

Diversity

By Bob Papper and Michael Gerhard

The controversy started on the first night of the 2001 American Society of Newspaper Editors Convention in Washington, DC this past April.

“It is probably the most disturbing thing that I’ve heard about us as journalists in some time,” says Paula Madison, NBC vice president for diversity and president and general manager of KNBC-TV in Los Angeles. “Even worse, that was a room full of management.”

The incident might have gone unreported—just another “harmless” racial slight—if not for a Ball State University intern named Amy Leang (pronounced lee ang). Working as a photographer, Leang watched in horror as a white member of the evening entertainment troupe put on a costume and wig, thick, coke-bottle glasses, and pretended to speak “Chinese”—gesturing wildly and shouting, “ching, ching, chong, chong”—a satirical commentary on Chinese-American relations in the aftermath of the U.S. spy plane incident.

The audience of mostly white newspaper editors howled. The next morning, Leang awoke in tears.

The issue wasn’t simply that a bunch of white people were using negative stereotypes in an attempt to be funny. Worse, to Leang, was that hundreds of newspaper editors—her future employers—were hysterical with laughter as the skit went on. By all reports, no one stood up to protest; no one publicly expressed outrage afterwards (except Leang); and no one from ASNE ever apologized for the insensitivity of the mostly white editors.

“If newspapers are supposed to speak for their communities,” Leang wrote, “did they think the Chinese-American population would have found that skit amusing? Would they have laughed at a white man in black face if the crisis concerned an African country?”

Madison, who happens to be part Chinese along with African American, sees no difference between whites putting on black face or a “Chinese” face.

“I’m not looking for PC (political correctness),” says Madison, who spent a dozen years in newspaper—the last four as an editor. “What I expect is fairness, consideration, respect--none of which was present there.”

Leang says the episode has made her more “determined but also disenchanted,” and she’s still unsure whether her public outcry will affect her career.

“I was afraid at first,” says Leang, but she says two things went through her mind: “‘I am so mad,’ and ‘Shouldn’t someone say something?’ So I did.”

“Hindsight is 20-20,” says Madison, “but there is no way that I could have sat through that and not stood up either during or after and asked, ‘What are we doing?’”

She says this embarrassing episode demonstrates exactly why we need not only a more diverse workforce—but a more diverse group of managers.

A more diverse perspective

“In a ratings-obsessed management culture, stories about minorities are routinely rejected or stalled,” according to former ABC news executive Av Westin, who conducted a series of interviews for a project for the Freedom Forum. He says local stations do far

better than the networks, but he heard plenty of complaints from reporters that local stations don't cover the ghetto. "They're all over a crime in the white section but they will skip one of similar magnitude in the black sections of town," says Westin.

"The media has got to figure out a way to tell a diverse group of stories," says Mark Trahan, chairman and CEO of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education in Oakland, CA. "Bob Maynard said that this country cannot be the country we want it to be if the story of the country is only told by one group of citizens."

The latest U.S. Census puts the minority population of the country at 30.9 percent and growing rapidly.

"The country is clearly, clearly, clearly becoming so much more diverse that I would think to stay in business both newspapers and broadcast properties have to pay more attention to diversity," says Mary Kay Blake, senior vice president for partnerships and initiatives at the Freedom Forum in Arlington, VA.

A diverse workforce brings a diverse perspective, along with diverse knowledge, connections, and sensitivities. It can help the organization make good decisions and avoid bad ones.

Patty Talahongva, vice president of the Native American Journalists Association and now a freelance journalist, still remembers the disconnect between a white, middle class reporter at her TV station in Phoenix and a woman from a very different world. The woman's son had been arrested for a crime, and she told the reporter that her other son was in Florence. "Italy?" the reporter asked. "No, honey, the state prison [in Florence, AZ]," the woman answered.

Progress in diversity has been strongest on the air. Television stations, particularly, tend to look a lot like the audience. But diversity behind the scenes—especially managers—has clearly lagged behind.

“Are the voices of diversity being heard at important times in planning meetings and budget meetings and things like that?” asks Jeffrey Marks, vice president for training and network coordination at News12 Networks in New Jersey and a management trainer for the Radio Television News Directors Foundation. “Or have we congratulated ourselves because we have three minority photographers and four minority people on the air?”

More diversity in management

“A manager has a clearer and louder voice and the authority to make coverage decisions,” argues David Louie, tech reporter and business editor for KGO-TV in San Francisco and a former president of the Asian American Journalists Association. Louie says a diverse management team brings more texture to the decision-making process.

“Better newsrooms are diverse ones because it just multiplies exponentially the possibility that you’ll make a good decision,” adds Lillian Dunlap, leadership and management faculty member at The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, FL and a management trainer for RTNDF.

“We solve problems differently,” says Walt Swanston, senior project director for diversity and education at the RTNDF. “We bring different experiences to the mix. We

may look at the world differently; we may have some shared experiences, but we don't all think the same."

Need to develop managers

"The things that we find that minority managers need the most is a coach or a couple of coaches or mentors," says Paul Pohlman, associate dean at The Poynter Institute.

"There weren't a lot of role models," remembers Georgeann Herbert, operations manager at WWJ and WXYT in Detroit. "Here it is 30 years later, and it surprises me sometimes that there aren't more women at management levels."

"I am an army of one," declares news director Becky Bruce Zani at WCDA, WGKS and WLXG in Lexington, KY. "That's what women do in commercial radio; they wind up doing news." Zani says she doesn't see many women general managers or owners. She says there are only two or three women disc jockeys in the whole area and none at her company's five stations—other than a board op who "doesn't get to say her name on the air." News is a "support role" in radio, says Zani, "and I know that I make the least of anybody around here."

"It's definitely a challenge," notes Xochitl (pronounced SOH shee) Sandoval, news director at KINC-TV in Las Vegas. "Definitely a challenge being a woman; the hardest part is managing." She says Univision has provided some training, but she's one of only a handful of women and the youngest of their news directors, so it hasn't been easy.

“I started as manager, but I wasn’t managing anybody,” says Christine MacKinnon, news director at WPSK, WFNR, WBXW, WBRW and WRAD in Radford, VA. Now she has three reporters working for her. “It’s a little bit of a challenge sometimes, because it’s not what I trained for, and it’s not anything that I have a whole lot of background in. It’s all been OJT (on the job training).”

That kind of haphazard training can extract quite a toll on someone thrown into the management arena, but that’s frequently the way things work.

There are no figures on minority retention in broadcast news, but the newspaper industry has studied the issue and determined that minorities are twice as likely as whites to leave the business.

“The pressures of being a few instead of a majority probably lead a lot of people to leave,” suggests Mr. Trahan.

That’s likely to be an issue in broadcasting as well, and the thin ranks of minority managers certainly aren’t helping to encourage and retain more potential minority managers.

Workshops like those sponsored by RTNDF, Poynter, Maynard, some of the minority journalism groups and some companies clearly do make a difference.

A session sponsored by AAJA got Randall Yip started on the path to management. “It gave me the savvy to deal with some situations and a lot of confidence as well,” says Yip, executive producer at KPTV in Portland, OR. He says part of the problem was that others were more politically savvy. “That’s part of the game,” he says, “and I wasn’t playing the game well.”

Katherine Green, vice president and news director at WTTG-TV in Washington, DC, says the various workshops she's attended have been an enormous help in teaching her about management and leadership. "I also learned about managing up," she says. "It's not all about just managing down, but managing up as well. You can never get enough education. You just never can."

"One of the things that we're finding is that the challenge of retention ties directly into how much investment you put in a person," says Trahan. He says their studies indicate that when companies invest in training employees—by doing things like sending them to workshops—80 percent stay in the business and most stay with their own company.

Corporate commitment

"I can tell you that I look from my position upward and see a need to develop women and minorities," says Green. "I still see a lot of television stations being run by men. I see very few African American general managers. I see very few women and African American news leaders. When you get into those high ranks, it's still pretty much a white male world."

The latest RTNDA/Ball State University Survey bears that out. Just 12.6 percent of TV general managers are women and 8.7 percent of TV general managers are minorities—6.6 percent excluding Hispanic stations.

Probably no media company has the track record of hiring and promoting women and minorities of the Gannett Company. Back in 1980, the Arlington, VA-based

company established a goal to be the industry leader in diversity—a goal it says it’s achieved in both print and broadcast.

“It comes down to accountability,” says Jose Berrios, vice president for staffing and diversity at Gannett. “Senior management and executives know that it’s expected, and we look at this very closely.” That includes monthly, quarterly, and annual reviews.

“We’ve always said, what counts, gets counted,” says Berrios. “Otherwise, a thousand other things become more important.”

Berrios notes that Gannett’s reputation for hiring and promoting women and minorities results in good women and minorities seeking them out, and that’s helped keep their numbers and quality high.

Without a strong corporate commitment to diversity, progress will continue to be slow.

Dunlap hopes that, over time, the people she and others train will become the corporate leaders throughout the industry and institute meaningful changes. “Cultures change slowly,” she notes.

“There needs to be a management team in place that can lead the effort, that can lay the groundwork and create an environment where all voices are welcome and even sought after,” says Madison.

Amy Leang is cautiously optimistic.

“Journalists of color need to speak up more about the injustices they encounter,” says Leang. “The rest of the newsroom needs to work on building an environment that invites trust and respect, so that they can.”

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Tips to identify potential managers

We surveyed the experts contacted for this article and asked for their list of how to spot potential managers.

- People who listen well. The most widely-mentioned attribute.
- People who have journalistic integrity and solid news judgment. Skilled and knowledgeable.
- People who are collaborative and build good relationships with others.
- People who have ideas, even if they sometimes seem a little crazy.
- People with influence and who command respect. Anyone with a title might well be influential, but, as Jill Geisler of The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, FL points out, it's the influential people without titles who will be the next group of leaders. "They are respected for more than their expertise," says Geisler. "They give credibility; they listen; they coach others; they model excellence."

- People who take responsibility, make decisions, and attempt to solve problems. “It’s the editor who comes to you and says, ‘You know, such and such happened, but this is how I handled it, and I hope that’s okay,’” says Georgeann Herbert, operations manager at WWJ and WXYT in Detroit.
- People with vision. “The best people I’ve worked with have had this ability to see something before it’s accomplished,” says Mark Trahan, chairman and CEO of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education in Oakland, CA, “and the very best ones then are able to take that vision inside their head and get the rest of us to see it.”
- People who are strong at follow-through and feedback. “They must inform and empower,” says Paula Madison, NBC vice president for diversity and president and general manager of KNBC-TV in Los Angeles.

Newspapers v. Broadcast

The latest survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors found that minority journalists make up 11.64 percent of newsroom employees at daily newspapers, down from last year’s 11.85 percent. African Americans were 5.23 percent of the total, Hispanics 3.66 percent, Asian Americans 2.30 percent, and Native Americans 0.44 percent. Women rose to 37.35 percent from 37.12 percent of the total.

In contrast, minority journalists make up 24.6 percent of television newsrooms. African Americans are 9.9 percent of the total, Hispanics 10.1 percent, Asian Americans 4.1 percent, and Native Americans 0.6 percent. If we just look at the English language

TV news operations, the minority population is 21.8 percent. African Americans are 10.2 percent, Hispanics are 6.7 percent, Asian Americans are 4.2 percent, and Native Americans are 0.6 percent. Women make up 39.7 percent of the television news work force.

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The latest figures from the RTNDA/Ball State University Survey show a mixed picture for both women and minorities.

On the positive side, minorities now hold 24.6 percent of all jobs in television news—the highest level ever. Even without Spanish-language stations, the 21.8 percent minority workforce is still the highest ever recorded. Hispanics and Asian Americans rose from last year and have been generally rising over the last seven years. In radio, the percentage of staffs with minorities and the percentage of minority work force both rose from last year.

The percentage of women in television remained at about 40 percent—an all-time high.

The percentage of women in radio news rose to its highest level ever—again: 37.4 percent, up from last year’s record 35 percent (and well up from the 25.8 percent of the work force seven years ago).

But while the overall work force numbers generally looked good, the news director numbers were not as encouraging.

In television, minority news directors lost all of the gains reflected in last year’s numbers—sliding back to about the same level as two years ago. That might mean that last year’s increase was simply an anomaly—reflecting an unusually high rate of return from stations with minority news directors. It’s also possible that it simply reflects the high turnover and movement of news directors. If last year’s numbers overstated the percentage of African American news directors, this year’s numbers clearly understate them. The survey results—which simply reflect who fills out and returns the survey—show only five African American TV news directors in the country. Clearly, that’s low.

In radio, the percentage of minority news directors dropped again—from last year’s 6 percent to this year’s 4.4 percent. Note that over the last seven years, the percentage of minority TV news directors has remained unchanged, and radio is down.

The percentage of women news directors dropped from last year’s all-time high of 24 percent, but the more significant figure may be the progress made in where women are news directors. For the first time, women are no more likely to be news directors in smaller markets or smaller stations than major markets and the biggest news operations. Over the years, women have made steady progress in that area. In radio, women news directors rose from last year’s 20 percent to this year’s 21.9 percent, but that’s still below most of the 1990s when the figure was in the middle-20s.

Broadcast News Work Force ... Television

	2001	2000	1994
Caucasian	75.4%	79%	82.9%
African American	9.9%	11%	10.1%
Hispanic	10.1%	7%	4.2%
Asian American	4.1%	3%	2.2%
Native American	0.6%	<1%	0.6%

Broadcast News Work Force ... Radio

	2001	2000	1994
Caucasian	89.3%	90%	85.3%
African American	5.2%	5%	5.7%
Hispanic	5.5%	3%	7.5%
Asian American	<1%	1%	0.6%
Native American	<1%	1%	1.0%

Minorities now hold 24.6 percent of all jobs in television news—the highest level ever. Even without Spanish-language stations, the 21.8 percent minority workforce is still the highest ever recorded. Compared to a year ago, African Americans dropped by a percent, Asian Americans rose by a percent, and Hispanics increased by more than 3 percent. Note that in the last seven years, Hispanics and Asian Americans have risen substantially while African Americans and Native Americans are essentially unchanged. In radio

news, after two years of decreases, the minority population rose marginally as Hispanics increased.

Broadcast News Directors ... Television

	2001	2000	1994
Caucasian	92.0%	86%	92.1%
African American	0.6%	3%	1.6%
Hispanic	5.7%	9%	3.8%
Asian American	1.1%	2%	1.5%
Native American	0.6%	<1%	1.0%

Broadcast News Directors ... Radio

	2001	2000	1994
Caucasian	95.6%	94%	91.4%
African American	1.5%	3%	5.4%
Hispanic	2.9%	2%	2.4%
Asian American	<1%	0	0
Native American	<1%	1%	0.8%

In television, minority news directors lost all of the gains reflected in last year's numbers—sliding back to about the same level as two years ago. That might mean that last year's increase was simply an anomaly—reflecting an unusually high rate of return from stations with minority news directors. It's also possible that it simply reflects the high turnover and movement of news directors (whose median tenure on the job remains two years). The current figures clearly understate the number of African American news directors—since 0.6 percent would translate to just five African American news directors, and there are considerably more than that. Among English-only television stations, 5.3 percent of the news directors are minorities. In radio, the percentage of minority news directors dropped again to 4.4 percent. Note that over the last seven years, the percentage of minority TV news directors has remained unchanged, and radio is down.

Women in Local TV News

	News Staffs With Women	Women News Directors	Women as Percentage of Work Force	Average Number of Women on Staff
All Television	97%	20.2%	39.7%	13.8
Network Affiliates	98.6%	20.3%	39.8%	14.8
Independents	91.7%	28.6%	36.5%	11.3
DMA 1-25	100%	23.3%	38.6%	27.5

DMA 26-50	100%	23.1%	42.7%	20.2
DMA 51-100	98%	11.8%	39.3%	14.4
DMA 101-150	97.7%	23.9%	39.3%	10.3
DMA 151+	93.1%	20.0%	42.0%	7.4
Staff 51+	100%	23.7%	39.2%	30.0
Staff 31-50	98.1%	16.7%	39.2%	14.6
Staff 21-30	87.2%	17.5%	40.6%	10.0
Staff 11-20	92.3%	25.9%	42.5%	6.1
Staff 1-10	80.0%	18.8%	42.5%	2.1

The percentage of women in television remained at about 40 percent—an all-time high. The percentage of women news directors dropped from last year’s all-time high of 24 percent, but the more significant figure may be the progress made in where women are news directors. For the first time, women are no more likely to be news directors in smaller markets or smaller stations than major markets and the biggest news operations. Over the years, women have made steady progress in that area. Still, at 20.2 percent of news directors, they’re only 50 percent of parity. In 1994, women made up 36 percent of the television work force and 13.6 percent of TV news directors.

Women in Local Radio News

	News Staffs With Women	Women News Directors	Women as Percentage of Work Force	Average Number of Women on Staff
All Radio	46.4%	21.9%	37.4%	1.3
Major Market	61.9%	35.3%	41.2%	3.0
Large Market	36.4%	7.1%	30.8%	0.7
Medium Market	44.7%	23.3%	31.6%	0.8
Small Market	42.9%	30.8%	42.9%	0.9

The percentage of women in radio news rose to its highest level ever—again: 37.4 percent, up from last year’s record 35 percent. Women news directors rose from last year’s 20 percent to this year’s 21.9 percent, but that’s still below most of the 1990s when the figure was in the middle-20s. In 1994, women made up 25.8 percent of the radio work force and 22.8 percent of radio news directors. Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are from 250,000 to 1 million. Medium markets are 50,000 to 250,000. Small markets are fewer than 50,000.

Minorities in Local TV News

	News Staffs With Minorities	Minority News Directors	Minorities as Percentage of Work Force	Average Number of Minorities

				on Staff
All Television	86%	8.0%	24.6%	8.6
Network Affiliates	87.9%	5.3%	21.3%	7.9
Independents	93.3%	35.7%	67.0%	20.7
DMA 1-25	100%	20.0%	36.8%	26.2
DMA 26-50	81.8%	8.3%	18.1%	8.5
DMA 51-100	96.1%	7.8%	24.0%	8.8
DMA 101-150	81.8%	4.5%	15.3%	4.0
DMA 151+	72.4%	3.3%	15.7%	2.8
Staff 51+	100%	10.5%	29.0%	22.2
Staff 31-50	94.4%	9.6%	22.3%	8.3
Staff 21-30	97.4%	5.0%	20.3%	5.0
Staff 11-20	76.9%	11.1%	23.0%	3.3
Staff 1-10	40.0%	0%	13.7%	0.7

In television, the minority work force rose, but the percentage of minority news directors fell. At 24.6 percent of the work force, that's the highest percentage of minorities in television news ever—up from last year's record-tying 21 percent. But last year's record-setting 14 percent minority news directors dropped to about the same figure as two years ago. The drops came in several places, but particularly among the smallest stations (staffs of 1-10) and Fox affiliates. Last year, Fox stations were two to three times more likely than the others to have minority news directors. In this year's survey, they were less likely than all but ABC affiliates to have minority news directors. That could reflect a real change or simply the news directors who returned the survey. Excluding Hispanic stations, minorities account for 21.8 percent of the television work force and 5.3 percent of television news directors.

Minorities in Local Radio News

	News Staffs With Minorities	Minority News Directors	Minorities as Percentage of Work Force	Average Number of Minorities on Staff
All Radio	15.5%	4.4%	10.7%	0.5
Major Market	42.9%	5.9%	23.4%	1.9
Large Market	12.7%	0	8.1	0.3
Medium Market	13.2%	7.1	8.4	0.2
Small Market	6.1	0	6.6	0.1

In radio, the percentage of staffs with minorities and the percentage of minority work force both rose from last year. The increase came in all markets except large. The percentage of minority news directors dropped from last year's 6 percent to this year's 4.4 percent. Minority news directors went up in major markets and edged up in medium markets, but dropped in both large and small markets.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2000 among all 1,387 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,193 radio stations. Valid responses came from 731 television stations (52.7 percent) and 120 radio news directors and general managers representing 278 radio stations.

TV General Managers

	Percent Caucasian	Percent Minority	Percent Men	Percent Women
All Television	91.3%	8.7%	87.4%	12.6%
Network Affiliates	94.5%	5.5%	87.2%	12.8%
Independents	66.7%	33.3%	93.3%	6.7%
DMA 1-25	83.3%	16.7%	86.7%	13.3%
DMA 26-50	75.0%	25.0%	66.7%	33.3%
DMA 51-100	92.0%	8.0%	90.2%	9.8%
DMA 101-150	97.7%	2.3%	84.0%	16.0%
DMA 151+	93.4%	6.6%	93.3%	6.7%

The white, male world of TV general managers is actually a bit more white and a bit more male this year than last. Last year, 10 percent of TV general managers were minorities and 14 percent were women. Among non-Spanish stations, the percentage of minority general managers drops to 6.6 percent. Note that the figures for general managers only includes those stations with news departments; those without news departments are not included in this survey.

Radio General Managers

	Percent Caucasian	Percent Minority	Percent Men	Percent Women
All Radio	94.3%	5.7%	87.7%	12.3%

In radio, the percentage of minority general managers rose marginally from 5 percent to 5.7 percent. The percentage of women general managers remained essentially the same at 12 percent.