

# The Call FINAL

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

COVID-19 impact, mental health, police stereotypes, journalist follow-up, black scholar story, microaggression incident, defamation concerns, voice actor use, grammar correction, emotional violence, racial discrimination, journalism career, editorial decision, public interest, support system

## SPEAKERS

Noel Tesfa, Leonor Dias, Jennifer Simpson, Keir Moulton, Adam Floujeh, Chloe Kim, Carmine Posteraro, Yanika Saluja, The Interviewee, Unnamed Voice, Jelena Vermilion, Alexa Difrancesco, Gabrielle McMann, Chantelle Krupka

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**Y** Yanika Saluja 00:05

This is We Met U When... A podcast by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University. I'm your host, Yanika Saluja. We go back in time, dig up news stories from the past and track down the people in those stories. Usually we go back 10 years, but this season, we're going back to 2020. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19, a global pandemic. It was a time of lockdowns, global protests, disruption around the world, and it affected all of us in different ways.

**G** Gabrielle McMann 00:45

During COVID, like we weren't allowed to gather. We weren't allowed to come together for pow wows. And I think many people's spirits and their mental health kind of felt that,

**C** Carmine Posteraro 00:56

You know, I woke up, I had a catheter in me. I had a colostomy bag in my backside. It was just like intense. I couldn't move like my you know, I didn't move for 12 days. My muscles were all deteriorated. I got this scar.

**C** Chantelle Krupka 01:08

I'm not all the things that they like to stereotype us as, and I was still almost killed by the police. And so, like, I'm trying to say that they use those stereotypes as an excuse to devalue us.



Yanika Saluja 01:23

We want to know what happened after their names were in the news.



Jelena Vermilion 01:27

I've had journalists like, reach out after to follow up on a different story, but not not. I've never once had a journalist be like, Hey, are you okay? I saw those comments. I want to check in. Like, no, not once, not one time.



Yanika Saluja 01:41

No one was in a position of power, but many of them felt the power a new story can have. We're exploring what's changed and what hasn't.



Unnamed Voice 01:51

Chloe, can I say something? Is it fair to say that you're of Korean origin?



Noel Tesfa 01:58

It's a heavy thing to talk about, but I think it's also very important. This is something that people need to hear.



Yanika Saluja 02:06

We're also thinking about the difference we journalists can make going forward by first going back to 2020. You're listening to We Met U When Season 3. This is The Call.



Leonor Dias 02:28

So this episode, where do I even begin? I'm Leo Dias. I wasn't part of this team at first, but when things got complicated, the team needed help, so here I am. Production started like all the others, with a 2020 news story. It was about a black scholar and people who touched her life in positive ways, but our experience trying to report that story took a turn, and it got intense.



Chloe Kim 03:02

It was really fucked up. I was like, not. I was just surprised at first when I texted you guys right after the interview, but then, like, I was like, when I was looking through the transcript and I

was replaying it like it was kind of bad.

**N** Noel Tesfa 03:17

It was worse than bad. That's fucking crazy.

**A** Alexa Difrancesco 03:20

I'm so sorry, that's horrible.

**L** Leonor Dias 03:21

That's Noel, Chloe and Alexa. They were working on Alexa's original idea for this episode. Alexa had already interviewed the black scholar, and it went well. Noel and Chloe each interviewed that scholar's, former teachers. For Noel, it was no problem. For Chloe, it wasn't so easy. Just as she was trying to end the phone call with her interviewee, something happened. The interviewee decided to ask Chloe a personal question, and it led to a very long and extremely awkward exchange. We think it's important to share that exchange with you. This interviewee is a professor, but not here at Toronto Metropolitan University. She works at a different Canadian University, and she has been trying to stop us from playing that recording. She actually demanded we destroy the tape. We did not destroy it. She also wrote an email to the graduate program director at the School of Journalism here at TMU, asking her to look into Chloe's work on this project. The Graduate Program Director wrote back clearly stating it would be inappropriate to interfere with our journalism. At this point, we had already consulted a defamation lawyer multiple times. Alexa sat in on those meetings.

**A** Alexa Difrancesco 03:48

The defamation lawyer was clear, our plan to play the tape does not break defamation laws. If it's an accurate recording, and it is not broadcast in a way that distorts the underlying message, it's not defamation. But that doesn't stop someone from bringing a defamation lawsuit against us, even if it's not valid. And we're students at the beginning of our journalism careers. We want you to hear what this woman said to Chloe, even though we are confident it is not defamation. We don't want to give her the power to even accuse us. So although we have the ability to play it according to our defamation lawyer, we have made an important editorial decision.

**L** Leonor Dias 05:34

We decided to hire a voice actor. We gave her the transcript of the exchange so you'll hear the interviewee's real words, but it's the actor's voice. When you hear Chloe, you'll be hearing her voice and her reactions from the original recording.

**A** Alexa Difrancesco 05:51

A Alexa DiFrancesco 05:51

Sometimes journalists must disguise the voice of a source, and that can include using a voice actor. Usually, this practice happens when the interviewee is vulnerable and there are safety concerns. This case is different.

L Leonor Dias 06:08

We are not doing this to protect the interviewee. We made this call to protect us because she has caused enough harm already, but more on that later. First, let's listen to what happened as Chloe tried to wrap up the call. This is the entire exchange.

C Chloe Kim 06:27

Thank you so much. Again. I know you're at the airport and that you're super busy, so thank you so much for making

T The Interviewee 06:33

Oh welcome. And Chloe, can I say something? Is it fair to say that you're of Korean origin?

C Chloe Kim 06:41

Yes.

T The Interviewee 06:42

Yes. I have a student who's of Korean origin, and he has a linguistic phrase that he told me comes from Korean. So if you don't mind, I'll tell you about it so you might avoid it in English.

C Chloe Kim 06:54

Okay.

T The Interviewee 06:56

It's just so you can advance. Forgive me, I'm a professor. You know how we are.

C Chloe Kim 07:00

Mhm.

**T** The Interviewee 07:01

So in English, when one says "he was able to," it means that it was a difficulty. For example, the premature baby had to be ventilated at birth, but by six weeks, she was able to be extubated, or the fire was on the sixth floor, but the firefighters managed, or they were able to get to the ladder and put out the fire. So "is able to" has to do with overcoming difficulty. But the way my student uses it, it's like I was able to put on my trousers, I was able to put on my shirt, I was able to walk forward. And so it sounds like he's disabled, because putting on your trousers and your shirt and walking forward are normal things.

**C** Chloe Kim 07:38

Uh huh.

**T** The Interviewee 07:39

So please avoid using that phrase "is able to" unless you're talking about overcoming difficulty. So you said you were able to say your name. You said that to me.

**C** Chloe Kim 07:49

Okay.

**T** The Interviewee 07:50

Do you see, do you see how it could be, it's in English. The connotation is not, I think, how it's understood by a Korean speaker.

**C** Chloe Kim 08:00

Right. I think that, yeah, I'm sorry if. No, no,

**T** The Interviewee 08:03

No, no, no, no, I'm not. I'm not. I'm not taking offence, please. I'm just, I'm trying to help you.

**C** Chloe Kim 08:08

Thank you,

**T** The Interviewee 08:09

so that you don't inadvertently cause offence by suggesting that something was difficult for somebody when, in fact it was routine.

C Chloe Kim 08:17

Right. Okay.

T The Interviewee 08:18

The way to avoid it is, whenever you've written, "was able to," like, he was able to make a cake, just say he made a cake.

C Chloe Kim 08:26

Right. Okay.

T The Interviewee 08:27

Because making a cake is not difficult, but he was able to climb Mount Everest, well, yes, well, that's great. That's a correct phrase.

C Chloe Kim 08:36

Alright, yeah, I think that I yeah, I will make sure not to say "able to" in that way.

T The Interviewee 08:45

Am I correct in understanding? Because this is what my Korean student said, Is that, is that how it is in Korean? It's, it's a common way of speaking.

C Chloe Kim 08:53

Um, to be honest, I I actually grew up speaking English.

T The Interviewee 08:59

Oh, oh.

C Chloe Kim 09:00

Yeah, and yeah. Like, I think, I think in Korean too, oh, it's like, I know Korean, but it's just like, I don't think about how it would translate into English every time I speak.

**T** The Interviewee 09:15  
Right, that'd be tricky, wouldn't it?

**C** Chloe Kim 09:20  
Yeah, I think that, yeah, like, I will try my best not to, like, make that grammar mistake, though, when I,

**T** The Interviewee 09:28  
I just thought it would be helpful for you to know how, at least how English used to be spoken. I mean, it's evolving.

**C** Chloe Kim 09:35  
No, certainly, yeah.

**T** The Interviewee 09:37  
But it's, it's still fair to say that "is able to" is about overcoming difficulty, significant difficulty,

**C** Chloe Kim 09:45  
100% I will try like, yeah, I Yeah. It's, I think it was just like, in while I was speaking, I just made the grammar mistake. I'll try not to do that.

**T** The Interviewee 09:56  
I don't. I really just, I want to help you so that things go well for you.

**C** Chloe Kim 10:00  
I can I appreciate it.

**T** The Interviewee 10:01  
That's what I do for a living. you know. I help vouna people.

C Chloe Kim 10:04

Yeah, thank you so much. I do appreciate it.

T The Interviewee 10:07

And I hope your journalism career goes well.

C Chloe Kim 10:09

Thank you so much.

T The Interviewee 10:10

It's such an important field, and it's so badly remunerated.

C Chloe Kim 10:14

And if you have some time before your flight too, I'm not sure if you have a voice notes app on your phone, if you do have some time, it's not like

T The Interviewee 10:27

I'm walking to the gate,

C Chloe Kim 10:28

Oh, yeah. Like, if you're able, sorry, I don't know why I keep saying that, yeah. Like, if you can just record a minute of sound at the airport. I think that would help with our podcast,

T The Interviewee 10:43

Sure.

C Chloe Kim 10:43

And if you could email that to me.



**T** The Interviewee 10:46  
Sure.

**C** Chloe Kim 10:47  
Thank you so much, and enjoy your flight.

**T** The Interviewee 10:50  
Thank you. Nice to speak with you.

**C** Chloe Kim 10:52  
Nice speaking with you too. Bye.

**T** The Interviewee 10:54  
Bye, bye, bye bye.

**C** Chloe Kim 10:57  
Okay. Wow. I I hate how I apologized at the end. My name's Chloe. That was me. That's kind of embarrassing. But yeah, I just, I just felt like I had to get off the phone. I guess that's why I apologized, and that's just what my instinctive reaction was.

**L** Leonor Dias 11:19  
Chloe says it felt confusing, but at the same time, it was somehow a familiar feeling.

**C** Chloe Kim 11:27  
Yeah, before this whole incident, I had been in the Master of Journalism program at TMU for a whole year, and I really felt like I found the path that I wanted to go down for my career, but at the same time, I had some experiences at work and at school where I felt like I was sort of pigeonholed for being Asian. And I don't think that anyone like intended to hurt my feelings, but that ended up happening being a person of colour and being around people who aren't used to having like diverse people in the workplace, that kind of thing. So I just sort of understood where these people were coming from and tolerated it. But this moment was just so intense that I thought, this is not okay, and this is there's like, I shouldn't have to tolerate that kind of thing. That's why this moment really felt like it was worth publishing. Worth talking about.

L Leonor Dias 12:43

it's worth publishing because it's in the public interest. Why? Because this kind of incident, unfortunately happens a lot, and it's harmful. A Statistics Canada report released in May 2024 found that half of racialized people have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years. These experiences happen in many everyday settings, such as at work, school, while seeking health care. The list goes on. Chloe started thinking, maybe we should use this tape. We never expected this interviewee to say something like this, maybe because she was so supportive of the black scholar we had hoped to feature, and yet, here she was in the middle of a microaggression. We weren't sure what to make of the situation. In our class, we often share our strongest tape to get feedback from classmates. Chloe wanted to hear all our opinions before deciding what to do with the tape. But when the moment came, it was harder than she expected.

C Chloe Kim 13:54

The moment that I sat down, I started getting a little bit more nervous facing the reality that like 15 students were going to listen to a super embarrassing thing that happened just made me burst into tears.

L Leonor Dias 14:14

Her head was down on her desk, resting on her arms. We couldn't see her face.

N Noel Tesfa 14:19

I saw how much it was upsetting her. That's when it hit me, like, oh, this is like, something really, really serious. Shari asked the whole class to just take a break and, like, leave for for like, 10 minutes. So that's what we all did. And Chloe was actually the only one staying in the class, and Shari was talking to her, and we all left, and we were all just waiting, like right outside of the class.

L Leonor Dias 14:48

Our professor, Shari Okeke was telling Chloe, "it's okay to change your mind. We don't need to play this tape." But Chloe felt the class needed to hear it so we could all make an editorial decision about what to do with it. She just didn't want to hear it yet another time. So we went into the class to listen, and Chloe stepped outside.

N Noel Tesfa 15:12

I went out with her to, you know, give her some support, and to, like, comfort her. And, yeah, she was just telling me about how, how it didn't even hit her, until she realized that the whole class was gonna hear it, and some of her mentors came into the class and they were gonna hear it as well. And it was kind of like a wave of emotions for her, and I felt that, and I could see

it on her face. That's when, that's when I started to really get, not emotional, but like, you know, like in defence mode for her, you know, and, yeah, so we just, we just stood outside the classroom. It's, it's like, big glass windows so, like, we could see everybody listening to it, we just couldn't hear it. And in my head, I'm just like, I hope everyone's as mad as I am when they hear this clip.

**A** Adam Floujeh 16:15

Frustration. I think anger was a big thing, not just me, but that was kind of shared throughout the class. I was shocked. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, and somehow, as the clip continued, it felt like a grave was being dug deeper and deeper. I am a white guy. I have not experienced stuff like this happen to me, maybe ever.

**N** Noel Tesfa 16:41

It's definitely been a learning experience for me. I've never tackled a story as serious as this one, even though I'm a black person, and I've experienced things like, I don't want to say racism, but like, I've definitely experienced like, microaggressions and condescending people in my life, but um, I've never really been a part of a story where I'm telling other people about these type of experiences.

**Y** Yanika Saluja 17:10

I think I did start, like, crying while listening to the tape. I got really emotional because I just had all these thoughts built up in my head, and I was like, like, I was feeling so bad for Chloe, because, like, she shouldn't she what happened to her? Like, that shouldn't have happened. Whenever I interview people, or, like, generally talk to some people who are, like, born and brought up here, they always ask me, like, oh, where are you from? And I'm like, oh, I'm from India. And they're like, no way you're from India? Your English is so good. Do you think the people in India are like, not educated and or like, don't speak English? Like you might feel like, oh, you're complimenting them, or like, it's a very normal thing to say, but it's actually really racist and it's really hurtful. So when, when the clip was playing, I was like, recalling those moments. And I always wish that, I wish I had that on tape, and, like, if I could just, like

**L** Leonor Dias 18:06

This time, we do have it on tape. So we decided we're using it. That's when I joined this group. We knew this was going to be a heavy lift. Chloe captured a recording of something that is hard to describe or prove. It's often called a microaggression, but some say there's nothing micro about it, no matter what we call it, Black, Indigenous and racialized classmates recognize it immediately. What's happening here--

**T** The Interviewee 18:47

Chloe, can I say something? Is it fair to say that you're of Korean origin?

C Chloe Kim 18:53  
Yes.

T The Interviewee 18:54  
Yes. I have a student who's of Korean origin, and he has a linguistic...

L Leonor Dias 18:59  
This is more than just rudeness.

J Jennifer Simpson 19:01  
I think it shows that racism is alive and well.

L Leonor Dias 19:04  
That's Jennifer Simpson. She's a professor at the School of Professional Communication here at TMU. She has decades of experience researching race, racism and colonialism. She listened closely as Chloe told her that it took time to process what had happened.

C Chloe Kim 19:22  
I listened to this clip over and over again afterwards, and then I realized later that this was very hurtful to me.

J Jennifer Simpson 19:30  
You mentioned Chloe that you were hurt and felt embarrassed, and I want to acknowledge those feelings. I think it's terrible like and I'm white, so I'm sitting in a the positionality of I guess I understand my own whiteness as I may engage in that behavior as well, either knowingly or not knowingly. So I am not claiming innocence, but I think it's problematic. It's problematic. That kind of response is problematic. So there's the emotional component that you felt, which is a consequence of racism, which does a kind of violence I believe. Whether or not the person doing the racism notices that, the violence happens, can be violence on a lot of levels, including emotional violence and harm.

L Leonor Dias 20:20  
In Chloe's case, her interviewee is still convinced she was helping. Chloe sent her an email to

say that our story has shifted. We wanted to give her an opportunity to expand on her perspective. We were nervous.

**C** Chloe Kim 20:36

Oh my gosh. I don't want to. Okay, fine, I'll send it.

**N** Noel Tesfa 20:38

Don't worry. Okay, whatever she says to you, says to us.

**L** Leonor Dias 20:42

Okay how do you feel? We got a reply. It was another grammar lesson.

**T** The Interviewee 20:47

I was surprised to hear from that you interpreted my words unkindly. I did not take offense when hearing that, I was able to say my name, which is offensive, except in the case of a toddler or someone with dementia. As a professor, I know that most students mean well, and certainly assumed that was the case in our conversation. I was aiming to assist you in your journalism career to avoid in the future, accidentally giving offence to elected officials or others who are not teachers and do not always assume that most people mean well. To say that someone is "able to" is to say that someone overcame significant hardship to achieve a task, as in the examples I offered you. An infant being extubated is finally able to breathe on his own, and a firefighter reaching the sixth floor is able to reach the sixth floor with a ladder. Both parties overcame significant difficulty. A student told me that he made this error in English because there is a similar phrasing in Korean. I apologize if I offended you by referring to your cultural background. I am not offended when people refer to my cultural background. In French, there is a term, faux amis, that refers to grammatical usage in French that translates poorly in English. I know that these days, people can be offended. I sincerely apologize if I offended you. That was not my intention in attempting to help you advance your career by a more nuanced understanding of the phrase, "able to." If I offended you, then I hope you will accept my apology. If you would like to communicate further to resolve disagreement, then I'm happy to do that. But as stated, I do not consent to being the subject of a media interview or a podcast.

**L** Leonor Dias 22:34

As journalists, we needed to fact check this, so we started calling up language experts. Kier Moulton is an associate professor and graduate chair in linguistics at the University of Toronto. I met up with him at his office. He told me grammar issues are not as clear cut as we might assume.

**K** Keir Moulton 22:55

NON PROBLEM 22:55

I could imagine, and let's be charitable, if someone said to me, out of the blue, you're able to say your name, it's true. I'd be like, wait, what? I'm usually able to say my name. But then if I embed it in a richer context, which is like, oh, I'm glad you know, given that we had time in the meeting that we were all able to say our names or introduce ourselves a little better...

L

Leonor Dias 23:19

We wanted to know, does saying "able to" necessarily imply that there was a major challenge to overcome?

K

Keir Moulton 23:27

This, I can say confidently, there's nothing inherent in the use of present day, given my idiolect and my sense is the state of the grammar of Canadian English in 2024 is that "able to" doesn't necessarily automatically give rise to the inference that the subject alone had difficulty performing the action. It's much more complex and nuanced, and so much more...

L

Leonor Dias 23:53

That interviewee who thought she needed to help Chloe with English had no idea that English is Chloe's first language.

C

Chloe Kim 24:00

I was taught specific grammar rules growing up, it was all for me to speak in a way that I guess is by society deemed respectable or professional, and so for that prof to correct my grammar, it was really offensive to me, because I...

L

Leonor Dias 24:20

When the interviewee asked our graduate program director to inquire about this project, she made a point of also saying Chloe's use of the term "able to" was an insult. Jennifer Simpson is familiar with this kind of defensiveness.

J

Jennifer Simpson 24:36

In Canada, there's a very strong narrative that Canada as a country has worked out multiculturalism, that they've kind of solved the multiculturalism problem. But we live in structures of racism. We live in a system where whiteness continues to be rewarded, and so white people, as I understand it, can and will, including myself, engage in practices of racism. And we have to come to terms with that. I have to understand myself as a recipient of that

privilege, and therefore a person who can engage in racism. And then I can, I can start to repair those relationships and start to orient myself in a different way to the conversations like the one you had with your interviewee.

**C** Chloe Kim 25:25

I felt better after speaking with Dr. Simpson. I felt validated that this was a really terrible situation. This whole process was really difficult and challenging for me emotionally, and it put me in a very vulnerable place. But at the moment, I'm not feeling like this is going to stop me from pursuing a journalism career or anything like that. I just kind of have to accept that this is going to be a part of my life in this career path for at least a little bit, but hopefully not too long if we publish this tape, and if people can see from this tape that this kind of behaviour isn't okay in the workplace.

**L** Leonor Dias 26:09

Chloe and I spent quite a bit of time with Dr. Simpson. It was the first time we heard someone speak so openly about all this. We've never had our reporting takes such a personal turn.

**N** Noel Tesfa 26:22

It's a heavy thing to talk about, but I think it's also very important. This is something that people need to hear. They need to know that this is, this still exists even even in 2024.

**A** Alexa Difrancesco 26:38

We made so many editorial decisions as a group, and they were hard to make. They were hard to make as journalists so early on in our careers. The first editorial decision that we all had to sit together and think about was after Chloe had this interaction with the interviewee. If we'd stuck to that original story, then this interviewee who was so disrespectful to Chloe would come across as a supporter to someone whose story involved themes of racism and facing racism. So we didn't feel that it was right of us as journalists to paint her in that light when we knew that something completely different had happened behind the scenes. We thought that it would be ignoring something that had actually happened if we proceeded with doing that original story.

**N** Noel Tesfa 27:27

I'm proud of the way my group has handled everything, and how we just rallied around Chloe, and it's been tough, but it's also been, like, very encouraging to see how we've responded to the adversity of it all.

**C** Chloe Kim 27:45

I'm just really grateful that, even though this really shitty thing happened, that there are people

there, like available to support me. I think this is really rare.



Yanika Saluja 28:07

We Met U When... is a production by journalism students at Toronto Metropolitan University. This episode was produced by Leo Dias, Chloe, Kim, Alexa DiFrancesco and Noel Tesfa. Shari Okeke is our executive producer and professor. Eunice Kim is our senior producer and teaching assistant. Angela Glover is our Director of audio production. Our season 3 theme music was composed and performed by Eric Croda. Web design by Lindsay Hanna. Thank you to Live Actor Simulations at TMU and voice actor Shannon LaHaie. Special thanks to The Creative School, the School of Journalism, and the Journalism Research Centre at Toronto Metropolitan University, for supporting Season 3 by sending some of our producers to the Resonate 2024 Podcast Festival in Richmond, Virginia. I'm your host, Yanika Saluja. Thanks for listening.