

'Taking the view from nowhere' leaves journalism only partially objective

Published in St. Catharines Standard on March 15, 2023

"Show me a man who thinks he's objective, and I'll show you a man who's deceiving himself" – Henry Luce

In its efforts to remain objective, journalism has long been taught and practiced as taking a 'view from nowhere.'

Journalists are taught that they are to approach their writing strictly as observers and to remain objective by not holding a particular view of their own; or by being able to set their viewpoint entirely to the side on the issues on which they report. As a historically male-dominated profession and with men being considered rational (whilst women are considered emotional), male subjectivity is what has come to be considered objectivity. However, several journalists have begun to write about the harms of what we understand as objectivity.

The view from nowhere cannot be completely objective as it stems from the social location of the journalist, the media outlet, and conventional journalistic practices. Too often, the word 'bias' is invoked to point out differences between journalists or between the journalist and the people about whom they are writing, when it should be a recognition of the journalist's knowledge, expertise, and life experience. As academic researchers, particularly in social sciences, have become adept at situating themselves in their research and acknowledging how their knowledge and life experience may impact their interpretation of their findings, so, too, should journalists acknowledge how their social location may impact their interpretation of the topics about which they are writing.

As discussed in *The View from Somewhere*, "[d]ispensing with the myth of objectivity is not about rejecting the possibility of truth altogether; it's about accepting the possibility of multiple truths." Much of the literature suggests that where the media falls down is in not discussing the broader context in which events happen. Discussing social context and structures when covering people and events does not mean the story is no longer accurate, and it certainly does not mean it is biased in a manner that negatively impacts how it will be best understood. Rather, it provides a more complete picture of why gender-based violence continues to happen or why we still have not achieved gender equality or why Indigenous people continue to be victimized at higher rates than white people.

For example, we have long read history books that are written from the perspective of the colonizers, rather than from the perspective of the colonized. When we finally began to learn Canada's history from the perspective of the colonized, we came to understand Canada differently and were given the opportunity to develop an understanding of the systemic racism

and other barriers still faced by Indigenous people today. Understanding and writing about these ongoing systemic issues does not mean the story is no longer objective. It means the story is more complete.

Jody Santos, an award-winning journalist, writes that some biases are healthy; that we should be outraged at the number of women who will be abused by a partner in their lifetime; that journalists should oppose violence, rather than be compelled to tell both sides of a story and sanitize the brutality of life events. She asks why news media tell stories of gender-based violence as singular events, rather than as the devastating epidemic it is. For instance, rape cannot be understood through emotional neutrality or objectivity, because it is a problem that, at its very core, is emotional. Whilst journalists have been trained to seek objectivity and balance, it must be recognized that there is no balance in anti-woman violence or many gender equality issues.

When journalists come from different backgrounds, have different lived experiences, and management permits them to take a view from somewhere, we will end up with more accurate and complete stories.