

Racial Narratives in Minnesota Media: Survey of Media Professionals

Summary of Key Findings

In January of 2019, Wilder Research collaborated with the APM Research Lab to design and administer a survey of media professionals, including reporters, editors, producers, and others. This survey addressed perceptions of racial representation, bias, and narratives in Minnesota media.

The survey was conducted on behalf of the Truth and Transformation: Changing Racial Narratives in Media Coalition (The Minnesota Humanities Center, Minnesota Public Radio, KMOJ, Pillsbury United Communities, ThreeSixty Journalism at the University of St. Thomas, and Hamline University) and funded by the Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundations.

Who took the survey?

The survey focused on media professionals who work in Minnesota news media. Six hundred and nine media professionals identified by Leadership Media, a contact directory specific to news media, were directly invited to participate in the online survey. In addition, the survey was promoted by professional organizations via social media, email, and word of mouth.

In total, over 300 media professionals answered one or more questions on the survey, and 246 media professionals completed the survey. Because the group of respondents was not sampled in a statistically random way from the entire population of media professionals in Minnesota, these results are not statistically representative of the entire industry; however, the media professionals who responded represent a wide range of years of experience, types of media organization, roles, ages, genders, and racial identities. (See Figures 1-5 in the Appendix.)

The media professionals who took the survey feel that they understand the topics covered in the survey. Eight out of ten media professionals surveyed said they are “very” or “somewhat” familiar with the concept of racial narratives.

What did we learn from the survey?

Media professionals who took the survey recognize that there is a problem with racial bias in news reporting, and that racial biases perpetuate inaccurate and problematic racial narratives in Minnesota.

Overall, those who took the survey had mixed perceptions of how Indigenous people and people of color are portrayed in local media. Three out of four media professionals believe that news media outlets in Minnesota are doing a “fair” or “poor” job of portraying Indigenous people and people of color. When viewed by each respondent’s racial or cultural background, media professionals who identified as Indigenous or as a person of color were more likely than their white counterparts to say that news media outlets are doing a “poor” job. (See Figure 6 in the Appendix.)

In general, the media professionals who responded to the survey think racial bias is an important topic to consider in news reporting: 8 out of 10 media professionals said that it is “very important” to learn about and consider the race and culture of the people in their news reports, and two-thirds of media professionals believe that it is necessary to understand racial bias in order to be effective in their jobs. In addition, most media professionals who responded feel that racial bias has implications for racial narratives. One-third of media professionals believe that racial biases “very much” lead to inaccuracies in news stories. Nine out of ten media professionals believe that their work has at least “some” influence on public perceptions of Indigenous people and people of color. (See Figures 7-10 in the Appendix.)

Media professionals who took the survey believe that Indigenous people and people of color are not fairly represented in local news media.

The majority of media professionals did not think that Indigenous people or people of color are fairly represented in media. More than two-thirds of media professionals believe that Indigenous people and people of color are “rarely” or “never” used as subject matter experts for stories that are not explicitly about race and culture. Media professionals also identified one or more ways in which various racial groups are represented in problematic ways in local media. In particular, media professionals felt that African Americans were “overrepresented in a negative light,” and that American Indians and Asian Americans were “missing” from news stories altogether. Meanwhile, a majority of media professionals thought that white people are “overrepresented in a positive light” in news stories. (See Figure 11 in the Appendix.) Media professionals who identified as Indigenous or as people of color were even more likely than their white peers to have these perceptions.

These perceptions are similar to ways that Indigenous people and people of color in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington counties see themselves represented in media. In the East Metro Pulse, a 2018 survey of residents that is statistically representative of the population of these counties, individuals from African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic and Latinx communities believed that they were not fairly represented in local news media¹.

Media professionals who took the survey understand the importance of training on racial bias, but many have not had this training or do not know where to get it. Still, they are confident in their ability to report on racial and cultural groups other than their own.

More than half of media professionals think that it is “extremely important” for media professionals to receive training on racial bias and similar topics. At the same time, more than half did not receive training about these topics in their formal education (high school, college, or graduate school) or in employer-sponsored trainings; 2 out of 10 reported not receiving any training in these areas. In addition, 4 out of 10 media professionals either do not know the extent to which training is available to people in the field or believe this type of training is not available. (See Figures 12 and 13 in the Appendix.)

Despite these gaps in training, 8 out of 10 media professionals are at least “somewhat” confident that they can accurately reflect the experiences and stories of people from different racial or cultural groups than their own. (See Figure 14 in the Appendix.)

Media professionals who took the survey think about race more often than they talk to their colleagues about it.

Media professionals who took the survey said that race and culture is an important component of the work they do: 6 out of 10 media professionals “often” think about race and culture in the context of their work. At the same time, only 4 out of 10 media professionals “often” discuss race and culture with their colleagues; 2 out of 10 “rarely” or “never” do. (See Figures 15 and 16 in the Appendix.)

In conclusion, more work is needed.

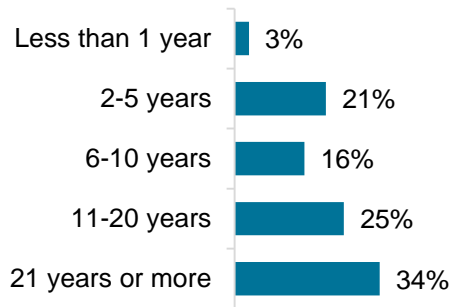
Collectively, the media professionals who responded to this survey expressed concern about representations of various racial and ethnic groups in local news reporting. While most are at least somewhat confident in their own ability to report news stories about those who come from a different racial or cultural background than their own, most also appreciate the importance of understanding and avoiding racial bias to creating accurate news stories. The survey also points to a lack of accessible training on these topics, either in formal education settings or on the job itself. Together,

¹ Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundations. *East Metro Pulse, Volume 2* (2018). For more information, see <https://www.spmcf.org/east-metro-pulse>.

these findings suggest a need for additional and ongoing training in the area of culturally competent news reporting in order to fairly represent Minnesota’s rapidly diversifying population.

Appendix

1. How long have you worked as a media professional in Minnesota?

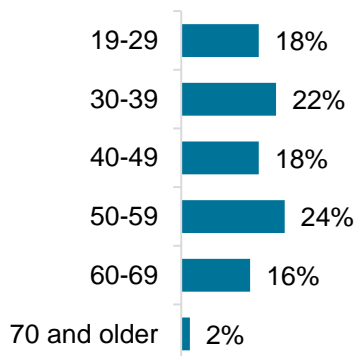


2. What type of media organization(s) do you work for?

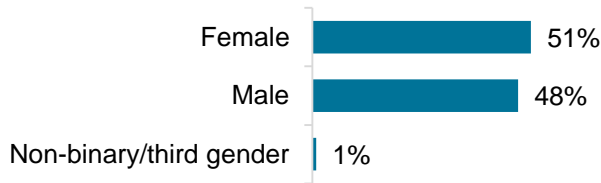
	N	%
Print	118	49%
Digital/online	99	41%
Broadcast radio	68	28%
Nonprofit	63	26%
Commercial	48	20%
Community	48	20%
Mainstream	45	19%
Broadcast television	18	8%
Self-employed/independent	11	5%
Prefer not to answer	4	2%
Other	3	1%

Note. Those who took the survey could select more than one answer; totals may equal more than 100 percent.

3. What is your age?



4. What is your gender?



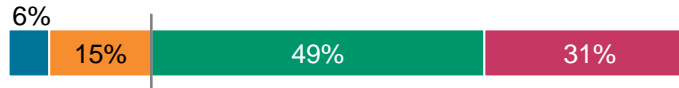
5. What is your racial or cultural identity?

	N	%
White	177	74%
African/African American	19	8%
Asian/Asian American	12	5%
Latinx/Hispanic	8	3%
American Indian/Native American	7	3%
Other	9	4%
Prefer not to answer	14	6%

Note. Those who took the survey could select more than one answer; totals may equal more than 100 percent.

6. How well do media professionals think news media portrays Indigenous people and people of color?

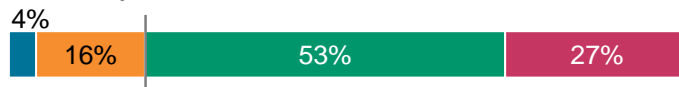
All media professionals



Media professionals of color/Indigenous media professionals



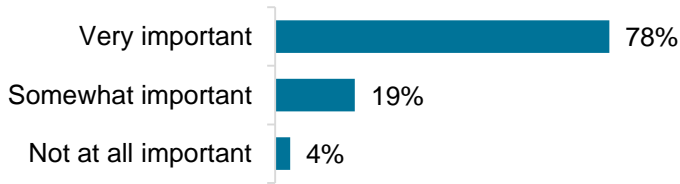
White media professionals



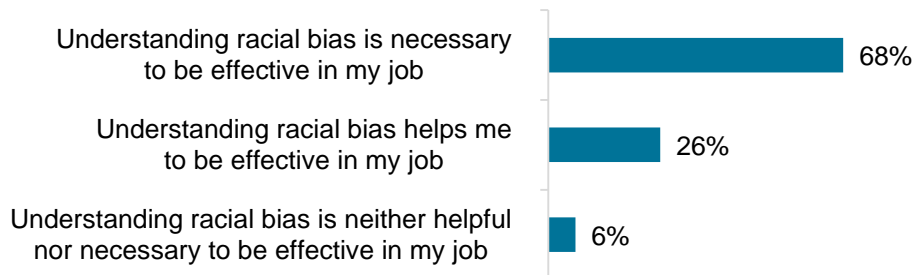
■ Excellent ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor

Note. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

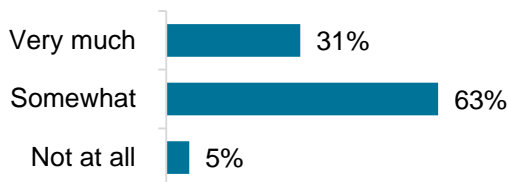
7. How important is it for journalists to learn about and consider the race and culture of the people about whom they report?



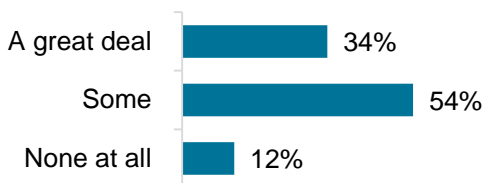
8. Which of the following statements aligns most closely with your views?



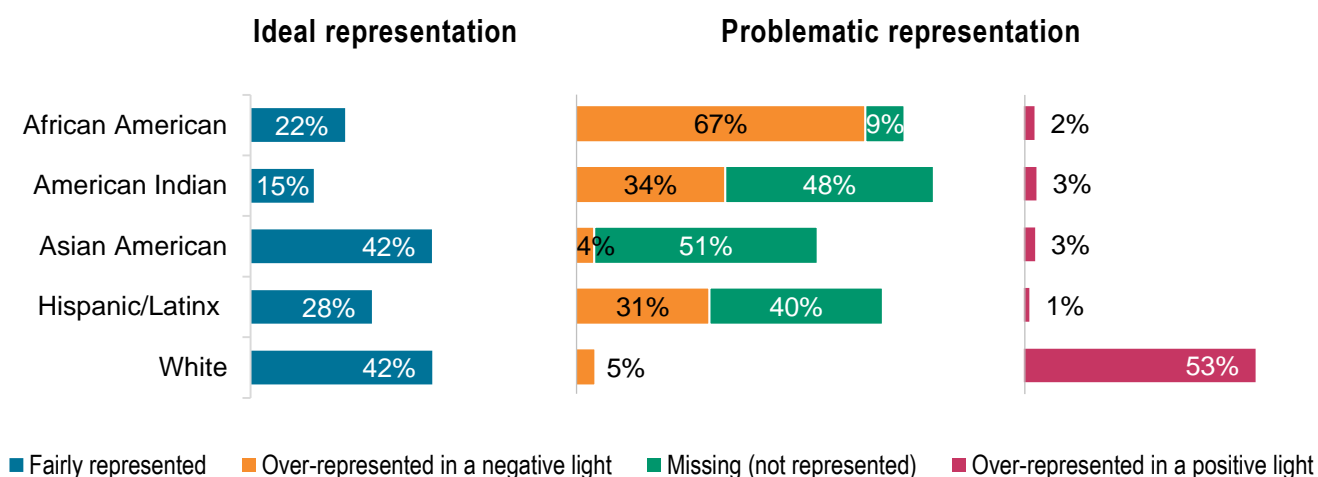
9. How much do racial biases among media professionals lead to inaccuracies in news stories?



10. How much influence do you think your work has on public perceptions of Indigenous people and people of color in Minnesota?



11. How do you feel the following groups are represented in Minnesota news media?



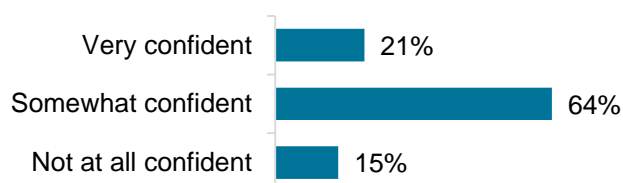
12. Where have you received training about diversity, inclusion, cultural competence, racial bias, or similar topics?

	N	%
Employer-sponsored training	117	47%
High school, college, or graduate school	113	46%
Non-specific training outside of the workplace	75	30%
Media-specific training outside of the workplace	68	28%
I have not received training	43	17%

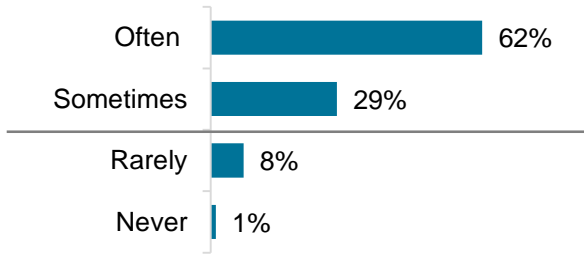
13. To what extent is training on these topics available to media professionals in Minnesota?

	N	%
Training is easily available to every media professional who wants it	25	10%
Training may be available to some professionals who seek it out	136	55%
Training is not available to media professionals	17	7%
I don't know	69	28%

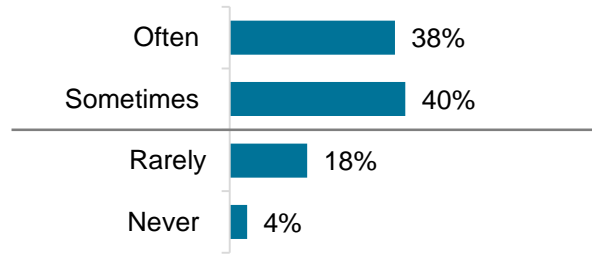
14. How confident do you feel in your ability to accurately reflect the experiences and stories of people who are from a racial or cultural group that is different from your own?



15. How often do you think about race and culture in the context of your work?



16. How often do you discuss race and culture with your colleagues in the context of your work?



For more information

This summary presents highlights of the Racial Narratives in Minnesota Media survey. For more information about this report, contact Nicole MartinRogers at Wilder Research, 651-280-2682.

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