



Diversity Still Includes Gender

Dr. Cathy Robinson

Media educators have rightfully concentrated on ensuring students are aware of diversity when interviewing and reporting news stories. Understandably, this often focuses on indigenous and racial diversity to help give a voice to those subgroups who have been invisible in the media for too long.

Recent research, however, indicates that there is still a problem in women gaining a voice in the media.

Women are not seen or heard as much as men. Journalists need to work harder to ensure there is more of a balance when selecting people as the source in a news story.

According to the recent Global Media Monitoring Project, women are the source of news stories only 25% of the time. This means that for every woman in the news, there are three men. This seems incongruous considering the number of women heading countries now, and women in politics and corporations. And this was lower for indigenous women (20% of sources) and refugees and immigrants (18% of all sources).

And gosh knows women of all walks of life have opinions!

The GMMP samples the news media every five years since 1995. The latest one assessed media in 114 countries, and included print, radio, television, online news, and news tweets. The final 2020 report concluded that at the rate of improvement in gender balance of news sources, it will take another 67 years to close the gender gap.

Even in North America, where women have full legal and cultural rights, only 33% of sources quoted or written about in news stories were women.

This research is an arms-length content analysis

of what was published or broadcast, so the results are only *what* imbalance exists and there is no clear reason of *why* the imbalance exists.

One indication came from an anecdote on research monitoring day where two competing newsrooms ran the same story about a local sports code planning to travel during the early COVID pandemic when travelling was difficult. One television station ran the men's team media conference held on the topic. The other station ran the same men's team media conference, but also ran comment from the associated women's team. We know that sports journalism is still dominated by male journalists, sources, and topics, so how did these two similar television crews differ? The hint is that at the second station the news presenter, as well as the sports segment presenter, were both women.

The second television program did not specifically plan to balance gender in their sports story, but rather they were not blind to the potential for an additional angle. The woman sports presenter happens to follow that particular team, and therefore it was natural for her to think of getting that team's viewpoint too.

Another example was a community at a standstill because of unexpected snowfall. The TV news interviewed all men—a farmer, a roadworker, a local politician. We all know that when a community is cut off, there are effects on teachers, parents, caregivers, health workers, midwives—who are often women. This was a missed opportunity by the journalists going to the first people they thought of!

On the surface that seems to be the solution: more

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women working in the newsroom will lead to more women being interviewed or reported on.

But that is not what is happening.

This same GMMP research in 114 countries and 30,172 news stories, showed that 40% of the traditional news media news items were produced by women reporters, whereas only 25% of news sources were women. Other research, such as the World Journalism data from 67 countries, also shows that in many countries women make up almost half the newsrooms, and in many countries women were more than half the reporting staff.

But despite the increasing ratio of women in the newsroom, it is not flowing into an increasing ratio of women in the news. Women newsmakers' voices are still unheard.

Gender in radio had some unexpected results. For all 114 countries only 30% of radio reporters were women. In the USA, however, women journalists made up 60% of radio journalists, which looks like a strong female presence, until you look at Australia and New Zealand where 100% of the radio journalists on the monitoring day were women—yes all of them. These statistics deserves more analysis.

All of these figures lead to the same conclusion, that women are still under-represented in the news media in terms of whose views or opinions are reported. This imbalance has not markedly improved with the increased ratio of women journalists in newsrooms.

The obvious problem is that women are now significant in the field of journalism, but not necessarily in the decision-making level. More women at the top may provide more opportunity for the female voice to be a natural angle.

The solution may come down to journalism classrooms, where educators can show students this type of gender research and imprint on them the need to think outside the traditional box when looking for news sources.

The GMMP full report is freely available: <https://whomakesthenews.org/>

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Percentage of Women as Sources in News Stories (n=114 countries)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	25-year change
Newspaper	16	17	21	24	26	26	+10%
Radio	15	13	17	22	21	23	+8%
Television	21	22	22	24	24	26	+5%
TOTAL	17%	18%	21%	24%	24%	25%	+8%