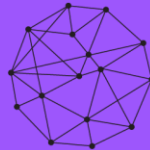


# Representation of Equity-Deserving Communities in Mainstream Canadian Media and Online Hate

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# Agenda

- > About the Diversity Institute
- > Context
- > Media Study
- > Implications

# ABOUT THE DIVERSITY INSTITUTE

- Diversity Institute (DI) founded in 1999
- 100+ full-time researchers and staff
- 250+ industry and community partners
- \$30 million+ in funding (over 4 years)
- Committed to social justice but grounded in “the business case” for diversity and inclusion
- Runs 7 incubation projects and sponsors several others
- Named a “best practice” by UN PRME
- Led by former TMU (formerly Ryerson) VPRI

**Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH):** 10 regional hubs; Network of 250 organizations; 100,000 + diverse women entrepreneurs

**Future Skills Centre:** \$260m investment to strengthen Canada’s skills and employment ecosystem

**Women in Technology (ORF-RE)**

**IRCC Innovative Service Delivery**

**DiversityLeads and 50/30 Challenge**

**OCC + “She-Covery”**

# CONTEXT

- Mainstream media plays a pivotal role in shaping public awareness, influencing judgments, and perpetuating stereotypes
- The media plays a crucial role in shaping decision-making processes that drive societal, organizational and individual level outcomes
- Media portrayals of equity-deserving communities have a significant impact on their everyday experiences at the societal, organizational, and individual levels
- Research indicates that these experiences are further intensified within the online environment

- Negative portrayals of equity-deserving groups in the media can be reinforced by online communities who intend to spread hate and encourage individuals to engage in the harassment of these groups
- Online platforms ensure anonymity which can reassure individuals that they will not face repercussions when spreading hate speech
- Like-minded individuals can gather as a collective on online platforms to contribute to the ongoing hate of equity-deserving groups ultimately normalizing and increasing hate speech

# Journalists as Human Rights Defenders

- Many journalists put themselves in harms way
- This includes speaking out against oppressive regimes, entering dangerous contexts and telling stories that would not otherwise be heard
- Canada has stellar examples of journalists who championed stories that resulted in policy change and whose coverage of human rights issues helped move the dial
- Journalists themselves have been bullied, abused, harassed and even killed for their defence of truth and human rights.



## UNFOUNDED

WHY POLICE DISMISS 1 IN  
5 SEXUAL ASSAULT CLAIMS  
AS BASELESS

In a 20-month-long investigation into how police handle sexual assault allegations, The Globe and Mail gathered data from more than 870 police forces. The findings expose deep flaws at every step of the process

BY ROBYN DOOLITTLE LONDON, ONT.

PUBLISHED FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2017

**Police dismissals of  
sexual-assault claims as  
'unfounded' dropped by  
more than half since 2017**

Today, 8 per cent of sexual assaults reported to police are being closed as 'unfounded,' down from the 19-per-cent rate that The Globe reported in its 2017 Unfounded series

By ROBYN DOOLITTLE

Published: December 22,  
2022

# But, the media is also part of the problem

- Out of 800 published stories on mainstream news outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, when poverty was discussed news outlets chose to feature Black families **59** percent of the time, even though in the United States only “**27** percent of families living below the poverty line are black
- White perpetrators were almost twice as likely to be framed in terms of mental illness. “the constant stream of urban crime coverage discourage[s] empathy and harm[s] those already vulnerable to whatever crisis has made the news.”
- In Canada – when police officers killed Black men, details were often included that implicitly served to blame the victim (such as referring to them as being “known to police,” even if they were not committing a crime when killed) and language was used that absolved the police of responsibility.\_



# Stereotypes, discrimination and hate

- **Lack of Representation:** Underrepresentation or misrepresentation of certain groups in the media can reinforce stereotypes (Blanchett, 2021)
- **Sensationalism and Confirmation Bias:** Media outlets often prioritize sensational stories that align with existing stereotypes (Blanchett, 2021)
- **Cultural and Social Expectations:** Stereotypes are rooted in cultural social beliefs and as the media often perpetuates societal expectations, it can reinforce established stereotypes (Ward & Bridgewater, 2023)

- Coverage of Black people, the police and race in *The Globe and Mail* found the framing – which topics were covered – was overwhelmingly about drugs, gangs and gun violence.
- Coverage of Black Lives Matter protests in the United States was ten times more likely to focus on violent protests than on peaceful demonstrations.
- Stories about Black civil-rights protests were half as likely to mention the protestors' grievances as stories about protests on other topics
- Many Black Americans feel that coverage of protests reinforces negative stereotypes and erases Black agency

# LEXPERT

SPECIAL EDITION JUNE 2012

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FIND SOLUTIONS THAT BENEFIT ALL.

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# Media Processes

- **Selective storytelling:** The media often selects certain stories and narratives that align with pre-existing stereotypes (Pollino, 2023; Reddi et al., 2021)
- **Repetition and reinforcement:** Through repeated exposure, the media reinforces stereotypes by consistently portraying certain groups in specific roles or contexts (Walsh & O'Connor, 2019)
- **Simplification and generalization:** Media outlets sometimes simplify complex issues and present them in a generalized manner, leading to stereotyping (van Doorslaer, 2021)

# (re) production of the news

**Lack of Diversity in Newsrooms:** This can lead to limited perspectives and biased portrayals of diverse communities (Schatto-Eckrodt & Quandt, 2023)

- White journalists, editors and producers may not question framing
  - eg. an article mistakenly claimed that “goats were being slaughtered” in the bathrooms of a hotel used by refugees”
  - eg. “Street gang members, a few days ago, in the city” used a decade-old photo of Black students waiting in line to attend church
- Journalists may (consciously or unconsciously) use different language when writing about White and racialized subjects. Eg sports announcers discuss White basketball players in terms of their intelligence but refer mostly to Black players’ physical qualities and innate

# The Globe & Mail Columnists



# Relationship between mainstream and online (fringe) media outlets

- Mainstream media outlets legitimize controversial figures from online (fringe) media, providing them with broader exposure (Steinsson, 2023)
- Inadvertently amplifies online (fringe) narratives by devoting significant attention to them which, in some cases, has led to the spread of conspiracy theories or misinformation (Cosentino, 2023)
- Online (fringe) media exert influence on policy debates through coverage and framing of issues (González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023)
- Fox News Controversy: Fox News, a major conservative news outlet, has been subject to scrutiny and controversy regarding its coverage and potential influence on public discourse (Ash & Poyker, 2023)
- **Media Ecosystem and Information Sharing: Alternative Narratives and Counterpublics:** Fringe media outlets often cater to specific ideological or cultural communities that feel marginalized by mainstream media (Lupu et al., 2023)

# MEDIA BIAS PROJECT

To study the role of the Canadian mainstream media in advancing or impeding inclusion

Impact and perceptions of Black, Indigenous, Jewish and Muslim people regarding the media: 13 virtual focus groups with a total of 131 participants

- Content and discourse analysis of stories
- Production of stories and experience of journalists
- Partners include UARR, Toronto Star, CBC, APTN and others



# Focus Group Findings

- All focus group participants felt that their representation in mainstream media was inadequate
- Perpetration of stereotypes
- Over-representation of negative images
- Gaps in stories of success
- Unfair representation of political issues

# Findings - Black Community

- **Portrayal as Criminals**

*"...the media totally follows the narrative being fed by the police [of] Black neighbourhoods...They [media] produce more statistics of Black crimes. That reinforces this idea that Black folks are doing more crime, which of course is not the case."*

(Black focus group participant 4, Ontario, 2022)

- **The Aggressive Narrative Portrayal**

*"Black women being deemed as being aggressive and sassy or hypersexual. There's...,you know, the baby's mother, the diva...And then when we look at black men, aggressive, angry, scary, dangerous"*

(Black focus group participant 23, Ontario, 2022)

# Examples - Indigenous Peoples

- **Portrayal of Helpless Narrative**

*“I almost feel like the media talks about it like ‘oh, isn't it great that this Indigenous person was able to do this positive thing...It's almost condescending...like it's unexpected that an Indigenous person is smart enough or innovative enough or has the skills to do these great things”*

(Indigenous focus group participant 2, British Columbia, 2022)

- **Portrayal as an Addict**

*“I think back about that story of who froze...She of course might have been a drug addict...She might have died out there because of fentanyl, or something along those lines, for sure. But that doesn't change the fact that she was a mom”*

(Indigenous focus group participant 2, Ontario, 2023)

# Examples - Jewish Community

- **Portrayal: Stereotypes of Wealth and Power**

*"It seems to be a focus [in mainstream media to] only include Jewish stories that fit the narrative of wealth, of power, of this outsized political representation. Now [in media], we're [Jewish community] just lumped in with a bunch of White people who don't realize how good we have it."*

(Jewish focus group participant 14, Ontario, 2022)

- **Involvement in the Middle Eastern Conflict Portrayal**

*"The fact is, [all Jews in Canada] tied to Israel. And that's how Jews are portrayed in the media... Because of the Middle East conflict Jews in Canada are being treated badly on the street now.... The outrage with Israel stirs up hatred for Jews here [Canada]. You hear it again and again."*

(Jewish focus group participant 3, Ontario, 2022)

# Examples - Muslim Community

- **Muslims Portrayal as Terrorists**

*“So if it was a Muslim person who's committing or who's the perpetrator, you're quick to say he or she is a terrorist. But if it was a White person, then you call them the lone ranger, the lone wolf with mental health issues....I would say that it was really distinct to say if he is Muslim, then he is a terrorist.”*

(Muslim focus group participant 8, Ontario, 2022)

- **Gendered Portrayals**

*“Muslim women are portrayed as weak. We are portrayed as-, we are being oppressed by these religious [Muslim] men, even if we try to speak on our own behalf.”*

(Muslim focus group participant 22, Ontario, 2022)

# Key Takeaways

- **Representation:** unrepresentation of important aspects of the communities everyday life (e.g., contribution to the Canadian society)
- **Impact:** Frequent perpetuation of false stereotypes have negative effects on communities and participants' everyday lives
- **Participant Disclosure:** Those who are able hide ethnocultural identities or modify their behaviour for personal safety
- **Production:** Participants' voices in editorial and writing processes would greatly improve representation

# IMPLICATIONS

- Media outlets must do more work to address inadequate representation of equity-deserving groups
- Negative biases are reinforced by the harmful stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media
- Positive depictions without the relevant historical context can still spark unfair treatment online (comments, social media posts, etc.)
- Strong desire for increased diversity amongst journalists

# Thank you

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