Learning to Diversify the Media Labour Force

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A long quest for diversity in the media labour force began in the United States in 1967, after President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of race riots in the country. According to the Commission's 1968 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, also known as the Kerner Report, "Our Nation [sic] is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" (Kerner Commission 1968, 1). Condemning white racism, the report criticized the news media for failing to "analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States" (ibid., 203). The report concluded, "By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problems America faces and the sources of potential solutions. The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world" (1). To remedy this failure, the Kerner Report recommended that news organizations employ enough African Americans "in positions of significant responsibility to establish an effective link to [African American] actions and ideas and to meet legitimate employment expectations. Tokenism…is no longer enough" (211). Beyond the news media, the Kerner Report also thought that "[African Americans] should appear more frequently in dramatic and comedy [television] series" (212).

The Kerner Report paved the way for numerous reports on the lack of diversity in news and entertainment media industries over the past 50 years. For example, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) has conducted an annual "Newsroom Employment Diversity Survey" since 1978, which collects data on the percentage of women and racial minorities working in U.S. newsrooms (ASNE 2018). Likewise, the Radio Television Digital News Association has done annual research on women and people of colour working in local U.S. news since 1995 (Papper 2019). The Pew Research Center has also conducted research on newsroom diversity with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, and age in the context of the U.S. workforce writ large (Grieco 2018). The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, a think tank at the University of Southern California, has studied diversity and inclusion in the film, television, and music industries, focusing on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and disability (Annenberg Inclusion Initiative 2019). All of this research has aimed to bring attention to and help fill gaps in diversity. Media education programs have also responded in the past 50 years, aiming to bring awareness to and teach emerging media workers how to challenge this diversity gap.

This article considers the relationship between media research, media education, media practice, and advocacy in such labour and diversity initiatives. In what follows, I will offer a reflection on my own labour-focused media research and strategic communication advocacy, and will outline my efforts at pedagogical intervention toward diversifying the media labour force.[1] The intervention occurs at the curricular level, teaching students ways to diversify media industries by understanding, analyzing, and evaluating what black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw defines as the three aspects of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational (Cho, Crenswhaw, and McCall 2013). At its core, intersectionality is focused on overlapping social inequities, discrimination, and systems of hierarchy as applied to social identities, such as race and gender. As we will see, students leave my course with a "core career competency": tools to "engage diversity" (University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts 2019). To establish my approach, I will first ground this case study in the labour-oriented media research and the social justice methodology which informs aspects of my pedagogy.

Labour Standpoint Research, Media Diversity, and Social Justice
Grounded in a critical political economy of communication and sociology of work approach to media industries, my research is focused on the labour standpoints of media workers. Through archival research, interviews, and personal communication with workers and labour union representatives, I consider how broader structural conditions within and beyond media industries shape employment relationships, working conditions, workers' experiences and identities, labour organizing, and labour resistance (Salamon 2019). Such a labour standpoint approach reveals the power and social relations, such as the relations organized around social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability. My research also reveals the roles that media workers have played in efforts to reform a privately-owned and controlled, white male dominated capitalist media system, suggesting implications for diversifying the media labour force.

Journalism students and labour unions have long played a powerful role in supporting each other's efforts to address workplace and broader social inequities. As far back as 1968, hundreds of university students in the province of Ontario joined journalists who were on strike over union recognition at the *Peterborough Examiner*, which was owned by Thomson Newspapers (now known as Thomson Reuters) (Salamon 2018). Together, they launched a local alternative newspaper called the *Free Press*, filling gaps in local news coverage during the strike and commenting on the need to democratize the corporate and classist media system. In recent years, unions have addressed the economic barriers to securing and completing media internships, which have become an important stepping-stone for students hoping to obtain long term and decently paid media work. To limit such barriers, unions have launched and defended paid journalism internships at news outlets, such as the *Toronto Star* (Salamon 2015). Unions have also established and protected in collective agreements internships that pay an entry-level wage, including at the *Globe and Mail*.

In addition, journalism unions have created programs for students and emerging workers, and incorporated support for racial and gender diversity in hiring through collective agreements. Since 2016, I have served on the steering committee of the associate members program of the Communications Workers of America CWA Canada, which was established in 2011 (Lapointe 2013). CWA Canada has co-organized free networking events, arranged panel discussions and mentoring sessions with professional media workers, and published articles aimed at supporting emerging media workers. Our biggest campaign has focused on strategies to limit socioeconomic barriers to securing internships. We developed model language for media internships in 2016, which Vice Canada incorporated into its collective agreement in 2017, becoming the first digital news company in Canada to adopt such language. This advocacy and outreach has informed my scholarship, which is grounded in an "engaged" and "embedded research" methodology (Salamon et al. 2016, 267). This advocacy-oriented research is based on a close relationship between the researcher, the organizations, the communities, and/or the

individuals that are being studied. I bring these insights on labour and advocacy to bear in teaching media diversity.

Toward Institutional and Representational Change in Media Industries

In my Diversity and Mass Communication course, students complete a final research paper based on an interview with a media professional and a labour force analysis. Working toward this major assignment, students do related short assignments and in-class activities throughout the semester. Students learn about the opportunities and challenges facing media industries in attaining equitable representations of historically marginalized social identities in media content and in the labour force by considering the following tactics, among others: diversity statements, employee resource groups, diversity committees, labour unions, and professional associations. For instance, we begin the semester by discussing company diversity statements. In class, we dissect example diversity statements and discuss how they are a clear way for media outlets, such as the Associated Press, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), the Walt Disney Company, and WarnerMedia, to publicly show their commitment to diversity and inclusivity in terms of race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, physical and mental ability, and age. To put this knowledge into practice, I ask students to create model language for a classroom diversity statement. Since diversity statements are commonly a company-led intiative, we turn to employee-initiated and collaborative tactics to diversify the media workplace later in the semester.

One such approach, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), consists of worker-led committees based on demographics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and age, which aim to diversify individual workplaces. Media workers have started ERGs at various media companies, including Vox Media and BuzzFeed. The impact of ERGs is measurable. For example, Vox Media traces an increase in diversity in its labour force with regard to gender identity and ethnicity between 2013 and 2019 in tandem with the work of its ERGs, among them ERGs for employees who identify as women, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Latinx, and/or LGBTQ+ (Vox Media 2019). BuzzFeed workers have expanded ERGs for women, people of colour, and LGBTQ+ employees since 2017 (Peretti 2018).

To help students write a short reflection paper regarding ERGs and explore their own interests, I took my students on a field trip to MPR in the fall 2018 semester. Dividing this assignment into small parts, students take field notes on a presentation about MPR's ERGs including "Women at MPR," "Millennial ERG," "Equalizers" for GLBTQIA employees, and "People of Colour ERG" (MPR 2018). We discuss their observations in the next class. Some students have then been inspired to write a paper on how MPR gives employees who identify as GLBTQIA, people of colour, or women a voice in the organization's cultural programming, grounding their paper in conceptions of intersectionality and social identity.

Outside of individual media companies, we focus on the role of labour organizations, including both unions and professional associations. Drawing on work from my current book project (in progress), we consider how recent union organizing efforts at digital-first media outlets across the United States, such as the Writers Guild of America East and The NewsGuild are helping media workers organize their workplaces and set up diversity committees (Salamon 2016). We also discuss some of the many professional organizations that are run by and for diverse groups. They include the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Association of LGBTQ Journalists, and the Asian American Journalists Association.

At the end of the semester, students apply this knowledge to their final research papers. They draw on demographic data, such as information in the reports mentioned above and from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, along with directed interview questions to examine how diversity plays out in the media workplace. Students interview a media worker about their work experiences and the content that they create. Examples of media workers include (but are not limited to) professional journalists,

graphic designers, and filmmakers.

The course assignments mentioned above are designed so that students leave my course with various skills and core career competencies, among them tools for "engaging diversity" in the media labour force. According to the University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts, engaging diversity refers to the "process of cultivating awareness of one's own identity and cultural background and that of others through an exploration of domains of diversity, which may include: race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, ability, class, gender, age, spirituality, etc." (University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts 2019). Such an approach recognizes that social structures and systems establish and sustain intersecting inequities in institutions, policy, and representations in media and cultural artifacts (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). This engaged pedagogy, grounded in course-based research, suggests that students who engage with diversity, appreciating and adopting an intersectional standpoint, may be better able to navigate and participate in the labour force. Yet, this approach also demonstrates the important role education and advocacy play in the landscape of alternative social structures and systems for historically marginalized social groups in the promotion of alternative media structures, policy, and representations.

Notes

1. This pedagogical intervention is grounded in course-based research in Diversity and Mass Communication, an undergraduate course that helps students fulfill a liberal education requirement in diversity and social justice at the University of Minnesota in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

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