

Content with Diversity

An interview and textual analysis based on the *Huffington Post* crowdfunded Ferguson coverage

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The death of Michael Brown, shot to death on August 9, 2014, was in many ways typical of the many cases of police brutality covered in the 21st century press: an officer, white, gunning down an unarmed black individual over nebulous details. The case surrounding the 19-year-old's death was part of a growing coverage of police brutality against blacks. But it was also additional evidence for activists, victims' families and their supporters who had been sounding the alarm about the differences in life quality and social treatment in America along racial lines. One of the institutions called to look at its practices has been the media. In fact, the term "media diversity" has become associated to many of its industries, from entertainment and technology to the press.

While much research has been performed on the way blacks and other minorities are included and covered in the news, the relationship between newsroom composition and content has received less attention (Ankney & Procopio, 2003). Schulman (1990) talks about the role of social identity in the newsroom, through a conversation he had in the 1970s with a reporter. In the midst of a strike pitting *Washington Post* management against production workers (those not involved in editorial work), the reporter told him that he would not join the picket lines because "[w]e eat lunch at the same restaurants as Henry Kissinger, and thus identify with those kind of people." The same reporter went on to

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declare that despite the fact they work “*in the same building [...] journalists work in offices; the printers work in a factory*” (118). It would not be fair to paint all news reporters with the same brush, of course. But it is important to look at the dearth of minorities in the news business from a social, and organizational, standpoint. Such pursuit spurs the following research questions: on one hand, do inclusive hiring practices foster progressive content? And how can an organization implement hiring practices that affect change in content when such initiative may not be part of its traditional way of operating?

Based on textual analysis of a reporter’s crowd-funded work for news website <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> and an interview with the journalist, this paper’s main argument is that a newsroom’s progressive hiring can result in the creation of progressive content, but that these practices are subject to challenges on the part of the organization and the reporter. In this present study, the campaign of <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> meant the organization reached out to a budding reporter already interested in doing work the newsroom was not equipped to cover; that the organization opted for a crowdfunding alternative to fund her salary; but it also meant the same organization ensured this reporter would be adequately accompanied throughout her duties. This opportunity has allowed the journalist to turn in articles that have shed light on the lives of Ferguson residents and struggles in a contextualized and detailed way. The opportunity has also shed light on some of her own blind spots and the emotional toll her work has taken on her.

Though “*one of the most often discussed underlying reasons for the inequities is race or ethnicity,*” (Luther, Lepre & Clark, 2012: 4) blackness is not equated with poverty in this paper. Because even blacks who are considered well-off suffer from many of the prejudices experienced by those from the underclass this analysis does not solely focus on the black poor, but on the black experience as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Social lack of power of blacks

The push for fairer and more inclusive practices in U.S. media is not a quest of political correctness. Nor is it pursued for a “*simple postmodern celebration of multiplicity*”, a stance Fraser (1990) ascribes to those who underestimate the fact “*the ideal of participatory parity is better achieved by a multiplicity of publics*” (70). What is said, if anything is at all, about blacks and other traditionally poorly re-

presented groups contributes to what media consumers learn about members of these communities. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) puts it, the average American is “*ambivalent, ‘a little bit scared’ of some Blacks and admiring of others-more on the basis of what he [or she] learns from the media than personal experience*” (2). The significance of social ideas regarding blackness is, in fact, so considerable that even blacks can hold these views and apprehensions about members of their own group, Entman and Rojecki argues.

One’s natural inclination is to point the finger at racist individuals that make up the media. But the practices inside these organizations work within larger social structures and attitudes. This is why one must not look solely at the personnel of newsrooms and “*market incentives*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 11) to tackle issues related to content and hiring practices. One must take into account, on one hand, organizational factors by which the media operate, but also what Feagin (2010) calls “*the white racial frame*” of viewing the world.

As this paper argues, the disappearance of overt, old-style discrimination has not wiped the American slate clean for vulnerable groups like blacks and the poor. Slavery and lynchings may be of the past, but indignities of the past have, instead of disappearing, morphed into insidious forms of strife that have become easier to miss and dismiss because of their stealth manifestations. Du Bois (2007) spoke at the beginning of last century of American blacks’ “*twoness*”, as an “*American, a negro*” and a “*double-consciousness*”, which consists in having “*two souls ... two unconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body*” (9). Thus despite being free, blacks still “*simply wis[h] to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows*” (9).

The right to vote, a revealing mark of this African-American duality pitting their official status as citizens versus that of unwanted foreigners, was fought for and wrested with much physical pain. Coates (2014) characterized this long history as a “*visceral experience*” where “*the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts*”, can all be summed up in “*great violence, upon the body*” (10). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, “*that effectively outlawed egregious forms of discrimination against African-Americans and women, including most forms of segregation*”, (Clayton, 2015: iii) was an initiative borne out of a long and physically violent trend. Clayton explains that “*the violent attacks on marchers [...] persuaded President Johnson and Congress to call for a strong voting rights law*”.

Yet no matter how egregious this struggle may have seemed to media viewers seeing the images on television, Bonilla-Silva (2014) points to “[c]olour-blind racism... as a new racial ideology in the late 1960s” (16). The colour-blind frame works from the standpoint that racism is a matter of the past and that the slate is clean. But what is actually true is that the discrimination that fuelled and maintained the egregious acts of the past have been instead shifted around “central elements of liberalism ... to rationalize racially unfair situations” (76). As a result, the “frame of abstract liberalism” tenets, which value “choice, individualism”, place responsibility for black strife on the victims’ shoulders (and, interestingly, by extension, the group not individuals).

This is why Dzur (2008) argues that while a “public forum may be inclusive in that its participants are not constrained by lack of deliberative resources and abilities” the fact still remains that “[m]arginalized groups ... that have been the subject of historical discriminations may be included ... while still lacking equal opportunity to influence the policy debate” (165). A case in point is the Civil Rights Act, which has ensured that “[n]o person acting under color of law shall ... deny the right of any individual to vote in any Federal election” (Our Documents, 2015). The passing of this law, however, did not prevent “hindrances to black empowerment in the form of cumbersome voter registration procedures, district boundaries that dilute the black vote, gerrymandering”, and “hostility to black candidates among a significant number of whites” (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990: 388) to this day. Indeed, in 2016 the courts overturned the voter identification law in North Carolina because “new provisions target African Americans with almost surgical precision” and “constitute inapt remedies for the problems assertedly justifying them and, in fact, impose cures for problems that did not exist” (United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, 2016: 11).

And the case of Ferguson, St. Louis, Missouri, apart from its high media attention, is no different. In 2013, 13,389 of its 20,337 citizens were black and 6,630 were white. Approximately 10.6% of the latter were below the poverty line while 29.7% of blacks were below the line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Besides adding to a long history of what many African-Americans perceive as undue police violence directed at them, several elements made the death of Michael Brown controversial. On one hand, “(s)ome witnesses said that Mr. Brown had his hands in the air” (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015) and was being compliant to the officer; Darren Wilson, the officer, on the other hand, testified before a grand jury he “was authorized to use force against Michael Brown Jr. after Brown punched him twice in the face” (Staff

reports, 2014). Comparing Brown to a “demon”, the officer said he “felt like a 5-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan” (Cave, 2014). Months of rioting cost Ferguson some \$5.7M in law enforcement services alone. In fact, two months after the death of Brown “officials have not yet finalized the expenses of their responses, and the unrest in the area has all but settled” (Chasmar, 2014).

The Department of Justice’s report, which honed in on Ferguson police, confirmed what many blacks in Ferguson had long suspected. The report told a tale of a city where “African Americans are more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops” (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2015: 4). This despite the fact Ferguson blacks are “found in possession of contraband 26% less often than white drivers” (5). Moreover “violent crime rate is far lower in Ferguson than in [neighbouring] Jennings, and it is comparable to two other adjacent towns of similar size” (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015).

This unfair treatment of Ferguson blacks also occurred in the form of less straightforward indignities, such as “emails circulated by police supervisors and court staff” where “one joked about an abortion by an African-American woman being a means of crime control” (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2015: 5). Not only “officers expect and demand compliance even when they lack legal authority” but they were also “inclined to interpret [...] innocent movements as physical threats, indications of mental or physical illness as belligerence” (2). An example the report provided was that of a 2012 case in which a 32-year-old man was approached by a policeman and was “(w)ithout any cause [...] accused [...] of being a pedophile” (3). The policeman charged the citizen with “(m)aking a False Declaration, [...] for initially providing the short form of his first name (e.g., “Mike” instead of “Michael”), and [...] for not wearing a seat belt, even though he was seated in a parked car”. A contractor with the government, “he lost his job [...] that he had held for years” (3).

Ultimately “(p)olice supervisors and leadership [...] rarely respond meaningfully to civilian complaints of officer misconduct” (2). In fact, “the court primarily uses its judicial authority as the means to compel the payment of fines and fees that advance the City’s financial interests” (3). Yet the City justified its behaviour by evoking a “personal-responsibility refrain”, which entailed officials finger-pointing “‘certain segments’ of the community” (5), a euphemistic turn of phrase meant to obscure the fact that one is referring to an undesirable group. These cases show that liberalism, based on “indivi-

dualism” and the tenet that states that “*force should not be used to achieve social policy*” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014: 76), is a veil behind which egregious discrimination and acts actually take shape. As a result, for blacks, “*discrimination is a series of unforgettable life crises*” (Feagin, 1994: 16). And the effects of these incidents are not neatly contained inside the lives of only those directly involved. As Feagin (1994) explains these incidents create a “*cumulative effect*” as a “*black victim frequently shares the account with family and friends*” eventually becoming not only individual memories, but also “*family stories and group recollections*” (Feagin, 1994: 16).

Consequences of this white racial frame are far-fetched. In a study that looked to understand how police officers process information when using their firearms against potential suspects “*[a]ccurate responses to targets congruent with culturally prevalent stereotypes (i.e., armed Black targets and unarmed White targets) required less time than did responses to stereotype-incongruent targets (i.e., unarmed Black targets and armed White targets)*”. (Correll, Park, Judd, Wittenbrink, Sadler & Keesee, 2007: 1020). Because “*stereotyping tends to happen where there are gross inequalities of power*” and stereotypes are “*a signifying practice that is central to the representation of racial difference*”, (Hall, 1997: 258) this is a good time to look at what the news media is doing in terms of not only hiring practices, but also of content production.

Media practices

Media plays an important part in perceptions when it comes to poverty. It has been found that “*television’s visuals construct ‘poverty’ as nearly synonymous with ‘Black,’ and surveys show Whites typically accept this picture even though poverty is not the lot of most Black persons*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2002: 102). Studying the portrayal of Katrina hurricane victims from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, Kahle, Yu and Whiteside (2007) found that “*[p]hotographs consistently put Anglos in the role of helper and African-Americans, of helpless victim*”, (86). Blacks were identified 80% in “*passive social roles*” while Whites were identified in “*active social roles*” 74% of the time. This portrayal was part of a narrative depicting an “*overwhelming representation of White military and social service personnel ‘saving’ the African-American[s]*” (86), in addition to including the use of the term “*refugees*”, in captions.

Entman and Rojecki (2000) notes “*the absence of contextual explanations*” as problematic when it comes to the representation of black poverty. The authors note that even when the media covers the

topic with empathy, omissions in stories may end up causing misinformation. Using as support the analysis of local television news stories regarding Martin Luther King Day the researchers argue that the stories “*denounced racism without explaining exactly why it is bad*” and “*even implied that racism is a thing of the past [...] because he [Martin Luther King] inspired passage of the civil rights laws*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 102). The contextualization is important here because poverty is “*a continuing, multifaceted social problem*” that “*audience members may find ... easier to see ... as an essentially personal condition susceptible of wholly individual cures*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 101). By doing this, the authors suggest this audience fails to “*reconcil[e] ... its simultaneously sympathetic and impatient assumption that America offers the promise of escape from poverty to all who work hard*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 94). They suggest the coverage would have been informative if “*the news had explicitly asserted that the poor were somewhat more likely to die from traumatic injuries than the middle class because of the hospital’s closing (and the underlying problem of insufficient government funding)*” (101).

Feagin (2010) notes the blind spots tied to “*local news programs that are major sources of news for most Americans*” and how “*[m]ost local media operate routinely out of the dominant racial frame*” (104). This means “*focusing on blue collar crimes by black Americans and ... ignoring much white crime especially white collar crime*” (106). This further highlights the association of blacks with violence, here as its perpetrators, and the resources allocated by news organizations to, so to speak, keep an eye on them. This white frame establishes “*subtleties in defining violence and in categorizing it as criminal or as newsworthy*” by ignoring “*[s]lumlords whose neglect of heat and sanitation codes causes children to become sick, police who harass minority youth without probable cause*” or “*banks that refuse to lend to credit-worthy individuals based on race*”. Ultimately, they are “*serious kind[s] of crime[s] if not violence against people*” yet are easily dismissible by many viewers, especially whites, because they are “*not reported in official statistics of crime or in most newscasts*” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 81).

When looking at what occurred in Ferguson, it is reasonable to conceive that part of what allowed such rife prejudice to go on was an ill-equipped, if not uninterested altogether, mainstream media when it came to addressing the concerns of the city’s black community. Linda Lockhart, a former reporter and editorial writer for 17 years at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the most read newspaper in St. Louis (Mondo Times, 2015), said “*the Post hasn’t gone below the*

surface on [...] the greater problems related to race” (Lockhart, 2008: 28). She justified this statement by the low count of African-Americans involved in the actual news-gathering process: thus while there are “number of [...] African-American reporters”, there is only “one African-American ‘news’ reporter” (28). The rest are either “columnists or writers and editors in the sports and features sections” as well as “several African-American photographers” (28).

In the newsroom

On the basis of the argument that factors outside newsrooms have much to do with what goes inside them, Entman and Rojecki (2000) argues that “the mainstream culture” is one of “the forces that interact to produce race-based differentiation” (8). In fact “[s]tructural forces have far more bearing on the nature of news images than the racial identifications of the personnel” (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 84). This is why despite the number of white individuals who own media companies Mellinger (2007) construes whiteness not merely by skin colour but “hegemonic dominance to those who are admitted to its privileges”. Here “the salience of whiteness is not as skin color but as a power differential” (147).

Indeed, the mere inclusion of minorities in the ranks of media organizations does not suffice to create progressive media content. Thus some of the decision-making elites who do “side with blacks and women” may do so by favouring those “who move into the existing social order to separatists who want to alter it” (Gans, 1979: 61). To understand the errors of media organizations’ ways when it comes to inclusiveness, one must first look at news organizations as businesses, “because the news media claim to sell the news” (Tuchman, 1978: 16).

The sociology of work, particularly literature regarding the importance of controlling work, is relevant to understand the organizational nature of major newsrooms. Perrow (1967) notes that, as part of an organization, an “individual must interact with others” and that this is part of “the structure of the organization” (195). Thus “understand[ing] the nature of the material [yielded from this interaction] means to be able to control it better” (197) and “remove variations ... and thus provide boundaries for rationality where its constraints and contingencies are greatest” (Thompson, 1967: 78).

The decision to simply strive for numerical, visible diversity—without making any deep-seated changes to the organization itself—may then be one put in place to ensure keeping critics at bay, but also avoid perturbations that would hinder a company’s orderly affairs. This numbers-based policy can be

seen in USA Today’s practices, for example, when “[n]ewspapers owned by the Gannett Company, the nation’s largest newspaper chain, are increasingly adhering to a policy of making members of minority groups more visible in their news columns” (New York Times, 1988). But Glasser (1992) counters that “conspicuously missing” from such policy “is any discussion of how these changes in employment brought about changes in journalism—changes in the way newspapers are managed, changes in the way news is defined” or “changes in the way stories are written” (133).

This is not to say that individuals are not important in the process. Indeed, “[i]f journalists are found to come predominantly from white middle-class homes ...undoubtedly this will influence the sensibilities and knowledge base informing journalist output” (Cottle, 2000: 19). Once news organizations realize their lopsided practices, a heterogeneous staff should be brought on board with the mindset that “the presence of African-Americans in positions of influence can produce good story ideas that whites may overlook” (Shipler, 1998: 32). Real change can thus only occur if both the organizational and personal factors are addressed.

Breakthroughs

Some organizations have made such steps. While online news site BuzzFeed publicly breaks down its staff by gender and race, it has also broadened its approach, by questioning its practices, to make its workplace more heterogeneous. Its staff has come up with a “working definition of diversity”, defining it as “enough people of a particular group that no one person has to represent the supposed viewpoint of their group—whether ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ... socioeconomic background, or disability”. The definition further specifies that “if the group is a small one we should never expect one person to be the ‘diverse’ reporter or writer, or to speak for anyone other than themselves” (Smith, 2014). To BuzzFeed, “[d]iversity helps editorial organizations avoid the ... false conventional wisdom held in a room full of people who come from similar places”. It has also listed publicly on its website “things editors should do when hiring”. This list includes items such as “be thoughtful about the wording of job listings, and of using language in ways that inadvertently signals that we’re looking for a guy”, “[m]ake an effort to look outside of job board applications and personal networks” along with “[l]ook for opportunities to make hires that will increase the diversity of our readership”.

The ethnic press has made strides where larger organizations have struggled when it comes to ad-

dressing communities of color. In St. Louis, The St. Louis American has been in operation since 1928 as “*the longest continuously published weekly newspaper in the St. Louis area*” and “*the single largest weekly newspaper in the entire state of Missouri*” (The St. Louis American, 2016). The newspaper, which boasts on its website a circulation of 70,200 copies every week, (The St. Louis American/2, 2016), describes itself as a “*hyper-local media entity*” where “*we make sure our readers see themselves and read their stories*” (The St. Louis American, 2016). As a purveyor of content of “*hard news, religion news, entertainment, sports, or profiles of successful local African Americans, the American provides [...] African Americans a credible voice*” (The St. Louis American, 2016). In this vein, the paper fulfills what Luther, Lepre and Clark, (2012) describes the mission of the ethnic press, as a “*source of disseminating information and an active, contributing member of a community*” (292).

Social media has been one avenue for the evolution of the press, but for social and political advancement also. One group that has used it for its activities is Black Lives Matters (BLM). BLM was formed in the wake of the Trayvon Martin shooting. The African-American teen, unarmed, was shot to death during an altercation with a “*neighborhood watch volunteer*”, (Alcindor, 2013) George Zimmerman. BLM has rallied against institutions by “*draw[ing] attention to the ways in which media outlets perpetuate narratives of respectability surrounding the victims of police violence that ultimately shape the grievability of Black bodies left dead after police encounters*” (Obasogie & Newman, 2016: 556). Members of the group do so “*by directly engaging these outlets or providing alternative perspectives through [...] uploading videos on Instagram, promoting Twitter hashtag campaigns, or using comments sections in online editions of newspapers*” (Obasogie & Newman, 2016: 556).

The media has also relied on social media, specifically crowdfunding, in the past few years. Hunter (2015) calls crowdfunding a “*possible solution to the economic uncertainty that has gained momentum*” (273). But it is also “*a space to foster marginalized talents and projects that, either by choice or necessity [...] exist[s] outside of mainstream media industries*” (Scott, 2015: 168). The method consists of “*solicit[ing] funds from friends, colleagues and strangers to support their journalism endeavours*” (Hunter, 2015: 273).

Despite the funding, however, “*the giving does not create an equivalently strong bond for donors as it does for reporters*”. (Aitamurto, 2011: 438) Indeed, the donors may feel some kind of tie to the

story in some kind of personal way, but in many instances “*the donors might not ... even read the final story*” (438). For these donors, their act is not so much a commitment as it is an accomplishment, and “*are compensated with either the symbolic gratitude of seeing the work published or by receiving a reward from the professional in question*”. (Carvajal, García-Avilés & González, 2012: 642)

Some media organizations have also solicited funds to issues they believed required attention. Aitamurto (2011) raises “[a]n example of problem-solving journalism ... *the Huffington Post Impact, where journalism is married to ... issues like hunger at schools, or the misery of a family that lost a home in a flood*”. The site, at the bottom of the story then invites “[t]he reader ... to donate for a nonprofit organization that aims to alleviate the problem” (443).

Created in 2005, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> is a website where bloggers and personalities “*are invited to blog and use the website as a podium for their opinions*” (Bakker, 2012: 634). Its popularity has soared and it “*came to surpass the traffic of virtually all the nation’s established news organizations*” (Shapiro, 2012: 36), boasting a 2015 revenue of \$168 million. For its editor in chief, Arianna Huffington, “*(j)ournalism is meant to give people ... a voice in how their world is structured*” (Columbia Journalism Review, 2013: 29). One way it fulfilled this mission in the Ferguson coverage has been by relying on crowdfunding. This lead <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> to use the services of Mariah Stewart who began filing reports for <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> in March 2015. She was brought on to “*(m)ake sure Ferguson isn’t forgotten*” (Beacon Reader, 2015).

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

this study first performs a textual analysis of Mariah Stewart’s <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> articles. The method serves to understand news content since the latter “*is a representation of the world in language,*” which “*imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented*” (Fowler, 1991: 4). Textual analysis is an approach that can look into the formulation of discourse, namely “*style, rhetoric ... or narrative structures*” and how they inform readers how “*other research about socially shared ethnic prejudices ... relate to structures of text and talk*” (van Dijk, 1991: 6) But this present analysis looks to carry out another goal of the approach, which is looking at texts as “*representations [that] do not so much ‘distort’ reality as productively provide the means by which ‘reality’ is actively constructed and/or known*” (Cottle, 2000: 9).

The analysis focuses on the way the poor, namely mentions that relate to their daily reality, were addressed in Stewart's articles. Because most images of Ferguson largely featured protesters who are black, generally perceived to be part of the poor as seen earlier, this paper narrowed its search by solely focusing on articles that textually made reference to the poor even if their race is not specifically indicated. Thus passages referring to "the poor," "poverty" and any mention about financial ability or disability were selected.

The poor's insignificance

Two major themes stand out from the articles. The first one deals with the insignificance of the poor. Part of this portrayal involves the fragility of their life, as expressed in the following passage:

*At that rate, she would have to appear in court on the designated night every month for more than three years to pay off the full amount. **Miss a night, and she could face arrest*** (Stewart and Reilly, 2015).

The full force of the sentence "Miss a night, and she could face arrest" actually takes shape through the phrase "Miss a night", which establishes how one error could subject the poor to suffering from the legal system. The shortness of the phrase reproduces the teetering state of the poor's living conditions.

Adding to this fragility is the description of the poor as child-like:

*As the city defends itself against a civil rights lawsuit brought on behalf of individuals the city jailed for days and weeks ... an attorney for the city is arguing, essentially, that the poor people **lacked** personal responsibility* (Stewart and Reilly/2, 2015).

The verb "lacked" here is reminiscent of another term it is usually associated with in "manners". Indeed, "lacking manners" is usually reserved for unruly children. This sentence thus implies that the treatment of Ferguson residents is the result of the system viewing them and treating them as immature individuals.

Beside being depicted a fragile or child-like state, the poor are also featured in language where they are depicted as being physically dominated:

*"If a police force seems like its primary **mission** is to **extract** fees from poor people in the neighborhood, and a court system has **tricks** to compound those fees into very large pay-*

*days for themselves, if that isn't an **assault** on liberty, what is?" he said* (Stewart and Reilly, 2015).

The quote here connotes two elements. The fact that their life hinges on "tricks" frames their life as inconsequential, as a game, on top of suggesting those behind the tricks, City of Ferguson officials, are looking to gain for their misfortune and does not have their best interest at heart. Such contextualization establishes that the weight of Ferguson residents is not solely the result of decisions they make in their own lives, but also stem from institutions that have a stake in their failures.

But much of this sentence, through the use of words like "mission", "extract" and "assault" also depicts the black poor of Ferguson as not only being handled with force, but of being devoid of control over their life altogether.

The poor's lack of control over their lives

This lack of control is expressed not only as physical, but metaphysical also:

*The threat of incarceration is a brutally effective tool for ensuring that municipal court payments **are prioritized in a poor person's monthly budget*** (Stewart and Reilly, 2015).

The payments being "prioritized in a poor person's monthly budget" present them as invading the thoughts, if not the entire life, of Ferguson's poor. By extension, these thoughts actually consume them and should thus be understood as an internalization that besets the poor's lives in all ways: the "threat" is still active even when it is not physically present. It is in fact present even when those in Ferguson "prioritize," in other words show discipline, how they take care of their financial matters.

This lack of control is also apparent in the way Stewart writes about the relationship Ferguson's poor shares with the penal system.

*Thousands upon thousands of citizens were **caught up in a system they felt they could not escape**, with many of them spending **days hopping from jail to jail** because they **could not afford to purchase their freedom*** (Stewart and Reilly/3, 2015).

Phrases such as "could not afford to purchase their freedom," "caught up in a system," "a system they felt they could not escape" imply an idea that these citizens are not simply trapped but subjugated to the system. Such idea is more forcefully implied in the sentence

“hopping from jail to jail.” Imprisonment, for most in society, represents a steep descent from habits considered “normal”. Thus “hopping” here implies that, in fact, this is not the case for Ferguson’s poor and that imprisonment is a normal part of life.

The articles describe this lack of control also as bottomless.

*You’re effectively **being punished for being poor*** (Stewart and Reilly, 2015).

The fact one can be “punished for being poor” expresses that being born and living into poverty, already a punishment in itself, is negligible in comparison to what awaits the poor’s daily life. Ultimately, readers are told that the exponential nature of this punishment is susceptible to the whims of the city officials and is evidence to how much the poor lack ownership of their own fate.

INTERVIEW

The initial interview took place on November 16, 2015, and another one was conducted on October 4, 2016.

Mariah Stewart’s stint with <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> began as a result of the reporter’s own initiatives. A 2014 journalism graduate, she was posting developments out of Ferguson that year, in the fallout of the Michael Brown case for the crowdfunding site <http://www.beaconreader.com>. Stewart said civil rights issues had long been important to her, so much in fact “*I probably should have mined in black history*”. She said that “*I didn’t even look at that as [a professional] option*”, but more in the sense that “*I care about this and this is what I’m going to cover*”. It was because of poverty’s significant role in the lives of Ferguson residents that “*I feel my place is to uncover truth that other reporters, especially local reporters, overlook*”.

She had been doing reporting work for about two weeks when “*my [future Huffington Post] colleague Ryan Reilly had approached the chief bureau of <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> DC office about having this girl for a fellow in Ferguson*”. This is when the “*Huffington Post reached [out] to Beacon*”, reasoning that “*since Beacon’s so good at crowdfunding, let’s use Beacon Reader to do it*”.

The *Huffington Post* presented the campaign to the reporter as an opportunity “*to do what the national media isn’t*”, by “*stay[ing] invested for the long term while it remains a sexy HP story*” in terms of popularity. But the program was a learning experience for [http://](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

www.huffingtonpost.com also. Stewart says that once her *Huffington Post* “*colleagues realized that because I was working remotely in Missouri I wasn’t getting a newsroom experience...they reached out to the St. Louis American*”. The newspaper took her on board as a “*content partner*”. This meant that “*I get that newsroom experience and I work on my craft by doing other stories as well*”.

The partnership with the St. Louis American has been a beneficial one for Stewart for multiple reasons. She mentioned that the publication, much like <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>, has assigned her to stories, but also has been open to her pitches and “*allow[ing] you to be creative and share the stories that need to be shared*”. This has helped her being “*what a journalist is about*”. In addition to the fact that “*I don’t think you’re going to see as much diversity in newsrooms as you see at the St. Louis American ... [where] whites, Hispanics, Asians, blacks you name it*” work side by side, the paper has also allowed her to have access to resources that journalists at national mainstream outlets don’t have, namely “*sources and prior knowledge*”. This is because the paper has been “*covering the city for years*”, which means that “*a national reporter from the L.A. Times or somewhere else would have to work just a little bit harder to get that type of information*”. Despite not being remunerated by the paper, Stewart says “*they pay me in experience*”.

But the reporter’s stint has encountered a few difficulties, in terms of access on one hand. Simply speaking, some of the Ferguson locals she approached were “*at times*” reticent to speak with her, despite being a black woman who grew up close to Ferguson. The reticence came from some of her sources not knowing <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>:

I didn’t have the St. Louis American connected to my name and they would say “Oh, it’s Huffington Post: what are they like?” That mystery too kept people on guard. I know there’s a big difference between when I say “St. Louis American” and “<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>” with people familiar to the St. Louis American who know their coverage and trust it.

She conjectured that “*there’s a disconnect between national news outlets like The Huffington Post and the black media and the Ferguson region*”, which may “*somehow [...] relat[e] to poverty*”.

Stewart also faced emotional difficulties. Demby (2015) expressed the dismay of “[b]lack [r]eporters

[r]eport[ing] on [b]lack [d]eath”, via such qualifiers as “[t]hat whole process takes a lot out of you”, and “his team won a Pulitzer for its [Hurricane Katrina] coverage [b]ut he also remembered being on edge for months later” as “[n]o one had ever warned him about the psychic residue of paddling through a lake of floating corpses”. For Stewart, this dismay revealed itself when covering stories directly related to poverty. While she says she learned in journalism school rudimentary aspects of reporting about poverty, “my first time talking to a grieving parent was difficult”. She called her work “emotionally draining, tolling”.

You’re not talking about a 40 pound-cat. You’re talking about race and you’re talking about your community, how it’s affected by it and it’s heavy. There’s been times when I cried at protests. I went to Alabama to go see Selma actually. I had to walk out of the movie theater. I cried like a baby. But I feel like if it had not been for Ferguson I would have been able to stay and watch the movie in its entirety. It was just way too trigger-y. As I was watching the movie I kept thinking about all of the messed up things I had witnessed on the ground at Ferguson.

Stewart thinks that one factor that has not helped attract attention on Ferguson’s conditions has been the media, mostly because of news organizations relying on official news sources.

I definitely feel that the reason these systematic issues have blown up is because local news here was reporting the police’s side of things and thinking since they [police officials] said it, it must be true, whereas the media would barely get other people’s side. [...] So I think it’s very important to get both sides of the story, especially the people’s voice because it’s not often heard. [...] I don’t want my reporting to seem lazy or uneven, but sometimes these personal narratives speak for themselves and they need to be shared.

Once on the ground, Stewart says she saw firsthand a “lack of understanding that’s very frustrating because you should have some kind of sensitivity especially when you’re a journalist”.

She explained it in further details this way:

It’s frustrating too to see your white counterparts not understand or relate while they’re asking questions or while they’re at a protest and “heehee” and “haha” about certain things. It’s very inappropriate. [...] There were some

things said among the other reporters [that made me think] “Man, that’s why we need more minorities covering out there.” A lot of the inappropriate things were from photographers and cameramen. Being rude to photo subjects: [they would tell them] “You need to stand over here, not over there...”. “They don’t need to be here protesting, the guy was guilty....” And some of these people were Pulitzer Prize winners. [...] There’s been so much. It’s tiresome.

In light of the Department of Justice’s damning report, Stewart speaks of the continual balancing act she has had to perform given the level of wrongdoing on the part of the City. The DOJ report, but also “when I see the Ferguson City prosecutor laying down the law hard even after watching video evidence that shows a protester was wrongfully arrested”, has “sometimes” made it difficult to give Ferguson officials the benefit of the doubt. She also points to city officials’ lack of contrition in the wake of the report’s revelation concerning the city’s financing stratagems:

In an interview with the mayor I mentioned instances, where he was mentioned in the DOJ report, regarding revenues and things of that nature. He essentially told me that he wasn’t aware of them. So it does [make it hard to give Ferguson officials the benefit of the doubt]. But I know when it comes to reporting the story I can’t let my personal opinion get too much in the way when I’m saying something they said and how they said it.

Part of this introspection also concerned her own positions. The reporter realized along the way that she carried some apathy when it came to some of the practices from Ferguson officials.

Even I to an extent wasn’t aware of the issues in St. Louis County. Like most people I thought it was the norm. As a matter of fact I was telling Ryan (Reilly) about my mother having a warrant for having high grass on one of her properties, as though it’s nothing, and he said “No, this is not OK!” At first, I was harsh on local reporters, but I realized we’re blind to some things.

One item that Stewart did not pay much attention to in her work was how activists felt towards one of the African-American candidates running for city council. Some in the national press described the victories of these candidates, Wesley Bell and Ella Jones, glowingly, pointing out, in the title, that “Ferguson election makes history”

(Basu, 2015). It was “*the first time ever, Ferguson’s City Council will be half black*”. Also, Ella Jones became “*the first black woman ever to sit on the Ferguson council*”. Yet Stewart mentioned that activists on the ground did not support Wesley Bell.

They [activists] felt Wesley was a part of the problem. He is a judge in Velda City, I believe, and that city is notorious for ticketing blacks and profiting off them for revenue. As a matter of fact, pretty much every city he’s worked in has had legal problems.

Such a story would have been relevant given this lack of progressiveness activists associated with the candidate, but also in terms of broaching a conversation about the multifaceted aspects of black candidates and the black electorate. Stewart does not recall why she had not covered that particular angle.

Working on a more regular basis in the industry has been sobering, Stewart says. It has shed light on the realities of reporting for local news:

I was really critical because I felt for years the things I was discovering from people and ... so [I wondered] where were our local reporters getting this out. [...] I do understand when it comes to TV broadcasts they have to get a story out quickly, as detailed as possible in the shortest way [...] so that’s understandable why they won’t have this long intense thesis about the corrupt government.

But Stewart also mentioned that what she described as “blind spots” are all the more reasons that newsrooms should be more heterogeneous in their composition, including in terms of race and gender, to better monitor life in Ferguson and reduce the chances of important stories being overlooked. Stewart noticed a lack of progressiveness even when some media organizations attempted to broaden the criteria of coverage.

I know in a couple of recent instances where local newsrooms were looking for a reporter to cover local diversity, but they hired someone that doesn’t necessarily represent that.

When I spoke to the reporter again, approximately a year later after our initial conversation, she mentioned of waning interest in Ferguson stories from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> and readers, so much so that it was the editor of The St. Louis American, through connections, who facilitated her second stint.

By the second go-around [...] there was a certain lack of interest. People were still there, but we saw these protests happening around the country more. It was clear that Ferguson is everywhere so I think people were invested in the story and not so much specifically Ferguson.

One aspect that had not changed for her, however, was what she described, again, as the “*emotionally tolling*”, aspect of her work. In fact during the second conversation, Stewart brought up this point without having been asked:

I realized that at the beginning [how much reporting work was emotionally tolling] but I didn’t know it would affect me this far into it. You have to take time for yourself. [...] There were a lot of people I know who were in Ferguson that needed to take a step back, because it’s no joke.

Stewart mentioned that these feelings shifted into her personal life or while working on a story:

Sometimes you’re at a press conference or something and you see another reporter asking something that’s really insensitive to a victim’s family or to the situation. And it’s insensitive to people of color. That’s a time when it’s a lot.

She credits <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> and her St. Louis American colleagues’ “*great understanding for when reporters need to pull back*”. Stewart says during these times of distress that come with the job, management will pay attention to reporters who say “*Hey this is too hard for me to handle*”, “*I can’t cover this*” or “*This happened to me, has it happened to you?*” She says “*it’s so reassuring to have people who don’t look like me understand how I’m feeling about a story or race situation.*”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The textual analysis of Mariah Stewart’s work shows its progressive inclination, instead of “*treating the poor as a nameless group without explaining the root causes of poverty*” (Luther, Lepre & Clark, 2012: 292). Many of her articles feature instances in which she does not merely present Ferguson residents’ legal and financial woes in terms that would make readers infer that American life is guided by strictly one standard that Ferguson residents happened to fail to obey. Through detailed depictions and contextualisation of the residents’ experiences the reporter presents not only the woes, but also instances of the city’s self-funding scheme at work.

But the experience has also had an impact on the reporter herself. She realized along the way having her own blind spots, particularly when it comes to government practices she wanted to shed light on in the first place. While she admits she had not fully realized the realities of the local press until she began practicing journalism as a full-time reporter, she also noted that all reporters are subject to having blind spots, which is all the more reasons to insist on making newsrooms more heterogeneous. The reporter believes that having more non-white male reporters will help newsrooms gain a greater depth of knowledge about their communities and have a better chance at ensuring to make up for each reporter's blind spots.

One aspect of journalism work the reporter was not prepared for was the emotional toll that accompanied covering these communities, where discrimination and also death often work in concert. *The Huffington Post* was certainly aware of some of the rigors around such work and showed empathy with Stewart. That said, the organization also knew, to a certain extent, it could not carry out this campaign all on its own, not just from a financial aspect, but in terms of resources also. This is why the organization not only sought a reporter that could file in compelling reports about Ferguson, but also felt it necessary to seek the help of an organization that could

fund the journalist's salary. According to Stewart <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> was flexible enough to realize it was not assisting Stewart in her work as adequately as it should and tapped local paper, *The St. Louis American*, in order to assist with the reporter's work and development.

In this vein, the program defies the traditional, and erroneous, model where the creation of progressive content and newsrooms hinges solely on the back of good-willed individuals instead of a top-down approach. *The Huffington Post* campaign has spotlighted the intersection of several key agents when it comes to fostering the production of more equitable, progressive representation of minority communities. One that includes a reporter invested in the creation of reporting work that broadens the traditional white-framed journalistic model; a news organization endeavouring to promote diversity beyond cosmetic and superficial standards, while still being flexible enough to seek assistance in the face of challenges; and a small news organization equipped with resources the bigger company cannot provide and that benefited from such partnership, by being able to create more content to inform the community it serves in the process.

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En • The death of Michael Brown, by gunfire on August 9, 2014, became part of a growing news coverage of police brutality against blacks. Activists, victims' families and their supporters had long been sounding the alarm about the differences of life quality and social treatment in the U.S. along racial lines. One of the institutions called to look at its own practices over the past decades has been the media. Investigating the inequitable representation of minorities in media companies leads to questions about discrepancies between the companies' practices, progressive on the surface, and the resulting journalistic content. Do inclusive hiring practices foster progressive content? How can an organization implement progressive hiring practices when such an initiative may be outside of its traditional way of operating? Based on textual analysis of a reporter's crowd-funded work for news website *The Huffington Post* and an interview with the journalist, this paper's main argument is the following: a newsroom's progressive hiring practice can result in the creation of progressive content, but these practices are subject to challenges on the part of the organization and of the reporter. In this present study, this means that the news organization had to realize its shortcomings and be willing to tackle them. For the reporter, obstacles came in the form of the journalist's blind spots and the personal emotional strife that her work caused.

Keywords: representation, Huffington Post, Ferguson, journalism, crowdfunding.

Pt • A morte de Michael Brown, assassinado com tiros em 9 de agosto de 2014 pelo policial Darren Wilson, integrou parte da crescente cobertura jornalística sobre a brutalidade policial face aos afrodescendentes. Ativistas, familiares e apoiadores das vítimas há algum tempo têm chamado a atenção sobre as diferenças baseadas em critérios raciais no que diz respeito à qualidade de vida e ao tratamento social nos Estados Unidos. Uma das instituições que tem sido convidada a refletir nas últimas décadas sobre suas próprias práticas em relação a esse tema é a mídia. A análise da forma como a mídia representa de modo desigual as minorias mostra uma diferença entre suas práticas, que aparentemente se mostram progressistas, e o conteúdo jornalístico resultante delas. As práticas inclusivas de recrutamento no jornalismo favorecem a produção de um conteúdo progressista? E como uma organização de mídia pode desenvolver práticas de recrutamento progressista se esse tipo de iniciativa pode destoar do seu modelo tradicional de funcionamento? Com base em uma análise textual do trabalho de uma jornalista do *The Huffington Post* e de uma entrevista feita com essa profissional, este artigo se baseia no seguinte argumento: práticas de recrutamento progressista podem dar origem à criação de um conteúdo progressista, mas essas práticas resultam em desafios para a organização e para o jornalista. No caso em questão, isso significou que a organização midiática teve de aprender sobre suas falhas e estar disposta a resolvê-las. Para a jornalista, os obstáculos a levaram tomar consciência dos seus próprios pontos cegos e dos problemas pessoais causados pelo seu trabalho.

Palavras-chave: representação, The Huffington Post, Ferguson, jornalismo, crowdfunding.

Fr. La nouvelle de la mort de Michael Brown, tué par balle le 9 août 2014 par l'agent de police Darren Wilson, s'est jointe à la couverture médiatique croissante de la brutalité policière vis-à-vis des activistes afro-américains. Familles de victimes et soutiens tiraient depuis longtemps la sonnette d'alarme quant aux différences de qualité de vie et de traitement social selon des critères raciaux aux États-Unis. Les médias figurent parmi les institutions qui ont été appelées à reconsidérer leurs propres pratiques au cours des dernières décennies. L'analyse de l'inégalité de représentation des minorités au sein des organisations médiatiques montre l'écart qui existe entre des pratiques qui semblent progressistes en surface, et le contenu journalistique qui en résulte. Des pratiques d'embauche inclusives favoriseraient-elles l'apparition de contenus progressistes ? Et comment mettre en œuvre des pratiques d'embauche progressistes qui diffèrent du mode traditionnel de fonctionnement d'une organisation ? Sur la base d'une analyse textuelle du travail d'une journaliste pour le site web d'information The Huffington Post et d'une interview avec celle-ci, l'argument principal de cet article avance que si des pratiques d'embauche progressistes peuvent favoriser la création de contenus progressistes, elles représentent des défis pour l'organisation et pour les journalistes. Dans notre étude, l'organisation médiatique devait admettre ses lacunes et être disposée à les combler. Pour la journaliste, les obstacles venaient de ses propres aveuglements et des conflits intérieurs causés par son travail.

Mots-clés : représentation, Huffington Post, Ferguson, journalisme, crowdfunding.

