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Diversity in Journalism

The newsroom perspective on what's wrong and how to change it

Karin Bromander

Polis/Journalistfonden Research Fellow



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Introduction

The question of diversity, or rather lack of diversity, in the media has been a burning topic for the past few years. Gender, racial and ethnic imbalance in the make-up of newsrooms has been put under the spotlight, with research showing that journalists in most European countries are a homogenous group of people – though no longer exclusively male, it's still predominantly white and middle class¹.

The focus of the discussion has been representation, whether the body of journalists is representative of the population of the country, and whether different groups with different interests are featured in the news. Much less has been written about the actual process in newsrooms – what is the conversation about diversity like? Are there concrete strategies to diversify the content? Are there certain practices or tools that are particularly effective, on a managerial level as well as on an individual one?

The aim of this article is to give a glimpse into how diversity is being discussed at different levels in media organisations, by management as well as senior journalists and those at the very start of their career. 15 journalists from Sweden and the UK were interviewed about how they experience the work place conversation, as well as what strategies they use to diversify their content, whether ordered or suggested by management, or of their own invention.

The journalists cover various beats and fields. The group was purposely chosen to represent different aspects of the journalistic landscape, including high-ranking editors as well as junior reporters, self-employed as well as employed, working in broadcasting, online publications and print. All participants have been anonymised in order for them to be able to speak freely about their work and their employers.

This article by no means claims to give a complete picture of today's situation, this is a tiny portion of the people working in the media in Sweden and the UK, but the stories told by the participating journalists could still bring insight to how the issue of diversity is being managed in today's newsrooms.

It should be noted that the interviews took place in the late fall of 2019, well before the coronavirus forced many journalists to work from home, and plenty of workplaces to be reorganised. The research also predates the Black Lives Matter protests and the debate about diversity that followed in late spring 2020. The article ends with concluding remarks, as well as a short list of methods and best practices given by the participating journalists.

¹ "Are Journalists Today's Coal Miners? The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms" Reuters Institute For The Study Of Journalism (2020)



I: What do journalists mean by diversity and does it matter?

“ There’s a sort of hierarchy: Kind of a way to sort through the important things we need for a story. For example, I’m not as concerned with age as much as I am with gender. I’m not as concerned with geography as I am with ethnicity. Gender and ethnicity are really the top two criteria where I really want to make sure there’s a diversity. ”

Broadcast reporter

How do you define diversity? The Cambridge Dictionary definition reads: “The fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people”, exemplified by the sentence: “Does television adequately reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country?”

When contacting the journalists participating in this article with requests for interviews I emphasised that I was interested in a broad definition of diversity, by gender, ethnicity, age, class, and geography. I was curious to see what possible aspects of diversity the interviewees themselves would put an emphasis on. There are of course many more variables that could be included, such as personal characteristics as well as background and life experiences.

Reading between the lines you see that colouring the journalists’ own definitions of diversity are what they feel their specific organisations lack when it comes to mirroring their current audience, as well as the one they wish to attract. A reporter of a local newspaper in rural Sweden says that lack of range in age in the people they interview is a real problem since it doesn’t reflect their readership. A senior news reporter says gender balance is not as much of an issue as it used to be, but that they need to focus on not every interviewee being white. A reporter of a tech site says representation of different ethnical backgrounds actually isn’t that much of an issue in the beat she’s covering, but that there is much more work to be done when it comes to the number of women featured in their articles.

The broadcast reporter quoted on the hierarchy of criteria in aspects of diversity, underlines this is not something explicitly said in the newsroom, nor something he would say without the cover of anonymity. But then time constraint is always an issue, he has to make decisions on where to focus. He is not the only one talking about having to choose. The almost exact words are used by a reporter working for a large news website:

“ There’s almost like a hierarchy of diversity because journalists are under a lot of time constraints and you want to make sure you are getting the best people for the story. ”



Gender and ethnicity are the two aspects of diversity most often raised, though age, geography and class are regularly mentioned as well. Many of the interviewees say that a lack of balance in gender, in the workplace as well as the content, has been discussed for a while now and that they feel there has been a definite change. Conversations about ethnicity or class are quite recent though.

About a third of the journalists spoken to for this piece say we need a broader definition of diversity in the media: It is not just about who the reporter is and who is being featured in an article. There are many more aspects which needs to be taken into account.

“ We need diversity in every level of our newsrooms, not just the reporters but the managers, the editors; we need it in our sources; we need it in our stories; we need it in who we’re reporting with, not just who we’re reporting on. Diversity is a huge concept. We really should be talking more about diversity in media ownership too. ”

Investigative reporter, non-profit organisation

Some of the interviewees say diversity permeates everything they do. It can’t be narrowed down to whose face we see on an image in a newspaper, it’s about language and methods, what stories are being told, and how. One of the interviewees, an editor-in-chief for digital operations for a group of regional newspapers, says they only recently started working systematically with diversity, evaluating the current situation as well as coming up with strategies on how to improve. They soon understood they needed to go further than just looking at representation of gender and ethnicity, she says.

“ The more we look into this, the more we realise how much we need to be mindful of. Diversity is so many different things. LGBTQ representation for example. I’m not sure if we’re there yet, but we want to look at what kind of language that we use and who’s represented and who’s speaking for that community within our company. ”

This “wider” definition of diversity, that it’s about more than representation, appear to often go hand-in-hand with how much weight management is giving the issue, but not exclusively. Some of the interviewees emphasise that visual representation, in names or in images, truly is the most important when it comes to a diverse content.

“ I’m not necessarily saying you need to find a diverse group of sources, information just comes from where it comes from. But in TV you need someone to comment on that, and that’s where you need diversity. ”

Broadcast reporter



It is clear that there are various ways of interpreting “diversity in the media”, depending on the organisation you look at, as well as the individual you speak to. Almost all interviewees agree on the importance of the issue as well as why it’s important. It has a democratic purpose – the media should reflect the country and the population as a whole, audience groups should feel represented and stories from all of society should have a place in the news. There is a slight difference in the interviewees’ views on how urgent it is though, while some are content in saying it needs to be looked at, others speak of the lack of diversity as one of the most important struggles of journalism of today.

The scattered definitions of diversity are nothing compared to the variations in how much weight the issue is given in different organisations, however. When asked about the conversation about diversity in their workplaces, the interviewees painted a very mixed picture.



Newsroom policy and diversity

“ There was no thought whatsoever about diversity, it was just me who kept bringing it up. It was me assuming that role. ”

Magazine reporter

There appears to be a palpable variation in how much weight the question of diversity is given in newsrooms today, as well as in what editors compared to reporters feel are being done. Whereas an editor of a magazine says she “can’t imagine there’s a single media organisation not giving this a high priority right now”, several of the reporters interviewed say diversity is hardly ever discussed in their workplaces. What efforts these reporters are putting in to improve the diversity of their content, are something they do very much on their own, or in conversations with their colleagues. This seems to be the case for larger organisations as well as smaller ones.

A reporter fresh out of university, working at an entry-level position in broadcasting, says she’s never heard anyone talk about it in the office. Some say conversations about diversity only ever takes place between colleagues in corridors, never in official meetings and rarely initiated by management. Two of the interviewees say diversity is something they hardly ever think about, and that for it to have a place on their daily agenda their editors would have to take the initiative and allocate the time, as well as introduce them with ways of addressing it. Others feel they try their best, but lack support.

“ It’s a 100 per cent an insular thing, something that I practice on my own. There’s no real rule in place or any kind of guidance in general doing that. There have definitely been conversations when people are talking about specific stories – someone will say it’d be good if you speak to someone who has this or that background. There might be a conversation between colleagues or between editors and writers but there is no structure to it. ”

Online news reporter

There is also a clear difference in how deep the conversation about diversity goes. Most of the interviewees say it stops at talking about the importance of representation. Few recall having discussions on methods in diversifying your work, such as ways of finding a diverse pool of sources or interviewees.



Two of the three people interviewed who are in managerial positions say diversity is the top priority in their organisations, though one of them confesses their diversity work is probably not yet felt or seen by all of the staff. The other one says it runs through all they do at magazine where she works.

“ We’re constantly thinking about how our journalism is reflecting what our audience is interested in. You need to diversify the conversation; in the office as well as with the audience. I suppose that’s something which takes an enormous part of our effort in diversifying our working practice. ”

Magazine editor and reporter

In a 2020 [Reuters Institute study](#) leading news executives as well as heads of journalism schools in Germany, Sweden and the UK were interviewed about their current work with diversity, in hiring new talent as well as the making of the news. The researchers conclude that all of the interviewees show concern and interest in attracting and retaining a mix of talent, as well as for their product to appeal to a more diverse audience, but that there appears to be much less commitment to initiate actual changes leading to more diversity. “*Very often, diversity is treated as a ‘nice-to-have’ issue rather than a ‘must-have’ for newsrooms and journalism schools,*” the authors write. This paradoxical interest-combined-with-non-commitment is something very much felt by reporters interviewed for this piece. Several interviewees feel that though the importance of finding a diverse pool of sources is definitely being discussed, they’re never allowed the time or tools to do so.

None of the freelancers interviewed for this piece can recall ever having a discussion with an editor about diversity, though they both would very much welcome it. Their work is something they very much do on their own, and they’ve figured out their own methods in how to diversify it. Both feel their skills development is something separated from their client–freelance relationship.

“ I’m part of a network of journalists covering the same issues as I am, our stories fall under the same umbrella. There’s a conversation there. Right now one of the things we are talking about is complicating the narrative: How you ask questions; are you actually listening; are you making assumptions about your interviewee. That conversation really helps. ”

Freelance journalist specialising in social issues



A journalist who now works for a large newspaper with a significant social media output, recently went back to school to study social media after having worked as journalist for a few years. He says he was shocked at how little diversity was addressed there as well:

“ At university we talked about reaching different niches, about the problems in engaging different communities. But it was never in terms of diversity, or at least not in addressing the diversity of society. It was on a smaller scale. A niche could be defined as a small group, like we’d talk about how to reach the gaming community. But black people are not a small group, it’s not a niche. It’s a huge community that the media is missing out on. ”

One reporter interviewed reflects the view of the executives, confirming that in some places diversity work runs through the organisation and doesn’t just stay as a conversation on management level:

“ It’s now a kind of founding principle where I work. If you try as hard as possible to have a story come from several different angles you’re more likely to have a story that resonates with more people. And it’s more likely it will resonate with people from minority groups and of different ages, so we’ll have a bigger chance of reaching a wider audience. ”

Broadcast reporter

The same reporter mentioned that the initial conversation in the last place he worked, in online media, didn’t come from management though, but from the readers. This perspective is something that shouldn’t be forgotten in the discussion, he says:

“ I think a good way of looking at it is not just top to bottom, not only if it comes from the leadership or the reporters on the ground, but from an outside-inside perspective. The reason we started looking at these issues was an increased pressure from our readership. Since then, a lot of work has been initiated from the editors, but the origin was pressure from the outside. ”

No matter the conversation at your own place of work, all of the interviewees feel something definitely has happened in the past 5-10 years, diversity is generally being talked about more now than it used to be. And that slowly, first steps are being taken in trying to balance journalistic content.



What to do about diversity?

All of the interviewees who say their workplace has any sort of structured work with diversity say it started with some kind of content audit, specifically what is sometimes referred to as “counting heads”, to look at an issue of a magazine or a certain number of broadcasts and count how many men/women, white/people of colour, etc are featured, and in which role. This appears to be a rather new practice for many media organisations, according to the interviewees – many say they first encountered it sometime in the last 5-10 years, either with their current employer or at the last place they worked. It seems to quickly have become common routine though, about two thirds of the journalists interviewed say it is practiced in some form where they now work. In fact, many larger news organisations, such as Dagens Nyheter and the Financial Times, now say they use gender bots to track how many female or male experts and sources are quoted.

An editor-in-chief for digital operations for a group of regional newspapers says of their offices recently made their first big content audit. The results showed coverage consisted of positive stories featuring mostly men, predominantly white and middle aged, whereas people of colour, in the period of time they choose to audit, were only featured in court stories:

“ And once you’ve learned that, you can start changing it. You can look at the news list and say ‘Who are we representing here and how are we representing them? How are we going to recruit people to come and be journalists if the only thing they see from us is negativity?’ If you are black, if you live on a council estate, and the only time you see your local news brand representing something you can relate to, it’s about crime or about how dreadful the area that you live in is. ”

This perspective, that you audit the content and then develop a plan on how to improve your work based on the data you’ve collected, is what several of the interviewees wish for but feel like they’re not always getting. In some places, the procedure stops at counting:

“ I don’t know if we have a strategy... We have a goal. We say we should have at least 14 articles a week where a woman is the main character, not just with a photo of a woman. I’m not sure how many articles we put out each week at the moment, but the goal is 14. If we don’t have that, we work to get it. ”



Some of the journalists say they sometimes audit their own work, but that there is no initiative from editors or management to make it into an official practice. In places where auditing is part of the editorial routine, what criteria you look at varies from place to place, as does how often it's done and how organised it is:

“ Well, we kind of evaluate each issue. We'll look at it and say ‘Oh no, too many white men, no-one over 50 years old, no-one under 30...’ And that's it. We have no system on how to improve, nothing like that. ”

Magazine reporter

Interviewees working in places where they state diversity work has a more pronounced role call the practice a “tick-boxing exercise”, giving it a certain negative connotation. It's a useful tool, but a crude one; an important first step to kick off progress, but that it should be just that – a first step:

“ I think it's really important that there are some very early steps being taken, some of them are tick-boxing exercises but still meaningful. They can be necessary to begin with, but there really needs to be structural changes for anything to actually change. ”

Investigative reporter, non-profit organisation

The burning question is of course what you choose to do with the information you get out of the content audit. Some of the interviewees express a frustration in the lack of a plan or system: if there is a goal, they are not given any resources or suggested methods to reach it. There is no structure in how to achieve a better balance in who's featured, just the knowledge of a gap and everyone now knowing they need to “do something about it”. Few say they have discussions on actual methods in finding sources or interviewees. Some say they've never had it, not with editor nor with colleagues.



Diversifying the journalists

“ No matter how aware I try to be, I’m still a white, heterosexual 35-year-old living in a nice area of the city with my husband and child. That’s my reality and that’s the reality of a lot of my friends. I’m never going to fully understand other perspectives, I’ll always see them from my point of view. I think if we had a greater diversity among journalists, stories that are not reported on at all right now would have a greater chance of being picked up, because the way it is now, people like me never hear about them. ”

Magazine reporter

For the past few years many media organisations have been openly working towards a greater diversity of staff. Ads for journalist positions in Sweden often contain some variation of the phrase “Most of the people currently on our staff are men with Swedish as their mother tongue. We welcome applicants of other backgrounds”. In the UK, big media organisations like the BBC and The Guardian have set up employment schemes to try to attract junior journalists with different class backgrounds or ethnicities underrepresented in newsrooms today.

Most of the interviewees emphasise that diversifying staff is not just of symbolic value, it’s the most important step towards a greater diversity in content, and though recently things are starting to look slightly better, we’re far away from achieving that.

But diversifying staff can’t be the sole solution – not just because it’s a slow process, but because all journalists, no matter their background or ethnicity, need to be mindful of who they are and what they bring to the table. There is a need for self-reflection, several of the interviewees point out – though that particular word is more often used by journalists talking about their own whiteness. Almost all the interviewees however, no matter their ethnicity or background, underline that who you are as a reporter matters. A tech reporter, who professes she very rarely actively thinks about diversity, says her gender is something that shines through in the work she does:



“ Somehow, since I’m a woman, contacting other women feels like the natural thing to do. Going out to lunch with people and establishing your network is a big part of my work. My boss, who is a man in his late 40s, tends to meet other men in their late 40s, and then that’s unfortunately the group he’ll often write about. I actively try to meet women. And I tend to write about women. I think for me as a woman, that comes naturally. ”

Though in this case it is safe to assume the reporter’s background as well as her actions are making the content more diverse, on a larger scale this is specifically what is often seen as a problem. As human beings we tend to seek out people who are like us, and journalists tend to write about issues which are close to them:

“ When deciding on what story to run you tend to go for what gets you going, which sometimes mean you look at the same issues over and over again, they’re in your sphere and they’re things you yourself find interesting. Things get very biased like that. ”

Radio producer

The radio producer says it took him a long to time to see this in his own work, as a white man with a middle class background he fitted right into the norm when he started his career in journalism. A magazine reporter speaks about how her being just slightly different from her colleagues actually made a lot of difference:

“ When I started working here the policy was ‘we go for the best story’. The idea was that this motto should in itself ensure a diverse selection. And so looking for a diversity in what stories we told were not at all considered important. The thing is that what you consider to be the best story is based on who you yourself are. I’m not that different from the other people working here, but the fact that I’m a woman and that I’m not from a big city were enough for me to want to pick slightly different stories than them. Their ‘best stories’ were not always my best stories. ”

Magazine reporter



As concisely phrased by another one of the interviewees:

“ Anything you know is technically only something you’ve experienced yourself. Everything else is something you assume or you think you know. ”

Investigative reporter, non-profit organisation

If you accept this premise – that your own perspective is all that you know, or at least something that will influence everything you do – the need for self-reflection is paramount, no matter your background or ethnicity. And you could of course argue that taking in other people’s perspectives is something built into the role of a reporter. After all, most would probably agree on that key traits for a journalist are being curious, as well as a good listener.

An editor-in-chief in charge of diversity work for a group of regional newspapers say they’re now trying to implement innovative ways in thinking when hiring new staff in several different ways:

“ The right person for the job is the one you currently don’t have in your newsroom. A colleague of mine was recruiting and we looked at the candidates. And she said ‘You know what? I’ve got a newsroom full of journalists. What I need is someone else, because right now I don’t have them and I need their skills’ – I thought that was brilliant. ”

Something largely agreed upon is that change can’t just happen when hiring new reporters. The diversity of editors and management are key to making actual changes. After all, they make the larger strategic decisions. And the conformity in newsrooms, but more importantly at the top, has further implications than just story choosing:

“ If all journalists are white and middle class – who decides on what is political, on what’s an opinion and not a fact? Feminism used to be controversial, which meant that it was toxically political, an opinion rather than something everyone agrees on as a foundation of our work. Now racism, human rights are political. The white middle class decides on what is controversial and what is not, what is important and what is not. That is a problem. ”

Radio producer



Diversity, the audience and social media

many of the interviewees point out that an important part of working with diversity, especially in trying to diversify the stories you tell, is interacting with your audience. This is how you get tips on a wide variety of stories and how you'll know what is relevant for different groups, those who are already part of your audience as well as the ones you wish to attract. This, reaching new groups and interacting with your audience, was somewhat revolutionised by social media.

In the early days of Twitter it was said to comprise mostly journalists. And in the decade since, social media has undoubtedly found a certain and steady place in the professional lives of many journalists. All of the people spoken to for this piece say they use social media daily: for research; for finding interviewees; for connecting with their audiences; and for distributing their content. Many say they quickly fell in love with the possibilities of social media, especially connecting with new groups of people and getting input from readers. But this attitude might actually be about to change:

“ Most of us feel like we need to be on social media, but we really don't like it. ”

The above quote is from a self-professed Twitter fanatic, someone who embraced the rise of social media wholeheartedly, but whose interest is now fading. There are more than one reason for this, she says, though the main one is the paradox in how the freedom of the place was something that originally attracted a lot of its users, but that this freedom has turned: Twitter could now be considered too free, in the sense that it's taken over by bullies and hate speech:

“ You wouldn't know it now, but Twitter used to be a genuinely nice place to be. Somewhere you'd get to chat to people in this new, innovative way. What you see now is a backlash and it's horrible. The abuse and trolling that women and ethnic minorities are exposed to. ”



Though Facebook is still undoubtedly the largest social media community in the world, several of the journalists spoken to for this piece say they no longer use it, definitely not privately and less and less frequently professionally. Depending on their audience, platforms such as LinkedIn or Instagram work better for reaching and interacting with their audiences. And the fact that Facebook charges start-ups and smaller companies for spreading their content makes it even less attractive for more niche media. A journalist in broadcasting says that in the beginnings of Twitter it was an amazing channel to find new people, and to contact them easily. But with all the noise, it's now quite the opposite:

“ If you are, say, a woman with 50,000 followers, there’s definitely a chance you won’t check your DMs for instance. Your inbox would be full of abusive comments. This constant noise is making it harder to get in touch with someone, and to get them to trust you. ”

Several interviewees say news organisations were slow in understanding the possibilities social media brought, and then, when they did embrace it, they still didn't fully understand it. There was a general thought of it as a solution to everything going wrong with the media in the last decade, the lack of diversity among it:

“ Social media is not representative of the world, it’s just representative of social media. Do media organisations truly understand that? I’m not sure they do. I think maybe a few are getting a bit wiser about what it really does, but also social media has changed. When it came along it was more powerful than it is now. ”

Broadcasting reporter

It's not just the attitude towards social media which has changed, it's how you use it and what it's good for. The perhaps unique "social" aspect of it has somewhat faded, with trolling, fake news and fake accounts, as well as the sheer volume of messages making it harder and less interesting to chat to strangers. Almost all of the interviewees use it as a mean of contacting people, but in that respect it's not all that different from telephone or e-mail. What could still be seen as unique with social media, especially when it comes to working with diversity, is that it allows you to quietly listen in on your audience. A producer of a radio show targeted at a young audience says:

“ Instagram has that function for us. If someone follows us, we follow them back. It’s like having a peephole into the lives of our listeners. ”



And it's not just about listening in on your current audience, it's of particular value to someone wishing to learn about groups they may not have in their established network. An editor-in-chief with a 30-year career in journalism says:

“ I am fascinated by this. Personally I've learned so much from following different people and different organisations, particularly on Twitter. Like understanding how people want to be referred to, the importance of not just assigning people a pronoun based on what you think. For me, it's been invaluable to be able to follow other people's conversations about this. ”

Not all of the interviewees present themselves as disenchanting with social media, and the ones who say they are still use it excessively. A good thing with social media, says one interviewee, is that it builds trust. If you're contacted by a reporter, you're able to check that reporter out, making the conversation more transparent. And several people point out that even though it has its flaws, social media really is useful when trying to find new sources:

“ I've been in journalism for 10 years and to be honest I can't really recall the time before social media. But there was a time when your contacts were limited to people who were already in your phone book. Social media has allowed for journalists to find new people and to contact them in a much quicker way, which makes us find more diverse sources. ”

Online reporter

Something a lot of the interviewees are advocating going back to basics: Social media is definitely not the only place to meet and talk to new people. Many say the best interactions still are the ones happening face-to-face, and a few suggest it's useful to try to remind yourself of what reporters did before the internet came along. Not everyone is on social media:

“ There is something tantalising and tempting about social media as an answer to this problem, but really it's the day-to-day grind that makes what you do diverse. I personally think that if you go to a lot of events, you see someone great and you go over and introduce yourself, talk, exchange cards, all that stuff is actually more helpful. ”

Broadcast reporter



Two of the interviewees work in places which organises social events as part of their journalistic work, though in slightly different forms. In one of the places, the events are a way of financing their magazine, at the same time allowing them to interact with readers, finding out what they care about and are interested in. For the other one, who work for a non-profit organisation focusing on investigative journalism, the events are free and serves the purpose of connecting with groups they are reporting on as well as finding new stories and angles. Both journalists view these events as one of the most important things they do and say they wish it was practice in more places.

Something a lot of the interviewees say, which relates to both social media and face-to-face meetings, is that for you to make your content more diverse you need to remind yourself over and over to actually listen to your audience:

“ I’m a profound believer in that journalism needs to be as much about listening to your audience as telling your audience, that there’s an exchange of ideas there. ”

Magazine editor and reporter



Finding time to build awareness

“ To make serious changes you need hard work and time. And the conditions we’re working under right now – and not just us – are quite the contrary. We have less and less time to do our work. ”

Radio producer

The last few decades have been hard on many media organisations. Today’s newsrooms consist of far fewer reporters than just a few years ago, their work descriptions generally widened, with more assignments and more responsibilities. This will only get tougher with the economic pressure on the news business after the COVID-19 crisis and the economic downturn for the journalism industry. The consequence is increased pressure on time.

Stress is something a lot of the journalists interviewed describe as especially difficult when it comes to finding creative solutions to achieve a higher diversity in content. All journalists interviewed for this piece mention the importance of having time to perform good journalistic work. Stress can make you a less thorough journalist.

“ When it comes to interviewees, a lot of the time you take what you get. ”

Radio producer

Time pressure is not just affecting source gathering. A radio producer says he feels that for serious change to happen, public radio, which commissions the show he is producing, would need to give them the possibility to further develop their work with diversity:

“ A massive problem for us is that we never have the time to sit down and actually look at what it is that we do, to make a thorough analysis of the content over time. I think is what we’d need to do to make a serious strategy on diversity. But that work would take weeks, and there is absolutely no way I would find the time. Absolutely not. ”

Radio producer



But some of the interviewees underline there is an individual moral responsibility. Though the issue of time pressure definitely is a huge problem, it sometimes turns into an excuse:

“ When you’re on a tight deadline it’s so easy to call someone you’ve talked to at an earlier occasion. You know they’ll probably be willing to make another interview. ”

Online journalist

He adds that this is on him too. The constant time pressure might not be his fault, but it’s still on him to prioritise working to find new sources. A TV correspondent says that since he can’t imagine there being a solution to the problem of time pressure any time soon, he has to force himself to go the extra mile, that it’s important to be uncompromising about being serious about finding a diverse group of interviewees. A reporter for a local newspaper says, after having reflected on her constantly never having enough time:

“ In the end I actually don’t think it’s about time or money, it’s all about knowledge and awareness. It can be hard finding the right source or interviewee and it takes time, but the question is where we look and how we look. And right now I don’t feel like we know that. ”



Best practices, tips and tricks shared by the participating journalists

It would be wrong only to point out the negative things that the journalists interviewed for this piece say about diversity today. The fact is that things are being done, on an editorial level as well as an individual one. Most of the journalists spoken to for this piece have at least some thought-out practices and guidelines they follow, outlined by their employer or, in most cases, of their own invention. The ones who say they don't give diversity much thought still list a few things they do to make their content more diverse. A few of the interviewees say they give this issue daily thought and that they constantly strive to include the thought of diversity in everything they do.

Three things are most often mentioned. The first is the importance of perspective and questioning your instincts. Before you go after a story, you need to ask yourself why it's interesting and to whom it's interesting. If you follow your own interest without thinking, it's easy to end up repeatedly covering issues that concern yourself, not noticing stories that which doesn't necessarily affect you or anyone in your sphere.

The second thing is the conversation: journalists need to learn from each other, organisations need to learn from each other, and management needs to be clear on what it is that they want and how it is to be done.

The third thing is hard work. Changing established ways of working, methods which you might have practiced for years and that have been custom to many before you, is hard and it takes time. You need to decide for yourself that the extra time it takes is worth it:

“ I guess you could think of it as affirmative action, but I actually think it's made my reporting better because you know there are loads of amazing people out there that I probably wouldn't have met if I hadn't made a bit of an effort. It's not diversity for diversity's sake after all, you get better stuff if you talk to more people. ”

UK internet reporter



On a reporter level

Talk to your colleagues about working methods, in your organisation as well as other media, for instance how you go about finding sources.

The thought on diversity needs to run through all that you do, it can't come in at the end. You need to think about it before pitching a story, not when you're trying to find someone to comment.

Don't just think in new ways, think in old ways: What did we do as reporters before the internet? Listening in on a community meeting might lead you to voices you would never find online. Even if time is scarce, it's important to try to meet people face to face.

Try new ways in finding stories and sources. It could be just asking everyone you meet – from taxi drivers to relatives to your kid's teacher – what is relevant to them, what stories do they want told.

Don't just commit on a superficial level. Instead of contacting 50/50 women and men as possible experts for a piece you're writing, you need to ensure the actual participants are 50/50 and accept that there might be some extra work in doing that. Don't fall back on things like men often being quicker to accept, ask again and get more women.

Set up a goal for yourself, something that's achievable even if you're under time pressure. It could be inventing new ways of finding sources, as well as not using the same expert twice.

Diversity shouldn't just be about who, but about how, not just the people but the stories and the angles.

For those working in organisations who rely heavily on tips or pitches from readers or listeners, you need to think about who is most likely to suggest stories – are they representative of the public? Not everyone feel they have the right to to tell their story, to offer their opinion and their thoughts.

What language do you use, what terminology? To truly include new groups and write about their issues you need to consider not just what you write about, but how you write it.



On a management level

Include all employees in the conversation about diversity. The initiative needs to come from the top, but management need to listen to issues being brought up by staff as well. Suggestions on how to work differently might just as easily come from junior reporters seeing things in a new way.

Think about possible ways of training staff in skills development and awareness. People sometimes need to be shown concrete examples on how to work differently.

Invite junior reporters to listen in or to present new suggestions in senior meetings.

If presenting goals or agendas, make sure the employees actually have the time and resources to think and work in new ways.

Explore new formats in trying to reach new audiences.



Conclusion

It is troublesome that a discussions about diversity and inclusion so rarely appear to actually be inclusive. Perhaps after the Black Lives Matter inspired debate of early 2020 that might change. Whatever conversations are held at a managerial level, they hardly ever seem to trickle down to reporters working further down the organisational ladder. This could strengthen the image that questions relating to diversity are theoretical rather than practical, nice-to-have rather than must-have. As the Reuters Institute report on talent and diversity in modern newsrooms puts it: If top leadership doesn't embrace and push it – little will happen.

The absence of a shared definition, as well as a clear goal, could further complicate the work for a more diverse media climate – it's hard to compare what work is being done when different organisations are zeroing in on different things; and it could make it harder for media organisations to work together. It is also harder for individual journalists to give each other advice when different things are expected of them depending on where they work.

It is also evident that the reporters interviewed feel a need for a clear goal as well as an organised way to get there: Some kind of concrete strategy on how to work with diversity. This goes for organisations as well as the individual. There needs to be a thought-out way to work with diversity from beginning to end, it can't just be applied as a filter just as your article is about to go to print. Several of the people interviewed for this piece feel the organisations they work for rely heavily on the individual's ability to work in new ways. But if the practices and innovations of individual reporters are what's being asked for, those reporters need to have the resources to innovate, and to have a voice in speaking their mind on how to change things.

The interviews with reporters also show a, perhaps expected, hierarchy in the liberty you're given to shape your stories: The more senior you are, the more freedom you have to experiment with format and to suggest new methods of working. This hints at something that could be troublesome in the efforts of diversifying staff. If you're hiring in hope of finding new voices as well as new ways of working in finding sources and stories, that effort is of little worth if new journalists are rarely able to suggest changes or given the resources to do their work in innovative ways.



For change to happen, on an organisational as well as an individual level, you need cooperation and exchange of information, especially since a lot of good work is being done in different places and on different levels. Listening to the interviewees, there is a clear wish for channels to exchange tips and tricks on best practices – on finding sources, on working with diversifying your language and on how to manage to change your methods of working despite time being scarce.

Finally, there is need for self-reflection. This is something underlined by all the interviewees, no matter their background. To make your stories more diverse, you need to see how you as a reporter or editor influence them, how your point of view is shaping what you think makes a story interesting. This of course goes on a larger scale as well. Organisations need to see what current practices are hindering them in working with diversity to be able to change them.

A few of the interviewees stressed the importance of pressure from the outside, that the audience demanding a higher diversity of content is sometimes what is needed for actual changes to be put in place. With this in mind, there is cause to hope the debate inspired by the Black Lives Matter protests are perhaps already leading to transformations in the practices, methods and conversations about diversity in newsrooms today.

Polis

Department of Media and Communications
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street London WC2A 2AE

Email: polis@lse.ac.uk

Telephone: **020 7107 5176**

blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/

The author Karin Bromander can be contacted at: bromanderk@gmail.com



lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications



Department of Media and
Communications
The London School of Economics
and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

E: polis@lse.ac.uk

T: +44 (0) 20 7955 6107

Click [here](#) for MEDIA@LSE

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