Global Voices is a weekly column written by Craig and Marc Kielburger examining current events, topics and issues affecting local and global communities. Each month, engaging classroom resources are created to accompany one column to help educators bring world issues into the classroom in a digestible manner. For more information on how to sign up please visit [WE.org/global-voices-signup](http://WE.org/global-voices-signup).

# Holding Ourselves Accountable: Our Gender Bias Report Card

## Fact Sheet

- In a study analyzing 1,467 articles and broadcast segments from seven Canadian media outlets with national reach and high audience/readership numbers, male sources accounted for 71 percent of all quotes; women accounted for 29 percent. ([Informed Opinions](https://www.informedopinions.com))

- Very little has changed over two decades; from 1990 to 1993, the number of women quoted or interviewed in Canadian media rose from 17 percent to 22 percent. ([Globe and Mail](https://www.globeandmail.com))

- This statistical bias applied regardless of profession, including among academics (where 66 percent were men), politicians (76 percent of whom were men), unelected government officials (70 percent were men), NGO representatives (52 percent were men), private business people (78 percent were men), lawyers (73 percent were men), health professionals (55 percent were men), sources from the media (66 percent were men), police personnel (88 percent were men) and individuals associated with sports (99 percent were men). ([Informed Opinions](https://www.informedopinions.com))

- The percentage of women quoted, however, differs greatly from publication to publication and journalist to journalist, suggesting that it is a matter of conscious effort as opposed to systemic imbalance. For example, Matthieu Dugal, host of the French-language radio show La Sphere achieved gender parity on his show focusing on technology; Radio Canada, CBC and TVO all featured more than 40 percent women; in contrast, private TV news shows had between 23 and 34 percent female sources. ([Policy Options](https://www.policyoptions.ca))

- This issue is global; a survey conducted in eight countries on four continents revealed that male voices will be heard 66 percent of the time on public radio and 60 percent of the time on public television. ([Ethical Journalism Network](https://www.ethicaljournalism.net))

- In more than 2.3 million online articles analyzed over a six-month period, women are more likely to be subject of photos as opposed to the voices of quotes, reinforcing the stereotype of women as “eye candy” as opposed to the substance source of news. ([PLoS One study](https://www.plosone.org))

- A survey of 1,080 journalists in the United States found the median income for women employed in newspapers in 2012 was $5,000 less than for men, leading to a pay gap of 13 percent (in other words, women at newspapers earn 87 percent of what men do). ([Indiana University](https://www.indiana.edu))

## Key Terms

- **Bias**—Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.

- **Gender parity (in the media)**—An issue of who produces, reports, writes and features in the media. More widely, it’s a question of what stories and perspectives inform our media.

- **Gender wage gap**—Connected to the question of gender parity is income parity. The gender pay gap is defined as the relative difference in earnings by women and men. In the media—as in society as a whole—the gender wage gap skews toward men who earn, on average, more than women.

- **Media literacy**—The ability to view, analyze, evaluate and create media in different forms.
Essential Question:
- How can representation in media be fair and equitable?
- What are the negative impacts of bias in media?
- How can media literacy skills help young people become active, engaged citizens?

Learning Goals:
Students will:
- Learn about bias in media and the effect it has on individuals and communities
- Explore why representation in media is important
- Understand how media literacy can inform their understanding of the world around them

Discussion:
1. Why is science writer Ed Young trying to “level the gender balance in his stories”?
2. What do the authors conclude about gender balance in their own articles?
3. What does the term “gender bias” in media refer to? What examples of gender bias are presented in the article?
4. What are the benefits of including different perspectives in media?

Educator’s Note: The following activities will explore the concepts of bias, perspective, privilege and equity. The intention is for students to examine their own media consumption and how bias in media can impact their views, both locally and globally. It is important that students are not made to feel criticized for their choices, but instead feel empowered to become more informed media consumers.

Warm up: (20 minutes)
As a class, brainstorm a list of sources where students typically get their news, including television news programs, social media platforms or print newspapers. Ask students, why do you prefer these sources? What other options could you choose from? What are the risks of only getting news from one or two sources?

Show students two news articles about the same topic from two different sources. Consider choosing a local story that is relevant to students. Examine the similarities and differences between the articles by exploring the headlines, the bylines, the leads, the text, the facts or quotations and any photographs that are included.

Investigate and Learn: (40 minutes)
Share with students that one form of bias in the media is gender bias. As a class or in small groups, read the article “Holding Ourselves Accountable: Our Gender Bias Report Card” and discuss the questions in the Discussion section.

As an alternative, discuss the article using the jigsaw strategy. Divide students into five home groups and give each student a number from one to four. Ask them to join students with the same number to form expert groups. In their expert groups, ask students to read the article and discuss one of the questions. When students have had adequate time to discuss their question, ask them to return to their home group to share what they have learned about the article. As a class, discuss each question and provide explanations or clarification if necessary.

Challenge each group to look for other types of biases in the new sources they access on a daily basis. Ask them to consider whose voices, experiences or perspectives are missing from the news stories. What impact does this have on your understanding of the issues presented in the news? Are there news sources that do provide those perspectives?

Bring students back together and discuss their findings. Explain to students that this process of critically analyzing and evaluating media is known as media literacy. As a class, create a list of tips or suggestions to remind students how to identify bias in news and how they can make informed decisions about the news media they consume. Display the list in the class for students to refer to. Consider encouraging students to share what they have learned about bias in media and media literacy with students from other classes.

Reference: www.mediasmarts.ca

Dive Deeper: (2 x 60 minutes)
Explain to students that biases exist in all media, including books, films, television shows, video games, blogs and social media posts. Use the following activity to encourage students to deepen their understanding of bias in media and develop their ability to critically analyze and evaluate the media they consume:

Perform a classroom library audit to explore whose voices and
experiences are represented in the books, magazines and other media in their classroom. Ask students to categorize the materials by author or theme and then examine the categories to see which voices, stories or perspectives are represented and which are not. Challenge students to write a letter to the principal, parent council or Teacher-Librarian, explaining why it is essential to have a wide representation of voices and perspectives in their class library and offering suggestions for materials that could be added.

Educator’s Note: It’s important to remind students that funding may not be available to purchase new materials; however, their suggestions could inform the purchases the school makes in the future.

Extension: Ask each student to track the books, television shows, films, video games, magazines or newspapers they access in one week. Students can also track the online video channels and social media accounts they follow. Encourage students to reflect on the trends or patterns they see in the media they consume and what perspectives they might be missing. The following week, challenge students to explore at least three pieces of media content (books, films, video channels, etc.) that they wouldn’t normally access. Provide an opportunity for students to discuss their thoughts and perspectives on this new content as a class. The discussion should not focus on whether the students liked or disliked the content, but rather on how the media content presented new perspectives or ideas that students were not familiar with before. Encourage students to continue exploring new media by creating a Recommendation Wall in class where students can post book, film, magazine or social media suggestions for their peers.

Educator’s Note: Students can access media content for this activity at home or at school. If students are accessing media at home, make sure to inform parents of the purpose of the activity to ensure students have adequate supervision. If students are accessing media at school, refer to your school or district policy on the use of digital technology or consult your Teacher-Librarian for support. For more information about media literacy and resources to support the development of media literacy skills, visit:

- www.mediasmarts.ca
- www.commonsensemedia.org