

Why does media feature more male than female experts when reporting?

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In 2020, the International Women's Media Foundation released two studies that discussed several issues related to gender equality in news coverage, including the representation – or lack thereof – of women as experts.

One study found that media featured men as experts and commentators about COVID-19 news four times more frequently than they featured women. It is suggested that one of the reasons for this underrepresentation of women is that “status quo bias” results in journalists relying on established sources who are much more likely to be men than women. In the other study, which was a broader report on women's representation in the media, it was found that the expertise of women has historically been marginalized and undervalued and that in the ten-year time period between 2005 and 2015, less than 20% of experts or commentators involved in news coverage were women. This underrepresentation is most pronounced in television news and newspapers.

Women are overrepresented in telling stories as homemakers, students, and parents while they continue to be underrepresented in political news coverage in comparison to their actual numbers in political positions. Even in the case of news coverage related to gender equality, men are more likely to be featured in stories than women. If this continues to be true and if gender equality issues are not truly front of mind for journalists, other opinion formers, or decision makers when we know how critical the media is in forming public opinion and influencing public policy, then we face an enormous obstacle in ever achieving true gender equality.

We are not seeing journalists connect gender equality issues to issues that are of public concern; they are not considering how issues might impact women differently than they impact men; and there are numerous examples of issues that we do not commonly think of as gender issues that are, in fact, gender issues. In her book, *Invisible Women*, Caroline Criado Perez discusses a variety of issues that fall into the categories of daily life, the workplace, design, healthcare, and public life. She points out that, for instance, snow clearing is a gender issue and how prioritizing clearing roads of snow over clearing sidewalks disproportionately impacts women and drives up healthcare costs for women, because women are more likely than men to be pedestrians, and pedestrians are three times more likely to suffer injuries due to icy conditions than are motorists.

If journalists and editors use a gender lens to analyze and report all stories, it is highly likely that they will find ways to report the stories that improve – or at least bring more attention to – gender equality, including if the people they speak to about these issues are women. Even

better if, in the case of snow clearing as a gender issue, they are speaking with women engineers and planners.

Several studies have found that journalistic sourcing is biased toward a narrow range of sources who are most likely to be middle-aged, middle-class, and predominantly white men. Of course, given the continued challenges with the representation of women and racially-marginalized folks in senior leadership roles, it would be uncommon to find anyone other than white men to consult for stories. Further, when journalists are looking for someone to quote or speak to, it is reasonable to think they could just as easily look to people who simply are well-educated and informed about the issue and can speak about it, rather than being the 'foremost expert' or someone at the top of a corporate ladder, and that it will be easier to find women and racially-marginalized people when journalists do not rely on traditional ways of sourcing experts.