourly news wheel. VOSOT's, contrasted with "package" stories, were smaller stories with less attention to detail. The working assignment editor of the day determined what stories were VOSOTs and packages. Thus, in this case, Christoph only needed a few shots of the action and a quick interview with someone involved in the event. What was strange to me, however, was that we were not running late for the 2 o'clock meeting. We even had enough time to stop and fill up on gas and chat afterwards.

Some Voices Heard More than Others

It was not until I was involved in another ride-along a couple of days later that I noticed a difference in both a structural approach to stories and the individual interaction with the respondents. A couple of days after the astronaut story was filmed and run on the news wheel, I observed what was called a “morning live.” Morning lives were hour segments shot on scene and transmitted as it was filmed.

For the morning live, we went to a North Austin suburban summer program that incidentally was also pushing STEM education for young, school-age girls. In this story, we not only got to know the members of the center much more intimately, but the story itself was structured much more interactively. We spoke to the head of the program in an interview format as well as included the viewpoints of two young girls who were taking part in the program. The respondents were given time to present their viewpoints, personalities and, ultimately, a more humanistic element to the story.

What was most striking was that the respondents in the second story were all white respondents in a suburban community. Contrasted with my earlier ride-along, I never saw Christoph attempt to gain insight from any of the children at the community center, nor the outlooks of the astronaut giving the speech. This live story afforded him this ability to seek the input of the children involved.

These stories were far from outliers or anomalies at the station. To the contrary, the tendencies to include white or “neutral” sounding topics and discrepancy of ethnoracial minority voices fit with other data documented in my time at KEQL.

Reflections on Protocol and Practice

In gaining direct insight from the suburban white respondents, I and other viewers were given a personable image or representation to identify with. It is true that the message from the community center story carries no direct overtones of ethnoracial inferiority. Indeed, the story had a positive message on the surface that definitely detracts from the sensationalized view of crime. I would be remiss if I downplayed the significance of the station's efforts to decrease crime coverage as a way to combat inaccurate racial portrayals. However, though the station did a fine job in aiming for stories that did not fit the typical racialized "crime time", it is certainly not the whole truth when it comes how the station reproduced other inaccurate portrayals.

But with a lack of insight from the non-white children or the non-white speaker talking to the children about achieving success, I got the impression that the children only need to hear a message of hard work to overcome their community's shortcomings. Viewers were not given the insights or personal contributions of the largely ethnoracial minority makeup of the children involved in the community center. This played right into the implications of multiculturalist ideology. While it was hardly Christoph's intent to convey an image of these children lacking initiative, the images conveyed subtly gave that impression.

In contrast, the children in the suburban STEM program looked eager to talk about their experiences because they were given a platform to do so. We learned the student's names, their accomplishments at the program, and their interests in science. The representation of the children going out to achieve, increasing their cultural competence

with new skills, was embedded in the story. Thus, the only difference on display was a matter of ethno-racial cultural difference. One group is actively out to achieve more while the other simply has to be told to do so.

It appeared to me that the inaccurate images stated in worker protocols were the images that white assignment editors and managers saw as problematic. Thus, injustice was defined first and foremost through the filter of white management. Outside of “avoiding crime,” the workers were filling in what constituted diversity and culturally sensitive portrayals from their own social understandings. This left not only a gap in whose voices were chosen to be interviewed for similar story content, it left a gap in between the stated goals of fighting covert racially unjust images stated by the director and what was being filmed. This phenomenon in handling “diversity” in the workplace has been studied by Unzueta, et al (2012) and will be expounded on in the following chapter.

THREE. DIVERSITY AT KEQL: UNDERSTOOD BY WHOM?

Diversity is “Just Understood”

Getting an opportunity to shadow workers at KEQL was not an easy task. Instead of asking each station’s directors if I could study race, ethnicity, and ideology in their newsroom, I opted for less charged terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘cultural awareness.’ Many other stations I spoke with before KEQL lacked interest or outright stated that “there wouldn’t be any reason for to study their workplace culture.” A recurrent theme in these statements was that diversity was not a problem in their work. Further, they repeatedly told me that diversity was important or was “just understood” as a part of what they did as journalists and broadcasters. Therefore they assured me they “wouldn’t have much to share or teach me” about this topic.

What I found curious was the contradictory nature of the phrasing. If it was so well “understood” then to the contrary there should have been a lot for me to learn from them. Regardless, KEQL did not differ much in this respect. In fact, diversity was not something they routinely or explicitly taught in regular employee training; it was described by the director as a shared ethic embedded in their everyday practices.

As discussed in Chapter I, the director painted a picture of a unique newsroom structure and culture shaped by what he called a philosophy of diversity based on feelings of ethnoracial social justice. In this chapter, I investigate attitudes of workers in the station about the idea of ‘diversity’ at KEQL and how the stations diversity council relates to the experiences of workers in the newsroom culture of KEQL. Further, I

explore how these experiences may further social tendencies linked to the ideology of multiculturalism.

Ideology is a way of making embedded practices and systematic interactions appear normal or self-evident (Makus 1990, 499). With this in mind, the use of the term ‘philosophy’ at KEQL seemed to mirror the use of the explicit use of the term ideology as an overt set of goals or ideas. Indeed, it was this philosophy that laid the groundwork for the culture of diversity at the station. The director made it clear that KEQL’s philosophy came from a place of concern for social justice. In my research, however, I found that where the director’s philosophy was not made clear, worker’s own tendencies to reinforce or enact their own ingrained prejudices became predominant.

In my interviews, the ‘understood’ and accepted nature of diversity varied greatly depending on who I spoke with at distinct levels of the newsroom hierarchy. It was in my interviews and intimate conversations during observation of the news room that I found disjunctions regarding what was understood.

Early Signs of Dissatisfaction with Diversity

Karl, a 28 year-old African-American male, was an employee in the master control room that I worked with for many mornings in my stint with the station. His testimonial, among those of others, gave me insight into how others in the station viewed just how inclusive this understood idea of diversity really was.

One morning during his lunch break, Karl and I walked over to Chick-Fil-A to grab some breakfast to eat back in the station. On the way there he asked me my opinion regarding the Trayon Martin case; Martin was a teenage African-American male who had

been killed by a local neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman in 2012. This was a very controversial issue in the news at the time, and as an ethnographer I decided to respond with some caution. I told him my feelings on the death of Trayvon; I found that we agreed almost wholeheartedly. Further, I remarked that I didn't like how the major media outlets treated the case, making Trayvon out to be a thug of some sort.

Karl remarked, "Yeah, I agree. I went to a protest about Trayvon here in Austin, it was a pretty big deal. Our station didn't cover it, but that's no big shocker to me." Tellingly, he followed this remark with a slight chuckle. I asked him what he meant by that and he followed up by saying, "I mean, they just haven't spent much time covering local reactions to this case at all." He went on to tell me that there had been recent controversial shootings in the area of cops that killed black males. According to Karl, KEQL had paid only scant attention to these types of stories. He continued, "Why wouldn't we cover Trayvon? I mean the atmosphere of that kind of topic is around here for sure."

This statement held heavy significance for me as time went on. At first, I couldn't think of an immediate reason why the station *would* necessarily want to cover local reactions of what was not really a local issue. However, in my interview with an assignment editor I was told that the station had won a supposedly prestigious award in 2001 for its coverage of September 11th attacks in New York City by covering local perspectives. Don, a 56 year old white news editor told me:

"Our station actually learned about details on the terrorists via investigating local pilot's knowledge of their training. KEQL was one of two stations in the country to pick up on this story before the major media outlets got to it. I really pride myself and our station prides itself on that kind of local coverage and investigation of major events."

Afterwards, I got the distinct impression Karl had expressed his frustration because he knew there was a precedent for the station to cover nationwide issues with a local spin. Some weeks later in our sit-down interview, Karl told me, “Well, we actually wound up eventually covering some local perspectives (on Trayvon Martin) when the verdict was decided. But you know, that was after everyone had their minds made up.”

First Encounters with the Diversity Council

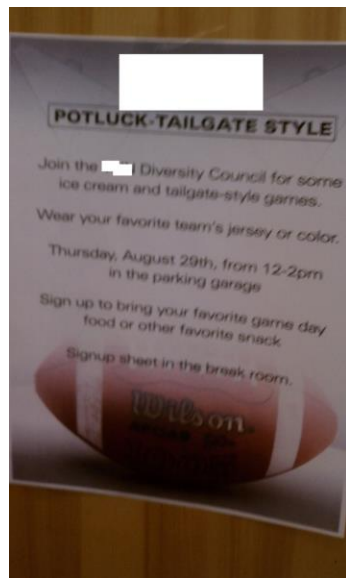
After hearing about Karl’s thoughts on the lack of attention to these stories, I asked his thoughts on the station’s diversity ethic. In fact, it was a conversation with Karl where I first learned about the station’s Diversity Council. I was shocked to have never heard of this group in any of my interactions with management before coming to KEQL.

Karl explained, “Yeah, we got a diversity council. I admit I’ve never taken part in it and maybe I should, obviously.” After saying ‘obviously’ Carl pointed to his dark skin color. He went on to tell me that he didn’t feel that getting involved would mean much. From what he had gathered, the council involved itself in little more than organizing birthdays and holiday celebrations. He made a point to tell me more than once that he felt “they should probably name it something else.”

Initially, my own experience told me his assessment might be true. In my own time in various workplaces there was a tendency to treat diversity activities as little more than Fourth of July parties. However, I also thought it likely that the council did much more and that maybe his perceptions would be different if he had been encouraged to be involved.

Interestingly, on my way out of the station that very afternoon I saw a picture posted on the exit door sponsored by the Diversity Council itself (See Figure 1). The flier encouraged employees to wear their favorite football shirts as an expression of diversity in the newsroom. I was getting more of an idea of what Karl had alluded to.

Figure 1 – Advertisement by the KEQL Diversity Council.



Diverse Understandings of a Shared Ethic

When I asked Carla, a 26 year old African-American producer, in our interview if she had ever participated in the diversity council she replied that she had not and that she did not really know what the council did. Further, when I asked what effect the council had on promoting diverse inclusion of ethnoracial topics, she remarked,

“I mean, I know we’re supposed to be about diversity but I’m not sure what that means when I think of the diversity council. I know they organize peoples birthday announcements and stuff like that. I know they are doing stuff for veterans this year but I don’t know what they do for the ethnoracial topics.”

When I asked management about the council, Cristine, the 40 year-old Asian-American female Head Producer (the second highest position in the newsroom) told me, “Diversity, you know, it’s a great corporate initiative for one, but we have kinda taken that idea and made it into our own thing. For instance last year we had a goal to see how much better we could represent military veterans.”

Even in Cristine’s examples, the focus was very different from the philosophy of the director’s goals of ethnoracial justice. Cristine told me of her own experiences with diversity scenarios in the workplace:

“It’s difficult to be a minority and not feel like I’m representing an entire race when I do something. But then again I’m Asian so you know; it’s mainly a lot of positive stereotypes that people expect from you. It’s not the same as being Latino or Black. So you definitely have ideas of what people are figuring about you. But my last name is Hispanic since I’m Filipina so a lot of people think – oh here’s this little Latina woman, she’ll be great and then I hit them with the fact that I’m Asian and it’s different then. They warm up to me quicker and actually ask my input more.”

Initially, I was taken aback by Cristine’s assessment of how she was received. Being viewed as Latina was, in her eyes, seen as some sort of commodity or trophy figure. Her Asian-American identity being revealed often gave her more legitimacy. I found this trend of Latino/Latina identity as being invisible or un-credited to reoccur in my data throughout my time at the station.

To me, Cristine’s comments also reflected a similar trend from discussing diversity with the director. Both, in certain aspects of their lives, feel intimately affected in some sense by the effects of racial and gender injustice. Further, both of them seemed comfortable discussing these experiences with me. However, though she seemed

personally committed to taking on these issues rhetorically in our interview, most of her examples were not related to diminishing the “irreparable damage” done to people of color that the director made clear to me.

Another Diversity Council member, a 25 year-old white female associate producer named Kathy, told me about diversity, “Well, we have an atheist and a lot of religious discussions about how we are going to cover something. So there’s definitely understanding of other viewpoints in the newsroom, so I would say we have people from all walks of life contributing to what goes on.”

Indeed, as I moved further away from the director’s office and into the office staff of producers and photographers, the focus and practice of implementing diversity deviated significantly. Personally, I found it interesting to hear about the religious diversity Kathy talked about. But the lack of discussing race as a Diversity Council objective began to stick out more and more. The only universally “understood” element of diversity was to avoid crime.

In addition, aside from Christine, every member of the Diversity Council was white. And given Christine’s opinion that her ethnoracial category as Asian-American did not constitute the kind of negative imagery that typically comes with being a ethnoracial minority, I started to question the kind of inclusion that was taking place in the Diversity Council.

Accounting for Shortfalls with Diversity

In a follow up interview with the director towards the end of my stint, I asked him if he felt his idea of implementing inclusion and diversity as a philosophy fell short in any

significant ways. His response was that he felt as far as content, his philosophy was “as good as it could be, given the networks constraints.” Remarkably, here the director broke from previously celebrating his lack of constraints from his news model. He now claimed that his structural constraints were what explained any shortcomings. What’s more, neither he nor Christine would elaborate on what structural constraints they felt held back the goals of the philosophy.

Most notably, the director brought up the issue of diversity in hiring and staffing on his own. He noted that “I haven’t been able to hire as many people of color as I would have liked, to be honest.” His contention was that since journalism and broadcasting was not typically a high paying career, economically disadvantaged people who get to college are not going to usually go for lower paying journalism work.

He allowed that “some may say that my viewpoint there is wrong, but that’s how I’ve seen it play out.” He went on to say that “most of the people that work here have got to be on some kind of assistance. These hipster white kids working here are getting assistance of some sort, I know they can’t afford these Austin high-rise places with the money they get paid.”

Initially, I felt there was a grain of truth to his statement on why there were more suburban white employees at KEQL. Regardless, I found it hard to overcome the wide rift in viewpoint between his philosophy and the understanding of many in the news room. I will investigate the director’s statements further in Chapter 4 when assessing the answers to the surveys I administered towards the end of my time at KEQL.

Straying from the Philosophy

While some members of the Diversity Council believed that they were generally inclusive of diversity in what they did for the station, the feeling of disconnect from other employees remained. I heard various employees express skepticism about how deeply or seriously diversity was considered at KEQL. Whatever ways the council felt they had made it into “their own thing”, it did not line up with the directors goal of correcting social injustice and inaccurate ethno-racial perceptions. The focus on non-racial and non-gender roles as examples, alongside examples such as the flier I saw, embodied this disconnect.

After these interviews and encounters, I started to feel as though the practices of the newsroom definitely challenged a certain set of inaccurate images regarding minorities (e.g., crime). But more and more it seemed these were images that white management felt were problematic. Further, the focus on avoiding crime appeared to be the only element of the director’s philosophy that was carried out as promoting diversity. This allowed employees to “fill in the gaps” with their own personal understandings of what diversity was.

My interactions with Karl gave me senses of this worker disconnect in his comments about not being included in the council and his skepticism about their work. What I did not anticipate, however, was the level at which employee’s personal interactions with each other reflected ways in which multiculturalist ideology permeated their social relationships.

FOUR. SHARED ETHNORACIAL SPACE

IN KEQL CULTURAL PRACTICES

Whiteness and Shared Ethnoracial Space

Multiculturalism is the erasing of historical injustices towards ethnoracial minorities and the repositioning of the white liberal as the converted, enlightened, and racially aware model citizen (Melamed 2006, 7). He or she has opened a once closed off heart to multi-cultural attitudes and this image has become the ideal ethnoracial citizen in the post-civil rights era United States. According to multiculturalist ideology, inequalities between ethno-racial groups are the result of cultural differences or even deficiencies (Kim 2008, 19). Further, though groups may exist unequally due to the alleged monocultural ‘deficiencies’, policy inaction to address ethnoracial inequalities is framed as respecting cultural differences; whatever benefits are accrued for some in these relations are seen as the “just desserts” of multicultural citizens who lack these deficiencies (Melamed 2006, 7).

These monocultural deficiencies are often manifested in several ways: a lack of work ethic, a lack of emphasis on education, or as some have simply named it, a “culture of poverty” (Moynihan 1969, Cohen 2005). Even national leaders such as President Obama have rhetorically furthered these individualized or culture-specific conceptions of deficiencies which neglect structural constraints on citizens (Hairston, 2013).

At KEQL, I heard many comments that reflected the perceptions of a lack of work ethic and they were often frequently directed explicitly or covertly at non-white employees. This selective license to deride black or Latino workers work ethic privately

formed what I call a shared White space. In this chapter I will discuss this White space and how in my experience it shaped racist practices in the news room. Further, I will investigate how these practices were linked to the ideology of multiculturalism.

Often due to circumstances of scheduling and availability, one of the employees I was frequently able to ride along with was a young, 25 year old white male photographer named Christoph. He and I became comfortable with each other as weeks went by. On days where I was scheduled with him, we had a recurring catch-up conversation.

Christoph appeared to assume I was white for most of my time at KEQL. While he never came out and explicitly called me white, it did not take me long to connect the dots. I recall statements he made to me that gave me this feeling. For example, in ride-along observations I recall him saying things like “I’m not trying to make like a racist statement about Black people, we can’t do that *obviously*” or “Latinos are important, don’t get me wrong, but if we were to say [a Latino astronaut being given praise for the first tweet in Spanish in space] is sort of silly, you know we’d be called racist or something.”

These statements gave me a feeling that the “we” he alluded to was not black or Latino. It also made me aware that we shared a comfort zone in his eyes; a space of whiteness that he felt relaxed enough in to make statements about racial anxieties. He expressed both a derision of ethnoracial minority accomplishments while simultaneously claiming that he “knew” he would be called a racist. What I found even more interesting is that he assumed I would be joining him in the label of being a “racist,” as though his racist behavior would somehow be shared with me. Indeed, as I got to know Christoph I

noticed he would let me know about these ethnoracial anxieties through conversations relating to his job and his concern with journalism.

Ambition vs. “Wishy-Washy” Passivity

One early Monday morning Christoph took me on a ride-along to shoot footage of a road-closure on Highway 290 heading West of Austin, Texas. This was the furthest outside of downtown Austin I had been with any KEQL member to cover news. He told me on the way there that afterwards he was going to have to get back to the station, edit the story himself, and piece it together so that an anchor could read over it. Though he appeared excited to be able to put this story together, I couldn't help but notice him shake his head and widen his eyes when talking about it. It was at this point that he began talking about his producer Donna.

Donna was an African-American female producer who was overseeing his story that morning. Christoph had a cell phone that the station lent out so that he could contact her in the event of any unforeseen problems with his story. Upon arriving at the road closure, Christoph found that the police had closed off the road in a way that he couldn't get a decent shot of the highway itself. When he called Donna to explain the problem, I saw him silently shake his head when listening to her response.

After getting off the phone, he scoffed and remarked, “Come on, Donna, make a decision. You're not gonna get very far in this business by being passive, and that's how she is.” He would go on to add that “I'm not gonna go in and tell her how to do her job, but she needs to not be so wishy-washy with me, be more direct.”

What I first found most striking about his remarks was that he himself had not

actively confronted Donna in any way. He instead opted to make his complaint to me after getting off of the phone. However, it wasn't until later that I realized he was calling into question the hard-work or drive of a supervisor. If anything, she might have insight as to how to truly get ahead in the news given that she had already advanced. In any case, Christoph appeared not to consider these things when deriding his supervisor.

Experience and Limitations through Racialized Lenses

This attitude didn't stop in our interaction that morning. In my sit-down interview with Christoph, he talked at length about the future of KEQL and its workers. He noted, as he shrugged and shook his head,

“If you are a one trick pony and you're thinking that way is where journalism is going, you won't last. Journalism is changing big time. You gotta be multifaceted and some people here like Donna and Carl don't do much outside of what they are asked to do. That's not gonna last for them and you gotta wonder about their futures, their careers.”

Interestingly, Christoph spoke warmly on occasion about others at KEQL with similar limitations in job responsibilities. According to Christoph, Don, a 56 year old white male assignment editor, was “like a cool uncle around the place. He's got a lot of insight into his role in the newsroom with his editing and everything.” Don, he said, “has been doing his thing for years, he's got a lot of great stories.” In this case, when the ethno-racial makeup of a worker was similar to Christoph, his criticism of work ethic or limited titles weren't part of the description of the individual. However, when he and the subject were more dissimilar in ethno-racial backgrounds, the criticism was one of the first traits mentioned about them in our day to day interactions.

When Christoph spoke at length about these opinions, he did so when we were alone or, at most, in the presence of at least one other white employee. Whenever Christoph and I would hang out around Karl while inside the newsroom, his demeanor (as well as mine) changed significantly. Christoph in one instance showered Karl with compliments, “This is my main man! Master of the Control Room! (laughter) You catch the Rangers game?” He alluded to Karl being the master of the control room, the single department where Karl worked. This comment came off to me as slightly patronizing when I considered Christoph’s thoughts on people working in one spot in the news room.

Indeed, I felt a changing of the guard when it was time for Christoph to display his feelings of camaraderie with Karl and when it was safe for him to confide in me to talk about his other thoughts. Christoph was able to express his thoughts on black workers using terms that refer to their drive, their lack of ambition, or other sorts of cultural deficiencies to account for not getting ahead – even with workers of a higher position than him in the newsroom, like Donna. Meanwhile, based on my participant observation, Christoph and other younger white workers lauded older white workers for what they saw as limitations with Karl or Donna.

For a time, I chalked up the sincerity with naming Don an “uncle” type due to his being much older than the other workers. However, this was until I considered a 50 year old Master Control worker named Paulo. Paulo was Latino and had over five years experience at KEQL and was in charge of overseeing the stations sports news wheels, according to a casual conversation I had with him one morning. While he worked solely in the Master Control room during mornings, he was a fix-it type of personality around the newsroom. He was able to help solve computer issues with reporters and producers,

and had a sort of handy-man knowledge about other technical issues in the newsroom. He was warm, friendly, and outgoing with nearly everyone in the newsroom from what I saw and heard from others.

Invisibility and Visibility of Presence and Potential at KEQL

While I was never afforded an opportunity to directly interact with him, I noticed his presence constantly helping in the workplace. However, when I asked around about Paulo, people generally knew little to nothing about him. In fact, though he was a full-time employee, some did not even know his name without second guessing. Indeed, my experience with seeing Paulo's name little known rang true when I thought of Cristine's comments on how Latino/Latina identity was seldom taken as seriously as other ethnoracial markers. Most importantly in this case, Paulo was regarded as friendly, outgoing, and helpful in many areas while being seldom noticed or lauded for his vast experience. I was becoming less certain that this imbalanced view of limitations and work deficiencies was about age.

Christoph's perceptions about limitations in work abilities did not seem to escape Karl or Donna. Donna once told me in an afternoon shadowing her that "it's a good thing I minored in Accounting in school, just in case you know... I need a plan B!" followed by a quick laugh. She followed up by saying that she did enjoy her job and couldn't truly imagine doing much of anything else. What is important though is that Donna seemed aware that having another option for work was a reality for her.

At the end of all of my sit-down interviews, I asked participants if they had any words of advice for people entering journalism or broadcasting. Karl was interestingly

the only one to open and close his response with “have a back-up plan.” He went to on to say that there are some careers whose skills can translate over to other fields somewhat easily, but journalism was not one of them. He mentioned that he had training in a couple of other fields so his options were always open, even though he said “I don’t think I would leave, though. I do like what I do a lot.” Karl’s “limited” experience in only working on part of the newsroom may have appeared to be a deficiency or a hindrance in the eyes of Christoph. However, this perception neglected the fact that Karl had apparently gained insight into other avenues for careers.

Meanwhile, when I interviewed Don, the older white news editor who Christoph admired, I asked what his work experience was outside of broadcasting. He told me, “Oh nothing! Haha, I just kind of stumbled into this work and have kept at it ever since.” In the case of Don where he actually had been solely working in his particular niche in broadcasting, Christoph did not cast his position in the workplace as being deficient.

Yet while Christoph made these criticisms of non-white workers, his comment that he would not try to tell any of them how to do their job reminded me of what I’ve written about with multiculturalism and the “just desserts” of the monocultural deficiencies (Melamed 2006, 55). While there may be differences, multiculturalism promotes respecting the cultural uniqueness of everyone even if they are unequal. Thus, Christoph in practice is able to deride the non-white workers lack of will or work ethic while maintaining effectively there is nothing to be done on ethnoracial matters.

The “Just Desserts” of Being Groomed

Christoph, incidentally, made it clear to me on ride-along conversations and our interview that he was steadily on the path to being promoted. “I’m being trained right now as a reporter, so on any given day I have a number of hats I wear. I can come in and be a photographer one day but another I might need to be a reporter and shoot my own story, so I’m taking on a lot of responsibility.”

This instance of a non-managerial employee subtly dividing himself from other workers to strategically identify with white management was reminiscent of the “Wages of Whiteness” as articulated by David Roediger (1994). Roediger argued that white workers in American history have carved out their identity as a working class along race based lines seeking to be distinguished from the marginalized black racial enslaved and later working class (Roediger, 116).

In the case of KEQL, Christoph certainly does not appear to hold any overt contemptuous attitudes towards black workers. However, his language and behavior suggested his aligning with older managerial types who were white while finding ways to distance him and the white older workers from the non-white workers. Christoph adopted an attitude of working hard and taking on responsibility to get ahead while differentiating himself from people of color who, in his eyes, were just not working hard.

Simultaneously, he openly avoided the idea of telling them how to do their job, suggesting he did not feel asking them to change was in order. Thus, any rewards he accrued from aligning himself with older white established workers would be the “just desserts of his multicultural ethic.

Ethnoracial Space at KEQL Staff Meetings

When spending time in morning staff meetings, I noticed the highest degree of daily ethnoracial segregation at KEQL. The staff meeting room was located on the far right corner of the back of the newsroom. There was a sliding glass pane door and window which was kept open during the meetings. Every morning at 9 A.M. the director Mike and several producers and assignment editors assembled at the table to discuss the unfolding news stories that day and how they would be processed. Standing up in the room were typically other producers, reporters, and photographers. There was never any room for everyone to fit in the meeting space, so there were always at least 8 or 9 other employees assembled to listen outside the room.

There were six chairs at the table. Mike the director always sat at the head of the table. Every one of the producers sitting with him at the table were white men and women. Usually standing behind Mike in a somewhat looming, overhead position was Don. The rest of the reporters and photographers in the room were white or Latino. Their input was usually welcomed with some acceptance. However, the most striking thing to me in these meetings was how little black employees spoke up and how distant they were from the meeting table. I typically noticed 3-4 black employees seated outside the room paying attention, seldom offering input or being asked their input. The assignment editors usually interacted with them towards the end of the meeting before everyone went their separate ways.

One morning, however, I did notice a set of interactions that broke from the norm of silence from black employees. Stan, an anchor for the stations political commentary

program, approached Donna and told her, “I like what you did with your hair. Looks pretty good!” and “Does it take you a while to get it done like that?” Donna accepted the compliment politely and answered his question. However, this was asked just before the meeting broke.

This was the only time I ever saw Donna approached directly by anyone during the news meeting in a matter that did not have to do with being assigned a story or a specific instruction about her job. When suggestions were being asked for on various occasions, she was one of the only people who was never engaged by the director or other managerial employees.

One morning I approached Carla, a young black producer standing outside the staff meeting. I asked her why she wasn’t inside with everyone else and she simply replied “Oh, I’m just not a people person at all.” However, when shadowing her day-to-day she was quite social with people sitting around her desk and with whom she worked directly.

When I asked her in a sit-down interview if she felt like there was an air of inclusion in the newsroom, she responded with a “Yes.” Later in the interview, however, told me she could not think of an instance where she was included in giving suggestions on a major story’s development. Later, however, she recalled that sometimes she was asked about things like “whether we should use the word ‘black’ or ‘African-American’ in a story, but other than that I guess I never get asked.” Thus, Carla was only asked for input on a story’s development when it was on an explicitly ethnoracial question, not with regards to the shaping of the story overall.

This is reminiscent of assumptions about intercultural “expertise” briefly researched by Heike Graf (2010). According to Graf, non-white ethnoracial minorities felt as though they were designated experts on matters of race and ethnicity by virtue of their own identity, not due to any expertise or background in studying the matter (Graf 2010, 100). At KEQL, Karla could not recall an instance where she as a producer was asked to give key suggestions for a story’s formation but she could recall being asked to give suggestions on what to call black people in stories.

The voices that were chosen as relevant for discussing diversity and its implementation into daily procedures by cultural practice at KEQL were predominantly white voices. Further, the white employees I got closest to at the station routinely derided the work behavior of non-white employees (even those higher in management than them). At the same time, they overlooked these same tendencies in white employees they identified with. By inclusion in the diversity council, white employees were given a moniker of being involved in a group that overtly accepted diversity and could chalk up any short-comings of those not present as having a lack of motivation. They could deride the work of others as due to their own “passivity” and “lack of drive.” Many of these tendencies seemed to reproduce the behavior of multiculturalist ideology.

FIVE. SURVEY AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS.

Towards the end of my stint at KEQL, I administered surveys to 30 participants in the newsroom – nearly half of the employees. My observation hours and interviews were limited to either who was available on the schedule on a given day or whose schedule was flexible enough. Therefore, I administered surveys to get a larger sample and broader idea of the kinds of feelings many employees had with regards to diversity in both the news room and what was produced for the news. I administered the surveys on August 31st, 2013. Some of those who took the survey were people who I interviewed for this project, but the majority of the people receiving the surveys were people who I had not had opportunities to interview or observe in depth. These surveys strengthen my analysis, assertions and conclusions.

Employees were asked questions such as how often they made efforts to include diversity or cultural awareness into their job responsibilities, how often management promotes inclusion of these topics into work responsibilities, and how well they thought the station did at implementing diversity and cultural awareness overall.

Further, respondents were given a blank space to provide their age and gender and ethnoracial identity. My hypothesis was that most workers would report actively including diversity, since the director made it a point to bring up this philosophy so often. Further, I expected most respondents to report that management was doing an adequate job of promoting inclusion of cultural awareness. Finally, I anticipated overall satisfaction with how the station implemented these policies. Overall, the results matched my expectation that most would report including diversity into their work

routines. However, I was surprised by the consensus of many who reported a lack of satisfaction in how the station handled diversity overall.

Survey Results

The results of the survey reveal a general personal acceptance of values of diversity and cultural awareness in the newsroom, and that workers were generally mindful of these values in implementing their work. However, contrary to my expectations, worker attitudes on how well the station as a whole acted to further these values were mixed and slightly leaning towards negative.

When asked how well the station's management did to promote the values of diversity and cultural awareness in the newsroom, most KEQL workers answered positively in some sense, with roughly 16% responding "Not well" (See Table 1). Most respondents felt management did anywhere from Outstanding to More or less okay and generally positive about the way management promoted the inclusion of diversity and cultural awareness.

Table 1.1 – How well does management promote Diversity? Overall.

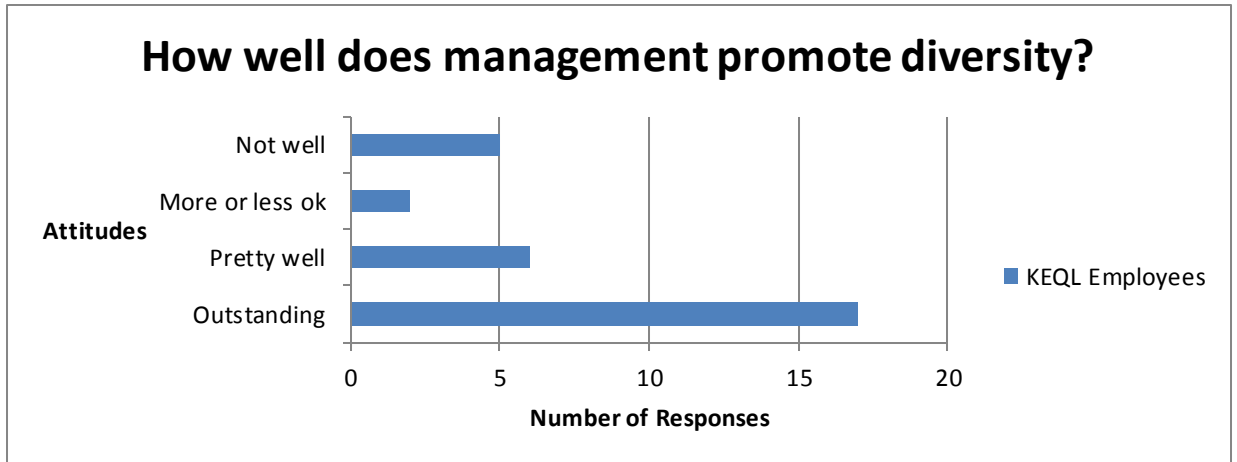
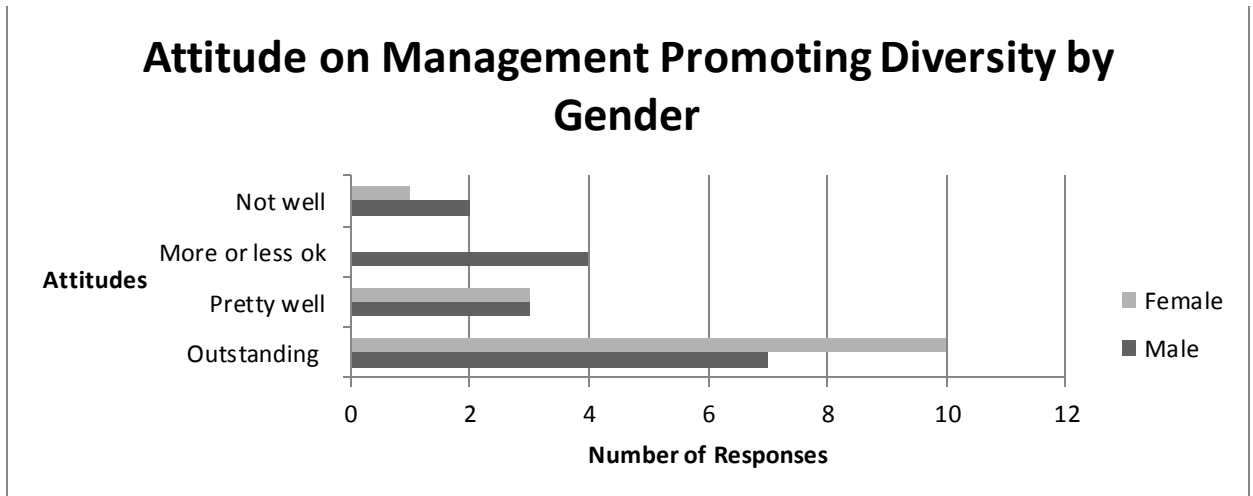


Table 1.2 - How well does management promote Diversity? By Gender.



The next question focused on how often participants worked to include diversity at KEQL. When asked how often workers included notions of diversity or cultural awareness in their role as a news worker, the vast majority of respondents said “Almost always” or “Very often” (See Table 2).

These results correlated with my participant observation findings. In everyday conversation, most employees would speak openly about how they valued the community

of Austin and took the task of including diversity and awareness into their work seriously. Often, they contrasted their work culture with that of other local stations on this very basis. Thus, an overwhelming number of workers in this sample felt that their values lined up with some semblance of diversity and awareness.

Table 2.1 – How often do you include Diversity in News Production? Overall.

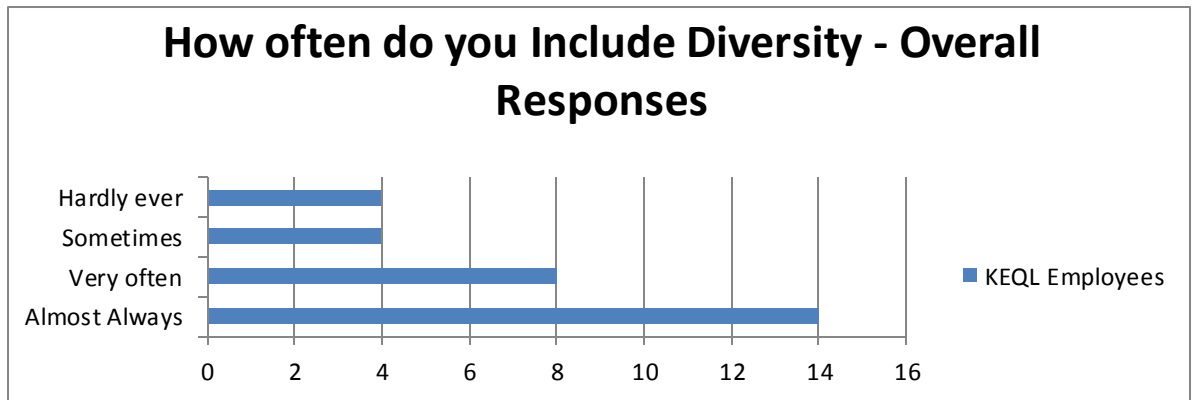


Table 2.2 How often do you include Diversity in News Production? By Gender.

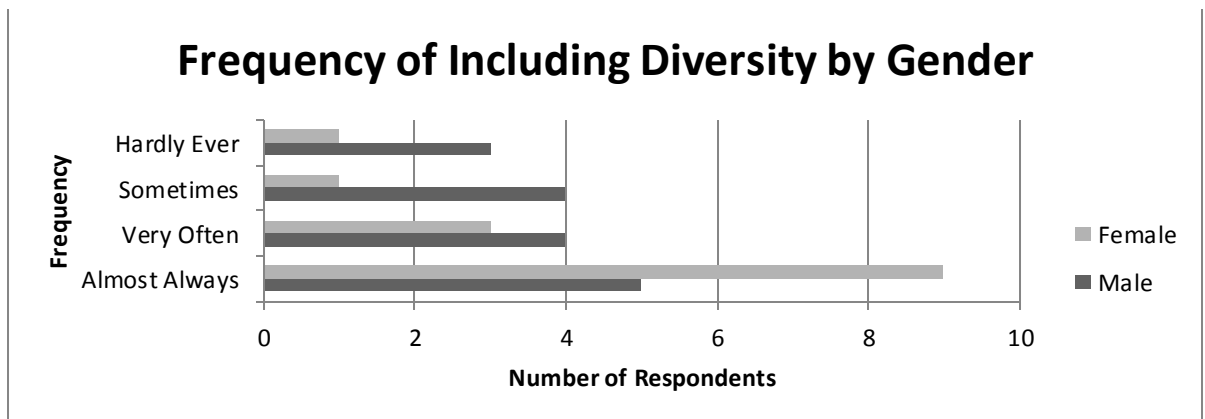
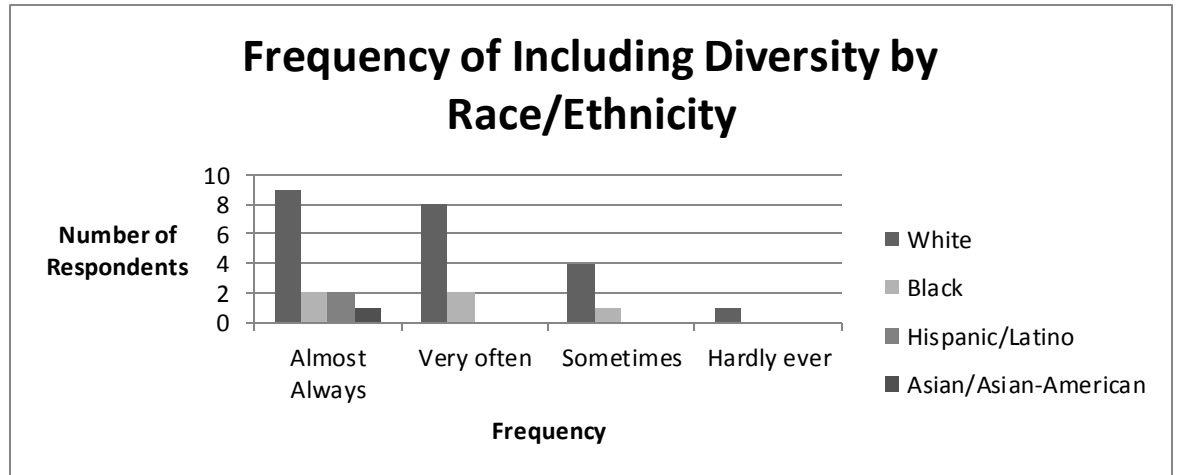


Table 2.3 How often do you include Diversity in News Production? By Race/Ethnicity.



However, what struck me as the most interesting were the responses on how the station did overall in implementing the values of diversity. Only 4 of respondents answered “Outstanding”, 5 answered “Quite Well”, 8 said “More or less okay”, and 13 answered “Not well.” Thus, the decisive majority of respondents do not feel that the station does an adequate job of addressing the issue of diversity.

Table 3.1 – How well does the station perform? Overall

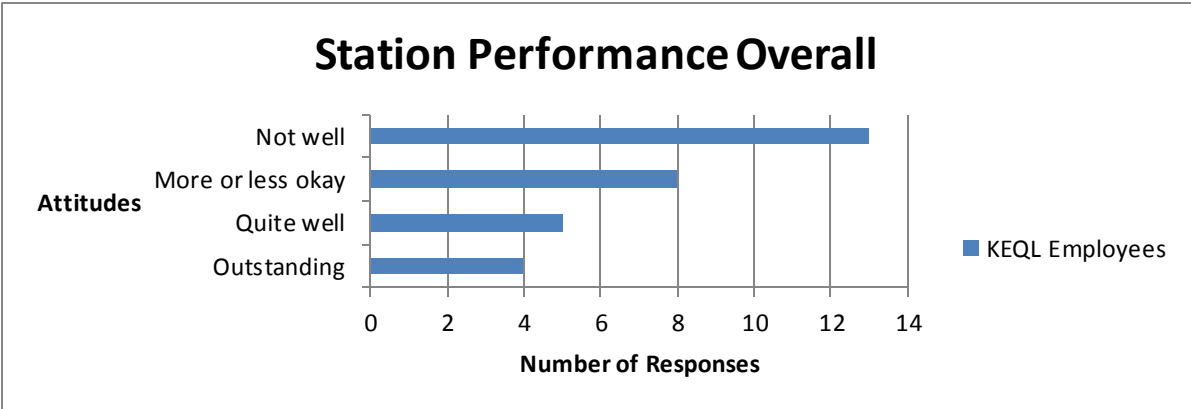


Table 3.2- How well does the station perform? By Gender.

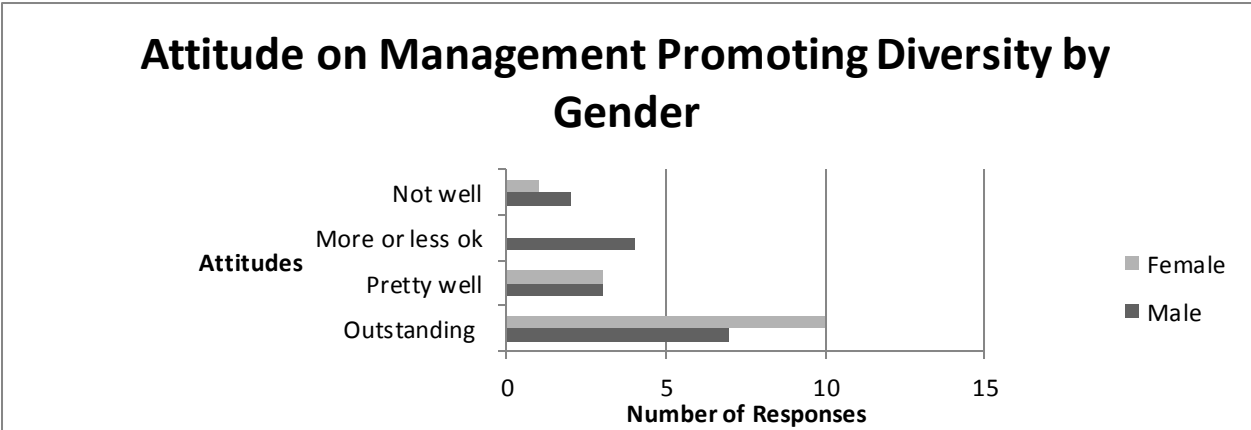
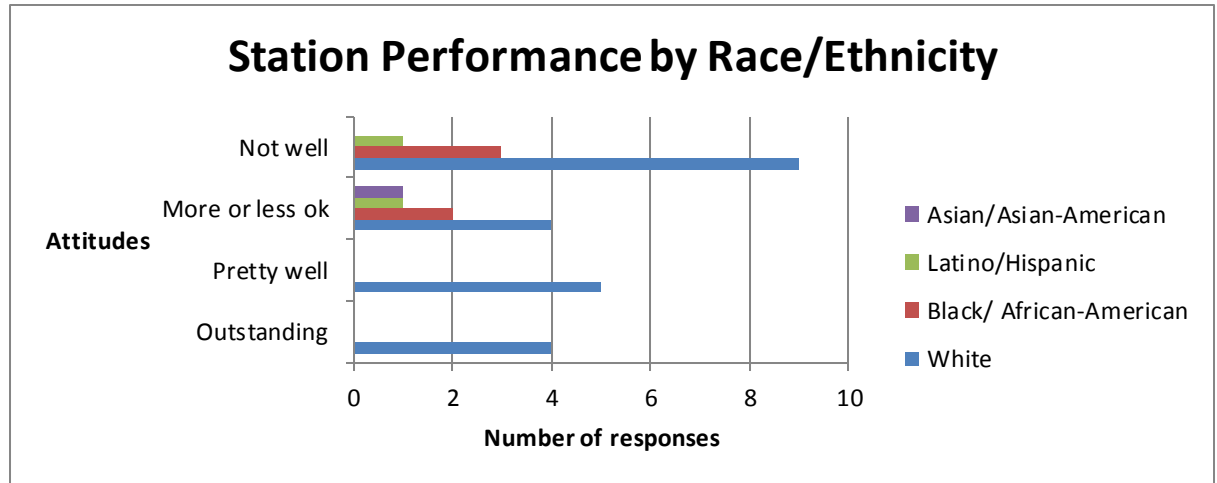


Table 3.3 - How well does the station perform? By Race/Ethnicity.



Interestingly, while an overwhelming amount of workers felt they personally worked to include diversity into their work, most did not share satisfaction with how the station as a whole implemented these values. It would appear from these results that the director has effectively promoted a rhetorical environment for valuing the idea of diversity. However, there seems to be little consensus of what the ‘diversity’ most are including actually is. The trend reminded me a lot of the early experiences I had talking with other stations: I was told that diversity was “just understood.” It appears that it is clearly understood by some in management but less clear as one moves to less powerful positions in the workplace.

The results of my survey do not surprise me in retrospect. During sit down interviews, I found that it was women and people of color (particularly those without any management positioning) who were most critical of how well diversity was implemented in the newsroom. In contrast, white respondents (and particularly white male respondents) were usually the least critical and most optimistic when assessing how well

diversity and cultural awareness worked at KEQL. Everyone, however, believed that they individually worked towards implementing ideas of diversity. Workers it seemed used their own social cues and ideas of diversity to operate on without having an explicit understanding of what it was outside of avoiding crime coverage.

Even the news director, who was the most open in discussing his philosophy on diversity, was somewhat dismissive in criticisms about how well the station carried out the philosophy. For example, when I asked him in a sit-down interview how he thinks his operations could improve, he responded by discussing structural constraints on employment opportunities:

“Well, it’s hard to hire people of color for these jobs. These jobs just don’t pay that well. I mean, the poor tend to be predominantly people of color and if they go to college, are they gonna wanna take a low paying job to get those loans paid off or are they gonna take a higher paying job? You tell me.”

The director drew a parallel between the salaries of the newsroom and the lack of interest from people of color. In his eyes, people of color were looking for shorter term economic pay-offs from their education coming out of college. Thus, the idea that they would come to work as a journalist was not likely in his eyes.

Interestingly, the director did not assume or ask why white employees would want to take low wages when he assumed Black or Latino workers would not. To be certain, in casual conversations the director would allude to the social positions of his white workers as enabling them to take on lower wages. For example, as I mentioned in a previous chapter, he made mention of many of his employees getting help from their family with money so that they “can live in those fancy high rise (apartments).”

However, this argument assumes that white workers will necessarily be okay with lower paying wages. This did not line up with my experience when talking to white workers at KEQL. On more than one occasion Christoph, a young white male photographer, complained about the terrible pay and how he had often thought about leaving to go to another station if given the chance. Thus, I am not convinced of the reasoning and validity of the argument the director made to shrug off any shortcomings with diversity in the newsroom.

What's more, the director's assessment of why people of color were not hired at KEQL sounded like a focus on an ethnoracial minority group's economic cultural choices and how it plays into their exclusion from newsroom practices. Claiming that black and Latino students do not value the employment of journalism because their upbringing demands a higher paying position shifts attention away from his hiring of minorities and onto a vague idea of what "they" (ethnoracial minorities) would supposedly want instead.

Further, when I asked Don, a 56 year old white news editor, about the stations implementation of diversity, he had this to say:

"Well, I do what I can to include different sources and I think I do a really good job. I mean, there was this black lady that kept calling up here trying to tell me things for a while for stories and I usually blew her off but one time she had something that seemed good and I went with it and it turned out she was this window into an entire community of African-Americans here, you know? Pretty cool stuff. I still use her now as a source."

Don also used this woman as an example of what the director called finding "purple people" or less conventional sources for news information. While in effect this turned out to be the case, Don's own account shows that time and again he had turned this person away continually until it was related to something he deemed important.

Thus, diversity and awareness were important only as long as it was important to Don's sensibilities. Even with that being the case, Don still maintained that "The station does just a really good job (at diversity), I think."

However, what was 'understood' in the dominant discourse of KEQL practices was definitely contested. For instance, Karl, a 30 year old African-American master control worker, did not share in the enthusiasm about how well the station did overall.

He said, "I feel that if you ever feel you're doing the max, you're probably not. Honestly I feel that the reputation we have is that we are doing a whole whole lot to make it a diverse place to work, but deep down I think we could do a lot better and make sure people that work here are more comfortable and um, break up certain cliques, because I feel there are definitely a lot of cliques around here."

When I asked how he felt he contributed to working towards more diversity, he specifically mentioned the same work cliques, adding,

"But a lot of that has to do with you get closest with the people you are around the most, so when it comes time to ask "What are you guys doing after work?" and then y'all are real close since y'all hang out so much and then someone new comes in and they feel left out, so they form their own clique. I don't feel anybody is on their own. I feel like people should have someone to go to. I try to be that person to let everyone know if they need someone to talk to, they can come to me. I try to invite new people along when we go do things."

Karl did not share the same optimism about how well the station promoted diversity at work and in news production. However, he talked about how he actively worked in his personal relationships to include people so that cliques did not form. In addition, Karl was one of the most continually outspoken critics of the station's diversity results in my experience at KEQL.

Christine, an Asian-American woman head producer told me in our interview that diversity was graded on inclusion. To Christine, inclusion was based on how well reporters adhered to the directors 'purple people' principle of varied sources and varied representations of diverse communities. On that front, she voiced no criticism and actually endorsed the already discussed Diversity Council of which she was the leading member. She did voice concern, however, on her status in the workplace.

She said, "I think to me there is still an issue with me as a woman in a position of power. It has come up in this station and it's something that is ongoing that I have to deal with. I can't say I feel like me being Asian has much to do with it because Asians are usually seen as the model minority, so I'm looked at as measuring up. But I do feel that me as a woman, that has something to do with issues I run into."

Christine felt that while the station did a good job in implementing diverse stories and viewpoints in news production, she encountered issues in the workplace as being a female. Further, she felt that her ethno-racial status as an Asian-American shielded her from racial discrimination as a member of a 'model minority' group. She also noted that it's difficult to change institutional sexism and racism because people are re-learning behaviors like "learning to bicycle backwards," thus "it's going to take time."

Working Towards Diversity, Seeing No Diversity

These observations give insight into some of the survey results. White interview participants typically stated positive outlooks on how well both they and the station did. At the same time, black and Asian-American respondents were more likely to voice criticisms on how the station implemented diversity in the newsroom culture, while stating that they were individually working hard to implement diversity as well.

If everyone feels they are working towards diversity but there is a significant divergence on how well the station is doing, something must be driving the gap in work and perceived achievement.

The director told me on various occasions, most notably in our interview, that he makes it a point to walk around the station at the end of the day and ask everyone how he can help them do a better job at including diversity. But it appears that at minimum a healthy minority of workers are not clear as to what kind of diversity or cultural awareness they are supposed to be achieving. It appears to me that the protocol of avoiding crime has been understood by all workers, though a clear philosophical understanding of the broader injustice done to ethnoracial minorities is less clear. Clearer communication of the director's philosophy of ethnoracial justice through more explicit policies and programs could be a key in better implementing the director's philosophy. I will discuss this policy suggestion at length in the proceeding chapter.

SIX. CONCLUSION:

REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR KEQL

On Ideology and KEQL Philosophy

Ideologies often work as an explicitly articulated set of ideas and philosophies on how the world should work. However, ideologies can often function as unconscious structures behind cultural practices that are seen as the ‘natural’ or ‘taken for granted’ parts of our everyday lives (Hall 1982, 65). At KEQL, management explicitly supported a philosophy of news production that countered inaccurate crime-laden portrayals of ethnoracial minorities. This philosophy was influenced by a deeply held sense of social justice on the part of the station’s director.

While many workers seemed to understand the “no-crime” element of his philosophy as a practical day-to-day protocol, it was not always clear just what others made of the anti-racist policies at KEQL. Where there was uncertainty, workers often took initiative to implement diversity based on their own ideas, which often had the effect of reproducing multiculturalist imagery of ethnoracial minorities as being unequal or inferior on the basis of cultural deficiency. Thus, the philosophy of diversity became malleable to suit whatever social tendencies the worker already held.

The subscriber-based structure of the funding for the station, as well as its 24 hour format, allowed for a conducive environment to carry out a ‘solutions-based’ and no-crime centered approach. Although the station minimized crime coverage compared to other stations, management did not seem to communicate the broader ways in which news coverage could inaccurately portray ethnoracial minorities as inferior or culturally

deficient. My research found that these shortcomings were a significant way in which KEQL inadvertently reproduced the ideology of neoliberal multiculturalism in newsroom cultural practices. The stories that I was privy to viewing on ride-alongs often gave priority to white voices as active agents in the community, and posed ethnoracial minorities as voiceless or passive in the community.

Unsurprisingly, management regularly touted its use of a Diversity Council at various times during my time at KEQL. Those involved with the council felt strongly about how they did well in “making it their own thing.” However, I found that there was skepticism from other employees, especially people of color, about its efficacy. Furthermore, the kinds of examples those involved with the council gave me of furthering diversity did not fall in line with the goals stated by the director of the station. In the absence of consistent reinforcement of knowledge about the director’s sense of racial and social justice, workers involved in the council would implement ideas of diversity that coincided with their own social comfort zones.

Moreover, relationships between white and non-white workers reproduced attitudes that were often skeptical or dismissive of the behavior of non-white workers, while praising the presence of white workers with similar work tendencies. This rhetoric worked to reproduce elements of multiculturalism by invoking the idea that non-white workers suffered from a cultural deficiency while white workers without these deficiencies would reap the “just desserts” (Melamed 2006, 12).

Nonetheless, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the benefits of KEQL’s philosophy as it played out in my time there. It is a worthwhile goal to diminish the

inaccurate portrayals of black and Latino communities by focusing less on crime. KEQL certainly challenged elements of overt racist imagery by enacting this approach and they were keenly aware of their structural ability to do so. Furthermore, this philosophy furthered a news room culture that was concerned with reporting “solutions based” news that did not focus inherently on spreading the “crime time” or “if it bleeds, it leads” approach which often results in disproportionate portrayals of non-white communities as dangerous.

However, the singular focus on crime as the explicit understanding of racist imagery appeared to narrow the lens of what was seen as inaccurate. As Hall would put it, “the ideological” or natural understanding on the part of many workers carrying out the philosophy was that these were the only types of images that could be problematic.

Survey results from my time at KEQL revealed that while most employees at the station believe they work to include diversity into their everyday routines, most do not feel the station as a whole is doing an equally good job at carrying it out. This suggests that not everyone is working with the same perception of what diversity is. Indeed, the Diversity Council appeared to spend time on many topics other than race or ethnicity. My interviews and observations showed that different employees seemed to have varying perceptions of how well the station did in including diversity. While white employees spoke of non-racialized topics as examples of diversity and tended to shrug off any shortcomings, black and Latino workers did not share the same optimism about how hard the station was working to be diverse.

To be certain, the station itself operates on a model that is conducive to fighting inaccurate portrayals of ethnoracial minorities with both a subscriber based funding model and a 24 hour time arrangement. However, the director seemed to only efficiently communicate the solutions-based, less-crime elements of his philosophy to the station. Most employees echoed this sentiment when asked about how the station differs from others. However, the Diversity Council was a prime example of how the director may have left too much assumed as “understood” with his employees with respect to other types of inaccurate portrayals and treatment of ethnoracial minorities in news production. Where employees were not reinforced with his concern for covert racist coverage, “culturally determined” multiculturalist images of ethnoracial minorities in stories, and in interracial employee relations, predominated.

Limitations with Research

I recognize that there are multiple limitations with my research. For one, KEQL was the only station I was able to observe in my research. I visited no other stations over the summer due to lack of clearance to shadow reporters and observe the newsrooms. Moreover the station was not part of a larger affiliate, which meant a smaller employee base in the newsroom than other stations. Thus, my sample size is admittedly very small in both locations and employee count.

Also, I only spent several weeks with strategically chosen hours during the week and was not a consistent member of the staff as I might have been under an internship. I can see that while I chose times that worked within the allotted hours I was given to shadow, it may have unduly influenced the sample of employees I was privy to

shadowing and kept me from seeing other workers in the newsroom whose insights could have differently influenced my findings.

Lastly, I only was able to get eight interviewees to follow through. Looking back, I would have liked to have interviewed several more people at KEQL. I believe this would have strengthened my results even further by having more in-depth data regarding the diversity protocols in the newsroom.

Proposals for Future Research

For future research I would try to include more stations in my observations and data collection. Increasing my sample size would give me a larger perspective on the differences between the employee behaviors and different director philosophies in dictating news production.

In addition to viewing another subscriber-based station, I would suggest observing an affiliate station to see if the same kinds of flexibility in approaches to imagery and news content selection exist there as well. The director of KEQL seemed genuine in his description of the other stations business model as constraining and pressured to produce quick and often inaccurate results. In addition, I feel the subscriber-based format did allow for more freedom to pursue other kinds of stories rather than quick, cheap stories such as crime. However, it would be more helpful to see if other stations are not actively pursuing their own methods of minimizing inaccuracies in portrayals of people of color. This would strengthen the case for subscriber-based news by having more data available for direct comparison of ad-based affiliate ethnographic work.

Shadowing reporters and other workers had its benefits. I had flexibility in my times for coming and going from the station. This come-and-go as I pleased scenario allowed me time to take down observation notes without the confines of an internship schedule, as I was unimpeded by obligations of work demands from producers or other employees. However, I would recommend future research take place on the basis of one or more internships to gather a consistent day-by-day sense of the work-flow.

Aside from Paulo, a Latino worker I briefly alluded to in my work, I found it difficult to get insight from other workers about Latino input in the newsroom. It was also hard to find out information on Paulo's schedule and thus I was unable to get an interview. Future research should be geared to focusing more on learning about how the presence of Latino workers in the newsroom impacts the unfolding of diversity policies. This is particularly prudent due to the growing Latino population in the state of Texas, let alone the growing population in the nation.

Policy Suggestions for KEQL

Regardless of my study's limitations, policy recommendations are in order for KEQL. These suggestions could help improve the relatively progressive structure and environment already in place. The environment of the station, while it contained flaws, was far and above what I had expected in terms of management and employee consciousness of ethnoracial justice. Going into my research, I anticipated management that was more or less apathetic to a profound discussion on ethnoracial portrayals in news coverage. Instead, the director and those producers under his immediate supervision seemed acutely aware of the problems in imagery for ethnoracial minorities in news

coverage and incorporated this awareness into crafting a philosophy to govern news production.

With that in mind, the primary building block for improvement with KEQL could be the Diversity Council they have established. The sentiment expressed by management to “make it our own thing” is a positive one, in my opinion. This approach can help the council become less of a rigid corporate requirement and more of one that is in line with the ideas and suggestions of those participating in the news room.

However, in most instances the council’s suggestions did not overlap with the stated goal of the director. This became a serious issue not only on paper, but in the eyes of several employees at KEQL in their work experiences. It is a worthy endeavor to enact ideas like celebrating sports team jerseys, as seen in a flyer from the news room, coordinating birthday parties, or organizing community events. However, these endeavors appeared to come at the expense of the goals related to ethnoracial justice as espoused by the director. Respondents’ answers to questions of diversity and awareness in crafting the news were a testament to this issue.

Therefore, I suggest that the Diversity Council be evaluated by an ongoing employee survey on a quarterly basis. Employees could evaluate whether they have been given opportunities to be included in the decision making of the council. Further, the evaluation could ask whether the council is doing a good job of tackling the issues of diversity that the director himself spoke about on numerous occasions.

I further suggest building on a project that the director alluded to during our sit-down interview. The director informed me that in 2011 he had a luncheon for all of the

employees where he had invited a UT Professor specializing in sociology and economics come to the station and discuss structural and economic racism with his employees. Most importantly, the professor explained how structural and covert racism relates to information presented in the news. The director said most of his employees enjoyed the luncheon, asked many questions, and that the information relayed a lot of what was important for employees to know about when producing the news. This concept could be expanded to an ongoing quarterly or annual luncheon featuring a new speaker or set of speakers addressing different issues pertaining to ethno-racial issues as it pertains to news coverage. This may be conducive to furthering the goals of the director.

Moreover, management could hold interview evaluations to test what employees have retained from these talks. The director prided himself on hiring employees after a rigorous interview process and holding his journalists to a higher level of research than other stations. Perhaps this could be an ongoing tool of evaluation for his employees. With these interview evaluations, the focus could be on challenging inaccurate ethnoracial portrayals other than crime-based images. For instance, images of the “culture of poverty” implicitly suggest inequalities are the result of some lack of work ethic or cultural behavior. These could be challenged in news production and employees could be given situational scenarios to give them a more applied sense of how to evaluate their own work tendencies.

Final Thoughts

Spending time and researching at KEQL was, all in all, a sobering and inspirational experience. To be honest, I realized how both hopeful and frustrating the

struggle for ethnoracial justice can be on both a structural and even individual level. I encountered people who in their everyday lives found ways to mitigate the effects of their day-to-day lives as marginalized members of society. I also found men and women, such as the director and other producers, who benefit from systems of injustice who actively sought new ways forward to combat such problems. This consciousness at a management level of a news station was uplifting at times, even when I felt as though other considerations for ethnoracial justice were neglected.

Furthermore, I was privy to a unique experience in how humans can hold one set of ideals and often act unwittingly in ways that contradict those ideals. Workers and managers at KEQL participated in a news structure that sought to overcome ethnically and racially inaccurate portrayals. However, they also carried with them practices and assumptions that worked to undermine the very ideals they worked to solidify in the newsroom. The interplay between agency and structure on the part of the news workers was encouraging as well as frustrating, and even demoralizing in ways I could never have anticipated.

Often, I found myself questioning how much trouble it was worth challenging embedded structures of ethnoracial injustice when at times some marginalized workers expressed their own apathy at challenging what systems that they felt were unfair. These were the moments that stand out most because they were the times I recall pushing myself the hardest to continue to hear even more experiences. It was also in this sense that I felt my sensibilities as an ethnographer grow more considerably. As new data emerged, I slightly tweaked my approach to asking questions as well as shifted my focus to account for the changing nature of circumstances and data in the field.

Indeed, for every worker who felt marginalized and for every manager who seemed complacent with the status quo, I found workers who also sought out answers on their own, whether in the form of breaking apart cliques in the workplace or by seeing other members of management who felt there was always room for improvement. These instances were the silver linings that made me look for structural and interpersonal solutions for improving upon a model and philosophy that was uniquely poised to challenge systems of ethnoracial injustice. Overall, it was in these silver linings that I feel my resolve to continue working towards ethnoracial justice has been strengthened.

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