

Although nation-wide women make up nearly 24% of political scientists and 33% of new Ph.D.s and assistant professors (APSA 2005), and at least 64 women work as political scientists at academic institutions in Minnesota, those of us who watch and read the local news hear from the same two or three local male experts. This problem is hardly unique to Minnesota. Study after study has proven that white men dominate the news. Men make up 85% of the names in the front pages of newspapers.<sup>1</sup> They are likely to be the first source named in an article as well as repeated as a source. They write 80% of the opinion pieces for the *Los Angeles Times* and a whopping 90% for the *Washington Post* (Ashkinaze 2005). Their athletic prowess dominates the sports pages (although women's presence has doubled from 7% to 14% in the last eighteen years ([Noll 2005])). They make up two-thirds of network correspondents. They make up 92% of the sources on television news (Howard 2002). Their pictures are on 96% of the covers of news magazines (Media Report to Women 2004). They make up 86% of guests on the Sunday talk shows.<sup>2</sup> Their bylines dominate the top intellectual and political magazines.<sup>3</sup> They are more likely than women to be reviewers for the *New York Times Book Review* or to have their books reviewed (a bizarre situation, given women buy the majority of books) (Caplan and Palko 2004).

In the early 1970s, Susan Brownmiller and Nora Ephron appealed to the *New York Times* to change its ways, as did Marilyn French and 100 other women writers in the 1980s. In 1989, Betty Friedan and Nancy Woodhull initiated a series of studies to explore how the media represented women. They regularly found that only one in four people named in the front page of news were women (Gibbons 2005). For awhile, studies showed incremental progress. Although it would take decades to reach parity, feminists could at least console themselves with the direction of change. Since 1999, however, women's position is now slipping. Although women hold more positions of

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<sup>1</sup> Media Report to Women, reporting on 1996 data. The *Minnesota Women's Press* looked at the front page, first page as well as the metro, business, sports, and variety/daily life sections of the *Pioneer Press* and *Star Tribune* and found that overall, women make up about 21% of the names in the news.

<sup>2</sup> The number of women on Sunday talk shows dropped precipitously after 9/11, but is now back up to 14%, although half of all talk shows have no women guests and only 6% of repeat guests are women. "These shows have an 'authority setting effect' whereby certain public figures are granted the status of experts, leaders, and authorities in their fields," (White House Project 2005, 5).

<sup>3</sup> Weiss (2005) found the publications ranging from 3/1 men to women at the *Nation* to 13/1 at the *National Review*.

power, as judges, legislators, business leaders, athletes and researchers, they are appearing less frequently in the *Star Tribune* and the *Pioneer Press*, down to 21% from a 1998 high of 24% (Noll 2005). Many established women writers from Ellen Goodman to Jill Nelson report being frozen out as post-September 11th media become more monolithically male (Zimmerman 2003).

Journalists may respond that they merit little blame for covering the president, a man, or can claim little credit for reporting on the secretary of state, a woman; the holders of key political positions will inevitably dominate the news. But reporters have more leeway over who they turn to for expert commentary, and surprisingly, experts and so-called real people more so than politicians dominate the news. “For all their seeming ubiquitousness on the network newscasts, politicians accounted for just one in five (18%) sound bites during the first half of 1998. Experts accounted for two in five (40%) sound bites, as did real people (39%)” (Media Studies Center 1998). Research shows that the media do not turn to women experts even when the story is clearly about gender; instead, they turn to men to comment on single mothers on welfare, rape, or breast implants, just as they more often turn to white commentators when the topic is directly on issues facing racial minorities (Howard 2005; Rhode 1995). Moreover, if journalists are merely adhering to reporting conventions, why do different broadcasts and publications vary so much in whether women’s voices, names, and faces are present? Why is the *Nation* so much better than the *National Review*? Why is network news so much better than cable news? Why are newspapers so much better than television news? Why are articles a newspaper’s own staff writes better than those the wire services write? Why are newspapers with larger circulation better than those with smaller circulations? Why is PBS’s *Newshour* second only to MSNBC in its *lack* of female sources (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005)? Why did NBC’s nightly news increase the number of women giving sound bites from 16% to 25% in 1998-99 while CBS hovered at an astonishing low of 11% (Media Studies Center 1999)? How has Chris Mathews managed to comment on the week’s news with about half of his guests women, while the other Sunday Talk Shows can only manage about 22% (Hollar 2005)? “The networks ‘golden rolodexes’ of expert consultants are badly in need of updating,” said Andrew Tyndall,

director of the study, *Who Speaks for America? Sex, Age and Race on the Network News.*”

The situation is more disturbing if one moves beyond mere counting and analyzes how women appear in the news. Women are most likely to appear as victims of crime, as commentators on health, education, or culture issues, or as everyday citizens on the street. They appear on morning television news programs or lifestyle pieces. They are least likely to be quoted on foreign affairs. Moreover, four of the nine most widely distributed female columnists are conservatives who frequently disparage feminism and feminist positions (Hollar 2005, 2).

Constant criticism has done little to compel reporters to call the women in their rolodexes, but one constructive thing the Center on Women and Public Policy can do is make sure journalists know who they can call. Journalists cannot continue to claim that they would like to diversify the voices we hear, but they do not know any women. This booklet includes the names of all of the women political scientists in the state of Minnesota we could identify, along with their contact information and areas of expertise. We invite the media to include women’s voices and perspectives on the issues.

What difference does it make that the faces we see and the expert voices we hear are white men’s? The media helps set the public policy agenda and frames the issues through selection, exclusion, emphasis, and tone (Gitlin 1980; Rhode 1995). “In this role as agenda setters and debate arbiters, the networks’ broadcasts profoundly affect the democratic process....In addition to putting topics on the nation’s agenda, the networks help set the range of debate on those issues by selecting sources who ostensibly represent the interests and opinions of the population” (Howard 2002).

Journalists might claim that they are merely recognizing experts rather than creating them through media exposure. Those who study journalistic practices, however, know that journalist under severe time constraints return to the tried and true, those they can count on to give a good quote. Such routines mean that women rarely get the opportunity to develop the experience they need to be good sources of quotes, regardless of their potential. But more worrying than being unfair to prospective individual women pundits, such media practices have a long-term corrosive effect on politics and the public more generally. Until women break a gender barrier, by serving as an astronaut,

secretary of state, or CEO, the public may not think women have the capabilities these positions call for, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Women leaders may be thought to lack the authority their job requires merely because the public is unaccustomed to seeing them in that role, whether it is as a surgeon, economic forecaster, or military strategist. “[A] lack of female guests on these shows not only excludes important voices from public debate but also makes it difficult—both for votes and political elites—to visualize women as key political ‘insiders’ who can contribute and potentially amplify the audience’s understanding of political and policy issues” (White House Project 2001, 9). In addition to stymieing the imagination, this steady drumbeat of male voices creates a dependence on men’s stamp of approval. “Consciously or not, audiences become habituated to male voices and bylines and dependent on white male gravitas to explain what’s happening in the world” (Zimmerman 2003). It is not just children, particularly girls, who need role models to fathom possibilities for themselves, but the wider electorate needs to become comfortable seeing women in positions of authority for it to confer that very authority on women. In addition to the affirmation that comes from seeing oneself is the importance of seeing others and learning about differences. News can tell us what we do not already know, bridging the gaps between people (Rogers 2004). Men, for example, can always use more practice listening to women. They might learn something new.

It is also possible that women may bring something to the discussion that has been overlooked by male analysts, or that they may conceptualize a problem differently from male experts. Perhaps, too, newspapers anxious to increase female readership, television news programs facing a declining audience, and advertisers anxious to appeal to women consumers might create more interest among a female audience by including women’s voices. Whether the motivation is self-interest (gaining audience), better reporting (widening the range of perspectives presented), promoting the public good (by creating role models for women and girls and a public comfortable with women wielding power), or fairness to individuals, clearly much room for improvement exists. The Center on Women and Public Policy hopes to make the task of including women’s voices easier and issues the challenge to Minnesota media: we, your loyal viewers and readers, are

watching, counting, analyzing, and will continue to report on how you are doing.<sup>4</sup> And we are ready to add our voices to the conversation.

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<sup>4</sup> At a national level, see SheSource.org, a comprehensive initiative designed to foster more representative public discourse by increasing the number of women in the news media. [www.Shesource.Org](http://www.Shesource.Org).

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