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)

• 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)

• 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)

• 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)

• 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)

• 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)

• 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)
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:
▶ Examine bias in media and the effect it has on individuals and communities
▶ Explore why equitable representation in the media benefits everyone
▶ 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. Why does gender balance in media matter? What are the benefits of including different perspectives?
5. This article focuses on having a balance of male and female voices in Canadian media. Are there other social groups who you feel are underrepresented in Canadian 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 critically informed citizens.

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. Ask students, if these articles are about the same topic, why are there differences between the articles?

Alternatively, examine the front page of two different newspapers or the main page of two different news websites. Ask students to identify similarities and differences between the stories that are highlighted on the front or main page. Discuss why a newspaper or a news site would choose to highlight some stories over others.

Explain to students that each journalist or news organization brings their own perspective or bias to an article. To have a bias is to favour or show preference to one person, group or idea over another. Even a news article that appears to be based on facts can contain biases. That’s why it’s important to make sure the sources we get our news from are reliable and that we explore a variety of different sources to fully understand an event or issue.

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 four home groups and give each student a number from one to five. 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.

Reference: www.mediasmarts.ca
Dive Deeper:

Explain to students that biases exist in all media, including books, films, television shows, video games, blogs, or social media posts. Provide students with the following options to allow them to deepen their understanding of bias in media and develop their ability to critically analyze and evaluate the media they consume:

1. Perform a classroom or school library audit. 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 or school library and offering suggestions for materials that could be added.

2. Host a class book, television or film club. Each week, ask one student to suggest a book, television show or film to the class. Encourage students to read the book or watch the show or film and give them an opportunity to discuss what they read or watched in class. The discussion should not focus on whether the students liked or disliked the suggestion, but rather on how that book, show or film presented new perspectives or ideas that students were not familiar with before. Encourage students to investigate a range of different authors, directors, writers or producers to ensure a diverse selection of media is explored. Consider inviting students from other classes to join and offer suggestions as well.

3. Design a presentation or a workshop to teach other students about the importance of media literacy. Encourage students to develop engaging ways to help their peers recognize media bias and develop their own media literacy skills. Consider inviting parents or community members to the sessions, or recording the workshops and sharing them on the school website.

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.

Educator’s Note: For more information about media literacy and resources to support the development of media literacy skills, visit:

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