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AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF THE CULTURAL COMPETENCE EXHIBITED AT AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WEEKLY NEWSPAPER ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Little is known of the cultural competence or leadership styles of a minority owned newspaper. This autoethnography serves to benchmark one early 1990s example.
Background	I focused on a series of flashbacks to observe an African American weekly newspaper editor-in-chief for whom I reported to 25 years ago. In my reflections I sought to answer these questions: How do minorities in entrepreneurial organizations view their own identity, their cultural competence? What degree of this perception is conveyed fairly and equitably in the community they serve?
Methodology	Autoethnography using both flashbacks and article artifacts applied to the leadership of an early 1990s African American weekly newspaper.
Contribution	Since a literature gap of minority newspaper cultural competence examples is apparent, this observation can serve as a benchmark to springboard off older studies like that of Barbarin (1978) and that by examining the leadership styles and editorial authenticity as noted by The Chicago School of Media Theory (2018), these results can be used for comparison to other such minority owned publications.
Findings	By bringing people together, mixing them up, and conducting business any other way than routine helped the Afro-American Gazette, Grand Rapids, proudly display a confidence sense of cultural competence. The result was a potentiating leadership style, and this style positively changed the perception of culture, a social theory change example.
Recommendations for Practitioners	For the minority leaders of such publications, this example demonstrates effective use of potentiating leadership to positively change the perception of the quality of such minority owned newspapers.

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Recommendations for Researchers	Such an autoethnography could be used by others to help document other examples of cultural competence in other minority owned newspapers.
Impact on Society	The overall impact shows that leadership at such minority owned publications can influence the community into a positive social change example.
Future Research	Research in the areas of culture competence, leadership, within minority owned newspapers as well as other minority alternative publications and websites can be observed with a focus on what works right as well as examples that might show little social change model influence. The suggestion is to conduct the research while employed if possible, instead of relying on flashbacks.
Keywords	cultural competence, microaggression, racism, prejudice, African American, newspapers, leadership, journalism, autoethnography, epistemology, flashbacks, reflection

INTRODUCTION

Much of what the public knows about the concept of cultural competence in general is found in the media. Many stories describe corporations and philanthropic or political organizations that appear to be leaderless and struggling, while few seem to offer a more moderate and exemplary level of community competence. Using an autoethnography methodology can effectively examine the inner workings of such organizations, for many organizations hide behind a veil and mask their identities. A prominent public competence example is found in the mainstream and minority press that are being challenged daily to account for their authenticity and accuracy in reporting and their legitimacy within the communities they serve, locally, nationally, and online.

No other time in history have press readers questioned more whether stories are sensationalized, reliable, or part of a wave of so-called *fake news* (alternative facts) designed to benefit an entity or hidden agenda. Some of this is blamed on social networks, an increase in advertorials, and Internet technologies that blur so called *real* stories versus those compromised. Cultural competence starts with leadership, an internal organizational phenomenon. It can be argued that the Black press had struggled with legitimacy for decades, since its purpose was and is to provide a reliable platform through which issues unique to the African American community can be fairly and equitably covered, issues the mainstream press might place ignore or delegitimize in a newshole, "...the space that is allotted for the actual news" (Tiberius, 2018, para 1).

Cultural competence, a concept that allows professionals to work collectively across cultures, typically for a shared goal or purpose, has been studied across a broad range of disciplines and industries (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1989, 1991). Many have asked how does cultural competence effectively propagate within a minority organization (Georgetown University, 2016)? For many in these identity-based organizations like the Black press, this may be the only establishment where they feel their leadership style is represented equitably. Robert Coles, a prominent social theory researcher, used a qualitative personal documentary style to investigate how people see themselves within their communities and their lives (Fricke, 2006). But that method includes real time observations. This study was a look back at empirical experience that occurred approximately 25 years ago. Consequently, the autoethnography methodology was selected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review began with search terms of peer reviewed studies as well those not peer reviewed aboard Websites, for example, such as, *cultural competence, definition, African American, newspapers, leadership*, in the Elton B. Stephenson Company (EBSCO) database, ProQuest, ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Theses, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The entries reviewed here are most pertinent to this autoethnog-

raphy study and show a significant gap in terms of the exploration of cultural competence at such weekly minority owned publications.

Cultural competence has been studied for decades applied to various uses in psychology and in various industries such as healthcare, business, and education. It is a similar to shared belief or philosophy about a culture, its challenges, its struggles, and its place in society. Isaacs and Benjamin (1989), as explained in a report prepared for Georgetown University's National Center for Cultural Competence, indicate that "Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (25).

Black press history is steeped in cultural competence. It is cultural competence that gave the Black press its purpose, its own voice, editorials, and documentation of an oppressed American race that was not guaranteed the right to vote until 1964. The *Pittsburgh Courier* launched its Double V campaign during World War II, "...which signaled the newspaper's support for victory abroad over the Axis powers and victory at home for black [sic] soldiers and their families" (Celis, 2017, para 10). The weekly black newspaper "...– at its height one of the most influential of the country's African-American newspapers – argued that if Black men were dying for their country, then the returning servicemen and their families had earned and deserved equal rights at home" (Celis, 2017, para 10).

For each Black newspaper, cultural competence is embroidered within its leadership's perception as well as society's. Such cultural competence is a form of intervention to improve the community (Barbarin, 1978). Thus, the perceptions of cultural competence may differ from Black newspaper to Black newspaper and from one community's perception of it versus another community's perception of it. Even so, such editorial intervention should imbue authenticity regardless of the racial background of the individuals that produce it (The Chicago School of Media Theory, 2018). Cultural competence in of itself is eristically controversial for, while it tangibly exists, there can be wide ranging differences of opinions even among those of the same culture.

Grand Rapids, Michigan is a community with a rich Dutch and Christian historical heritage. The African American community there is relatively small and tightly knit and is most centrally found around the inner-city area near Division Avenue and Franklin Street. The first known Grand Rapids Afro-American family owned and operated Black paper was that of the Topaz Marketing & Distributing Company (TMDC). They debuted a paper originally called ViewPoint in 1991 as an 8.5-inch x 17 horizontally folded tabloid. The paper was freely distributed at restaurants and store vestibules. The only other Black newspaper in Michigan, with no connection to TMDC, was one of the most successful in the nation and began approximately 55 years prior, *The Michigan Chronicle* (Real Time Media, 2019). According to Real Times Media (2019):

In April 1936, John Sengstacke, the young nephew of Chicago Defender founder Robert Abbott, sent Lucius Harper, then executive editor of the Defender, to Detroit. Armed with \$135 in capital — and a one-way bus ticket— Harper's mission was to launch a Detroit-based sister paper (para 2).

The Michigan Chronicle was an extraordinary example of a well-run black newspaper. "The Chronicle has been recognized five times as best Black newspaper in the country by the National Newspaper Publishers Association" (Real Time Media, 2019, para 29). Part of its success was due to an enormous Wayne County Michigan African American population, the fourth largest of all United States counties.

In the early 1990s ViewPoint was renamed the *Afro-American Gazette* (AAG), The AAG's place in the community was initially perceived as somewhat capricious. The newspaper content was mostly a mix of editorials just crying to be legitimately accepted, while featuring any number of inexpensive advertisements targeted to African Americans such as hair products, some local businesses, and lucky lottery numbers, combinations for the taking. The AAG was the brainchild of a sole proprietor and

included several family member employees. Barbarin's 1978 interpretation of cultural competence in the Black Press carries forward to the early 1990s AAG as will be shown in this autoethnography example. Therefore, the gap in the literature only shows that no other minority owned newspaper has been analyzed for its cultural competence example since and no other to present day.

METHOD

Since little is known about African American newspaper editors' and publishers' perceptions of their community presence and leadership styles, I employed the documentary style combined with an autoethnography of collective memory to reflectively write about what I now observed at an African American weekly newspaper and its editor-in-chief to whom I reported 25 years ago. How do minorities in entrepreneurial organizations view their own identity? What degree of this perception is conveyed fairly and equitably in the community they serve? I constructed a set of flashback anecdotes to recount my personal perceptions of the most prominent internal and external leadership constructs exemplified during my work at the Grand Rapids, Michigan based Afro-American Gazette owned by Topaz Marketing & Distributing. I acknowledge the epistemology associated with the autoethnography flashbacks (Aguilar, 2018). In addition to carefully examining my own biases, I also acknowledge the most prominent deficit of the documentary method – that observations are fashioned as much by the researcher's perceptions let alone the subject(s) observed (Coles, 1997). This is, of course, especially true in autoethnography.

According to Qualitative-Research.net another distinction regarding the quality of the autoethnography is via artifacts. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) discuss the importance of artifacts, "They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice" (para. 16). In addition to the flashbacks that serve as prominent anecdotes, I discuss some of the most prominent articles I wrote and published as such artifacts that accompanied these memories.

THIS STUDY

In spring of 1992 I answered an advertisement for an editor for a minority owned paper. I needed the cash and was itching to find my journalistic voice and an audience who could appreciate it. I knew from my Caucasian roots it would be out of my comfort zone. I was after all, I newly minted stringer for The Grand Rapids Press and had been assigned to Bowne Township in the outer most southeast rural part of Kent County and Jamestown Township to the southwest in Ottawa county. I will never forget my first published Grand Rapids Press story dubbed, SLIPPERY STUFF: *Drivers raise a stink about manure overflow on roadway*; it was a vivid description of manure pouring like mud from a nearby farm blocking a major road (Bean, 1992c). I was at the bottom of the reporter chain, but my stories were featured in the Thursday weekly Grand Rapids press community paper insert and sometimes even more prominently in the business section.

I was obtaining a real-world civics lesson on covering the function of municipalities, politics, boards, and planning commissions, police units, fire, and everything that *Roberts Rules of Order* was written for so that governments could fairly and rigorously conduct their business while upholding local ordinances, rules, regulations, and laws (Robert, 1990). I knew that my job was to mirror the news, not reinvent it. I had gained some practitioner publication experience with hobby and industry periodicals such as *Freshwater and Marine Aquarium*, *Marketing News*, and another weekly Grand Rapids area newspaper dubbed *The Advance*. I was learning the craft of interviewing, observing, and documenting, a quasi-researcher in the makings, one who possessed nothing more than a bachelor's in psychology degree. I was hustling and like many struggling writers making just enough to pay the bills.

I recognized that my own ethnocentrism and competence in understanding people and the craft of observing and writing needed much honing, the likes of which could only come from reporting to

my editor-in-chief at *The Grand Rapids Press* and my new editor-in-chief at the minority owned newspaper. Enter the *Afro-American Gazette* (AAG).

When I began as editor in May 1992, it was a monthly under the pseudonym dubbed Viewpoint: “Tell It Like It Is!” Its tagline aboard the masthead read, “The newspaper that lets citizens express their ‘uncensored’ opinions” (Topaz Marketing & Distributing, 1992, p. 4). The next month, the publisher converted the name to *Afro-American Gazette*. It also featured a tagline dubbed, “A Publication Promoting The Change From Negative Thinking To Positive Solutions. REMEMBER: EVERYONE LEARNS BY READING” (Worldcat.org, n.d., para 3). I was promoted to the role of senior editor that month too.

The look and feel of the AAG upon its inception featured oddly laid out stories with little copy editing (since one editor wore many hats including managing, design, and teaming with an advertising representative), which collectively helped it live up to its stereotypical reputation of another minority weekly rag. Much in the way of positive community cultural competence was on the table. Securing ads was a constant struggle and met with much community resistance not only due to its low ABC Audit Bureau rating, that the publisher worked feverishly to increase, but because advertising prospects were not convinced it had reliable circulation. The AAG simply looked suspiciously out of place compared to the black paper behemoth, *The Michigan Chronicle*.

However, that reputation was about to get a boost not only because of an investment in personnel, but because the AAG owner was willing to invest in computer equipment (a MAC computer, Quark Express newspaper software) to increase the quality and to better promote it. His son, wheel chair ridden with the use of no more than 10 percent of his hands would successfully insert all the stories and photos. He was an extraordinary individual who refused to succumb to his almost complete quadriplegic disorder. He willingly took many of my layout suggestions and together we grew.

The perception of the quality of the publication was much higher on the inside than outside initially. The outside perception did change because more ads were garnered in the second half of 1992 and in particular in January 1993 when the design was flipped to an 8.5-inch x 11 vertical fold which then positioned it as the look of a magazine. This allowed for a full 11 x 17 centerfold which freed the design team to work in theme-based collages for Black History Month, the annual downtown Grand Rapids Hispanic Festival, Praise Fest, fundraisers, or other special issues. This new look with better editorial copy, a color front cover, and important embedded community stories, such as whites helping blacks and blacks helping whites, allowed the paper to charge for subscriptions and achieve a better Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC).

Having the ABC audit subscription levels allowed newspapers to charge higher advertising fees since readership is certified. Stories such as a white doctor who performed successful surgery on a black patient and the like were commonplace (Bean, 1993a). The readership seemed to enjoy the community stories. What was once a *fake it until you make it* insiders’ dream, had become the reality of a paper that could begin to hold its masthead up more proudly; it had more content, more ads, more pages and looked like the mainstream Grand Rapids publications.

I knew from the onset of being offered the editor job that it would not be easy, that I would have to prove my abilities, perhaps even more challenging because of my race. I knew I would be in some uncomfortable situations. For instance, I would be the only Caucasian at an NAACP meeting, the only Caucasian who would represent the publication in the community, and I would endure some reverse discrimination as the “token” white staff member. My presence at local NAACP meetings would undoubtedly help lead to the view that the AAG leadership was charismatic, in my hiring process, an example of potentiating to be discussed later under the flashbacks. I brought stories with headlines like, *Task Force Aims At People Who Hate* (Bean, 1992d) and front page stories like *Time For Community Closeness Is Long Overdue* (Bean, 1992e). These stories I believe addressed the heart of racism and prejudice in its most simplistic form. People generally are uncomfortable about those different from themselves and without much further basis for these feelings, other than the proverbial *judg-*

ing a book by its cover or by the basis of one's religion, appearance, tone, or overt handicap, for example. These feelings can often result in victimizing microaggression, intentional or unintentional derogatory behavior (Sehgal, 2016).

That said, I truly wanted to help make the publication as professional as possible and to provide stories that could debunk racial stereotypes. I knew, like the AAG owner, that while the editor-in-chief and I had our racial differences, in his words, "It does not matter if one is black, brown, white, or yellow, my favorite color is green." This credo resting on the goal of profitability was appealing to me since it just made so much sense. After all, if my name was going to be associated with the paper, I knew that profitability was going to be accompanied by quality. I would selfishly accept no less. I also knew I was studying how the owner saw the publication in terms of its standing in the community, a struggling minor paper that was reaching out for its fair share of advertising and journalistic recognition. I was a contributor to and observer of the editor-in-chief and publisher's philosophy, even though I never knew that I would someday think back more analytically on both ownership's community interactions as well as my own Caucasian and ethnocentrism. The use of flashbacks would allow me to legitimize my experience let alone immerse this manuscript with prudence and acknowledgement of authentic, evocative, and analytical autoethnography practice (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2007).

According to Anderson (2006). "Evocative autoethnographers have argued that narrative fidelity to and compelling description of subjective emotional experiences create an emotional resonance with the reader that is the key goal of their scholarship" (p. 377). Anderson, however, argued that analytical autoethnography has five key features: "... (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis" (p. 378). This study relied on flashbacks like Anderson in emulating the collective memory style since what is revealed occurred over 25 years ago.

Aguilar (2018) used flashbacks for a study he did about events that occurred eight years prior in his work, *Epistemological Ruptures: Flashback on Fieldwork Dilemmas While Doing Research on Friends at Home*. Of the use of flashbacks, Aguilar wrote, "Until now, I better understand what really happened because of the following flashback. However, I conceptualize the field dilemmas more as epistemological ruptures that have taught me a lesson about the relationship between the researcher and the researched" (p. 510). While reflecting on my year and a half working at the AAG I vividly remember several short flashbacks, anecdotes of verbal exchanges that help reveal snapshots of examples of cultural competence inside the organization (that until now might have just been what I experienced with little relevant meaning). Of particular importance in my reflections are conversations between myself and the AAG editor-in-chief and a snapshot of a brief exchange between myself and the Grand Rapids Press community editor-in-chief. I was part of the universe in which I needed to objectively examine. These flashbacks and anecdotes are what I remember most prominently, and I gave great thought in trying to answer the questions that Barbarin (1978) and others have proposed. How do minorities in entrepreneurial organizations view their own identity? What degree of this perception is conveyed fairly and equitably in the community they serve?

FLASHBACKS

The first flashback observation I remember prominently was the outside perception of the AAG. During a visit to the Grand Rapids Press community desk, its editor-in-chief asked me, "*What's it like working at that African American Newspaper?*" While I knew part of the question was simply prompted by curiosity, I vividly remember I felt as if the question was actually questioning how comfortable I was working there or that perhaps it was somehow prompted so I would share my assessment of the quality of journalism practiced there. I will never know his intent.

Nevertheless, I immediately responded, "*It's like any other paper, the editor-in-chief assigns me a story. I go out and cover it.*" I was rather proud of my response. I was proud because I believed the question was in-

tended to be probing because it wasn't asked soon after I'd started at the AAG, it occurred almost six months after I started working there. The minority paper was gaining in popularity and credibility throughout Kent County because of the collective effort of its entire staff with me as senior editor. I saw this quality momentum as largely driven by the AAG leadership. The leadership style used at this minority owned newspaper is best categorized as charismatic, potentiating, and transpersonal leadership (McCaslin, 2015).

On the potentiating leadership style, McCaslin (2015) said, "It is a pity we do not speak of *eudaimonism* more in leadership studies. The leadership of human potential is grounded in a eudaimonistic philosophy (Norton, 1976; see also McCaslin & Snow, 2010). It simultaneously engages the good (eu) person (daimon) while creating the good society" (p. 81). When I think of the leadership at this minority publication there is no question that the AAG editor-in-chief was a good person who truly wanted to engage the Kent County community and to accentuate the best in people, African American and all races. He knew that, without over generalizing, many people are still uncomfortable being around others who are different. By publishing positive stories that showed different races working in concert with in one another and by being willing to hire a Caucasian editor, he modeled the behavior he knew society should model, a truly potentiating leadership practice.

In further analysis, his leadership style provided a community social change example (Dugan, 2006). My flashbacks during this era document that I became a vehicle to deliver the AAG editor-in-chief's potentiating and transpersonal community leadership message. As a result of this message it was soon obvious that many community members wanted their businesses covered by the minority owned paper. This conclusion was evident in the advertisements and press releases that grew exponentially, a social change example. The social change examples and resulting influx in increasing advertisers may have been prompted by numerous published examples (titles provide here as autoethnography artifacts) where I ghost wrote metaphors from late 1960s and early 1970s pop music hits that the editor-in-chief used in editorials. For example, *Don't Let One Bad Apple Spoil the Whole Bunch* (Bean, 1993b) and *R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find Out How Much The Japanese Mean to Me* (Bean, 1993c).

These were songs from my childhood, songs I knew were designed to make a poignant statement on how people should treat one another. These editorials were typically accompanied by exceptionally targeted cartoons that captured the overall community message. Another vivid example was an editorial that ran consecutively for many weeks dubbed, *Eye on Redlining* (Bean, 1992a), I wrote it (but did not receive a byline) to document this controversial practice in the Grand Rapids area. There were other concurrent stories I wrote for which no byline was given, for example, *African American Media Association May Boycott Procter & Gamble Products*.

The AAG editor-in-chief knew much about the way communities worked not only from a sociological perspective but from an economic one. He told me, "*Every time the community here spends money in the suburbs that money never comes back to the inner city.*" AAG in general had a good foothold on another economic stimuli that the advertising market would likely be receptive to – free advertising. I recall my reaction to the practice when it was first mentioned to me at a general meeting. I said, "Will these companies get mad for running the ads without their approval?"

The response was predictable: "Why would they get mad, it's free publicity." I thought to myself, they would have been mad if the paper had still been in its debut poor quality content and design stage. I reluctantly agreed that while the practice was a bit unethical, I as well as the entire staff, was proud of the quality production we had worked so hard to yield. I thought any advertiser should be humbled we would think so highly of them that we would want to include them as advertisers, for no fee. Including these free advertisements magnified the number of paid advertisers who wanted to be in the growing minority paper. The perception of the paper grew increasingly positive in the community. Previously, local banks and businesses were paid advertisers in the daily Grand Rapids Press but they placed only a small portion of advertising among minority papers like the AAG and separately owned Michigan Chronicle.

In this flashback example, the AAG editor-in-chief would often remark to me that there were Italian eateries, Polish restaurants, Dutch bakeries, and Chinese takeout, and ponder why aren't there restaurants with Black focused cuisine? He perceived this to be because few minority business owners could obtain legitimate bank loans. Thus, the AAG editor-in-chief and community leaders helped to enable more dialogue between loan prospects and local banks, that were also asked to place supplemental ads in exchange for advertorials.

I adopted to my role as a Black newspaper editor, thinking about racism, prejudice, and microaggression. I wrote stories such as advertorials entitled *Old Kent Bank Announces Reinvestment Plan For Inner City* that courted sponsors and competitors such as NBD and Comerica (Bean, 1992b). These stories were advertorials designed to bridge the gap between Blacks who were unrepresented in securing loans.

Old Kent Bank, a Grand Rapids Based entity, was later sold to the Cincinnati based behemoth Fifth Third. In further analysis, this leadership style of potentiating led to a community social change example (Dugan, 2006). The editor-in-chief reshaped the public's perception of a quality minority owned newspaper, a social change example. This conclusion noted a series of risks leading to increased newspaper circulation among many demographics beyond African Americans. By purposely targeting all socio-ethnic backgrounds and races with stories that zeroed in on blacks helping whites and whites helping blacks the readership model of a typical minority geared publication was challenged.

Leadership and perception of it was always on the mind of the AAG editor-in-chief. Each AAG cover was imprinted with a fable of a lion and a gazelle:

“Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle: when the sun comes up, you'd better be running.”

The quote is normally attributed to Dan Montano and a 1985 edition of the Economist newspaper (Montano, 1985). Below the AAG lion and gazelle imprint on each issue were the words, *WINNING SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP*. This was an obvious communication from the AAG publisher indicating his message to community leadership.

Bringing people together, mixing them up, and conducting business any other way than routine helped the Afro-American Gazette, Grand Rapids, proudly and successfully hold its minority head up. A potentiating leadership style had risen from the minority owned paper within Grand Rapids. This leadership style changed the culture inside and out into the community including the reader's perceptions. So when applying question 1, How do minorities in entrepreneurial organizations view their own identity? I can confidently say the AAG editor-in-chief knew he had his work cut out ahead of him. In considering question 2, What degree of this perception is conveyed fairly and equitably in the community they serve? The AAG editor knew the community did not immediately perceive the paper and its leadership fairly and equitably because of some maligned hidden agenda or bias and that the quality of the paper had to exemplify the quality of other mainstream type papers. The purpose of the weekly paper was to uplift the community; it was not designed to be a hard news type journal.

I resigned in October 1993, but not because I was disgruntled. I had acquired a better understanding of minority perspectives and honed my interviewing and writing skills satisfactorily to prepare for my next journey, the pursuit of my master's thesis at Michigan State University in journalism. Enormous technological changes were now underway such as the Internet and were about to permanently disrupt whole industries let alone minority newspapers and mainstream publications.

The owner and I on that last day were about to have one more memorable conversation, a flashback I would never forget one of ethnocentrism gutwrenching proportion. I felt compelled to share with

him the Jewish religion upon which I was raised. Like most religions, my religion had taught me to do unto others as I would hope they would do unto me. I was taught to respect all people, after all, we are all human beings. Sharing my religious background was difficult for me as a close family member had told me never to mix work with religion since so many people hold stereotype views of other sects. This same family member had also told me, “One of your most interesting qualities is you do not look Jewish. You can pass for a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP).”

My religion, like many others, has been the subject of discrimination and there is no denying that Jews, like African Americans, have been widely persecuted for centuries. In fact, to some degree Jews and African Americans can sometimes bind successfully as many within each group can be sympathetic to anti-Semitism, slavery, and prejudice. Maybe that was part of my motivation for initially applying to an African American newspaper. On my last day as I sat in the editor-in-chief’s office he was unashamed as he followed his normal routine and injected insulin through his pants and into the top of his right leg. We exchanged gratuities and after I told him why I was leaving, I revealed my faith to which he simply and adroitly replied, “*You can hide your religion, but I cannot hide being Black.*”

I was taken aback. At that very moment I knew that my own tendencies towards microaggression were often unfounded. He had single handedly stunned any remaining frail and predisposed prejudices contained in the bowels of my mind. I knew how much more vulnerable any African American might feel purely because of his or her color. It was a most profound remark, shared at the end of my one and half year reign as AAG senior editor where I had been humbled to experience walking in the footsteps of another minority. I now think of this as my Bandara moment. Albert Bandara, noted cognitive psychologist, recognized “... that chance encounters and fortuitous events often shape one’s behavior” (Bandara, 2018, para 1). I was forever changed.

This paper revealed how I interacted as my role as a young white editor of an African American local paper – and what I learned about cultural competency and working with the community from my experiences, particularly those shared between myself and the AAG editor-in-chief. I used the most prominent flashback anecdotes remembered and artifacts such as the various article titles where applicable. The editor-in-chief’s potentiating leadership style was the hallmark of the publication’s success.

CONCLUSION

I close with a quote from Dr. Carolyn Ellis (2007) and other researchers whose sentiments I wish to echo regarding the ethics of autoethnography: “I focus primarily on how researchers treat participants because researchers usually initiate the research relationship, have authority over what gets said and done, and earn prestige and power from their research” (p. 5). There is no denying this study like many autoethnography published studies is bound by Ellis’s preamble even though my flashbacks now knowingly set me as the researcher. It was obvious that not until recently had my recollections and interpretations of these roles allowed me to draw such interpretations. This observation has several useful purposes.

Since a literature gap of minority newspaper cultural competence examples is apparent, this observation can serve as a benchmark to springboard off older studies like that of Barbarin (1978) and that by examining the leadership styles and editorial authenticity as noted by The Chicago School of Media Theory (2018), these results can be used for comparison to other such minority owned publications. For the minority leaders of such publications, this example demonstrates effective use of potentiating leadership to change positively change the perception of the quality of such minority owned newspapers.

Are these publications devoting newshole to Black Lives Matter, police brutality, and civil rights? Are the articles authentic or biased? Are more contemporary minority publications examples of potentiating leadership? Do these current minority publications experience the same level of cultural competence with resistance or are communities more forgiving today? As noted earlier, by bringing peo-

ple together, mixing them up, and conducting business any other way than routine helped the Afro-American Gazette, Grand Rapids, proudly display a confidence sense of cultural competence. The result was a potentiating leadership style and this style positively changed the perception of culture, a social theory change example.

Such an autoethnography like this could be used by others to help document other examples of cultural competence in other minority owned newspapers. The overall impact shows that leadership at such minority owned publications can influence the community into a positive social change example. Research in the areas of culture competence, leadership, within minority owned newspapers as well as other minority alternative publications and websites can be observed with a focus on what works right as well as examples that might show little social change model influence. The suggestion is to conduct the research while employed if possible, instead of relying on flashbacks.

My primary goal was not to seek glory or to somehow appear to be triumphant in working at the AAG. I waited 25 years to share the experience carefully but undoubtedly from my unique perspective, my ethnocentrism. Truth be told, I had always thought I was being empathetic to the paper's leadership and minority community standing. In this respect I thought I did an admirable job putting myself in the shoes of another minority and believed I did a fairly good job at conducting my work since I believed I was somewhat persecuted myself. But how persecuted is someone who can successfully hide who he/she is? How much could I really understand until now as I continue to grow in my own ethnocentrism and awareness of cultural competence? Like my African American editor-and-chief counterpart who could never hide from being Black, I can no longer hide my religious upbringing admission. Will I be a victim of some type of microaggression? No more could the editor in chief wash his skin color off can I now wash off my upbringing. We are now one and the same?

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BIOGRAPHY



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