

ACTIVE RACISM AND THE 'INVISIBLE WORKLOAD': THE EXPERIENCES OF
RACIALIZED FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN CANADIAN MEDIA

by

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Abstract

Previous studies have found that female visible minority journalists experience various forms of sexism and racism in Canadian newsrooms. This thesis combines Journalism Studies and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in order to build on previous research and examine the experiences of racialized female journalists working in urban Canadian mainstream newsrooms. Through seven semi-structured interviews, five main themes emerged, many of which reiterate previous findings: (1) The racialized female reporters challenge dominant positivist norms in journalism, like objectivity; (2) These reporters have had to tailor their news stories in ways that appeal to white, usually male, editors; (3) Many of the women have experienced racism in the form of microaggressions and tokenization in newsrooms; (4) The interviewees have spent significant time educating their white colleagues on the nuances of race issues; and (5) The subjects value mentorship and “informal networks of support” in order to help other women and people of colour succeed in journalism. In contrast to previous findings, the subjects voiced an emboldened attitude towards challenging racial hierarchies in journalism spheres. Additionally, all interviewees voiced their desire to see enhanced representation of women of colour and Indigenous women in Canadian media. Particular attention is paid to how sexism and racism operate simultaneously in the lives of these reporters.

Lay Summary

This thesis explores the racialized and gendered experiences of seven visible minority female journalists currently working in urban Canadian mainstream newsrooms. During the one-on-one interviews, the women were encouraged to share stories about their interactions with co-workers and superiors. Through the discussions, evidence of ongoing racism and sexism in journalism spheres surfaced. However, the women voiced commitments to challenging these oppressions. In order to improve newsroom culture for visible minority women, the reporters emphasized the importance of mentorship and expressed a desire to see more women of colour and Indigenous women in journalism, as reporters and as news leaders. This project raises important questions about the treatment of racialized women in Canadian mainstream media.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, A. Zoledziowski. It was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (certificate number H17-02781) on January 23, 2018.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, the strongest person I know. I don't know where I would be without her unwavering love and support. I am forever grateful.

Kocham Cię.

1 Introduction

1.1 Speaking Out

You become disempowered and you become discouraged. I feel like I was trying to figure out what my white editors wanted. And I basically rarely pitched stories that matter to communities of colour or communities on the margins.

- Interview #1, personal communication, 2018

In the above quote, a female journalist of colour recounts the racial undertones of her early days working in Canadian mainstream newsrooms. As a visible minority working in newsrooms dominated by white (mostly male) decision makers, she felt pressured to pitch stories that would resonate with her superiors. Put another way, she did not feel comfortable pitching stories from “communities on the margins” because she assumed her editors would fail to see the value in them. She is one of a growing yet still significantly underrepresented number of minority reporters working in legacy Canadian newsrooms and as independent journalists.

In recent years, visible minority journalists have vocalized their dismay with workplace culture and the editorial processes in mainstream Canadian newsrooms. In a *J-Source* article, Maureen Googoo, a well-known Indigenous reporter based in Canada, recounts how early on in her career, “I got into a huge argument with a bureau chief telling me if I kept pushing Aboriginal stories or if I kept continuing on with this ‘Native-kick,’ that I was never going to be promoted or considered for prestigious beats” (Alzner, 2012). Last year, journalist-turned-activist Desmond Cole stepped away from his role as a columnist with the *Toronto Star*. In a widely-read blog post, Cole (2017) wrote, “It seems the *Star* is reluctant to invest in columnists who relentlessly

name these racial power imbalances, who call out the political and institutional forces responsible for white supremacy and Black suffering” (Cole, 2017). Cole continues, “This is bad news for emerging local Black journalists and journalism students, most of whom are Black women and many of whom tell me they are also being shunned, not for their actions but for their radical and emancipatory content” (Cole, 2017).

The fact that Canadian newsrooms reflect overwhelming whiteness is no secret. In 2006, a study investigating diversity in Canadian newspapers conducted by John Miller found that minorities make up 3.4 percent of news gatherers working for newspapers (p. 6). Cukier, Yap, Miller, and Bindhani (2010) also found that only 4.8 percent of MSM decision makers in the greater Toronto Area were visible minorities. Moreover, Canada’s public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), has experienced heavy criticism for its failure to hire minority journalists—despite the fact that multiculturalism is enshrined in the CBC’s mandate. The most recent annual equity report published by the CBC reveals that Indigenous reporters make up two percent of the total staff, visible minorities make up 10.5 percent, and women make up 48.2 percent (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2016). Unfortunately, Canadian studies do not breakdown how many women of colour and Indigenous women work in newsrooms across the country. As Callison and Young (2018) assert, these statistics elucidate the “persistent whiteness of Canadian journalism.” These anecdotes, statistics, and observations led to my research question: How does the “persistent whiteness” in newsrooms influence the lived experiences of female Canadian minority journalists?

This thesis examines the experiences of racial minority women journalists in Canada. The research is timely and significant because close to a decade has passed since a related study found evidence of systemic racial inequalities in Canadian newsrooms (Mahtani, 2009), yet racialized reporters continue to voice discontent with subordination in journalism spheres. Additionally, I believe the lack of data that quantifies the presence of minority women in journalism constitutes a form of erasure, because it fails to account for the oppression that afflicts reporters who are simultaneously gendered and racialized. As a result, I am specifically interested to learn whether or not female minority journalists experience systemic racism that mirrors previous findings. Methodologically, I am utilizing qualitative interviews to explore the relationship between race, gender, and journalism in Canada. Theoretically, I locate this study within journalism studies and a critical race theory (CRT) framework. Although CRT places race in the centre of analysis, many critical race theorists account for other identity markers, including gender (Clark, 2016; Crenshaw, 2010; Su & Yamamoto, 2002). Through seven interviews, this thesis suggests that racialized patterns in Canadian newsrooms have remained largely unchanged. In particular, minority journalists—especially those in junior positions—tailor their pitches in order to satisfy white editors. The reporters also shared stories about newsroom racism that takes the form of microaggressions and tokenization. Finally, they all discussed the “invisible workload,” a phenomenon in which racial minorities are expected to educate their white colleagues on race issues in addition to their regular nine-to-five responsibilities. Contrary to previous findings, there is reason for cautious optimism. The most experienced reporters voiced an ongoing and emboldened commitment to mentoring younger minority reporters and challenging traditional notions about race in media.

Although racialized individuals still make up the minority of the workforce in journalism spheres, this is increasingly not the case in Canada's urban centres. According to Statistics Canada, if current population trends continue, visible minorities will make up one-third of Canada's population by 2036 (Grenier, 2017). By 2031, the visible minority population in Canada's metropolitan areas could reach 40 percent—and this figure does not include Indigenous populations (Malenfant, Lebel, & Martel, 2010, p. 28). Plus, in 2016, visible minorities became the majority in Toronto and Vancouver. According to the Statistics Canada census data, 51.5 percent of Toronto residents and 51.6 percent of Vancouver residents identify as non-white (Statistics Canada, 2016). Finally, Statistics Canada reports that visible minority women will likely make up close to one-third of Canada's population by 2031 (Hudon, 2016). As Callison (2017) puts it, “newsrooms in countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia maintain a striking lack of racial diversity that do not reflect their populations.”

1.2 Canadian Multiculturalism and Journalism Studies

Research shows that journalism institutions (re)produce racialized hierarchies, and this in turn influences the type of content that news organizations publish (Fleras, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2002). The hegemonic whiteness dominating journalism spheres is further problematized by the fact that multiculturalism rhetoric permeates throughout the country. In 1971, Pierre Trudeau introduced a multicultural policy in Canada, which was eventually enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988. Among other things, the Multiculturalism Act encourages the full and equal participation of people belonging to all ethno-cultural demographics, aims to eliminate barriers to participation, and advocates for equal opportunity to gain employment and advancement (Government of Canada Ministry of Justice, 1988). Additionally, section 3.1.h of the act upholds an understanding that

multiculturalism represents the country's social fabric and cites a strong "appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society," while encouraging "reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures" (Government of Canada Ministry of Justice, 1988).

Despite Canada's commitment to ethnic diversity and inclusion, racism persists throughout the country's systems and institutions (Henry & Tator, 2002; Mahtani, 2014; Razack, 1998).

Moreover, the types of diversity and inclusion programs implicitly encouraged by Canadian multiculturalism have done little to effect change. As Mahtani (2014) argues, "these sorts of projects, which advocate an increased awareness and tolerance of racial diversity, imply that racism is simply a matter of attitudes rather than unveiling the systematic nature of discrimination" (p.108). In the United States, Pritchard and Stonbely (2007) note that newsroom diversity initiatives have supported, rather than eliminated, racism and race-based power imbalances (p. 244). Thus, it is important to contextualize media research within these failures and limitations of diversity and inclusion initiatives, like Canadian multiculturalism, in order to draw attention to the fact that the media represents an institution entrenched with ongoing and systemic racial inequality.

Media scholars frequently invoke Canada's multicultural rhetoric as a backdrop for studies on media and race (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Fleras, 2009; Mahtani, 2001a; Ojo, 2006; Roth, 1998). By examining Canada's multicultural persona through the media, scholars expose the failures of multiculturalism. Particularly, the media fails time and time again to reflect visible minorities and Indigenous peoples accurately. In the introduction of her book *The Media Gaze: Representations of Diversities in Canada*, Fleras (2011) argues that although "media institutions

are under pressure to incorporate minority inclusiveness... patterns of inclusiveness have proven erratic, shallow, and tokenistic in challenging traditional representations of minorities (p. 3). The whiteness of Canada's mainstream media (MSM), along with the magnitude of media scholarship uncovering multiculturalism's inability to eradicate racism, necessitate ongoing research that delves into the racial hierarchies plaguing Canadian journalism institutions.

Canadian critical mixed-race scholar and journalist Minelle Mahtani (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2009) as well as former journalists and current scholars Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young (2017; forthcoming book) have researched the lived experiences of Indigenous reporters, female reporters, and/or visible minority reporters. And while scholars and reporters have focused on the number of visible minority journalists or media leaders in Canada (Cukier, Yap, Miller, & Bindhani, 2010; Fekri, 2016; Miller, 2006), few have focused qualitatively on newsroom culture and organizational structures, aside from Mahtani (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2009), who has interviewed women and minority journalists and found a number of cases of structural sexism and racism. This thesis builds off of Mahtani's previous work and aims to fill a gap in race-centric journalism scholarship by examining the racialized experiences of female journalists working in Canadian mainstream media through a CRT lens.

Considering the recent criticisms newsrooms have received for their homogeneity (Alzner, 2012; Callison & Young, 2018), a contemporary exploration into the experiences of minority journalists is timely. Additionally, this thesis expands upon and contributes to existing literature by integrating critical race theory and methodology into Canadian journalism research. Race-centric research in journalism that explicitly draws from CRT is developing in the Canadian

academe (Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani & Dessner, 2016). CRT provides media scholars with useful analytical tools because it places race at the center of research, explicitly legitimizes lived experience, and incorporates a wide-range of fluid methodologies that work together to challenge and deconstruct hegemonic epistemologies. Additionally, the critiques CRT scholars have traditionally directed towards legal fields mirror the critiques found in journalism scholarship: that white masculine worldviews enjoy hegemonic status within western institutions. Thus, critical race theory compliments existing journalism scholarship by providing researchers with an additional generative framework that places the experiences of racialized (and gendered) reporters into the foreground of research. Moreover, CRT offers more than a theoretical and methodological framework—it is a decentralized movement supported by academics and activists committed to social justice (Hylton, 2012; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). This decentralized, activist component to CRT propels journalism studies into a body of collaborative and interdisciplinary research that uncovers the systemic nature of racial inequality plaguing institutions within and across fields.

2 Literature Review

2.1 What is Journalism?

Communication does not stand apart from reality. There is not, first, reality and then, second, communication about it. Communication participates in the formation and change of reality.

- Richard V. Ericson, 1998, p. 84

The first listed Merriam-Webster definition of “journalism” reads “the collections and editing of news for presentation through the media.” However, defining journalism is significantly more complicated. Many media and journalism scholars place emphasis on journalism’s democratic role (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Nielsen, Esser, & Levy, 2010; Singer, 2008; Ward, 2017). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) argue that in western societies, journalism’s primary function is “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (p. 17). In today’s media landscape, they explain that journalists perform the following roles: acting as *authenticators* who help their readers discern which accounts are accurate and which accounts are not, given the endless information supplied by the Internet; contextualizing facts as *sense makers*; making their best efforts to *bear witness* to events, particularly under-covered events, themselves or through proxies (sources); and finally, performing a *watchdog* role by holding elites to account and uncovering wrongdoing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Despite the multiple roles outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel, scholarship written by Broersma (2010) suggests that the truth-seeking role internalized by journalists represents the most important characteristic of the profession. Broersma (2010) writes:

Journalism’s claim to truth is the main feature of the journalism discourse. It is its *raison d’être*, distinguishing journalism from entertainment as well as from political opinion.

This claim to truth legitimizes journalism's special position as Fourth Estate. As a trustee of the public, it professionally reports and critically investigates social reality. For the common good, it distinguishes facts from fiction, lies and biased comments. As such, this promise of truthfulness is the basis for the social code shared by journalists and their reading audience (p. 25).

Through his work, Broersma interrogates the (im)possibilities of truth in journalism. When developing news stories, reporters have to sift through conflicting views, information, and statements in order to choose which accounts and details to include and exclude (Broersma, 2010, p. 25). Typically, reporters craft stories that adhere to dominant professional norms and values, like objectivity, neutrality, and balance, that have been consolidated deliberately in a specific time and place—when the dominant ideology governing journalism changes, so do the processes journalists use in order to craft their stories (Broersma, 2010; Carey, 1997; Deuze, 2005; Ericson, 1998). These dominant norms operate as legitimation strategies that give news stories their veracity.

The objectivity paradigm found in Anglo-American journalism governs traditional reporting practice. Michael Schudson (2001) describes "objectivity" as "at once a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing" (p. 149; see also Tuchman, 1972). Objective reporting fairly portrays all sides to a story, separates fact from value, is impartial, and incorporates a reserved, unemotional tone (Broersma, 2010; Deuze, 2005; Schudson, 2001). In order to present their audiences with credible information, reporters are expected to comply with these specific professional norms. As Tuchman (1972) explains, objectivity represents a "ritualistic procedure" that provides reporters with a certain level of moral license:

Attacked for a controversial presentation of ‘fact,’ newspapermen invoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirits (p. 660).

Most media scholars contend that the objectivity norm is not achievable and argue that positivist interpretations of ideals like truth, objectivity, and balance fail to accurately reflect the complexities involved in doing journalism (Broersma, 2010; Hackett, 1984; Rao & Wasserman, 2007; Singer, 2008; Zelizer, 2004). In a piece that explores gendered experiences in newsrooms across various national contexts, Mahtani (2005) unveils the hypocrisy behind the objectivity norm when she writes, “our identities, whether we like it or not, always play a role in the acquisition of material and the ways we, as academics, literally ‘report’ our stories” (p. 301). Because journalists also strive to report information, the same argument can apply to the construction of news. Put simply, the identities of reporters, including gender and racial identities, will influence which stories are reported and *how* they are told.

This sentiment is reflected across disciplines, with many thinkers arguing that the notion of objectivity (as well as neutrality and balance) simply obscures, normalizes, and legitimizes white masculine subjectivities, thereby rendering whiteness invisible (Alemán, 2017; Bell 1995; Crenshaw, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2011; Mahtani, 2001a; Squires, 2007). The “gatekeeper” metaphor often employed to describe decision makers in media (Schudson, 1989; Singer, 2008) exposes this invisibility. The gatekeepers—editors, managers, journalists—who are predominantly white and male, have the “agenda-setting” authority to determine what information is disseminated to the public and what information is not (Singer, 2008). But their race and gender are rarely referenced—even the term “gatekeeper,” is ostensibly genderless and

colourblind. Unlike white masculinity, non-white and non-male perspectives are always explicitly defined through race and gender. Subsequently, newsrooms represent what Crenshaw (1997) dubs “discursive spaces where the power of whiteness is invoked but its explicit terminology is not” (p. 254).

In her iconic article, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Haraway (1988) makes a lexical shift by classifying the objectivity norm in multiple fields, particularly in science, as an objectivity *problem* (p. 578). Haraway (1988) explains how epistemologies stemming from subordinated groups fail to meet standards of objectivity because their knowledges are automatically marked by race and gender. On the other hand, white and male interpretations of the world are given credence for their “objectivity.” According to Haraway, scholars need to expose objectivity as a “hierarchical and positivist ordering of what can count as knowledge” (p. 580).

Thus, journalism’s desire to seek the truth objectively presents an awkward paradox: reporters are expected to relay truthful accounts even though it is impossible to embody objectivity and report *absolute* truths (Broersma, 2010, p. 26). This has led Broersma (2010) to characterize journalism as a performative discourse, as opposed to a discursive one. Reporters conform to dominant journalistic norms and values, thereby producing works of journalism that are compatible with the status quo. Going forward, I turn to Zelizer’s (1993) characterization of journalism as an “interpretive community” or a group defined by “shared interpretations of realities” (p. 223). She illustrates how journalism professionals create dominant understandings of reporting practice through ongoing discourse, ultimately consolidating aforementioned

journalism norms. Zelizer's (1993) definition is important because it exposes the way in which reporters collectively construct reality through discourse. Accordingly, journalism norms and values—such as objectivity, balance, and truth—do not produce news untarnished by subjectivities. Rather, they produce news that is contextualized and constructed through dominant interpretations of reality.

2.2 Media and Race

Of particular relevance for this thesis is the way race-centric scholarship has challenged traditional views of journalism. The majority of academic studies that examine race and media focus on representations of racial “difference” (read: non-white) or the “Other” in Canadian media, and have found time and time again that racialized communities are consistently mis- and under-represented (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Fleras, 2011; Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani & Dakroury, 2009; Jiwani & Dessner, 2016; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Mahtani, 2001a). Put another way, mainstream media rarely reports on racialized communities. When it does, the media represents these communities simplistically and prejudicially. The significance of these studies cannot and should not be understated. As Jiwani and Dakroury (2009) explain, “the mainstream mass media contribute to the formation of social order in terms of communicating systems of classification and categories of social life” (p. 2; see also van Dijk, 1993). The formation of racial and ethnic categories poses no exception to this rule, as illustrated by Anderson and Robertson (2011). The scholars poignantly argue that through the dissemination of reductive, racist, and inaccurate stereotypes of Indigenous people and communities, the mainstream media contributed to the solidification of a colonial *common sense* in Canada—one in which Indigenous people are rendered racially inferior when compared to white Canadians (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

By propagating problematic narratives about people of colour, the media simultaneously bolsters white hegemony (Henry & Tator, 2009; Mahtani, 2001a). Henry and Tator (2009) assert that “media discourse plays a large role in reproducing the collective belief system of the dominant white society and the core values of this society” (p. 711). Moreover, Mahtani (2001a) points out that despite an increase in minority coverage, “such expansion has been very careful not to challenge Eurocentric cultural hegemony.” As a result, most portrayals of minorities continue to rely on exotic or pejorative stereotypes (Mahtani 2001a).

2.3 Racialized (and Gendered) Hierarchies in Canadian Newsrooms

While ample race-centric research focusing on mainstream representations of “Othered” bodies and communities exists, considerably less research looks at how racial hierarchies are reproduced inside Canadian newsrooms. Part of what makes research examining representations so accessible are the associated methodologies: discourse analysis (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Henry & Tator, 2002), content analysis (Mahtani 2001a), and framing analysis (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Miller & Ross, 2004), which primarily require access to readily available news stories. In order to explore internal institutional racial hierarchies in journalism, access to media professionals is required—a difficult, though not impossible, feat. Nonetheless, some scholars, particularly Mahtani, have started to question the processes that lead to misrepresentations of racialized people in Canadian media, often through interviews with journalists and editors about newsroom practices (Anderson & Robertson; Mahtani, 2001a; Mahtani, 2001b; Mahtani, 2005; Mahtani, 2009). Mahtani’s findings show that norms and interactions within newsrooms likely influence the distribution of problematic representations of racialized people and groups.

In *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*, Robertson's and Anderson's (2011) assertions echo Mahtani's findings. The scholars explain that "ownership and editorial decision making may have clear repercussions for context" found in newspaper stories (p. 13). Drawing from Szuchewycz's work, Anderson and Robertson (2011) argue that despite the fact that systemic racism has been well documented in many of Canada's institutions, such as education, employment, and criminal justice, public ignorance of Canada's historical and ongoing discrimination against visible and cultural minorities persists. Accordingly, the fourth estate is plagued with the same ignorance as these other institutions (p.16). In order to contribute meaningfully to existing research, this thesis draws on this scholarship and builds on Mahtani's previous findings in order to examine the lived experiences of racialized female journalists currently working in Canadian media.

Although this thesis focuses solely on the Canadian context, noteworthy findings have surfaced in the United States (Ho, 2017; Newkirk, 2000; Nishikawa, Towner, Clawson, & Waltenburn, 2009; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007; Women's Media Center, 2018). In a recent Women's Media Center (WMC) report on the experiences of women journalists, race represented a factor in their analysis of U.S.-based newsrooms. During a post-report interview with WMC (2018), New York *Times* reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones explained that "It's still very, very challenging for women of color, particularly women of color who present in a certain way, for those of us who are vocal and push for diversity and want coverage to reflect our society." Additionally, journalism professor and former reporter Pamela Newkirk investigated the experiences of African American journalists almost two decades ago. In *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*, Newkirk (2000) interviews over one hundred African American journalists whose stories illustrate how

white masculinity dominates journalism organizations in the United States (p. 6). Newkirk argues that Black journalists are forced to perform in ways that adhere and appeal to white masculine norms and standards: “Black journalists, then, are forced to compromise their own sense of fairness to satisfy the journalistic standards of news editors whose own objectivity is clouded by their own subconscious assumptions about race” (Newkirk, 2000, p. 6). Furthermore, the writer explains how “because so few blacks and other people of color are at the helm of news organizations, much of the news coverage reflects the views of people who are typically white and male” (Newkirk, 2000, p.6). Most recently, Nishikawa et al. (2009) interviewed 18 African American and American Latinx reporters. The researchers found that most minority journalists succumb to dominant journalism norms, however, many also push against normative constraints and “stealthily advocate” for more nuanced understandings of race issues in newsrooms (p. 254).

Literature that delves into the experiences of female journalists, a lot of which is Canadian, is more commonplace than literature focusing on racialized newsroom experiences, however it is also underdeveloped (Aldridge, 2001; Gill, 2007; Mahtani, 2001b; Mahtani, 2005; Rhodes, 2001; Smith, 2015; Walsh-Childers, Chance, & Herzog, 1996; Young & Callison, 2017; Young & Callison, forthcoming book). Some of the texts, namely those written by Mahtani, Young, and Callison, examine experiences unique to minority women. Nonetheless, the majority of newsroom-specific feminist literature in media studies focuses on white women. One of the most recent contributions is Vivian Smith’s (2015) study of three generations of women working in Canadian newsrooms. Smith facilitates focus groups and interviews dozens of female journalists who are in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s to find that toxic masculinity continues to pervade Canadian journalism spheres. Despite her numerous interviews with women journalists

across the country, Smith (2015) only interviews one Black woman. Although she briefly acknowledges that race exacerbates gendered oppression, Smith fails to explain *how*. At one point, Smith, who is white, argues that the Black journalist “cast me as an outsider,” after the Black reporter stipulated that “if you’ve never experienced racism, you will never know the pain of it” (p. 74). Considering the fact that Smith and the majority of her interviewees were white, her self-identification as an “outsider” strikes me as an uncomfortable lexical decision. In 2015, women made up 42 percent of reporters, announcers, and presenters in print media (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015), even though a little over 50 percent of the Canadian population is female (Statistics Canada, May 2017). Minorities, on the other hand, make up more than one-fifth of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, October 2017), and anywhere between 3.4 percent and 10.5 percent of journalists (Miller, 2006; CBC, 2016). Unfortunately, the lack of data that outlines how many women of colour work in Canadian media makes it difficult to tell what kinds of impacts compounding identity markers (race and gender) have on job access in journalism. So: although women are problematically underrepresented in the media, the representation of racialized women is not even measured. As a result, racialized minorities, particularly minority women, live as “outsiders” in ways that Smith does not account for in her book.

Evidence suggests that female journalists of colour encounter unique racialized and gendered barriers in newsrooms (Mahtani, 2001b). The reality that many are simultaneously gendered and racialized inspired Kimberle Crenshaw to develop the theory of *intersectionality*, a theory heavily adopted by critical race scholars (Clark, 2016; Crenshaw, 2010; Jones, 2009; Solórzano, 1998; Su & Yakamoto, 2002). The theory describes the convergence of identities, such as race

and gender, and subsequent oppressions, like sexism and racism.¹ According to Crenshaw, the experiences of women of colour are often rendered invisible because they neither align with dominant feminist stances, nor dominant antiracist ones. She writes, “intersectionality is one of many registers through which women of color boldly speak back against their theoretical marginality” (Crenshaw, 2010, p. 152). Because female minority journalists likely experience entangled forms of gendered and racialized oppression, the current gap in Canadian literature that explicitly focuses on women of colour in media is troubling. Going forward, I limit my focus to racialized women in an attempt to make their unique experiences more visible in media scholarship.

Mahtani has pioneered Canadian research that examines newsroom culture and practice, both from a gendered and racialized perspective. Her work produces similar aforementioned conclusions to Anderson’s and Robertson’s (2011) *Seeing Red* as well as Newkirk’s (2000) American findings by illustrating that (mis)representations *come from somewhere* (the newsroom). That is, white masculine norms within newsrooms contribute to the inaccurate and harmful portrayals of some minority groups as an Other. But Mahtani’s (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2009) work goes beyond looking at the interactions that result in misrepresentations by also examining how female reporters and journalists of colour navigate media spaces—and how these spaces influence the lives of these reporters. In multiple studies, Mahtani (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2009) seeks out and interviews female reporters, racialized reporters, or reporters who express gendered and racialized identities simultaneously. One of Mahtani’s (2009) key and most recent

¹ Crenshaw (2010) notes that intersectionality is not limited to race and gender identities. A multiplicity of compounded identities exists. Race and gender simply represent the identities of focus in this thesis.

findings highlights how difficult it is for journalists of colour to challenge racialized positions in newsrooms and subsequent power dynamics (p. 263). One reporter tells Mahtani that despite witnessing the production of misrepresentations, she does not feel comfortable protesting the current racialized status quo out of fear of coming across as “politically correct” or a “loudmouth” (p. 262). Furthermore, when the experiences of white female journalists are juxtaposed with those of female reporters of colour, stark differences surface. According to Mahtani’s (2001) earlier findings, white women assumed minorities enjoyed equal access to opportunities in newsrooms, whereas racialized women referenced several examples of workplace racism. In particular, the women encounter “racialized gendered ideologies about their ability to perform competently in the newsroom” (p. 359). This thesis revisits Mahtani’s findings in order to determine what patterns persist nearly a decade later.

2.4 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory has relatively recent roots, with the earliest catalysts arising in American legal scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. According to prominent critical race scholar Richard Delgado (2009), lawyers and legal scholars noticed that, despite the civil-rights-era gains in the sixties, the seventies saw racial progress come to a halt (p. 1510). This realization necessitated a new lens through which subtle, unconscious, and/or institutionalized racism could be explored. Ultimately, collective brainstorming between scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Teri Miller, Stephanie Phillips, and Richard Delgado led to the term “Critical Race Theory”—a term that signifies the project’s political and intellectual location (“critical”), its substantive aims (“race”), and its desire to develop a coherent account of the intersections between race and law (“theory”) (paraphrased from Crenshaw, 2002, p. 19).

CRT scholars struggle against the same norms and ideals that many journalism scholars already critique. The majority of critical race theorists (or “race crits”) believe society is racially stratified and that academic, social, economic and legal institutions are dominated by white, Eurocentric thought (Hylton, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Price, 2010; Saeed, 2007; Tyson, 2003) and challenge views of race as a “naturalized order of things,” (Bell, 1995) as well as liberal notions of objectivity, universality, and neutrality (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2011; Solorzano, 1998). Additionally, critical race theory is a decentralized academic and activist movement that voices an ongoing commitment to battling social injustice (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Therefore, CRT provides media scholars with a useful lens to challenge the status quo. Finally, a noteworthy parallel between CRT and journalism studies stems from the fact that critical race theorists argue that dominant groups legitimize and consolidate their power through stories that “construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). Like Zelizer’s (1993) characterization of journalism as an interpretive community that constructs its own reality, and additional critiques that expose the media’s white masculinity (Callison & Young, 2018; Henry & Tator, 2009; Mahtani, 2001a; van Zoonen, 1998), critical race theorists attempt to expose the socially constructed nature of dominant and normative systems, most of which are racialized.

As a distinct paradigm, critical race theory allows for an inquiry into race while also deconstructing epistemological and ontological hierarchies (Clark, 2016, p. 800). Because racialized epistemological and ontological hierarchies plague institutions and systems across fields, including journalism, many disciplines within the academic landscape have taken advantage of CRT’s theoretical and methodological framework. As a result, CRT is no longer

unique to legal scholarship. To accommodate this contemporary interdisciplinary nature of the theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2013) define CRT broadly: “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaging in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 2).

2.5 What is Race?

As mentioned, CRT scholarship revolves around the belief that racial inequalities and stratifications are inherent in society: power is unevenly distributed, with racialized groups rarely enjoying equal power to their white counterparts. As Hylton (2012) explains, “we have a society where some are more likely to be looking up from ‘the bottom’ than others as a consequence of their background” (p. 24). In order to redistribute power, critical race theorists push for race-plus scholarship that uncovers power imbalances and legitimizes epistemologies informed by race.

It is important to recognize that many people who live race daily do not need to read a definition of race to make sense of it. As Ladson-Billings (1998) explains, “race is always present in every social configuring of our lives” (p. 9). However, in “Notes for a Critique of the Metaphysics of Race,” professor Denise Ferreira da Silva (2011) critiques contemporary studies that focus too heavily on the “how” of race and not enough on the “what” (p. 139). According to da Silva, there cannot be an onto-epistemological separation of “race” because “no critique of racial subjugation can afford not to investigate that which renders this ‘common’ knowing possible;” one cannot discuss phenomena, such as “racial subordination,” “racism,” “racial difference,” and “racial hierarchy,” without understanding what “race” is first (da Silva, 2011, p. 139) As a result, tracing the “what” of race before engaging in CRT-framed analysis will allow for a deeper understanding of modern racial conditions.

In 1998, philosopher Charles Mill wrote that what emerging critical race theorists have in common is that:

They see race as central (though not foundational) and as sociopolitically 'constructed,' thus distinguishing themselves from earlier theorists of race, who usually took it to be a transhistorical biological essence and whose assumptions were in fact often simply racist. The term originally associated specifically with minority viewpoints in legal studies is being used more generally by some writers to refer to this new paradigm: *critical race theory*. (Mill, 1998, p. 119).

Robert S. Chang (2002) quips that “Race is a social construct” represents the mantra of critical race theory (p.87). Social constructivist theories of race hold that race is “constructed and inflected by colour, nation, class, gender, and sexuality” (Chang, 2002, p. 88). Additionally, legal systems and the institutions we inhabit legitimize racial constructions and give them meaning (Chang, 2002). Chang concludes his argument by affirming that, “social construction must be argued to establish that individuals and institutions have acted in concert to create differences in the material conditions of racial minorities” (p. 95). As Henry and Tator (2009) succinctly suggest, the media helps transmit a nation’s myths and narratives (p. 711). Recall that Anderson and Robertson (2011) show how Canadian mainstream newspapers have contributed to the dominant understandings of Indigeneity across the country. Considering journalism’s complicity in constructing national identities and racial understandings, critiquing the field through a CRT lens helps to further expose how race is inflected within and by the media.

A prominent debate in critical race theory hinges on the dialectic between anti-essentialism and essentialism (Cho & Westley, 2002). Stefancic and Delgado (2012) explain that “essentialism entails a search for the proper unit, or atom, of social analysis and change” (p. 62). When it

comes to race-centric research and analysis, for example, non-white racial identity—and associated oppression—makes up a proper unit. A tension forms, however, within and between racialized demographics during the search for commonalities; although people of colour are weaved together by their experiences with racialization, not all people of colour are the same. Unpacking the term “oppression” illuminates the difficulties CRT struggles with when engaging in race scholarship: for instance, do all minorities experience the same forms of oppression or do various racialized groups have unique experiences? Are there differences in experience felt by members belonging to the same racial group? For example, does a Black woman experience racism in the same way that a Black man or a Black trans woman does? Thus, particularities within groups have to be honoured as well.

In journalism, questions surrounding the definition of racialized groups have surfaced. While investigating climate change reporting as it relates to and interacts with Indigeneity, Callison (2017) provides a nuanced and compelling strategy for valorizing sameness while simultaneously acknowledging difference within groups. Initially, she asks: “How might Indigenous people be understood as a set of publics in relation to climate change?” Callison (2017) explains that “the long labor required and important intervention of defining indigenous people rests on indigenous peoples both having much in common *and* so much diversity at the same time.” By acknowledging that racialized people share common experiences, discursive tactics for antiracist mobilization remain open. That being said, collectivizing around shared oppression does not necessarily negate and erase intra-group difference. While I acknowledge that all of my interviewees have unique newsroom experiences, an examination of their similar

experiences contributes to the ongoing critique of journalism and its culpability in the formation, implementation, and affirmation of racial hierarchies.

Cho and Westley (2002) characterize intersectional approaches to race-plus group formation as “conscientious essentialism” (p. 55). The academics draw from the historical Boalt Hall coalition in which students advocated for more inclusive hiring, enrollment, and curricula at the law school. Students organized at Boalt Hall defined themselves as “unified, but not uniform” (Cho & Westley, 2002, p. 55). Such an approach allows critical race scholars to factor in differences in gender, residential status/citizenship, sexuality, ability, age, class, etc. into their research, while also reaffirming persistent racism and its influence on marginalized bodies. Solorzano (1998) asserts that “although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, they are also viewed at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination” (p. 122).

2.6 Media and Critical Race Theory

Journalism researchers in North American, including a few in Canada, have started to incorporate critical race theory into their work (Alemán, 2017; Alemán & Alemán Jr., 2016; Campbell, 2012; Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani & Dessner, 2016; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007; Robinson, 2017). In particular, critical race theorists have echoed interdisciplinary critiques targeted at the mass media by arguing that it reinforces white supremacy (Robinson, 2017). Moreover, Campbell (2012) asserts that the news is shaped through white privilege. Despite the obvious compatibility between media scholarship and CRT, research that marries the two continues to slowly develop.

In one fascinating study, Pritchard and Stonbely (2007) validate critical race theory's utility in media scholarship. Through a combination of content analyses and interviews with journalists and editors working at a local paper in Milwaukee, the scholars found that Black reporters tended to be assigned stories that focus on diversity and minority-oriented topics, while white reporters focused on politics and business. "Race matters," the writers explain, because it determines, at least in part, what issues reporters cover (p. 242). In response to their own findings, Pritchard and Stonbely (2007) conclude that critical race theory is an acceptable framework for journalism-related research for two reasons: (1) Whiteness enjoys an invisible and unmarked position within journalism spheres, whereas race is only discussed in reference to minority stories; (2) Like the failure of Canada's multiculturalism, diversity initiatives in the United States bolster race-based power imbalances and racism (p. 244). The newsroom Pritchard and Stonbely (2007) studied had an above-average track record for hiring journalists of colour, yet race continued to influence newspaper coverage.

Alemán (2017) and Robinson (2017) represent two of the most recent articles that have brought critical race theory alongside journalism studies, however the scholars approach CRT differently. While investigating legitimization strategies pursued by reporters, Robinson (2017) enhances her critical discourse analysis of online media content by drawing on a critical race theory lens. Through this lens, she places race at the centre of her work and explores how discursive tactics employed by the mass media generally support stories that reinforce white supremacy (Robinson, 2017, p. 980). Alemán (2017), on the other hand, explicitly turns to a critical race methodology. The scholar puts together a composite story, informed by her own experiences, newspaper articles, and interviews with Latinx journalism students and educators. In the end, she

presents her readers with a counter-narrative—a strategy I will explore in the next section—that brings the whiteness of journalism objectivity to the fore. As I will show, critical race methods are diverse, but they typically place heavy emphasis on lived experience and storytelling.

2.7 Critical Race Methodologies

In order to expose ongoing, systemic subordination, critical race theory hinges on lived experience. CRT pioneer Derrick Bell (1995) holds that scholars of colour dissatisfied with white supremacy in scholarship and white academics aware of their privilege make up the majority of critical race theorists. As a result, CRT inquiry often begins with the lived experiences of the researchers themselves. Cynthia Tyson (2003) expresses the significance of CRT in the following passage: “It is the understanding of lived oppression – the struggle to make a way out of no way – which propels us to problematize dominant ideologies in which knowledge is constructed” (p. 20). According to Tyson (2003), “Whiteness remains the centre [of epistemology] and retains its control through ‘othering,’” (p. 22) a process that demeans the efforts of people whose bodies signify non-white heritage.

In her article, “Research, Race, and an Epistemology of Emancipation,” Tyson (2003) argues that white male scholars operate as the gatekeepers of knowledge in academia, similar to the gatekeepers in journalism. However, by maintaining exclusivity around what and *whose* knowledge is deemed legitimate, these “gatekeepers” fail to gaze inward and question the legitimacy and limitations of their own academic theories and praxis. To illustrate this point, Tyson powerfully stipulates that white theoretical frameworks confuse “knowledge” with “understanding” (p.26). It is Tyson’s contention that the experiences of oppressed Others “set the stage for inquiry on a different plane; the experiences of racism and oppression instill in the

Other a view of the world starkly different from the worldview of the gatekeepers who legitimize academic discourse and research” (Tyson, 2003, p. 21).

In order to pull race from the margins of academic scholarship, critical race theorists render race visible by “denaturalizing the place of whiteness” (Price, 2010, p.156; see also Bernal, 2002). As Tyson (2003) poignantly suggests, critical race theory functions to “deconstruct White racial ideology as the normative stance” by pulling race from the margins of academic scholarship into the centre of critical analysis (p. 22). In short, CRT disrupts the status of whiteness as a hegemonic standpoint and views people of colour as legitimate “holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002, p. 106). As Rolón-Dow (2011) explains, the centrality of experiential knowledge allows researchers to better understand how race functions in society because it allows people of colour to describe the “complex, varied and persistent nature of racism” in everyday life (p. 160). Because white masculinity constitutes the normative stance in journalism spheres as well, the field benefits from critical race theory and methodologies.

Critical race theorists assert that they do not subscribe to any one methodological canon or doctrine (Crenshaw, 1995). What matters most is the desire to centralize traditionally liminal voices and legitimize experiential expertise (Crenshaw, 1995; see also Ladson-Billings, 1998). In order to qualify experiential data, many critical race theorists turn to a research technique that they characterize as “storytelling” or, more aptly, “counter-storytelling” (Cho, 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Tyson, 2003). CRT’s approach to experiential data and research outputs as “storytelling” does not imply *fictional* storytelling. Rather, a counter-story (or counter-narrative) is grounded in real life and inherently challenges majoritarian stories—or groups of stories—about race that the dominant group has constructed, consolidated, and normalized

(Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado and Stefancic (1993) characterize majoritarian beliefs as “the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant group bring to discussions of race” (p. 462). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) expand on this definition by arguing that majoritarian stories are also stories of gender, sexuality, class, and other sources of power. Thus, “a majoritarian story is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (p.28). Any challenge to hegemonic narratives exemplifies a counter-narrative. As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue, counter-stories challenge hegemonic understandings “by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems” and by “open[ing] new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position” (p. 36).

Contemporary research that employs critical race methodology and storytelling often stems from the field of education (Cho, 2017; Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). As Hubain et al. (2016) argue:

As a methodology, [critical race methodology] CRM uses counter-storytelling as an analytical tool for understanding discourses on race and the intersections of other forms of oppression. The explicit focus on race and racism through CRM challenges common understandings of race in race-based discussions and critical discourses in education (p. 949).

However, given the centrality of fact-based storytelling in journalism (Robinson, 2017; Schudson, 1989; Zelizer, 1993), media and journalism studies will likely benefit from similar methods. CRT-informed storytelling takes on various shapes, including autobiographical and

biographical stories, family histories, testimonies, narrative, and creative writing (Bell, 1995; Solrzano & Yosso, 2001; Solrzano & Yosso, 2002). In order to collect data, critical race theorists draw from an arsenal of qualitative methods, such as analysis of court cases, discourse and content analyses, semi-structured interviews, and self-reflection. Often, quantitative coding is also used in order to make sense of large amounts of data (Hubain et al., 2016). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) characterize counter-stories in three ways: (1) personal narratives stemming from the researcher's experiences, (2) other people's stories, and (3) composite characters that are developed through a combination of data-gathering techniques, including personal stories, interviews, focus groups, etc. One strategy commonly employed by critical race theorists is to develop a single narrative arc that reveals daily racism encountered by themselves, research subjects, or a composite character (Alemán, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). However, any story that challenges and decentralizes majoritarian epistemologies constitutes a counter-narrative. Instead of developing a meta story arc, this thesis treats the stories and testimonies gathered from interviewees as counter-narratives: by discussing their lived experiences in newsrooms, the seven journalists interviewed for this thesis offer multiple counter-stories that challenge the white masculinity inherent in Canadian media spheres. This idea was inspired by Cho (2017), who explores counter-stories told by her subjects while researching the experiences of language minority pre-service teachers. Cho categorizes and analyzes the race-based and language minority-based testimonies shared by students as counter-stories that offer legitimate evidence about traditionally marginalized experiences.

2.8 Moving Forward with CRT and Journalism Scholarship

In conclusion, given the evidence of institutional and systemic racism in Canadian newsrooms, as well as the near-decade that has passed since the last related studies, a contemporary race-centric analysis of the daily lives of minority reporters will meaningfully contribute to Journalism Studies in Canada. As discussed, journalism in general is still oriented around notions of objectivity. Derrick Bell (1995) has said, “[Critical race theorists] insist...that abstraction, put forth as ‘rational’ or ‘objective’ truth, smuggles the privileged choice of the privileged to depersonify their claims and then pass them off as the universal authority and the universal good” (p. 901). Countless studies uncover how white masculine newsroom norms, like objectivity, influence what content is produced and how. A contemporary follow-up into the lived experiences of journalists of colour, and women of colour more specifically, will update previous contributions to the field. Furthermore, critical race theory provides journalism scholars with a useful theoretical and methodological framework to investigate systemic racism—and its intersection with gender—in newsrooms. The next section maps out my CRT-informed methodological approach.

3 Methods

This thesis examines the newsroom experiences of female journalists of colour. Almost ten years have passed since the last study that explores racial inequalities in Canadian journalism spheres was published (Mahtani, 2009). I intend to address a gap in Canadian critical race literature that analyzes newsroom culture by revisiting and building off of Mahtani's previous findings. The central orientation of this thesis is in critical race studies, which informs my theoretical and methodological approach. In keeping with the literature's main goals, I explore counter narratives within journalism through qualitative interviews with visible minority journalists in Canadian mainstream media (MSM). Specifically, I focus on women visible minority journalists because both women and minorities are significantly under-represented in Canadian MSM, and the presence of women of colour is under-measured. By interviewing minority women, I am able to explore concurrent racialized and gendered challenges and difficulties experienced in Canadian news organizations.

3.1 Researcher's Positionality

My subjectivity is relevant to this thesis because I identify as a racialized female journalist, and as a result, my own lived experiences contribute to my interest in this topic. As Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, in critical race theory scholarship "the experience of oppressions such as racism or sexism has important aspects for developing a CRT analytical standpoint" (p.11). Admittedly, as a multiracial person—I have Polish, Armenian, and Jewish roots—I do not identify as a person of colour easily. I look decidedly more Armenian than anything else, but my European name affords me a certain level of privilege—people typically assume I am mixed when they connect my name to my face. Nonetheless, journalism spheres have proven difficult for me to traverse.

During my first year as a graduate student at the University of British Columbia School of Journalism, I had the opportunity to freelance for and intern at multiple journalism organizations. Although the experiences were largely educational and positive, I found it difficult to navigate newsrooms and editorial processes when issues of race surfaced. As a mixed-race woman, I experienced pushback on stories that highlighted marginalized groups and I spent significant time elucidating the nuances of race issues to my co-workers. As I will describe shortly, interactions like these are often taxing and uncomfortable for people of colour working in journalism. Drawing from these experiences of racialization, I wondered: if a journalist like myself—who is often racialized but can pass for white—is treated in this way, do other reporters who belong to racialized groups, and have worked in the field longer than me, have to cope with similar experiences in newsrooms?

My identity as an early career journalist also influenced my subject position. In particular, my time as a reporter and intern at a number of news organizations provided me with access and knowledge about journalism and the experiences of minority journalists. Going into this project, I had already heard about my colleagues' racialized newsroom experiences at the proverbial water cooler. Thus, I recognized that this topic was timely and necessary. Moreover, my identity as a journalism student may have increased the likelihood of finding subjects. I was able to utilize my growing social network of media professionals in order to find Canadian reporters who belong to minority demographics. In a few cases, I was put in touch with sources through my contacts.

3.2 Research Questions and Interviews

Because CRT makes up the theoretical and methodological framework for this thesis, I place race in the centre of my discussions with the journalists, all of whom work in urban Canadian centres, and identify as both women (she/her) and as visible minorities. The lack of data that quantifies how many women of colour work in newsrooms is disappointing, especially considering the fact that they face unique oppressions that are simultaneously racialized *and* gendered (Crenshaw, 2010). As a result, I am deliberately choosing to limit this research to minority journalists who identify as female in an attempt to illuminate newsroom experiences unique to racialized women. My sample includes seven women who identify as visible minority journalists from mainstream media organizations in major city centres in Canada.

As such, this thesis aims to explore racial and gender patterns in newsrooms that afflict minority women by examining their lived experiences. With race placed in the centre of the discussions, I use semi-structured interviews to explore three research questions, all of which address a number of themes—such as the objectivity norm and systemic racism—that have emerged from existing literature (Mahtani 2001b; Mahtani, 2005; Mahtani, 2009; McCabe, 2009; Newkirk, 2000; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007; Smith, 2015; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). They are:

1. How does race influence one's interactions in the newsroom?
2. Do female minority journalists have common racialized experiences? If so, what are they?
3. How have female minority journalists experienced change throughout their careers in Canadian mainstream newsrooms?

In order to gather meaningful data through interviews, many critical race theorists ask their subjects open-ended questions that allow researchers to gain in-depth insight into the racialized lived experiences of the subjects (McCabe, 2009; Solórzano, 1998). As a result, I tailored my questions in such a way that enabled the interviewees to discuss racialization in newsrooms in detail. For my research, I draw from Cho (2016) and McCabe (2009). Both scholars use qualitative interviews to highlight the ability of CRT-informed counter-storytelling to challenge master narratives in Education Studies. Cho for example argues that “counter-storytelling can be instrumental in unveiling the mask of objectivity, colorblindness, white supremacy, and meritocracy, endowing the teller with power to contest the status quo” (Cho, 2016, p. 669). McCabe, on the other hand, combines interview data with CRT to explore gendered and racialized experiences of university students on predominantly white campuses. Responses from interviewees are analyzed qualitatively with particular focus on the racial undertones of their responses.

In her study, McCabe uses CRT and interviews in order to examine the experiences of students of colour and female students on a university campus. Because the scope of McCabe’s (2009) study was significantly larger, she interviewed over 80 participants and incorporated interviews with focus groups. Due to the size of this project, I limited my methodology to one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Nonetheless, the questions asked by McCabe heavily informed the questions asked during the research phase of this project. During her research, McCabe (2009) encouraged participants to tell stories about their racial identities by asking questions about interactions with peers, their on-campus experiences, what originally swayed them to enrol in university, and how they imagine their futures (p. 3). Similarly, I asked interviewees about

newsroom interactions, the junction between professional and racial identities, and what inspired them to become reporters in the first place. I was also curious to know how participants imagine the future of journalism—and what kind of change they would like to see. Specific questions included: Why did you become a journalist? What stories do you tend to gravitate towards? Does your racial identity influence what stories you look for? What have your experiences been like working with editors? Have you ever experienced pushback on the stories you want to tell? Have you ever had racialized encounters in the newsroom unrelated to the editorial process? Do you feel like there is adequate representation of people of colour, and more specifically, women of colour at your organization? And finally, do you feel like things are changing in journalism spheres? CRT holds that to fully understand subordination, researchers must recognize the validity and significance of experiential knowledge held by people of colour (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). These questions reflect this tenet by acknowledging the legitimacy of diverse epistemologies informed by lived experience, and they were developed to encourage open and in-depth storytelling.

My sample included seven female minority journalists working in Canadian newsrooms. I focused on urban centres because they represent the locations in Canada where the majority of visible minorities live (Statistics Canada, 2011). As mentioned, there are no definitive statistics on the number of journalists of colour in Canada, however the most recent ones suggest they make up anywhere from 3.4 percent (Miller, 2006) to a little over ten percent (CBC, 2016). Moreover, Cukier et al. (2010) found that only 4.8 percent of media decision makers were visible minorities. Again, no data shows how many visible minorities are women. As a sample of seven, the interviewees' testimonies cannot be used to generalize about Canadian media as a whole.

However, their stories shed light on ongoing systemic inequalities in newsrooms and raise important questions for future research.

In order to obtain my sample, I used my experience and network as an early career journalist and journalism graduate student. For contact information, I turned to Twitter and personal websites—often, journalists share their email addresses publicly through social media. I contacted most of my sources in this way. In a few cases, mutual acquaintances introduced me to my subjects via email.² As a result, it is important to note that the reporters I reached out to were not random. Rather, they were professionals I had either already been following or I was introduced to them through mutual acquaintances. It is also crucial to mention that many factors influenced how the final subjects were chosen. Time represented the biggest obstacle. As a graduate student balancing research with coursework, I was dependent on journalists who replied to my requests for interview in a timely manner: after reaching out to multiple female reporters who openly identify as minorities, only the reporters who responded to my requests were chosen. In the end, seven journalists responded to my outreach with a range of professional experience from early career to more than twenty years.

3.3 UBC BREB and Confidentiality

In order to learn about reporters' firsthand accounts with racism, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews that lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour-and-a-half. Before the interviews commenced, all materials and processes were reviewed by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). The participants were asked questions about their interactions

² The Canadian media landscape is relatively small, so in many cases, I had already met the journalists at least once prior to this project.

with co-workers and supervisors, as well as their workplaces more generally. As a result, BREB requires that all subjects are automatically granted confidentiality. Further care has been taken to protect the identities of all seven women. For instance, reporters often quip that the Canadian media landscape mimics a small town. As one journalist pointed out, the “Canadian media ecosystem is so tiny and everybody knows each other” (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). Although I have chosen to focus on urban cities in Canada, revealing which cities I have chosen to focus on could potentially hint at the identities of my sources. As a result, I will not share information pertaining to geographic locations. Finally, the sheer dearth of visible minority³ journalists across Canada means that they make up a particularly small pool of reporters in an already small industry. As a result, racial identities of the interviewees will also remain concealed. In line with BREB protocol, reporters were reassured that they did not have to answer questions that they found uncomfortable and they were allowed to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, however, direct quotes used in this thesis were edited for clarity.

3.4 Limitations

In addition to time, the scope of this thesis represents the main limiting factor. Because this is masters-level research, constraints surrounding the size of the project exist. As a result, I restricted my data-gathering to semi-structured interviews with seven reporters. Because my sample size is limited, the findings cannot be used to generalize about Canadian MSM. Rather,

³ I cautiously employ the term “visible minority” throughout this thesis. Considering the fact that “racial minorities” make up the majority of the world’s population, this term is problematic. However, I draw from Henry and Tator (2002) who argue that the term refers to “groups of people who because of their physical characteristics have been subjected to differential and unequal treatment in Canada. Their minority status is the result of their lack of access to power, privilege and prestige relative to Whites” (p. 10).

my findings suggest an ongoing presence of racial inequalities in Canadian newsrooms, especially when compared with previous research. Additionally, due to size and time constraints, I decided not to factor in identity markers that fall outside of the purview of race and gender. Undoubtedly, this topic will benefit from deeper—and more inclusive—research in the future. This project marks only the beginning of exploration in this topic through a CRT lens.

4 Racial Inequalities in Mainstream Canadian Newsrooms

In order to examine the lived experiences of female journalists of colour, seven one-on-one interviews took place. Through my discussions, racialized patterns emerged, many of which replicate Mahtani's (2001b; 2009) previous findings related to racism in Canadian newsrooms. In particular, the reporters shared stories about pitch-tailoring and various manifestations of racism. Many of the stories also mirrored previous findings from studies that explore gendered interactions in newsrooms (Mahtani, 2005; Smith, 2015). Additionally, most of the women I spoke with brought up the "invisible workload" associated with working in a white-dominated newsroom. Although all seven reporters expressed satisfaction with their current newsrooms, all believe that Canadian media underrepresents female minority journalists. Moreover, they have all experienced or witnessed various levels of prejudice throughout their careers. Nonetheless, there is reason for cautious optimism. In 2009, Mahtani shared an anecdote from a reporter who expressed hesitation towards challenging problematic views on race in the newsroom out of fear of retribution (p. 263). However, many of the women interviewed for the purpose of this thesis shared their ongoing commitment to openly challenging racist views in their newsrooms.

4.1 'Is this a Story that Needs to be Racialized?'

In a compelling critique of the objectivity norm in journalism, Mahtani (2005) explains that it "suggests that news stories emerge immaculately from somewhere pristine, and that journalists' personal and professional experiences and geographies never mix" (p. 300). In actuality, journalists' identities influence how they perform journalism. All of the reporters I spoke with expressed strong understandings regarding how their racial identities influence their reporting. Six reporters shared that their racial identities directly influence their news judgment and values.

For example, one interviewee shared that she entered the field *because* she wanted to tell better stories about communities like her own:

I've always liked to tell stories and I grew up in a community that was underrepresented. And often times when it was presented in the media it was in a very negative light...I always found that when the media would cover us, they would just make us seem like a very bad place. But I grew up in that neighbourhood, I went to high school in that neighbourhood, and me and my peers saw it much differently than the way that it was constantly being represented in the media. The only things that were ever really covered about us were the crimes and gangs and that type of thing, like violence. It was never anything good...I decided that journalism was probably the best thing that I could do that combined my love for telling stories but also, hopefully, will make an impact someday (Interview #3, personal communication, 2018).

When another journalist was asked if her identity influences her storytelling, she responded, “I definitely will spend a little bit more time if I see a story tip come through my inbox that comes from a community that I feel is underserved” (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018).

When I asked why, the same reporter said, “If I don’t, who will?” (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018).

All seven of the reporters stressed that their identities influence *how* they view and report stories, however only one subject stipulated that her racial identity rarely influences *what* stories she chooses to tell. One of the more experienced journalists explained:

I wouldn't say they influence the stories I look for but they for sure influence the conversations that we have in the newsroom around context for stories. That happens a lot. I know it sounds a little bit surprising but it still does...But I guess it's also a lens of how you look at stories. Yeah. Like, for me, a story is a story is a story. I just look for any story really, but I think just adding that context. The way I would look at stories that exist certainly will come from that [racialized] experience (Interview #2, personal communication, 2018).

In reference to her newsroom conversations, the same journalist explained that when race comes up, her first question is always “Is this a story that needs to be racialized?” For instance, she has noticed that her co-workers will often look for “race” angles when news stories involve people of

colour. When similar stories appear with white characters, race is rarely inflected (Interview #2, personal communication, 2018.). This interviewee’s experience mirrors Crenshaw’s (1997) assertion that whiteness enjoys the status of the “approved identity,” so “white people do not often talk about, or mark, whiteness in their discourse” (p. 254.).

In *Discourses of Domination*, the writers share that “journalists must learn to take a more self-reflexive approach and to acknowledge more openly their intrinsic values and interests” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 53). Furthermore, Young and Callison (2017) note that despite widespread belief that the objectivity norm is flawed, “journalists are also unlikely to admit to having ‘their own interests and agendas’” (p. 12). What is interesting is that the testimonies from the minority journalists counter objectivity’s dominant narrative by acknowledging the fact that their racial identities either shape what stories are pursued or how stories are told. This finding suggests that these minority journalists are acutely aware of their subjectivities, despite the ongoing pervasiveness of journalism norms—like objectivity—that require journalists to leave their identities at the door when reporting.

4.2 Tailoring Pitches and Journalism Beats

Recall that after their race-centric examination of a local American newspaper, Pritchard and Stonebly (2007) found that African American journalists were systematically assigned stories and beats associated with minority communities. White reporters, on the other hand, were assigned stories featured in prestigious sections, like politics and business. The Canadian reporters I interviewed articulated similar experiences. In particular, one testimony in which the subject discusses one of the first Canadian newsrooms she worked in illustrates her concerns regarding the racialized nature of assignments:

I noticed the ethnic reporters would always get assigned shit and the white reporters would always get assigned the best stuff, so you never had the opportunity to prove yourself. Because you'd get shit stories that weren't real journalism (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018).

For this reporter, “the best stuff” refers to the most popular or most important and influential news stories, particularly those that end up on the front page of a newspaper or digital news site. She argues that editors rarely assign high-calibre stories to minority journalists. This in turn precludes journalists of colour from fully employing their skills.

Additionally, most of the reporters shared stories about pushback from editors when pitching pieces that highlight racialized communities. In some cases, editors would receive pitches about minorities and cast them aside, arguing, “It’s just going to be the same thing over and over again” (Interview #6, personal communication, 2018). This type of rejection reveals the stereotypical assumptions some editors hold towards minority communities. One woman articulated this pattern:

I tend to have a generally good experience but I also think that a lot of times my ideas are sort of brushed aside when they have to do particularly with people of colour. Those types of communities. I mean, maybe the pitches were bad. I can never really know for certain but there are certain times where I felt like media organizations don't want to have too much of a token minority story type thing, and they don't really see it as something that affects the general public (Interview#3, personal communication, 2018).

Despite acknowledging that sometimes her past story ideas may not have been great, this reporter felt that often, white male editors would refuse story ideas based on preconceived ideas about the communities in question (Interview#3, personal communication, 2018). These stories came up repeatedly throughout the interviews. As with the previous quote, the women would qualify their interpretations by suggesting that perhaps, their story ideas failed to hit the high

standard required for a piece to be approved. Nonetheless, many of their experiences were similar: the women pitched ideas about minority communities, only to have their editors deem the story ideas uninteresting.

Recall the quote that opens this thesis. The reporter laments that racialized undertones of the pitching process left her feeling disempowered and discouraged. As a result, she stopped pitching stories about marginalized communities altogether. This reveals another pattern that surfaced during my discussions with reporters: many of the women, though not all, decided to tailor their pitches in order to satisfy their editors. Through her use of a fictional, composite character, critical race scholar Sonya Alemán (2017) argues that journalism students of colour are taught early on that if they want to succeed, they have to conform to journalistic norms (see also Nishikawa et al., 2009). It appears that for women of colour, pitch-tailoring represents a similar type of necessary conformity. In order to get stories published, the women I interviewed realized they had to pitch subject matter that appealed to decision makers' values.

But if pitches relating to marginalized communities are systematically tailored to appease editors, what does this say about journalism's core tenets, like objectivity and balance? Often, in mainstream newsrooms, "a story is a story is a story" only when it reaffirms—or at the very least, does not challenge—white masculinity. In Canada, published news pieces about minorities reflect "the way the opinion leaders think about minorities and the way the opinion leaders would like us—including the minorities themselves—to think about minorities (Ungerleider, 1991, p.161). As a result, pitches that subvert traditional media narratives about minorities would

simultaneously threaten and disrupt hegemonic interests (Ungerleider, 1991, p.161). This illustrates how journalism norms continue to reinforce whiteness.

One of the interviewees, who has had the opportunity to write and report on race, voiced an additional problem:

I've had very few editors who are from racialized backgrounds themselves. And so, sometimes working on this particular beat it can feel like a challenge. I mean, it's difficult because anyone who works on a particular beat, you probably think about your beat more than your editor does. Period. But I feel like sometimes—not always, sometimes—I'm challenged on things, which I need. And sometimes I think there is a tendency to defer because I'm maybe personally experiencing things that maybe my editors haven't. And so, I think that's kind of an interesting dynamic. Because that's one thing I sort of struggle with sometimes is that I want to be challenged a lot in my thinking about race (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018).

This reporter struggles with that fact that her editors are sometimes unable to challenge her views surrounding race issues. She concedes that beat reporters tend to enjoy a high-level of expertise in their subject area, often higher than their editors. Nonetheless, by writing stories that fall outside of her editors' expertise, she has not been able to engage in newsroom discourse that expands how she thinks and writes about race. Another woman made a similar comment. She explained that in her newsroom, she often feels as though her white counterparts “tip-toe” around her and self-censure out of fear of saying something that might offend her (Interview #7, personal communication, 2018).

4.3 'Toxic Environments' and Microaggressions: Newsroom Racism

Many critical race researchers define microaggressions as the everyday, subtle experiences of nonverbal and verbal racism that may be conscious or unconscious (Allen, 2012; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). However, the testimonies of the women I interviewed signify that microaggressions are anything but subtle. Stefancic and Delgado (2012) offer a more effective

definition. They explain that microaggressions represent the “many sudden, stunning, or dispiriting transactions that mar the days of women and folk of colour. Like water dripping on sandstone, they can be thought of as small acts of racism, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated” (p. 2). They continue by explaining that these acts of racism stem from implicit “assumptions about racial matters” that we soak in while growing up in specific cultural environments (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012, p.2)

Most of the women could not recall experiencing overt racial hostility in their newsrooms, however one woman admitted that her ability to pass for white likely helps. Nonetheless, most of the interviewees encountered various forms of microaggressions, even if they did not explicitly label them as such. Easily the most common and oft-repeated example occurred when white co-workers mistook journalists of colour for another racialized reporter:

There was one instance where we had a senior reporter—middle-aged, white, who doesn't work in the newsroom. He came to the newsroom and he introduced himself to this one guy who is a Black male and said, "Oh, hi so-and-so," calling him by the name of the other Black male that works in our newsroom. And it was just one of those moments where it was like, “Do you really not know who's who or did you just assume?” And for a white man to walk into a newsroom, introduce himself to the first Black guy he sees with the first Black name that he knows, it tells you how little diversity there is in the newsroom because if there was more diversity he wouldn't just assume that that person was so-and-so (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018).

Another interviewee recalled a similar memory from her early days as a journalist. She remembers being mistaken for a reporter who had worked in the newsroom for decades:

I felt worse for her because that's how horrible it must be for her. Where she's worked in this place, contributed as a really stellar journalist, for two-plus decades and people continue to mix her up with another person who looks nothing like her (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018).

Microaggressions surface automatically, daily, and take on many forms (Hubain et al., 2016; Solórzano, 1998). The interviewee who watched her Black co-worker get called by the wrong name experienced a different uncomfortable racialized newsroom encounter before she even got the job:

At the end of every interview I always ask ‘What was it about me or my application that caught your eye? Or what was it that you liked?’ And I always find it really interesting to hear just for good feedback and to know what it is that I offer them compared to any other applicant. There was one occasion when I asked that question, the response was ‘to be honest it's because of your [racial] background. We need more of that reporting in our newsroom and we don't have anyone here who can access that community.’ And I had mixed feelings about it (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018).

And two women shared stories about colleagues who hinted that women of colour advance only because they played the “race card”:

When you do advance, sometimes I think people think it's because you played the race card. You know what I mean? Now there is this notion of like, ‘Oh, it's because you have this card to play.’ And they don't see the struggle that it took for you to get to where you are (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018).

Although microaggressions made up most of the racist incidents shared with me, these testimonies do not imply an absence of racial hostility. Rather, microaggressions underscore it: Overt racism and sexism are rarely socially condoned, but covert microaggressions that surface in daily interactions often appear innocuous and rarely result in repercussions (Solórzano, 1998). The same interviewee who was mistaken for a senior reporter recalled how an editor asked, “Was he drunk?” when a colleague pitched a story about an Indigenous man at an editorial meeting (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). In another instance, one of the women had noticed that a different publication had labeled a Black athlete as “The Black One” in one of their stories. When she brought up the fact that she disagreed with the racialized characterization, one of her superiors failed to empathize with her point of view and made a racist joke about the

situation (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018). Altogether, these patterns create what one journalism called “toxic environments” for minority reporters (Interview #3, personal communication, 2018).

4.4 Diverse ‘Window Dressing’: Newsroom Tokenization

Most of the women referenced experiences with tokenization—a common phenomenon in predominantly white workplaces (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). Tokenization refers to situations where minorities—not necessarily racialized minorities—stand out for being different from the majority (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014, p. 463). In a racial context, white organizations often take advantage of this visible “diversity” in order to appear more egalitarian, without implementing real systemic change. In these situations, minorities may enjoy perceived or real gains in status, while white employers “can tell themselves that they are not racists because they have employed a certain number of suitably grateful minorities” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 39). As Duncan, a racialized female academic (2014) wrote in a personal essay, “I was also hired, it became clear to me early on, not only to teach about race and women-of-color studies...but to *be* the program’s woman of color, effectively embodying their commitment to diversity” (p. 43). A few of the journalists I spoke with voiced similar complaints.

One minority journalist used the term “window dressing” to describe reporters of colour who are asked to represent their organizations (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018). A few journalists also lamented the fact that in newsrooms, it often feels like there is only one spot for visible minorities: “one Asian reporter, or maybe if you're lucky one Asian male, one Asian woman, or something. Or one Black woman, one Black man. And so, you fight for that spot”

(Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). The same journalist later shared that she decided to leave legacy media because she did not feel comfortable competing for a token spot.

Yet another woman used the adjective “tokenistic” to describe many of the diversity stories that win journalism awards across Canada. She stated that she and her co-workers noticed that diversity awards often go to white journalists reporting on stories that explicitly feature the most diverse character tropes possible. This journalist, however, emphasized that “diverse stories” should go beyond tropes and stereotypes. Rather, she explained her team attempts to publish pieces that appeal to a wide-range of communities:

We tell stories that matter to those communities and so people might not even notice that this is a story impacting diversity because it's not obvious. Sometimes there are things that matter more to certain communities... So, we'll tell stories sometimes through a lens that might mean something to a different community. So, I think it goes back to that telling a story through a lens as opposed to like, 'here's a story about [racialized] people (Interview #2, personal communication, 2018).

This anecdote is by no means exhaustive, and further research would be required to empirically qualify it. Nonetheless, this journalist’s observation suggests that stories that highlight race or race issues might be tokenized in a similar fashion to racialized people: those stories that do not threaten white journalism norms and double as diverse “window dressing” are celebrated.

4.5 Beers, Sexism, and ‘Interesting Work’: Gendered Newsroom Experiences

Earlier, I discussed how journalism norms and practices, in addition to reflecting whiteness, stem from overwhelming masculinity (Young & Callison, 2017; van Zoonen, 1998). Vivian Smith (2015) even uses the term “tough, ‘macho’ environment” to describe Canadian newsrooms (p. 200). The hyper-masculine environment clearly influences the lives of the reporters I spoke to; many stories shared by the women mirror results from previous literature exploring the

intersections of gender and workplaces as well as gender and media (see Bennett, 2016; Gill, 2007; Rhodes, 2001). In particular, the gendered maxim “can I have a beer with this person” was referenced multiple times during the interviews. However, race clearly exacerbated the sources' experienced oppression.

One journalist commented, “I think there is a really subtle cultural thing where people feel like they relate to you and that's not always race-based but that idea of can you have a beer with this person? Can you invite this person to your barbecue in your home or whatever?” (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018). She added, “It's very subtle, it's nothing I can prove, but there is just this disconnect where they're not going to joke around with me the same way” (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018).

When I asked whether or not she felt this was a gendered experience as opposed to a racialized one, she quickly explained that for women of colour, their race represents an additional barrier in these scenarios. Instead of connecting with their non-white counterparts, white, usually male, journalists will express preconceived notions about female minority professionals. She said that at best, white male journalists will appreciate women of colour for their “interesting work,” but will not attempt to connect on a personal level (Interviews #4, personal communication, 2018).

The racialized and sexist stereotyping experienced by the women took on more hostile forms as well. One subject shared how shortly after starting a post-graduation job, colleagues informed her that one of the editors had a preference for “attractive brunettes,” or white women with dark hair (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). Yet another reporter recalled how:

I've definitely been on assignments where people thought I was – like there was one press conference, this was years ago – but somebody thought I was just the spokesperson, like a PR handler and just helping to coordinate the media scrum. And I said, "No, I'm here as a journalist. Like this is my space. Please don't push me out of the way (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018).

A couple of the women who shared experiences of racialized sexism minimized the severity of these stories by brushing them off as jokes or second guessing the obvious sexism inherent in these interactions. Cognizant of her inability to definitively state that her interactions resulted from gendered and racialized stereotyping, one reporter shared, "It kind of drives you nuts because you're like 'Am I overthinking this, but am I not?'" (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018).

The patterns discussed in this section were shared through a gendered lens during the interviews; gender was explicitly noted. To evoke Crenshaw (2010), race, gender, and a myriad of additional identities represent "co-factors" that operate simultaneously in order to determine an individual's many privileges and oppressions. As a result, she urges race theorists to take "gender structures as a given" and gender theorists to take "racial structures as a given" (Crenshaw, 2010, p. 163). Put another way, the systemic prejudice directed against racialized women occurs because they are racialized *and* women. During the discussion, even when gender was the focus, the women discussed race and gender simultaneously.

4.6 The 'Invisible Workload'

Minority journalists also discussed what one dubbed the "invisible workload." Despite the fact that each reporter called this phenomenon something different, they all referenced the same pattern: when white co-workers are unaware of the nuances of race issues, or they are nervous

about approaching a minority community, they reach out to minority colleagues for advice. One reporter explained that this type of side job does not bother her:

It always makes me kind of laugh that way because, you know, just be respectful like you would be with any other community. You don't have to be afraid or anything. Just do your due diligence, be respectful, and understand that this is the history behind the community and the country when you're approaching a story... It's not too, too taxing. It's people asking questions and it's fine. I'd rather they ask than they don't ask (Interview #6, Personal Communication, 2018).

Another journalist expressed a similar matter-of-fact attitude towards these interactions, arguing that they should not be characterized as a “workload.” Instead, she used the term *obligation*:

You walk into an average newsroom and you see the majority of people are either white or male people. You have to present your perspectives to people, you have to. I'm trying to sound diplomatic here, but it's just the way I see it. Like after a while, after several years of working in the industry, you know, you don't see it as a workload anymore, you just see it as maybe an obligation to make people know that these stories are important. It's your job to make people reason. Because it's just like someone coming to you, they have to make you see reason. Someone teaches a story to you, you want to know why you want to read that story. You want to know why that story is important, why you have to see it now, why it's perfect now. So, I don't tend to see it as a workload, I just tend to see it as one of those things that comes with the job, the territory (Interview #7, personal communication, 2018).

For others, these interactions have proven exhausting, particularly when white co-workers push back on the advice they had asked for to begin with. One journalist recalled how colleagues had opined that she was being too hostile after she brought up her views about race as it related to a story they were working on. “It was a lot of—honestly—unpaid, emotional labour that I had to do on the side, in addition to my main job, just to do what's right” (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). The situation is also taxing when white reporters do not initiate conversations about race:

There is a lot of bringing ideas to the table when you know maybe other people won't be thinking about this issue. Or feeling responsible to sharpen ideas, feeling responsible to find new contributors where we have gaps. I definitely feel I'm very cognizant of what

our gaps are...But sometimes, I feel like I take it on (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018).

This sense of responsibility to bring race issues to the table ultimately falls on the shoulders of each of the interviewed journalists. In this particular quote, the reporter echoes the aforementioned view that sharing one's racialized perspectives represents an obligation.

However, this female journalist of colour's story illustrates how sometimes, minority women are left to advocate for race issues alone.

Interestingly, the reporters who expressed the least amount of discomfort with discussions about race in newsrooms were the most senior. One of the more junior reporters emphasized that challenging racial hierarchies is not always possible, particularly for young professionals. As a "junior reporter on the ladder in the newsroom," she expressed discomfort when the notion of protesting misrepresentations of race came up in our conversation (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018). Approaching management and saying "Hey, this is actually really problematic. I don't know why we ran this," can threaten a junior reporter's professional position (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018). Her testimony implicitly reinforces the argument that newsrooms reward journalists who perform in a way that conforms to white male norms and threaten those who do not. Thus, challenging newsroom norms may prove to be difficult for news professionals whose careers have not been fully consolidated yet. As Mahtani (2005) notes, a woman who performs in a way that does not threaten masculine paradigms of power is more likely to get ahead (p. 305).

Whether characterized as an obligation, an invisible workload, or unpaid labour, this pattern represents an oft-referenced form of systemic racism. Part of the problem is that because there are so few minorities in Canadian media, the few that do work in newsrooms are solely responsible for speaking on behalf of all racialized people—a situation not unique to journalism (Duncan, 2014). This may have an impact on the women’s workloads, and may also create feelings of isolation (Duncan, 2014). Again, a few of the more experienced women did not feel particularly bothered by the phenomenon. However, for others these interactions were inescapable, exhausting, and/or uncomfortable.

4.7 Navigating the Terrain: Informal Networks and Mentorship

Studies have found that visible minorities, and visible minority women more specifically, bond with one another in isolating spaces in order to cope with ongoing oppression (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; McCabe, 2009; Villalpando, 2003). Many of the women I spoke with reiterated these findings, arguing that resilience in newsrooms often hinged on informal networks between fellow minority journalists as well as through mentor/mentee relationships. One story shed light on the “underground” connections. She explained that, as a young journalist,

There were a few people of colour there that were very friendly and went out of their way to be nice to me and asked me if I needed anything. If I needed anything, they would call me right away... There's like these informal networks of support also, which is really, really nice. And so much of it is because of what other people have gone through (Interview #4, personal communications, 2018).

These informal networks may inspire journalists to become mentors as they progress throughout their careers. The same woman stated that she tries to offer young minority journalists similar forms of support that she received when she initially started out in the field. Although she touched on that fact that mentorship represents yet another manifestation of the “invisible workload,” she explained that she works with younger people because “there are so few of us,

we feel like we have to take care of each other in a way” (Interview #4, personal communications, 2018).

All of the women who enjoy either a gatekeeping role or some authority over editorial decisions boldly stated their desire to improve representation of reporters belonging to all marginalized groups—not just racialized ones. In order to accomplish this goal, the women cited a few strategies. Most commonly, they try and recruit skilled minority reporters and freelancers. One reporter also cited larger-scale, personalized initiatives in order to bring in marginalized reporters. She noted the gendered element associated with mentorship, stating:

I think mentorship is important for women as a whole in workplaces because we need mentors. And as women of colour, yes, we have to mentor young reporters. We have to help people...I look out for opportunities for people. I see where someone could work, where someone could fit, what is your talent, what are you bringing to the table, and how can we match you with what’s available, and how can we help you grow. And that’s what I’ve always done (Interview #7, personal communication, 2018).

On the other end of the mentor/mentee relationship, the youngest interviewee I spoke with shared a story about a recent interaction she had with an experienced journalist of colour:

He was just like, ‘I want you to know that at some point in your life, especially in journalism, it’s going to happen where somebody is going to say something to you and it’s going to be really shitty. They’re just going to say something that’s really shitty to you. It might happen now or it might happen later but it’s going to happen. And I want you to practice these words: What do you mean?’ And he just really emphasized the fact that I should practice the words ‘What do you mean?’”(Interview #3, personal communication, 2018).

In this case, the mentor took it upon himself to prepare this interviewee for inevitable encounters with prejudice. When I asked this interviewee why she valued the “What do you mean?” question, she explained that the act of asking “What do you mean?” forces people to confront their own biases.

4.8 Representation in the Workplace: Are Newsrooms Progressing?

When asked if Canadian newsrooms adequately reflect the public, answers ranged from “No,” to “Oh God, no.” Moreover, none of the interviewees believe that newsrooms sufficiently represent women of colour, or visible minorities more generally. One reporter even asserted that “Canada itself pays lip service to diversity, and it absolutely does not fulfill its ethos of multiculturalism” (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018). Additionally, all of the women articulated that by failing to improve representation, the media fails to serve minority communities. According to all of them, there is value in reporting stories that matter to all Canadians, including Canadians belonging to marginalized communities. One woman tied this back to the mainstream media’s power to shape the country’s narratives:

By making media, we are also responsible for shaping parts of the culture. That responsibility for newsrooms or media organizations to represent, to reflect contemporary Canada is really important in order to actually reflect all the kinds of stories that Canadians experience (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018).

Another subject explained that when newsrooms fail to hire visible minority women “it leaves out the voices of a group that should be given the opportunity to say something and to have a voice...Everyone’s got a voice, but there’s lots of people in this country that don’t have their voices heard” (Interview #6, personal communication, 2018).

A few reporters also cited how crucial it is for young racialized people to see themselves reflected in media. According to one woman, the absence of representation likely dissuades budding writers from entering the field. She recalled how in the past, she would avoid pitching to publications that did not post stories relating to subject matter she was interested in because she assumed the organization’s editors would reject her stories. This feeling was echoed by another

reporter who said, “It does something really horrible to your sense of self when you don't see yourself reflected in the media you consume. You feel like you are less than” (Interview #1, personal communication, 2018).

Nonetheless, six reporters, particularly the more senior ones, expressed cautious optimism, arguing that they have noticed substantial improvements. One woman even exclaimed, “Winds of change are blowing through the newsroom!” (Interview #7, personal communication, 2018). However, according to the interviewees, most of the change in Canadian media has resulted in gender parity, not racial parity. One of the more senior journalists explained that she has primarily seen representation improve in entertainment, but less in news and current affairs:

There's not very much representation with any of that, except for entertainment, I guess. I'd like to see way, way more of that. In the world of news, it always makes me feel better to hear everyone else and see the different players that are coming up through the communities (Interview #6, personal communication, 2018).

She also noted that representation needs to improve in food, sports, and lifestyle reporting. Unfortunately, none of the women have noticed much progress in representation at the senior levels of their newsrooms. And as one reporter noted, representation is important in senior roles because “that's where the agenda-setting power is” (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018). This view was reiterated by all seven of the journalists.

The most junior reporter represented the sole voice of dissent, arguing that she is skeptical of meaningful change in Canadian mainstream media. She stressed that simply “hiring a bunch of reporters who are people of colour” will not lead to “systemic changes in journalism” (Interview

#3, personal communication, 2018). When asked if she has seen—or expects—positive change, she lamented,

I don't know if I feel hopeful or the opposite of hopeful because the situation doesn't seem to be getting any better. Yeah, maybe I'm cynical. I don't know. When I went into different newsrooms and it was mostly white, that one person of colour is super bogged down with all these different things. So, it's just, yeah. I don't know. I would just like to see [representation] become a natural thing where it's less of a token. And just more fluid where we have just more people of colour to actually be mentors for younger journalists (Interview #3, personal communication, 2018).

The difference in tone between the most junior reporter and the more senior journalists offers interesting insight that would benefit from more expansive research. Perhaps the senior reporters are more optimistic because they enjoy stable positions and more authority now that they are well into their careers. Another possibility is that the reporter with less experience has fewer reference points than the most established reporters. The scope of this thesis prevents any definitive conclusions, however the difference between the junior and senior reporters' testimonies is noteworthy.

4.8 Discussion

All of the reporters emphasized that their current newsroom environments are largely positive; their co-workers are often willing to have preconceived—and typically subconscious—notions about race challenged. Moreover, for many of the women, day-to-day interactions at work have not been marred with overt racial hostility. Nonetheless, many of the stories paint a picture of newsrooms laden with systemic prejudice: visible minority journalists, typically those who have less experience, feel pressure to pitch stories that appease their white, usually male, editors; racism manifests itself through microaggressions and tokenization; those reporters who feel comfortable challenging their colleagues and superiors feel responsible to educate their white co-

workers on race issues; and all of the women strive to support minority journalists as they enter and advance in the field.

One of the most striking findings is that all of the women acknowledged that their identities influence what stories they look for and/or how they tell stories. In stark defiance to traditional journalism objectivity, these women own their subjectivities. Rather than being detached, emotionless, and distant, they use their innate lenses—which are in part shaped by race and gender—to try and seek out stories from marginalized communities, challenge dominant perspectives on race, and present news in ways that may appeal to a wide-range of ethnic communities. Although the women’s actions and perspectives represent a drastic break from objectivity, their experiences do not shatter the hegemony and invisibility of whiteness. Until white journalists begin to engage in similar self-reflexivity, objectivity will likely continue to have a tautological relationship with whiteness (Henry & Tator, 2002, p.53). Further research exploring whether or not white reporters have begun to acknowledge their standpoints and dismantle journalism norms would be beneficial.

When compared with previous studies that explore racialized newsroom interactions, these findings indicate that not much has changed in the 2000s. Many of the results mirror previous findings, particularly those from Mahtani’s significant work in this field. Close to two decades ago, Mahtani (2001b) found that women of colour acknowledged that their racial backgrounds influence their storytelling. She also found evidence of systemic racism, such as tokenization. This raises important questions about journalism’s continuing legacy of racial inequality.

Literature exposing the unequal racial hierarchies that plague the field have been well-developed for decades. Future research should ask: Why has so little change taken hold?

One noteworthy—and cautiously optimistic—difference revolves around the reporters’ abilities to speak out against racial inequality. In 2009, Mahtani suggested that newsrooms perpetuate what she describes as a “culture of silencing” (p. 263). According to one of Mahtani’s interviewees, racialized reporters rarely protest problematic framing and content in news media out of fear of backlash from colleagues and superiors. The women I spoke with expressed more emboldened attitudes towards engaging in conversations about race. One reporter mentioned that she has seen a positive shift in the last three or four years regarding race-focused discussions: “There's just been kind of an increased race-consciousness about why we need to pay attention to particular issues. I don't know if it's because the last couple of years we've seen Black Lives Matter and #IdleNoMore and all of these groups that are kind of forcing it to the foreground again and again” (Interview #4, personal communication, 2018). Nonetheless, these open, discursive spaces may contribute to another form of systemic racism in which these women are left alone and obligated to educate fellow reporters on the nuances of race.

All of the interviewees voiced their desire for improved representation in newsrooms. One woman even shared that her dream would be to see newsrooms filled with beats that cover a wide-range of topics and communities, including those who speak languages other than English (Interview #5, personal communication, 2018). However, as Mahtani (2001b) notes, increased representation of minorities does not necessarily lead to a decrease in prejudice (p. 361). Most of the journalists I spoke with recognized that until the gatekeepers in journalism diversify,

including editors, columnists, and senior reporters, those with decision-making authority will continue to be predominantly white and male. However, exploring the material implications of representation in all rungs of journalism is beyond the scope of this thesis.

By placing race into the center of the discussion, the combined testimonies of all seven journalists create informative counter-narratives about mainstream newsrooms. This thesis thus draws on CRT-informed storytelling to displace normative and hegemonic epistemologies. In particular, these journalists' stories disrupt journalism norms, like objectivity, and shed light on persisting racial inequalities that they have had to navigate throughout their careers.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the racialized experiences of seven women of colour, all of whom work in Canadian newsrooms located in urban centres, using a critical race theory framework. Due to the limited sample size of this project, the findings are not generalizable and cannot be used to develop definitive conclusions about Canadian newsrooms. Additionally, this thesis does not explore how racialized experiences in newsrooms may differ between non-white racial groups, including, Latinx, Middle Eastern, South Asian, Indigenous, Black, and Pacific Asian, nor does it explore the experiences of individuals with other identity markers, such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, age, citizenship, and religion. Finally, a thorough investigation into racialized experiences across Canada, including in rural newsrooms, is also absent from this project. As a result, this topic would benefit from additional and more inclusive research.

Nonetheless, this thesis accomplishes its task: the seven journalists' testimonies enabled an CRT-informed examination of racial hierarchies in the contemporary Canadian media landscape.

Together, the women shared stories about how they tailored pitches to appease white editors and newsrooms racism, many of which replicated Mahtani's (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2009) previous findings. Additionally, they all discussed the invisible workload that comes with their racial identities: often, the interviewees' have to educate their colleagues on race issues and racialized communities. Finally, relationships with other women and minorities have facilitated healthier and more supportive work environments for many of the subjects. Tyson (2003) powerfully argues that emancipatory research is created when voices that have been forced into the periphery of scholarship are brought into the center. And as Ladson-Billings (1998) writes, all

we can do is "add different voices to the received wisdom or canon" (as cited in Tyson, 2003, p. 22). One of the reporters alluded to her racially-informed wisdom by stating, "If you've never experienced racism it's really hard to understand that. Even though you can say it's wrong, racism is wrong...It's different if you haven't experienced it... I'm not saying it can't be done, but it takes a lot of work (Interview #2, personal communication, 2018). By pulling race from the margins and acknowledging that lived experience represents a legitimate and *crucial* form of knowledge, CRT helps solidify a place for racialized epistemologies in media scholarship.

To conclude, in addition to hopefully encouraging more in-depth research in this topic, this project raises important questions for future studies. Firstly, if minority journalists have a hard time pitching stories for marginalized communities, does this mean that minority-related stories are held to a different standard than stories that stem from white epistemologies? Next, what do racialized experiences in newsrooms look like in cities and towns with small visible minority populations? Do patterns of systemic racial inequality look the same across Canada? How do racialized and gendered experiences differ between junior and senior reporters? Does experience and authority in the field contribute to fewer and fewer racist and sexist interactions over time? Finally, how many visible minority women work in Canadian MSM? Although many researchers have furthered race- and gender-centric research in Canadian media, I hope that this thesis will inspire more contemporary in-depth critical race research into Canada's journalism landscape and its treatment of minority newsmakers.

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