

## How personal is too personal? Should journalists be allowed to express their own views and opinions? Ahmar Khan's story.

*Case study by Lynda Calvert with an interview conducted by Ganimat Kaur and Kiyoung Lee  
A 2019 Canadian journalist's tweet, and the reaction that followed, reveals a much bigger debate about what the concepts of objectivity and impartiality mean for journalists.*

### The tweet that started it all

On November 9, 2019, then CBC Winnipeg reporter Ahmar Khan posted the following tweet on his personal Twitter account - a tweet that led to a chain of events resulting in Khan being fired from CBC. At the time, Khan had worked at CBC for about a year and had temporary status as a contract employee.

Khan wrote: ["It it \[sic\] long due time for Don Cherry's Coach's Corner to be cancelled. His xenophobic comments being aired weekly are deplorable. You know why black and brown kids don't enjoy hockey? Because of the deep-rooted racism, which we get to hear EVERY SINGLE week on national TV."](#)<sup>1</sup>

Khan had posted the tweet in response to hockey commentator Don Cherry's same day outburst referring to immigrants who don't wear poppies. At the time, Cherry was a long-time sports analyst and commentator on *Coach's Corner*, a popular segment of "Hockey Night in Canada". [On this particular segment, he complained that in downtown Toronto he didn't see anyone wearing a poppy, in comparison with small cities. Then, referring to immigrants, he added: "You people love – that come here, whatever it is – you love our way of life, you love our milk and honey, at least you can pay a couple bucks for poppies or something like that. These guys paid for your way of life that you enjoy in Canada, these guys paid the biggest price."](#)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Broadcasting Corporation v Canadian Media Guild, 2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/caladoc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Don Cherry - Buy a Poppy!" *YouTube*, uploaded by Jacques Untel, 10 November, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vsDjOmOsMc&t=1s>

According to evidence submitted to Ahmar Khan's subsequent arbitration ruling (more on his arbitration and the ruling in the next section), Khan's tweet spread quickly, receiving 4000 likes and 1000 re-tweets within 24 hours. The tweet was brought to the attention of senior management the next day, November 10, 2019. CBC Winnipeg's Managing Editor Melanie Verhaeghe then emailed Paul Hambleton, the Director of Journalistic Standards at CBC, to seek his guidance. Hambleton wrote back '[...that if Mr. Khan "wants to be an activist he should step down. Everyone hears what they want to hear from don cherry. \[sic\]"](#).' The decision was made to ask Khan to delete the tweet, on the grounds that it violated the social media policy outlined in CBC's [Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) (JSP).

According to his testimony in his arbitration hearing, Khan did not believe the tweet violated the CBC's JSP, however, he agreed to delete it. In an interview with J-Source, Khan said he felt CBC management handled the issue badly from the start.

### **Audio Clip - Khan Clip 1**<sup>3</sup>

*"I think there was a lack of understanding of why I would feel comfortable or why I tweeted this out, and more of a desire to be punitive with punishments. And I think that was where, you know, initially, we didn't see eye to eye, and that probably worsened. You know, the outcome, because if they had kind of come to me with a bit more of an attitude of hey, like, you know, what made you tweet this, I think I would have been a bit more understanding of them wanting me to delete it."*

Although Khan was told "[he would not be assigned to cover this topic, 'as you have shown the audience your bias'](#),"<sup>4</sup> he did not face disciplinary action for his tweet.

But that wasn't the end of the story.

## **1. Ahmar Khan vs. CBC**

Before the tweet was deleted, Toronto Sun columnist Joe Warmington saw it, and gave the issue national attention by including it in his November 11, 2019 column defending Don Cherry:

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<sup>3</sup> Khan, Ahmar. Interview conducted by Ganimat Kaur and Kiyoung Lee. 18 July, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> —2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/cala/doc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

[“No apology from Don Cherry on HNIC poppy comments.”](#) In his column, Warmington identified Khan as the CBC reporter behind the tweet.<sup>5</sup> Khan says in the days that followed, he began to receive many hateful messages via Twitter and email. As a result, CBC management asked Khan to stay off social media for a while.

[Khan continued to maintain he had not violated the JSP, noting that other CBC reporters had expressed opinions on Twitter in the past, and at least one other CBC reporter based in British Columbia had also tweeted objections to Cherry’s poppy comments. In his arbitration hearing, Khan testified that CBC’s journalistic policies were being applied selectively.](#)

### **Audio Clip - Khan Clip 2**

*“...you know, frankly, as much as we are journalists, we are black men, we are brown men, we are, you know, indigenous women, we are our identities, and that’s who we are every single day of our lives, we are journalists when we work, right. And we cannot strip our identity. And nor should we be asked to so I think trying to hold the same standards and expect the same reactions for every single person of colour, when they’ve dealt with things like this when they’re experiencing racism...”*

Unbeknownst to CBC, in the days following his tweet and CBC’s request to delete it, Khan secretly contacted journalists he knew at two other media organisations - Canadaland and Maclean’s - and asked them to let the public know what had happened. Khan asked his contacts not to identify him as the source of the information. On Nov 14 Canadaland published [“CBC Had Employee Delete Tweet Critical of Don Cherry.”](#)<sup>6</sup> The item, by Jonathan Goldsbie, reprinted Khan’s deleted tweet. Maclean’s columnist Andray Domise also posted a tweet revealing that CBC had asked Khan to delete his tweet about Don Cherry.<sup>7</sup>

At the time, CBC management did not know that Khan was the source, but that changed, about two weeks later, when another CBC reporter discovered the messages after Khan used a shared newsroom laptop, but failed to sign out of his private Twitter and WhatsApp accounts.

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<sup>5</sup> Warmington, Joe. “No Apology From Don Cherry on HNIC Poppy Comments.” Toronto Sun, 11 November, 2019, <https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/warmington-no-apology-from-don-cherry-on-hnic-poppy-comments>

<sup>6</sup> Goldsbie, Jonathan. “CBC Had Employee Delete Tweet Critical of Don Cherry.” *Canadaland*, 14 November, 2019, <https://www.canadaland.com/cbc-had-employee-delete-tweet-critical-of-don-cherry/>

<sup>7</sup> —2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/cala/doc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

While reading through Khan's private social media accounts, the CBC reporter also discovered messages to friends that were critical of certain CBC managers as well as CBC's treatment of him v/v the JSP, and yet other messages to Khan's friends that appeared to contain a homophobic slur. (CBC management did not investigate the full context or timing of these messages, and it turned out that the message containing a homophobic slur was sent before he started working for CBC.) On December 3, 2019, Khan was fired 4 months before his contract was due to expire. According to arbitrator Lorne Slotnik's ruling, Khan was terminated ["...with a letter that cites three areas of inappropriate conduct: contacting external outlets about the order to delete the Cherry tweet; making disparaging comments about CBC management and policies to parties outside the CBC; and using a homophobic slur on WhatsApp, where his profile identified him as a CBC employee \(his profile picture showed him wearing a CBC jacket\)."](#)<sup>8</sup>

The Canadian Media Guild, representing Khan, filed a grievance, and in January 2021 Slotnik ruled in Khan's favour saying, ["...the grounds cited by the employer for Mr. Khan's termination amounted to, at most, a minor indiscretion, and are far overshadowed by the breach of his privacy that enabled the employer to discover those activities. Consequently, my conclusion is that the CBC acted improperly by dismissing him for cause."](#)<sup>9</sup>

In explaining his ruling, Slotnik also acknowledged a much bigger issue at play in Khan's case - one he could not rule on because it was not one of the three areas cited in CBC's termination letter to Khan. Nonetheless, took pains to point out that, "...there was plentiful evidence in this case touching on such broad and provocative topics as objectivity in journalism and racism in society."<sup>10</sup>

Objectivity in journalism is a very provocative topic these days, indeed. But before we get into the debate surrounding the issue, let's look at what some other large media organisations have to say about objectivity, impartiality and social media use.

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<sup>8</sup> —2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/cala/doc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

<sup>9</sup> —2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/cala/doc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

<sup>10</sup> —2021 CanLII 761 (CA LA), <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/cala/doc/2021/2021canlii761/2021canlii761.html>

## **2. What do some of the major Canadian media organisations have to say about objectivity, impartiality and social media use? A sampling of current Canadian codes of conduct for journalists: CBC's *Journalistic Standards and Practices*; the Globe and Mail's *Editorial Codes of Conduct*; the Toronto Star's *Torstar Journalistic Standards Guide***

The CBC's manual of *Journalistic Standards and Practices* is an expansive document, providing guidelines on everything from covering police and crime stories to the correct use of language. Five clear principles anchor the JSP: [accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity](#). [Impartiality is defined in the JSP as: "We provide professional judgment based on facts and expertise. We do not promote any particular point of view on matters of public debate."](#)<sup>11</sup> All CBC employees, including temporary employees like Khan, are trained in these guidelines.

Here's what the section titled: "Use of Social Media" says:

[When we use social media, we should remember two of our principles: impartiality and integrity. We recognize there are specific challenges raised because social media create an intersection of personal and professional roles and identities.](#)

[With that in mind, our journalists - including casual and temporary staff as well as interns - should consider the following:](#)

- [In our social media activity, we are mindful of our professional association with CBC.](#)
- [We maintain professional decorum and strive to do nothing that could bring CBC into disrepute.](#)
- [We understand that what we say and do on social media can reflect on ourselves, our colleagues and on CBC as a whole.](#)
- [In particular, the expression of personal opinions on controversial subjects, including politics, can undermine the credibility of CBC journalism and erode the trust of our audience. Therefore, we refrain from expressing such opinions in profiles or posts for any account which identifies or associates us with CBC/Radio-Canada. The question we](#)

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<sup>11</sup> "Journalistic Standards and Practices." *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio Canada*. <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/vision/governance/journalistic-standards-and-practices>

should ask ourselves: if someone saw the content of this account, could they determine that we work at CBC?

- We recognize that nothing we express on the Internet can be considered truly private. So we understand that comments on accounts we intend to be exclusively personal and private can damage our personal credibility, and that of CBC as a whole.
- We consider perceptions created when we share, republish, link, or interact with other people's content. We strive to avoid having such actions appear to be endorsements. When appropriate and possible, we provide context.
- We understand that should our social media activity create a perception of bias, it would influence decisions editorial leaders make on who can cover certain stories.

The Globe and Mail's journalistic practices are contained in a similarly expansive *Editorial Code of Conduct*. Like the CBC, *The Globe and Mail* anchors its code of conduct in a set of journalistic principles: The credibility of the content in *The Globe and Mail* on all platforms rests on solid research, clear, intelligent writing and maintaining a reputation for honesty, accuracy, objectivity and balance.<sup>12</sup>

Here are some excerpts from the section regarding the use of social media and online activity by *The Globe and Mail* editorial staff,

While using social media, staff must apply the standards and principles set out in the Code.

All Globe and Mail staff members are personally responsible for the information they publish on Twitter, Facebook and other social-media platforms, including personal blogs. Journalistic accuracy, fairness and clarity should be the guiding principles of editorial staff in any public forum, online or otherwise. Do not post partisan, defamatory or clearly false material. You must not post personal attacks and should conduct yourself in a professional and respectful manner. Staff should be aware that passing along information, through links or otherwise, could be seen

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<sup>12</sup> "Editorial Code of Conduct." *The Globe and Mail*. 2017.  
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/files/editorial/EditorialCodeOfConduct.pdf>

as approval or endorsement of that information by The Globe and Mail. Care should be taken.....While columnists may express their opinions publicly on a topic, staff should be aware that anything published via social media — even private postings — can become public and associated with *The Globe and Mail*. Editorial staff should be aware of the risks of libel, malice and bias and should remain temperate on public and political issues. This means content that would not be considered for publication should not be posted....

**Political activity:** The news operations of *The Globe and Mail* must be, and must be seen to be, impartial. This goal must be balanced against the fact that staff members have rights and responsibilities as citizens.

While private views expressed through voting or with family and close friends are acceptable, political or partisan views which go beyond your public-facing role should not be expressed in public. Staffers should be aware that even in private settings on social media, information can become public.

Like the CBC and *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* also lays out clear foundational principles in its *Torstar Journalistic Standards Guide*. The *Toronto Star* is the only one of the three that does include objectivity as a general editorial principle. Impartiality is prescribed as a foundational principle, but the guide is less definitive on how that concept might be interpreted: “To be impartial does not require a news organization to be unquestioning or to refrain from editorial expression. Sound practice, however, demands a clear distinction for readers between news and opinion. All content that contains explicit opinion or personal interpretation should be clearly identified as opinion or analysis, as appropriate.”<sup>13</sup>

On social media use, the *Torstar Journalistic Standards Guide* appears to give journalists more latitude to express opinions on social media, as long as they don't take sides on issues the *Toronto Star* is covering.

Torstar journalists are always Torstar journalists.

Journalists are encouraged to be themselves and find their own voices on social media, but it's important to remember that the content they post and the way they conduct themselves can have an impact on reader trust, the journalistic reputation of our newsrooms, our brands and the

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<sup>13</sup> “Torstar Journalistic Standards Guide.” *Toronto Star*, 2018.  
<https://www.thestar.com/about/statementofprinciples.html>

company's public standing. This is true regardless of the privacy settings on a journalist's account, their profile description or whether they consider an account personal.

This policy applies to all editorial staff across all Torstar newsrooms. Other newsroom and corporate policies, such as those governing corrections, ethics and the business code of conduct, also apply to social media use.

Here are the key points:

• Staff must not do anything on social media that damages the company's reputation for fair journalism. That includes making partisan or offensive comments, endorsing candidates or — with the exception of opinion columnists — taking sides on issues our newsrooms are covering.

• Torstar journalists must not use social media to criticize or undermine the company, their colleagues or the work of their colleagues.

• Fact-based analysis by reporters is not opinion. In areas of reporting expertise, social media can be an effective platform for using facts to authoritatively point out lies, questionable behaviour, baseless claims and policies unsupported by evidence, even if doing so leads to a perception of being negative to one side of a public debate.

• Torstar opinion journalists have the same wide latitude to express opinions on social media as they are given on our other platforms.

In sum, for this section: three different takes on how far journalists can go in expressing personal opinions. Some stances are more definitive and boundary setting than others, but they all share 'impartiality' as a foundational guiding principle for journalist's social media usage. And whether the word 'objectivity' is used or not, impartiality implies objectivity, making it clear that the CBC, the *Toronto Star*, and *The Globe and Mail* all give a lot of thought to the concepts of impartiality and objectivity, as they apply to journalists expressing their personal opinions.

### **3. How have other newsrooms dealt with journalists expressing a personal opinion on social media?**



Ahmar Khan's case at the CBC may have been one of the first in Canada to have been made public, but it is unlikely to be the last. Indeed, media organisations around the world are grappling with the issue.

- In 2012, the *New York Times* newly installed Jerusalem bureau chief, Jodi Rudoren, got into trouble for some of her social media posts. In particular, she'd written a few posts on Facebook expressing some personal thoughts about Palestinians. According to the *NYTs*' public editor at the time, Margaret Sullivan, the reaction to these posts was swift, and a number of people considered Rudoren's comments insensitive. Rudoren was not removed from her position, but an editor was assigned to work with her on her social media posts going forward. Of that decision, Sullivan wrote: ["The idea is to capitalize on the promise of social media's engagement with readers while not exposing The Times to a reporter's unfiltered and unedited thoughts. Given the spotlight that the Jerusalem bureau chief is bound to attract, and Ms. Rudoren's self-acknowledged missteps, this was a necessary step. The alternative would be to say, "Let's forget about social media and just write stories." As The Times fights for survival in the digital age, that alternative was not a good one."](#)<sup>14</sup>
- In September 2020, BBC presenter Bobby Friction was forced to delete a tweet critical of the U.K. government. [Frustrated with the inability to get a Covid-19 test for his son, he tweeted: "I swear, I grew up under Thatcher but this f\\*\\*\\*ing government is a festival of faeces compared to those dark days."](#) <sup>15</sup>Friction was warned by his BBC bosses about his breach of impartiality policies, but did not lose his position. [However, the incident is credited as being one of the motivating factors behind the BBC's decision to impose new rules on social media use, forcing editorial staff to maintain impartiality on social media.](#)

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<sup>14</sup> Sullivan, Margaret. "Problems With a Reporter's Facebook Post, and a Possible Solution." *New York Times*, 28 November, 2012. <https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/28/problems-with-a-reporters-facebook-posts-and-a-possible-solution/>

<sup>15</sup> Moore, Matthew. "BBC Host Bobby Friction Told-off for Anti-Tory Tweet." *The Times*, 12 September, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bbc-host-bobby-friction-told-off-for-anti-tory-tweet-dzxsrn0dj>

<sup>16</sup> "BBC Issues Staff With New Social Media Guidance." *BBC News*, 29 October, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-54723282>

- In May, 2021, the Associated Press (AP) fired news associate Emily Wilder after she posted a series of pro-Palestinian tweets while she was employed by AP. ["Emily Wilder was let go because she had a series of social media posts that showed a clear bias toward one side and against another in one of the most divisive and difficult stories we cover." Brian Carovillano, the AP's managing editor, told CNN. "It's really important that we maintain our credibility on these stories.... Journalists' safety is at stake and the AP's credibility is at stake. Our credibility is constantly under attack. Our social media guidelines exist to protect that credibility, because protecting our credibility is the same as protecting journalists."](#)<sup>17</sup> In a statement on Twitter, Wilder responded to the firing by saying that AP knew of her activism before they hired her, and that she had been the victim of a smear campaign by Republicans angry about her position on the Israel-Gaza conflict. ["I am one victim to the asymmetrical enforcement of rules around objectivity and social media that has censored so many journalists — particularly Palestinian journalists and other journalists of color — before me."](#)<sup>18</sup> Wilder now works at The Press Democrat, as the criminal justice and public safety reporter.

#### 4. Let's discuss

- Should the definitions of objectivity and impartiality evolve? If so, how?
- Can journalists express personal views on matters of social justice and still be considered objective and impartial?
- Would readers/listeners/viewers still trust journalists' coverage of these issues?

Social media platforms have become prominent places to discuss social justice issues – issues such as Indigenous, gender and racial discrimination. The emergence of these platforms dovetails with the fact that a new generation of journalists from diverse backgrounds is entering newsrooms – younger journalists accustomed to making their views known on social media.

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<sup>17</sup> Goldman, David. "AP Explains Why It Fired Emily Wilder for Pro-Palestinian Tweets." *CNN*, 30 May, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/30/media/ap-emily-wilder-firing/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> Wilder, Emily [@vv1lder]. "My statement on my termination from The Associated Press." *Twitter*, 22 May, 2021, <https://twitter.com/vv1lder/status/1396142932583874563>

Indeed, Ahmar Khan's case can be read as a microcosm of this bigger issue confronting newsrooms everywhere, as a generation of younger journalists increasingly push back on restrictions about posting their personal views on social media, where those personal views touch on matters of great importance to their lived experience. And at the heart of this bigger issue, are questions about how to interpret and apply the principles of objectivity and impartiality.

Jay Rosen, a New York University journalism professor, questioned the notions of impartiality and objectivity, (objectivity is also sometimes referred to as 'the view from nowhere') in a 2013 interview with the *New York Times*. ["The grounds for trust are slowly shifting....The View from Nowhere is slowly getting harder to trust, and 'Here's where I'm coming from' is more likely to be trusted."](#)<sup>19</sup> Rosen touched on a major concern for media these days, as journalists around the world face a crisis of eroding trust in media.

American public relations consultancy firm Edelman has been studying public trust levels in institutions including media, for the past two decades. In its latest trust barometer report from 2021, it found waning trust in media across the world. Edelman puts out separate country reports as part of its annual trust barometer. [It found the Canadian public have more trust in the media than in many other countries, such as in the US, but Edelman still found a record low of 55% of Canadians surveyed who said they trusted the media. That's down from 71% in 2012. The Edelman 2021 trust barometer also reported that, in Canada, 52% of those surveyed agree that, "the media is not doing well at being objective and non-partisan"](#)<sup>20</sup>

Trust is closely linked to the concepts of objectivity and impartiality, because trust has to do with perceived credibility. For journalists, credibility is everything and this - takes us to the other side of the argument. As the associate managing editor for standards at the *New York Times* put it: ["I flatly reject the notion that there is no such thing as impartial, objective journalism — that it's some kind of pretense or charade, and we should just give it up, come clean and lay out our biases.... We expect professionals in all sorts of fields to put their personal opinions aside, or](#)

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<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, Margaret. "When Reporters Get Personal." *New York Times*, 5 January, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/public-editor/when-reporters-get-personal.html>

<sup>20</sup> "Country Report: Trust In Canada: Edelman Trust Barometer 2021" *Edelman*, 17 February 2021, <https://www.edelman.ca/sites/g/files/aatuss376/files/trust-barometer/2021%20Canadian%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer.pdf>

[keep them to themselves, when they do their work — judges, police officers, scientists, teachers. Why would we expect less of journalists?”<sup>21</sup>](#)

So, can journalists express personal views on matters of social justice and still be considered objective and impartial? Can journalists express personal views on matters of social justice and still be considered credible? Will readers/listeners/viewers mistrust journalists if they do so?

These are not easy questions! In considering your response, it may be helpful to look at how one other major media organisation has approached this. In 2021, National Public Radio (NPR) updated its ethics handbook in part, to reflect and respond to the ongoing debate about these issues. In writing about the policy updates, NPR’s public editor, well known journalism ethics expert Kelly McBride, acknowledged the pressure on newsrooms to allow journalists more freedom to express personal opinions. [“This pressure on news companies to allow their journalists a wider berth to participate in civic activities has been building over the years, particularly as social media has made direct engagement with audiences — sometimes rich, sometimes messy — part of the day-to-day workflow. As social justice causes took to the platforms, journalists were often caught in a new gray area between longtime professional practices and mores around personal communication. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, a younger generation of journalists pushed NPR to modify its traditional prohibitions.”](#) <sup>22</sup>

According to the updated policy, news editorial staff are not permitted to express opinions on political or legislative matters, but elsewhere, more space is allowed for editorial staff to express personal opinions. [“NPR editorial staff may express support for democratic, civic values that are core to NPR’s work, such as, but not limited to: the freedom and dignity of human beings, the rights of a free and independent press, the right to thrive in society without facing discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, disability, or religion.”](#)<sup>23</sup>

[“This policy confronts the generations-old question in newsrooms: Where does the journalist end and the citizen begin?”](#) McBride writes, although she admits not every one in NPR agrees

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<sup>21</sup> — “When Reporters Get Personal.” *New York Times*, 5 January, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/public-editor/when-reporters-get-personal.html>

<sup>22</sup> McBride, Kelly. “New NPR Ethics Policy: It’s OK for Journalists to Demonstrate (Sometimes).” *NPR*, 29 July 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/publiceditor/2021/07/29/1021802098/new-npr-ethics-policy-its-ok-for-journalists-to-demonstrate-sometimes>

<sup>23</sup> “NPR Ethics Handbook.” *NPR*, July 2021, <https://www.npr.org/ethics/>

[with the changes. McBride says some believe the changes go too far, and some believe they don't go far enough.](#) <sup>24</sup>

What do you think? Do NPR's 2021 changes allow for the concepts of impartiality and objectivity in journalism to evolve such that journalists can express some personal opinions but still maintain the trust of their audience?

Where does the journalist end and the citizen begin?

## 5. Epilogue

The CBC is asking similar questions. [In his June 2020 blog titled "On George Floyd's death, journalism and inclusive newsrooms" CBC Editor-in-Chief Brodie Fenlon asked, "Can our journalists be active citizens of the world without compromising their objectivity?"](#)<sup>25</sup>

He admits that he's heard complaints from within CBC that their interpretation of the Journalistic Standards and Practices is ["...so rigid it can muzzle within the organization important voices and lived experiences. Do our definitions of objectivity, balance, fairness and impartiality — and our insistence that journalists not express personal opinions on the stories we cover — work against our goals of inclusion and being part of the community and country we serve?"](#) <sup>26</sup> For the moment, the answer seems to be that CBC is not, unlike NPR, going to conduct a major overhaul of their ethics code. At least not yet. However, Fenlon writes that CBC is committed to, among other things, ensuring that hiring practices, news and current affairs coverage, and CBC journalistic leadership choices do better at reflecting diverse voices and perspectives in Canada.

As for Ahmar Khan, he now works at Global News as online journalist, where he focuses on issues surrounding vulnerable people, racialized communities and politics

In an interview with J-Source he says he is glad he stood up for what he believed in and fought back, although he admitted the experience took a toll on him, personally, mentally and professionally. He believes CBC would view things differently today. "I think nowadays, it [the

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<sup>24</sup> — "New NPR Ethics Policy: It's OK for Journalists to Demonstrate (Sometimes)." *NPR*, 29 July 2021,

<sup>25</sup> Fenlon, Brodie. "On George Floyd's Death, Journalism and Inclusive Newsrooms." *CBC News*, 8 June, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/editorsblog/george-floyd-editor-note-1.5603018>

<sup>26</sup> — "On George Floyd's Death, Journalism and Inclusive Newsrooms." *CBC News*, 8 June, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/editorsblog/george-floyd-editor-note-1.5603018>

response from management] would be very different. But this is prior to the social justice and anti-racism movements within the CBC.”<sup>27</sup>

Khan told J-Source it felt a bit surreal when he learned that arbitrator Lorne Slotnick had ruled in his favour in January 2021, but he soon came to believe that the decision was not just a positive outcome for him, but a positive outcome for Canadian media as a whole.

He has this piece of advice for journalistic leadership, when trying to decide how personal is too personal - where to draw the line in allowing editorial staff to express personal opinions on social media:

“I think it comes back to not micromanage [sic] things. I think there are obviously explicit things that should not be said and can be avoided, but I think we need to realize that journalists are people, right? You can't try to diminish them all the time.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> —Interview conducted by Ganimat Kaur and Kiyoung Lee. 18 July, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> —Interview conducted by Ganimat Kaur and Kiyoung Lee. 18 July, 2021.