Racial Diversity of Journalists in America's Blackest City

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ABSTRACT

Journalism industry leaders have long lamented the lack of racial diversity in American newsrooms. Research has shown that story framing changes as news organizations diversify their staff. This study seeks to create a baseline of racial diversity among Memphis journalists and measure the journalists' cultural competency and their perceptions of their news organization's cultural competency. Researchers created and disseminated a survey to about 200 journalists in Memphis working at news organizations that publish at least weekly. Survey results revealed white journalists are vastly overrepresented, despite the population of Black journalists being higher than average. This held true even between for-profit and nonprofit news organizations. Still, journalists of color were just as likely as white journalists to hold a supervisory position. Journalists gave themselves and their newsrooms mostly high marks in cultural competency but identified some areas of improvement. Journalists of color were less likely than white journalists to rate their newsroom as culturally competent.

Keywords: journalism, survey, racial diversity, cultural competency

Memphis recently became the largest majority-Black city in the U.S., yet the racial diversity of the journalists covering the city's population has been unknown. The Memphis media landscape has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. New outlets have cropped up, ownership of flagship news media has changed hands, and overall employment in journalism has fallen. But researchers have not examined how the racial diversity of the city's journalists stack up against the area population.

Measuring this diversity is important to the journalism industry anywhere. In 1968, the landmark Kerner Commission Report emphasized news organizations' (Kerner, 1968). The report became a clarion call to the industry to diversify its ranks from top to bottom and inspired the creation of the National Association of Black Journalists. At the time, the report said fewer than 5 percent of journalists (and fewer than 1 percent of editors and supervisors) were Black in 1968, compared to 11 percent of the U.S. population (Kerner, 1968, p. 210). In 2022, the numbers aren't much better. In a Pew Research survey of a representative sample of 12,000 journalists nationwide, just 6 percent were Black, compared to 13 percent of the U.S. population (Tomasik & Gottfried, 2023).

This research seeks to create a baseline of racial diversity among Memphis journalists, evaluate the journalists' cultural competency and measure their perceptions of their news organization's cultural competency. These goals were accomplished through a survey disseminated to individual journalists working at Memphis news organizations that publish at least weekly. The survey included questions about demographics, job roles, and the application of professional skills to produce journalism on race-related topics. While the presence of people of color in the newsroom alone does not influence coverage of race-related issues, in cities with more people of color, diverse newsrooms are significantly more likely to cover race-related issues (Sui et al., 2018, p. 1).

This research informs the state of racial diversity among journalists and how they

perceive the industry's ability to create racially inclusive environments in newsrooms and news coverage. According to the 2018 Newspaper Diversity Survey by the American News Editors Association, fewer than 10 major newsrooms have similar racial representation to the city or region they cover (Clark, 2018). But the Newspaper Diversity Survey was suspended in 2020 in a cloud of controversy because of an embarrassingly low participation rate, just as newsrooms had touted big promises in diversifying their ranks after the murder of George Floyd (Scire, 2022). While Memphis' flagship newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*, was included in the 2018 survey and its data is accessible to viewers, this survey was completed before the *Daily Memphian* launched the same year. And smaller news outlets in Memphis, such as *The New Tri-State Defender*, *The Memphis Flyer*, *Chalkbeat*, *MLK50*, *La Prensa Latina*, and the Institute for Public Service Reporting were not included at all. On the broadcast side, the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) annual diversity survey for television and radio stations reports aggregate national data and does not include city-specific information (Papper & Henderson, 2022). So, there is a significant research gap for Memphians interested in holding their local news organizations accountable to hiring, retaining, and promoting people of color who can then shape news decisions to not only report news from white perspectives. And because Memphis' racial demographics are significantly different than the U.S., with a 64 percent Black population (2023), it is doubly important to identify and analyze city-specific numbers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To craft the survey questions and identify research gaps in existing literature, included below is a review of findings from surveys, content analyses, and qualitative research regarding framing theory, cultural competency, and racial diversity of American newsrooms in the past two decades.

Framing

One of the main reasons why racial diversity in American newsrooms is considered important is the influence of cultural background and lived experiences on a journalist's framing of news stories. Framing theory examines the rhetoric used to emphasize certain aspects of the reality being shared in mass media. The landmark Kerner report conducted a content analysis of news coverage of the uprisings in the summer of 1967 and recognized that the lack of racial diversity in American newsrooms contributed to misleading coverage that emphasized confrontations between individuals rather than explaining the underlying causes of unrest (Kerner, 1968).

More recent content analyses have shown a higher racial diversity in newsrooms has an impact on whether race-related stories get covered at all (Sui et al., 2018). There is also a positive correlation between racial diversity in newsrooms and issue framing over conflict framing (Kirchberg, 2011; Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004). For example, newsrooms with higher racial diversity were more likely to frame the appointment of Justice Sonia Sotomayor based on her potential impact on policy while newsrooms with less racial diversity reported the story as the confrontational nature of her confirmation process (Kirchberg, 2011). In another example, stories about affirmative action from newsrooms with higher racial diversity were framed as a discussion on the benefits of a diverse society. Newsrooms with lower racial diversity were more likely to frame the stories as a debate on if people of color should get preferential treatment (Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004). Though this study does not specifically address framing of news stories in Memphis, it does provide a racial diversity baseline for further research to determine if there is a similar correlation in local news coverage.

Cultural competency

The desire to measure cultural competency spans many industries. A variety of professionals have recognized the need to develop and apply skills to effectively deliver services and relate cross-culturally. Finding ways to measure these skills can help practitioners of various fields find the necessary support to create an inclusive work environment and establish fruitful

connections with their audience or customers. Though cultural competency cannot replace the benefits of racial diversity, it is a powerful tool to help workers of all cultures and races see beyond their own experience and work well with others of different backgrounds. For rehabilitation professionals, for instance, a cultural competency assessment tool was created to evaluate cultural awareness, cultural skills, and organizational support (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2011). This study paid special attention to the organizational support aspect of this tool because the role of leadership and systems is often neglected in discussions about cultural competency. Even if individuals in a workplace have a high level of cultural competence, without organizational support, their efforts will fall flat.

Many have criticized journalism for not portraying the nuances and complexities of various cultures found in the U.S. (Garyantes, 2010; Clark, 2022; Kerner, 1968). Journalists themselves have given mixed reviews of how their industry is doing to improve racial diversity and prioritize equity and inclusion (Gottfried et al., 2022). One case study of student journalists sought to synthesize relevant cultural skills in everyday reporting, including awareness of self, awareness of how insider and outsider status is cultivated in a community, and skills and attributes that help the journalist understand "the other" (Garyantes, 2010). Using a cultural competency assessment tool created by Erba et al. (2020), journalism students and faculty tended to see themselves as more culturally competent than others. More research is warranted on how these concepts play out with professional journalists rather than students or other fields.

Racial diversity of newsrooms

The nation's largest study on racial diversity in newsrooms comes from the American Society of News Editors. The organization has tracked this data from newspapers since 1978, but in 2018 saw the lowest participation rate from newsrooms on record. Just 293 out of 1,700 newsrooms filled out the survey, causing the organization to caution readers from generalizing its results to the industry because of the low response rate (Clark, 2018). The study historically compared the racial and gender diversity of the newsroom with the demographics of the city in

which the newspaper resides. Fewer than 10 newsrooms achieved near racial parity. Another large survey of newsroom racial diversity comes from the Radio Television Digital News Association. Researchers there found that the number of people of color in TV and radio news is growing, but still a long way from reflecting national demographics (Papper & Henderson, 2022). In Detroit, Memphis' sister city in terms of racial demographics, less than 20 percent of the two largest newspapers' staff were people of color in 2017, down from 28 percent in 2005 (Simmons, 2017). All three of these studies relied on responses from news managers rather than individual journalists and researchers noted the barriers created by only reaching out to news managers. Researchers at University of North Carolina surveyed both newsroom managers and individual journalists and found a better response rate among individuals (Thompson & Davis, 2022). Surveying individuals also yielded valuable insight into how journalists see solutions to diversity issues including promotion of journalists of color, ensuring leaders see diversity as a priority, and addressing racist structures that enable problematic news stories (Thompson & Davis, 2022).

In Memphis, anecdotal evidence hints to the racial diversity of the city's newsrooms. Starting in 2020, shortly after the widely attended protests of police brutality following the murder of George Floyd, newspapers within Gannett, the largest newspaper company in the U.S. in terms of circulation, began to share demographic data of their newsrooms. This included *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis. The newspaper's top editor, Mark Russell, shared that in 2020, the newspaper's white employees made up 72 percent of the newsroom population, compared to 43 percent of the surrounding metropolitan area. The only other racial category overrepresented in the newsroom was multiple races at 3 percent of the newsroom compared to 2 percent of the community population. About 21 percent of the newsroom was Black, compared to 47 percent of the community (Russell, 2020). Two years later, the newsroom's white population decreased to 65 percent while the Black population increased to 29 percent, though still well below racial parity with the community (Russell, 2022).

The Commercial Appeal's main competitor, *The Daily Memphian*, launched in 2018 with a less diverse staff, which was 80 percent white (Doctor, 2020). The online news organization's CEO, Eric Barnes, said in 2020 that since launching, the newsroom has become more racially diverse, but specific demographic data has not been publicly shared since then (Doctor, 2020). Leaders of *Chalkbeat*, a national education news organization that has a local bureau in Tennessee, said in 2021 that people of color make up 45 percent of the total organization, compared to 26 percent in 2016, but that data was not broken down by bureau (Chalkbeat, 2021). Researchers could not find any publicly available demographic data for the city's TV and radio stations.

Ultimately, research does not exist on the racial diversity of newsrooms in Memphis, the nation's largest majority-Black city (Watts, 2023). Ample opportunity exists to close this gap in research for local news organizations and for community members interested in holding newsroom leaders accountable for hiring, retaining, and promoting journalists of color as well as support the development of cultural competency and skills among all employees to both produce and supervise journalism that more accurately reflects the community.

Therefore, based on the review of the discussed literature of framing, cultural competency, and racial diversity in news organizations, this study asks the following research questions:

RQ1. How does the racial diversity of Memphis journalists line up with area demographics?

RQ2. Is there a difference in roles for journalists of color versus white journalists in terms or supervisory positions?

RQ3. Is there a difference between the diversity in legacy outlets vs. new digital outlets?

RQ4. How confident are Memphis journalists in their cultural competency to cover race-related stories and that of their news organizations?

RQ5. Are there differences in confidence levels in newsrooms' cultural competency between white journalists and journalists of color?

METHOD

To answer the present study's research questions, a survey was conducted of Memphis journalists. Surveys have been applied in a variety of mass communication studies (e.g. Clark, 2018; *The Damned Pipeline*, 2023; Frissell et al., 2017; Papper & Henderson, 2022; San Diego SPJ, 2021; Thompson & Davis, 2022) seeking to understand racial diversity and cultural competency in newsrooms. Some surveys that seek to evaluate cultural competency ask questions about a person's sense of belonging in the workplace. (Gottfried, 2022; Thompson & Davis, 2022) while others ask about an individual's skills to relate cross-culturally in their work (Erba, 2020; Garyantes, 2010; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2011). This survey sought to measure both: journalists' attitudes about their own cultural competency and that of their newsroom leadership (See appendix for survey questions).

Conceptualization & Operationalization

The present study defines workplace diversity as characteristics of an employee that can evoke stereotypes and prejudices. Those stereotypes and prejudices can lead to poor job performance, low retention, and homogenous hiring. These differences among employees can include job-related and non-job related characteristics, such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation, education, and years of experience. (Phillips & O'Reilly, 1998). Further, it defines racial diversity parity as the racial demographics of a news organization's journalists being similar to the racial demographics of the community population it aims to serve (Dedman & Doing, 2005; Clark, 2018).

This study defines cultural competency as the scrutiny of cultural differences and biases and the development and application of professional skills to improve services cross-culturally (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2011). This definition can be broken down into an awareness and

appreciation of cultural diversity, factual knowledge of various cultures, and emotional connection with cultures different from one's own (Vasquez, 2010).

Measurements

To measure the racial diversity of professional Memphis news organizations that publish at least weekly[1], researchers asked participants to select the racial and ethnic group with which they most identified. The survey followed the U.S. Census model but included Middle Eastern or North African as a racial group to reflect proposed changes for the 2030 U.S. census and to address common complaints against the U.S. Census Bureau (Erba, 2020; Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, 2023).

To measure cultural competency, the present study created a "Culturally Responsive Journalist" tool to evaluate participants' perception of their own cultural competency and the cultural competency of their news organization to cover race-related stories in Memphis and create an inclusive workplace. The tool drew from themes found in other tools to measure cultural competency and sense of belonging among journalists, students and educators, and rehabilitation professionals (Erba, 2020; Garyantes, 2010; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2011; Thompson & Davis, 2022). The tool used a five-point interval Likert scale for participants' attitudes and values ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Sampling

This study uses a volunteer and snowball sampling method and had inclusion criteria for the survey. Researchers estimated that about 200 journalists – including reporters, editors, producers, executives, photographers etc. – work in the Memphis area (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). To establish a population, researchers compiled a database using publicly available staff lists of eligible local news organizations' websites, which resulted in about 200 entries. Some middle managers and executives were missing from this database and researchers sought to fill gaps by reaching out to study advisers from the Memphis Association of Black Journalists.

Researchers then individually emailed the journalists in the database with a survey link and instructions. Researchers also posted the survey link on the Memphis Association of Black Journalists (MABJ) social media accounts and its member newsletter. The survey was also posted to "All News is Local," a Facebook group that many working journalists frequent. Researchers instructed MABJ members and other journalists to personally contact their colleagues (excluding their subordinates so as not to create undue pressure) and post on their personal social media pages to encourage more Memphis journalists to respond to the survey. Survey collection occurred for three weeks between March 25 and April 15, 2024 after the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board approved the survey questions. Researchers sent three email reminders to journalists in the database before the submission deadline.

The survey was distributed to individual journalists online for several reasons. While other surveys sought racial diversity data from managers for the whole newsroom rather than individuals, researchers have found that response rates from individuals tend to be higher than newsroom managers (Thompson & Davis, 2022; Clark, 2018; Papper & Henderson, 2022; San Diego Society of Professional Journalists. 2021). Considering the sample size for Memphis journalists was relatively small, this study opted to reach out to individual journalists directly. This method allowed researchers to get more specific racial demographics than what newsroom managers may have on hand. For example, the Federal Communications Commission does not have a multiracial category in its demographic information it gathers from broadcast news organizations. And any newsrooms that rely on U.S. Census classifications would overlook employees of Middle Eastern and North African descent. And lastly, considering the voluntary nature of the survey, researchers took into consideration the possibility that managers from less racially diverse newsrooms would be less likely to participate to protect the organization's reputation. Surveying individuals who would likely not be as concerned with the organization's overall reputation allowed researchers to minimize this possibility.

At the end of the survey collection period, 116 respondents participated. Freelancers were included if they worked enough to have received a 1099 tax form from a news organization. Survey responses from journalists who worked at publications that do not publish at least weekly were excluded from analysis. Researchers removed 19 responses from the sample due to incomplete submissions, leaving a sample size of n = 74.

The sample was nearly evenly divided among men (51.4%, n = 38) and women (48.6%, n = 36). No respondents reported their gender as non-binary or other. Most respondents identified as white (64.9%, n = 48), followed by Black or African American (32.4%, n = 24) and Hispanic or Latino (8.1%, n = 6). One respondent identified with two or more races (1.4%) and one as Middle Eastern or North African (1.4%). No respondents identified as Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Figure 1

Racial demographics of survey respondents

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Two or more races
- Middle Eastern or North African
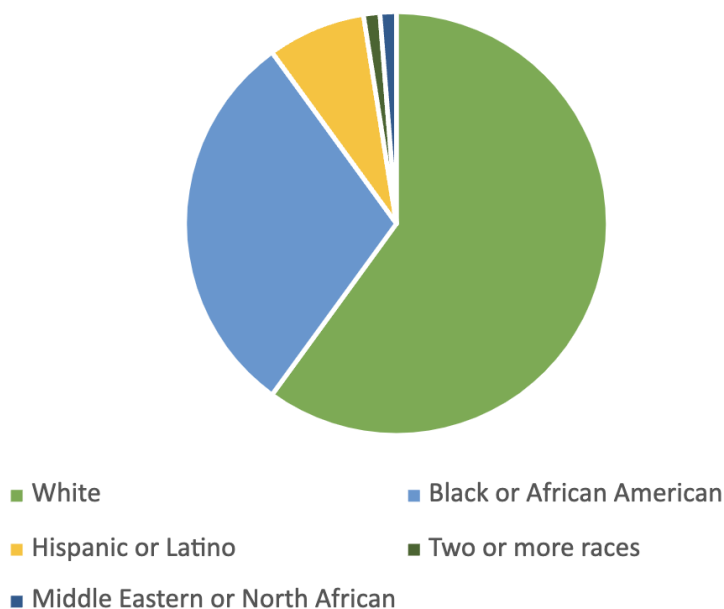
Young adults, ages 25 to 34 had the highest participation (33.8%, n = 25), followed by those aged 45 to 54 years (18.9%, n = 14). Those aged 55 to 64 accounted for 14.9% (n = 11), followed by 35- to 44-year-olds (13.5%, n = 10), and 18- to 24-year-olds (13.5%, n = 10) and

those older than 65 (5.4%, n = 4). In terms of education, all respondents had at least some college credit. Most respondents had a bachelor's degree (74.3%, n = 55), followed by a master's degree (23%, n = 17) and one each for a doctorate degree and some college credit (2.8%, n = 2).

Most of the respondents worked at a local newspaper or digital news organization (68.9%, n = 51), followed by news TV stations (24.3%, n = 18). Other respondents worked in radio or other types of news organizations (6.8%, n = 5). A majority of respondents worked at a for-profit news organization (58.1%, n = 43) while journalists working at nonprofit news organizations accounted for 41.9% of the sample (n = 31). Three freelancers responded to the survey (4.1%), two were part-time employees of local news organizations (2.7%) and the rest worked full time (93.2%, n = 69). Most of the respondents worked in non-supervisory roles (68.9%, n = 51), followed by executive leadership (17.6%, n = 13) and middle managers who supervise at least one person (13.5%, n = 10). Just over half of respondents reported that they spend less than half of their job "in the field" interacting with the Memphis community to produce journalism (54%, n = 40) with the rest spending more than half of their job in the field (45.9%, n = 34). Most respondents said they had not attended a cultural competency or cross-cultural training in the last 12 months (67.6%, n = 50), leaving 32.4% that had attended such a training (n = 24).

RESULTS

To answer RQ1, researchers compared the racial demographics of survey respondents with the Memphis and Shelby County population. As discussed in the sampling section, most respondents identified as white (64.9%, n = 48), followed by Black or African American (32.4%, n = 24) and Hispanic or Latino (8.1%, n = 6). One respondent identified with two or more races (1.4%) and one as Middle Eastern or North African (1.4%). No respondents identified as Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Because some local news organizations cover the metropolitan area in addition to

Memphis, this study used city and county population statistics to compare racial demographics of local journalists. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2022 estimates, 64.4% of the Memphis population is Black or African American, followed by 24.1% white, 8% Hispanic or Latino, 3.3% two or more races, 1.6% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. For Shelby County, the U.S. Census Bureau 2022 estimates report 54.6% of the population is Black, followed by 34.2% white, 7.1% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Asian, 1.8% two or more races, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The U.S. Census Bureau does not currently estimate populations of Middle Eastern and North African people, but proposed changes could take effect in 2030. Figure 2 shows the racial demographic comparison among Memphis journalists who responded to the survey and Memphis and Shelby County population estimates.

Figure 2

Racial demographics comparison
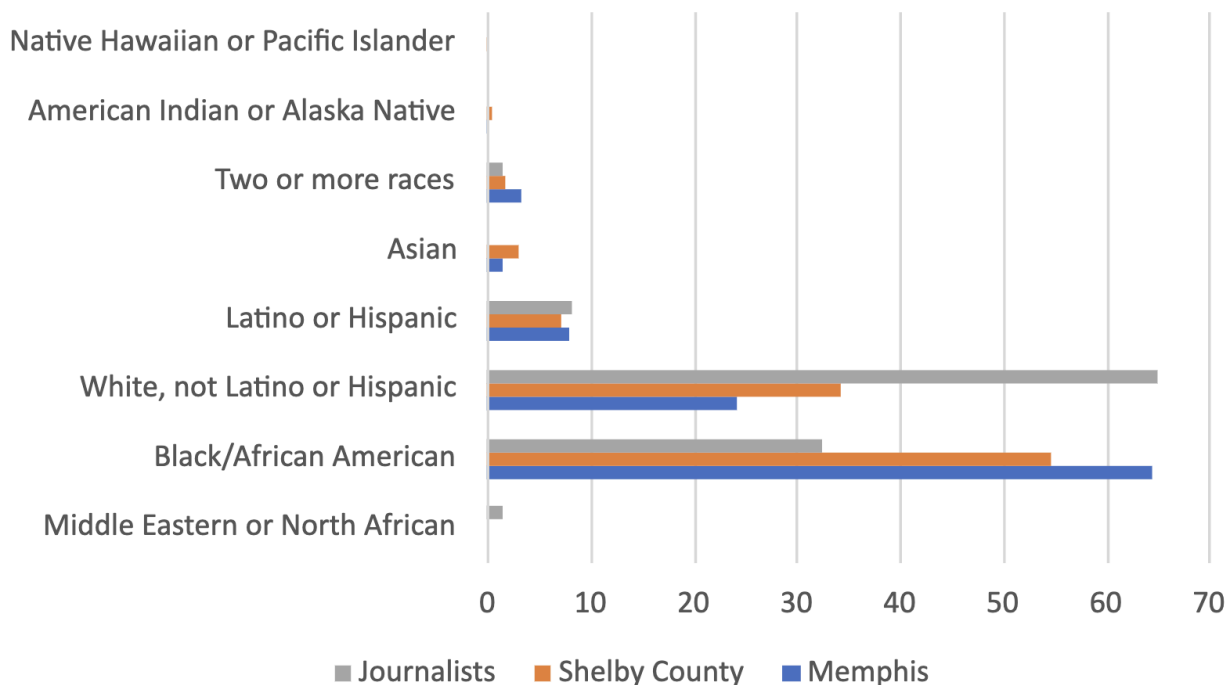
Thus, for RQ1, which sought to compare the racial diversity of Memphis journalists and area demographics, the only ethnicity that nearly lined up with area demographics was Hispanic or Latino. White journalists were vastly overrepresented by 40.8 percentage points when compared to the Memphis population and 30.7 percentage points when compared to Shelby County's population. All other races were underrepresented among Memphis journalists. Black journalists were underrepresented by 32 percentage points when compared to the Memphis population and 22.2 percentage points when compared to Shelby County. Because researchers received fewer responses than expected and to protect the respondent's confidentiality, this study excludes a racial breakdown by newsroom.

To answer RQ2, researchers recoded the race categories into white and non-white and then performed a chi-square test of independence to test the relationship between race and supervisory positions. The test showed that there was no significant association between race and job position ($X2(2)>$ = 2.43, p = 0.297).

For RQ3, a chi-square test of independence was performed to test the relationship between the news organization's funding model and staff racial diversity. The test showed no significant association between for-profit/non-profit news organizations and the level of racial diversity among staff ($X2(1)>$ = 0.872, p = 0.35).

For RQ4, researchers examined the descriptive statistics of the answers respondents gave to questions about their own cultural competency to cover race-related stories and that of their news organizations on a five-point Likert scale. On average, journalists highly rated their own cultural competency. When asked to rate their comfort discussing racial issues, respondents' average response was 4.26, with 5 being strongly agree. When asked to rate their empathy to problems raised by people from different racial groups, the average response was 4.51. When asked how comfortable they are building trust with sources cross-culturally, the average response was 4.64. When asked to rate their confidence producing race-related stories in the Memphis area, the average response was 4.38. When asked to rate their awareness of how

one's cultural background influences the journalism they produce or supervise, the average response was 3.99. When assessing the cultural competency of their newsrooms, the average response was lower compared to responses to questions about individual cultural competency. Table 1 shows the average response to each question based on a five-point Likert scale re-coded 1 to 5, with 5 being strongly agree.

Table 1

Average response to questions assessing newsroom cultural competency.

Statement	Mean
My background and identity are valued in my newsroom	3.86
I feel a sense of belonging in my newsroom	4.00
My racial or ethnic group is respected in my newsroom	4.04
Most people in my newsroom are inclusive of staff race and ethnicity	4.19
Most people in my newsroom prioritize stories regarding racial inequalities in the Memphis area	3.95
Most people in my newsroom are committed to telling well-rounded stories about various racial and ethnic groups in the Memphis area	4.14
My newsroom leadership is open to changes that would make our coverage more responsive to the cultures in the Memphis area	4.28

Note: For average responses, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. N = 74

To answer RQ5, a t-test was performed to determine if journalists of color were more or less confident about their news organizations' cultural competency than white journalists. One negative statement from the survey was recoded to better calculate confidence levels. The test showed that race was a significant factor for how journalists rated their newsroom's cultural competency, ($t(39.40) = -1.40$, $p = .02$). Journalists of color ($M = .78$, $SD = .15$) had less confidence in their newsroom's cultural competency than white journalists ($M = .83$, $SD = .11$), though to a small degree.

DISCUSSION

Racial representation of local journalists severely lags the Memphis area population. The average overrepresentation of white journalists in newsrooms across the nation was about 25 percentage points in 2018, the most recent available data (Clark, 2018). In Memphis, white journalists were vastly overrepresented by 40.8 percentage points. White representation was closer to parity when compared to Shelby County (30.7 percentage points) but still higher than the national average. Though 32% of journalists surveyed were Black – nearly two and half times the percentage of the U.S. Black population – the city and county have a Black population of 64.4% and 54.6% respectively. Local news organizations seem to be aware of this gap even without specific numbers, but the gap remains, nonetheless. Only the proportion of Hispanic or Latino journalists matched the area demographics.

Contrary to national estimates, racial representation in Memphis nonprofit news organizations is not significantly different than legacy for-profit news organizations. This is likely due to several factors. The largest news organization in the city, *The Daily Memphian,* is also a nonprofit and has admitted to falling short in racial representation (Doctor, 2020). Most nonprofit news organizations are small and so deviations from city or county racial demographics will be more pronounced. A newsroom-level analysis without the *The Daily Memphian* could have revealed a different result, but researchers excluded that analysis because of the smaller-than-anticipated sample size to protect participant confidentiality.

When considering cultural competency, survey results were similar to other places (Erba et al., 2020; Garyantes, 2010; Johnston, 2007; Nishikawa et al., 2009). Journalists rated their own cultural competency higher than their newsrooms as can be expected from self-reported answers. When evaluating their newsrooms, two areas of potential improvement stood out. Respondents were least likely to agree to the statements, "My background and identity are valued in my newsroom," and "Most people in my newsroom prioritize stories regarding racial inequalities in the Memphis area." For the first statement, the average score was 3.86 in between "neither agree nor disagree" and "agree." For the second statement, the average score

was 3.99. As expected, journalists of color rated their newsrooms' cultural competency lower than white journalists.

But there is one way that Memphis is ahead of the nation. The results showed that journalists of color were just as likely to hold a supervisory role as white journalists. The city boasts at least four local news organizations that have a top executive who is Black, including the longtime flagship, *The Commercial Appeal.*

CONCLUSION

Implications for the profession

Because of the larger population of Black people in Memphis, the responsibility to diversify newsrooms falls heavier on Memphis news organizations. Measuring just how far the local industry has to go to achieve racial parity with the community and how local journalists think about cultural competency skills needed in their newsroom can spur urgency for increased support to better serve the information needs of the community.

Limitations

The sample size was less than representative to achieve a 95% confidence rate. Though participation from most local newsrooms was representative of each staff size, the overall sample size limits the generalization of results. The smaller-than-expected sample size also restricted researchers from providing a racial breakdown of journalists by newsroom to protect participants' confidentiality. A larger sample size would have allowed for further public analysis of racial representation and perceptions of cultural competency by newsroom.

Also, turnover in journalism jobs can be high both locally and nationally. Since researchers only distributed the survey once for three weeks, the study may not have captured higher or lower levels of racial diversity at other times in the year. For example, one news organization may have had several people of color leave just before the survey was distributed and hired other people of color in their place shortly after the survey window closed, which would distort the news organization's overall diversity for most of the year. Retention, especially

for journalists of color, has been a challenge in the industry, and that was not captured in this survey.

Suggestions for further research

Memphians interested in tracking media diversity over time would benefit from replication of this study every one or two years. And now that a baseline of racial diversity statistics exists, content analysis at various local news organizations would help determine if there is a correlation between racial diversity and differences in news story framing.

This study used self-reporting surveys. Since self-reported evaluations can often skew higher than external review, surveying Memphis news consumers about local news organizations' cultural competency could contribute to better understanding of the issue.

Conflict of interest

As a working journalist in Memphis for the past eight years, Laura Kebede-Twumasi, the lead researcher, has existing professional relationships with many of the subject pool. She has also been employed, contracted as a freelancer, or her work has appeared in several local news organizations where subjects work including The Institute for Public Service Reporting, *The Commercial Appeal*, WKNO-FM, WKNO-TV, *The Daily Memphian, The New Tri-State Defender*, WREG-TV, WMC-TV, and *Chalkbeat*. She is a member of the Memphis Association of Black Journalists, which commissioned this study.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions

Introduction: We are surveying journalists working at Memphis news organizations to see how racial diversity compares with area demographics. The survey also includes questions about cultural competency in the workplace. This survey was commissioned by the Memphis Association of Black Journalists and supported by the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media at the University of Memphis. We will collect your name and work email for verification purposes, but your responses will be anonymous in the analysis and publication.

First name _____ Last name _____

Work email (for verification purposes) _____

What is your gender?
- Man
- Nonbinary
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe _____

What is your age?
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and over

What is your race?
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White

What is your ethnicity?
- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

What is your highest level of completed education?
- High school, GED or alternative credential
- Some college credit
- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

Employer name (list of eligible news organizations)

What is your employment status at a Memphis news organization?
- Full-time
- Part-time
- Freelancer

If you're a freelancer, have you received a 1099 from a news organization in the past 12 months?
- Yes
- No

What percentage of your job is spent "in the field" interacting with the Memphis community to produce journalism?
- 0-49%
- 50-100%

Which best describes your news organization?
- Broadcast television
- Magazine
- Newspaper or digital news
- Radio
- Other: _____

Which best describes your news organization?
- Nonprofit
- For-profit

What is your title? _____

Which best describes your role?
- Non-supervisory
- Middle manager (supervises at least one person)
- Executive leadership

If most of your job is reporting or editing stories on a particular beat, please indicate the closest category below:
- Crime/public safety
- Features
- Sports
- Weather
- Other news (government, education, specialty beat)

Have you attended a cultural competency or cross-cultural training in the last 12 months?
- Yes
- No

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements using the following scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, strongly agree.
(Individual cultural competency)
- I am comfortable discussing racial or ethnic issues.

- I am hesitant to communicate with people from different racial or ethnic groups.
- I am empathetic to problems raised by people from a different racial or ethnic group.
- I am comfortable building trust with news sources who come from a different racial or ethnic background than myself.
- I am confident in my professional ability to produce journalism about race-related issues in the Memphis area.
- My cultural background can influence the journalism I produce or supervise.

(Sense of belonging in newsroom)

- My background and identity are valued in my newsroom.
- I feel a sense of belonging in my newsroom.
- My racial or ethnic group is respected in my newsroom.

(News organization cultural competency)

- Most people in my newsroom are inclusive of staff race and ethnicity.
- Most people in my newsroom prioritize stories regarding racial inequalities in the Memphis area.
- Most people in my newsroom are committed to telling well-rounded stories about various racial and ethnic groups in the Memphis area.
- My newsroom leadership is open to changes that would make our coverage more responsive to the cultures in the Memphis area.

NOTES

1. Professional Memphis news organizations that publish at least weekly were included in the study:
  - *Chalkbeat*
  - *The Commercial Appeal*
  - *The Daily Memphian*
  - *High Ground News*
  - *The Institute for Public Service Reporting*
  - *La Prensa Latina*
  - *Memphis Business Journal*
  - *Memphis Flyer*
  - *MLK50: Justice through Journalism*
  - *The New Tri-State Defender*
  - *WATN-TV*
  - *WHBQ-TV*
  - *WKNO-FM*
  - *WKNO-TV*
  - *WMC-TV*
  - *WREG-TV*