# Importance of Diversity in the Media in Our Society

In a democratic society such as ours, the media is crucial to the structure and complexities of our everyday lives, as the modern media serves as an information hub, supplying the people with the most accurate, unbiased information available, so that they can make informed political, voting, and societal decisions.

Nevertheless, the media was once centered around the white-male aristocracy that controlled America, supporting only their claims and providing representation to said group. It wouldn't be until the 19th century that women as a societal demographic were recognized in the media as more than an extension of their husbands. Around this time, many abolitionists also began their battle for the emancipation of enslaved people in the South. Amongst various other progressive human rights causes and movements, the media began to represent more than just the original aristocracy and the many white demographics that branched from it.

The 20th century saw the rise of muckraking journalism, which furthered the push for human rights and economic diversity. Over time, many of the restrictions the early media saw, due to prejudiced and xenophobic practices and laws, subsided, and the media was able to embrace various ways of life.

Today, we see a diverse concept of American media, with journalists from various professions, ethnicities, genders, races, religions, and so forth.

We can see a more accurate representation of previously underrepresented and misrepresented groups. These groups are now specifically identified for awareness, and today's media allows for these previously suppressed stories to be sought out. The media comprises

stories whose subjects vary widely in demographics. The reporters we see on television and social media are also diverse in demographics.

Including these diverse experiences from several people in the idea, writing, and editorial processes will enable a more efficient and higher-quality story. Looking at it through multiple lenses like this allows many people from diverse walks of life to understand and interpret the story as intended. Working alongside professionals who differ from you demographically fosters a deeper understanding of other cultures, religions, and identity-related thought processes. Only deepening the knowledge of you and your coworkers, to produce higher-quality material.

The incorporation of diversity in our media is also important for the role it plays for individuals who once lacked representation, as well as for the next generation of professionals and the voting citizenry. Seeing someone who looks like you accomplishing a task, representing an entire demographic, can inspire you to ‘make your mark’ as well and do something that would make your societal groups proud. Children growing up seeing people from every demographic educating and informing them via the media learn that the information is factual and reliable, regardless of what the person who said/wrote it may look or sound like.

Most importantly, our society's media has undergone many changes over time. Once representing very few, and targeting ever fewer, to targeting and representing everyone. Technological advancements allow everyone to access media anytime, anywhere. Media professionals can also locate stories more quickly, learn about important hard news faster, and access information more quickly than ever before.

However, even a quarter of the way into the 21st century, major media deficits persist, and new issues are arising as technology continues to advance. Ironically, many of the very things

that make our media so great are also what make our media so poor, a direct reflection of our democracy.

Underrepresentation and misrepresentation remain significant issues, according to the National Library of Medicine and the Pew Research Center. According to the latter, “Black Americans see issues with the way Black people are covered in the news”. The same organizations also published an article titled *‘Black Americans’ Experiences With News’* that states, “Almost two-thirds of Black adults (63%) say news about Black people is often more negative than news about other racial and ethnic groups”. The articles also stated, “57% say the news only covers certain segments of Black communities”.

There are numerous other groups, still fighting this battle of under/misrepresentation, including women of all races and ethnicities. “Women only make up around 20% of expert news sources. Only 24% of the people in newspaper, television, and radio news are women. Only 4% of traditional news and digital stories explicitly challenge gender stereotypes. Women are only the subject of political and governmental coverage 16% of the time. Only 6% of news stories highlight issues of gender equality or inequality. Women reporters are only responsible for 37% of stories.” According to an article on the Global Citizen Organization’s website.

The LGBTQ population is another demographic that is heavily mis/underrepresented in today’s U.S. news media. According to Orbitz, a survey of 2,000 LGBTQ+ Americans found that “Only a third of respondents (31%) said that when they first saw someone like them in the media that it was a “positive” portrayal.” According to an article from the Just Like Us Organization, “48% transgender young adults said that transgender identities were ‘rarely or never’ portrayed positively.”

So why do all of these facts and data sets matter? Well, as astronomer Carl Sagan put it, “You have to know the past to understand the present.” Learning and comprehending the history of U.S. media, from the beginning through its evolution, and identifying the changes that have occurred as the country around it has progressed. Once we identify the boundaries that pioneers in the media field have broken to overcome oppression, segregation, and exclusion, we can understand how we fit into society today. We will also see that, hundreds of years later, there are still groups that are underrepresented and misrepresented in the media.

These representations are incredibly harmful to the progressive nature of our society and all of its characteristics, including the media. They begin to undo the miracles of pioneers such as Samuel Cornish, John Russwurm, Frederick Douglass, Gertrude Bustill Mossell, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a handful of journalists associated with the abolition of slavery and The Black Press Era. There’s reinforcement of false stereotypes, which empowers xenophobic individuals to continue their prejudicial and discriminatory behaviors. “A compelling illustration of this pattern emerges in U.S. news coverage. For instance, U.S. news coverage has historically depicted Black Americans as criminals. This portrayal often contradicts crime statistics and reinforces harmful stereotypes”, according to an article posted by Taylor & Francis Online.

It is issues like these that tear this country, a beautiful melting pot, in half, dating back to the Civil War. We’ve overcome so much as American media professionals, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the next generation has even more accessible resources and opportunities than we did. It is our duty to foster an atmosphere that celebrates each person’s uniqueness, because everyone brings something different to the table. In doing so, we embrace the true roots of America, the combination of hundreds of races, religions, and cultures. We can solve more problems, more effectively, with more ideas. As media professionals, it is our job to

responsibly and accurately inform the people with the truth. To do so, we must tell everyone's truth, everywhere, all the time.

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