

CHAPTER EIGHT

ETHICS, BALANCE & OBJECTIVITY

1. Journalism ethics
2. Photo ethics
3. Objectivity
4. Anti-bias guidelines

[Note: For a copy of the CUP Code of Ethics, log in to the members section of the website and look under “CUP policy”]





Introduction to ethics

- ▶ As a writer, editor or publisher you have a reputation to keep. Not only for your own publication, but for all journalists.

Part of your job as a reporter is to ensure that your actions are both responsible and ethical. Your motivation for being an ethical journalist should be the same motivation you have for writing in the first place. In the end, it is about a need to expose information in such a way that it engages readers and earns their respect.

So what does 'ethics' mean?

Ethics are guiding moral principles and values. The term also encompasses the study of right and wrong. Within different professions, self-imposed codes of ethics are designed to establish the moral boundaries of its practitioners. These codes include basic principles to follow and often address specific challenges that practitioners face.

The Canadian University Press has its own ethics guidelines, called the CUP Code of Ethics, which can be found on the CUP website at www.cup.ca. Within journalism, the codes of ethics are also referred to as "canons of journalism."

A strong code of ethics serves as a journalist's moral compass.

While codes of ethics differ across publications, professions, regions and contexts, they all share a common element: if what you are writing will do more harm than good, don't do it.

ELEMENTS OF ETHICS

Journalistic codes of ethics frequently share a number of common elements,

including truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability.

Objectivity

Objectivity implies a standard. But if a standard exists, then why don't two newspapers ever have the same angle on a breaking story? If they're all writing objective stories, how can they all present the same story differently?

From the very moment a story is assigned, there exists bias. An editor wants one story over another story because they think it's a better story. They then run with a particular angle because they think that it's more interesting.

The writer decides who to interview and, equally importantly, who not to interview. They decide what to ask and what not to ask, what research needs to be done and what doesn't. They then decide what the lede should be, what the angle should be (unless it's already been decided from above), who should be quoted first and who should be quoted longer.

Editors then decide what to change, what to cut, what to add and what headline should go at the top. More editors decide where the story should be placed and which pictures should appear along side it.

If you're writing a story with conflict, there will be decisions made by a number of people that will affect the way the story is written. Those decisions will affect the way the story is perceived by the reader.

This ability to influence perception is very powerful. It's your job to find out everything you can from all sides of any

issue you write about. Always find out what different sides have to say (there are always more than two). If the research shows that your stand on an issue is wrong, then it's wrong. If the facts don't back up your opinion, your opinion needs to change.

Balance

While objectivity might be a fanciful flight, balance is not. Balance is the devil's advocate and the lynchpin of credibility for your story. Without a balanced representation of all viewpoints, your story ends up serving the goals of those people you chose to interview rather than representing an accurate spectrum of opinion and dissent.

One of the more difficult, and hotly debated, aspects of balance is that it's necessities change story by story. Balancing one story may be as simple as asking a few students what they think of dining hall food. But often it's more difficult than that.

Balance means fair representation. If there is a voice of dissent or assent, they deserve to be represented in your story. There is an element of judgment to balance, though. Representing racist or homophobic views that are poorly informed on the topic of your article doesn't serve to inform anyone. Your responsibility as a journalist extends to interviewing people who are knowledgeable in the field you are investigating; who are not reactionary message-pushers; and who can legitimately debate issues at hand.

If the issue is the student use of food banks, for instance, the primary sources that most reporters would zone in on are students using the food banks, a student union representative and the



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operator of the food bank. These three sources would provide an interesting profile of the types of students who use these institutions but would not necessarily be a balanced story.

To balance this story, we also need to interview other users of the food bank. Do they feel that the students are legitimate users? Have long-term users of the food bank noticed an increase in the number of students using the service? Has it changed the way they use the service? A reporter might also nationalize the story by contacting researchers at the Canadian Association of Food Banks as well as students in other provinces who are facing similar problems.

Balancing the story does not include interviewing someone who argues, without research and facts to back up their claims, that the only people who use food banks are lazy. Since research and survey work has shown that welfare recipients and the working poor are the highest sector of food bank users in Canada (Canadian Association of Food Banks).

Balancing a story involves asking the hard questions about who you are interviewing and the quality of their responses. Remember that when you interview someone, you are under no obligation to use that interview in your story. If your source clearly has no idea what they're talking about, discount them and move on. Inform your readers through informed sources with a variety of backgrounds and concerns.

Which leads us to . . .

Sources

We all know that sources are an essen-

tial part to any news article. We must interview and report on all sides of a story. We must balance each view with the others, ensure that every voice is heard.

You must watch that you don't give voices unfair play though. In an article published in the May 2006 issue of *Vanity Fair*, titled "A Convenient Untruth", author Michael Shnayerson illustrates how sound-bite artists like Myron Ebell perpetuate doubt about global warming, despite the fact that global warming has been given credibility by the vast majority of scientists around the world. Ebell works for a think tank called the Competitive Enterprise Institute, where he is a source for journalists which advocate the 'alternative viewpoint' on global warming.

Remember, a source can tell you anything, but is what they say true? Shnayerson daringly debunks Ebell even as he gives him a voice.

Says Ebell, "It was warmer in the Arctic in the 30s and 40s than it is today. This is how you cook the data, and this is what these people are all about."

Dr. Robert Corell with the American Meteorological Society responds, "We have historical records that go back 400,000 years. The whole Arctic is warmer today than it's been in the last thousand years."

Sources, balance and credibility go hand in hand. For example, 500 people strongly believe that your school should put a pop machine in the student union building, and one person thinks the plan is a bad idea. If you write a story in which one person from the group of 500 gets a quote, and the

one person who thinks the plan is bad gets a quote, you may need to consider whether or not your story is balanced.

Anonymous Sources

What's wrong with this story?

"Students will decide the fate of the student union's proposed campus centre in a referendum next March.

"The union decided last night to ask students to support a \$30 increase in incidental fees for the next 10 years to help build an eight-million-dollar student centre.

"Joyce DeWitt, president of the student union, is promoting a 'yes' vote in the referendum. 'I think students really need a space of their own, and this is the only way they're going to get it.'

"But at least one student, who did not wish to be named, said the project was 'just the product of a bunch of power-hungry hacks who are out of touch with what the student body really wants.'"

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There's no good reason for the source in the fourth paragraph to be anonymous.

Even if the writer thought there was a reason — maybe the speaker is a good friend or relative of the student union president, and does not want to be known as opposing the project — there's an easy way out of such a situation.

Don't quote that person.

An anonymous source should only be used when the information or opinion they provide cannot be found anywhere else. That situation is very rare in student journalism.



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So why are there so many anonymous sources in the pages of student newspapers? Because reporters are often too lazy to find someone who will go on record.

This kind of laziness erodes the integrity of a student paper very quickly. Every unnamed source means that dozens of readers probably believe you made up the quote just to put some conflict into your story.

Accuracy

Accuracy can have a huge affect on the credibility of your paper, your article and you as a journalist. It is imperative that you fact-check and ensure that what you've written is, in fact, true.

Before, during, and after you have finished writing a piece, you should go back and check everything that is considered a fact. This includes:

- Nouns (names and places)
- Dates and times
- Job titles, duties
- Literary quotations
- Interview quotations
- Statistics
- Sequence of actions
- Contact information

•[See: Ch 9. Fact checking]

Purpose

What you write must have a purpose. As mentioned before, if the article is going to do more harm than good, you need to reassess whether or not it should be written. In addition, you must ask yourself whether everything you learned while gathering information for your piece should be published.

The Society of Professional Journalists, based in the US, lists the following for considerations on limiting harm in their code of ethics:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.

- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.

- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.

- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.

- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.

- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.

- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Libel

Do not defame people in your articles.

•[See: Ch 9. Libel]

With files from the Society of Professional Journalists, Amanda McCuaig, Mary Jankaluk, William Wolfe-Wylie and Deanne Fisher.



Photo ethics

BY JASON CHIU

- ▶ As a photojournalist your purpose is to capture the moment as it happens. You serve as the witness to an instant in time that others are unable to experience for themselves. Your photo becomes, in many cases, the first historical record that others will remember said event by. Your power to influence and direct the opinions of readers is equal to that of the writer.

As such, your ethics as a photographer are identical to a writer (journalist). However, given the recent advances in technology and the, almost complete, elimination of film as a medium for photojournalists; the ethics of a photographer working for a news agency or organization has been a topic of intense debate.

Photojournalists around the world have been vilified in forums, written off, and, in the most extreme cases, black listed by colleagues for violating an (sometimes) unspoken set of ethics.

Individual newspapers, wire services, and various photojournalist organizations all have their own set of ethics and codes of conduct. It can be difficult to sift through the endless amount of information on the web or the “word of mouth” do and don’ts you might get from seasoned photojournalists in the industry.

For the purposes of CUP and its membership, a good starting point for photojournalistic efforts is the outline authored by David Schlesinger, Reuters Editor-in-Chief. Schlesinger’s ethics for photojournalism are outlined below:

THE RULES ARE

- No additions or deletions to the subject matter of the original image (thus changing the original content and journalistic integrity of an image).
- No excessive lightening, darkening or blurring of the image (thus misleading the viewer by disguising certain elements of an image).
- No excessive colour manipulation (thus dramatically changing the original lighting conditions of an image).

THE GUIDELINES ARE

- Only minor Photoshop work should be performed in the field (especially from laptops). Cropping, sizing and levels with resolution set to 300dpi are acceptable in the field. Where possible, have your photo editor perform any required further Photoshopping on calibrated hi-resolution screens. This typically entails lightening/darkening, removal of dust and basic colour correction.
- All photographers should understand the limitations of their laptop screens and their working environments.

ALLOWED

- Cropping (only to extent so as not to distort the event).
- Adjustment of levels to histogram limits.
- Minor colour correction (on properly calibrated screen).
- Sharpening at 300%, 0.3, 0 (no in-

camera sharpening).

- Careful use of lasso tool.
- Subtle use of burn tool.
- Adjustment of highlights and shadows.
- Eye dropper to check/set gray.

If you must salvage or modify an image using any of the above tools, they should be labeled as a “photo illustration.”

NOT ALLOWED

- Additions or deletions to image.
- Cloning & healing tool (except dust).
- Airbrush, brush, paint.
- Selective area sharpening and in camera sharpening.
- Excessive lightening/darkening.
- Excessive colour tone change.
- Auto levels.
- Blurring.
- Eraser tool.
- Quick Mask.
- In-camera sharpening.
- In-camera saturation styles.

SET-UPS/STAGING OF PICTURES

- Photographers, staff and freelancers, must not stage or re-enact news events. They may not direct the subjects of their images or add, remove or move objects on a news assignment. News photography must depict reality. Any attempt to alter that reality constitutes fabrication.
- Photographers may direct the subjects of portraits, formal interviews and non-news feature images needed to illustrate a story. The caption must not mislead the reader into believing



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these images are spontaneous.

- The presence of the media can often influence how subjects behave. When the behavior shown is the result of the media's presence, captions must make that clear. If other photographers orchestrate or set up scenes, it is still a set-up.
- The best news photography occurs when the presence of the camera is not noticeable. Photographers should be as unobtrusive as possible to avoid influencing events and consider using long lenses.
- Composite images that show the progression of an event (e.g. lunar eclipse, time lapse) must indicate the technique in their captions. They are never acceptable in a news assignment unless captioned accordingly.
- Captions must also make clear when a specialty lens (e.g. lens babies, tilt-shift lenses) or a special technique (e.g. soft focus, zooming, circular polarizer) has been used to create an image in portraiture or on a features assignment.

ACCURACY IN CAPTIONS

Just as our news photographs must reflect reality, so too should your captions. They must adhere to the basic rules of accuracy and freedom from bias and must answer the basic questions of good journalism.

- Who is in the picture?
- Where was it taken?
- When was it taken?
- What does it show?
- Why is a subject doing a particular thing?

Captions are written in the present tense and should use concise, simple English. They generally consist of a single sentence but a second sentence should be added if additional context or explanation is required.

Contentious information, like death tolls in conflict, must be sourced or avoided entirely. The caption must explain the circumstances in which a photograph was taken and state the correct date.

Captions must not contain assumptions by the photographer about what might have happened, even when a situation seems likely. Explain only what you have witnessed. All other information about an event must be sourced unless you are certain of your information.

The above outline for ethics and photojournalism was taken and modified from the original policy of the Reuters News Picture Service. The original policy can be found at <http://blogs.reuters.com/2007/01/18/the-use-of-photoshop>.

ETIQUETTE

As a photojournalist, you will often have access to restricted areas. Be respectful of the context — remember, as a photographer you should try to go unnoticed. With sports and A&E, be cognizant of other people who have paid to see the event. With news, respect the environment you are in, as nobody likes a pushy photographer rearranging their office. Most of the time, a little courtesy goes a long way. If you explain to people who you are and what you are doing, they are usually more than happy to help out. ◀

Jason Chiu was the CUP69 graphics bureau chief, and CUP70 Ontario board representative. With files from



Objectivity

- **Objective:** 1. (of a person, an opinion, etc.) not influenced by feelings or personal bias. 2. (of writing, art, etc.) concerned with outward things or events; dealing with or laying stress on what is external to the mind.

— Canadian Oxford Dictionary

THE HISTORY OF OBJECTIVITY

The CBC was among the first to embrace objectivity in Canada. It was largely in response to the BBC's own performance during the Second World War, in which it was able to, according to Denis McQuail, "remain clear of political affiliation or involvement."

At the time most CBC programs consciously promoted the war effort. But former Toronto Globe reporter become CBC reporter, Dan McArthur, insisted that integrity and objectivity were the cornerstones of news services. McArthur adopted a narrow conceptualization of objectivity, in line with what was already happening in the United States, which defined objectivity as "accuracy and a rigid adherence to facts, a commitment to unbiased reporting, and the exclusion of any form of interpretation, analysis, and editorial comment . . ."

In "Sustaining Democracy," authors Bob Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao explain that news outlets, including the CBC, wanted to "establish their own institutional credibility and independence from the party in power." Furthermore, a non partisan newspaper could be sold to more people, in turn enabling it to sell more advertising.

It is important to realize that objectivity has not always been a value closely held by media outlets. Instead, some

have chosen to embrace what is known as advocacy journalism. Some argue that instead of 'objectivity' journalists should aim for fairness and accuracy. Others stress that balance is of the utmost importance. Either way, while objectivity is not the only method of reporting, it is always important to disclose your biases.

We have since deviated from the strict definition of objectivity enforced by Dan McArthur, and many journalists will agree. However, it is still seen as a cornerstone of 'traditional' North American journalism.

The danger of objectivity lies in its suggestion that what is written objectively serves as the "truth".

THE BREAKDOWN OF OBJECTIVITY

Let's look at where the concept of objectivity breaks down.

From the very moment a story is assigned, there is a bias being brought to bear. An editor choose one story over another because they think it's a 'better' story, and they want this particular angle on it because it's a better angle. That's their opinion. Writers also seek out stories that interest them, reflecting their own views and tastes.

The writer decides who to interview and, equally importantly, who not to interview. They decide what to ask and what not to ask, what research needs to be done and what doesn't. They then decide what the lede should be, what the angle should be (unless it's already been decided from above), who should be quoted first, who should be quoted longer.

Copy editors then decide what to change, what to cut, what to add, what headline should go with it. Editors decide where the story should be placed and what pictures should go with it.

Sometimes none of that makes a difference. If you're covering a flower show, you'll probably have an objective story, unless you have an inherent distrust of tulips. But, if you're writing a story with conflict, there will be decisions made by a number of people that will affect the way the story is written. Those decisions will affect the way the story is perceived by the reader.

•[See: Ch 2. Peace journalism]

Objectivity implies a standard, it suggests that there is one way to write a story. But, if that's the case, why do two newspapers never carry the same angle? If they're all writing objective stories, how can they all present different points of view?

LET'S LOOK AT SOME EXAMPLES

If we go back a few years to the invasion of Iraq, for example, we can see some stark contrasts. On April 10, 2003, the Globe and Mail printed a headline that read: "Brand America proves it's the real thing; Uncle Sam can expect a rise in his stock, DOUG SAUNDERS writes, thanks to cheering crowds of Iraqis appearing on televisions all over the world."

Only a week later, the Toronto Star, on April 17, 2003, printed about Iraq: "Seething residents shout complaints Blame Americans for all their woes."

It's an obvious example, but it goes to



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show that there is no such thing as a single, objective, way of covering anything. This pretence of objectivity can carry much more dangerous consequences.

In the early 2000's, for example, the Star ran a whole series of stories on serial killers at large in Canada. Undoubtedly, there are some, and obviously it should be a concern. But in printing stories of grisly serial killers, the fact that the vast majority of murders are a result of domestic violence were marginalized. Also, the way in which women continue to be the victims of that violence was overshadowed by the serial killer image.

The stories ran, the facts were presented. But some facts were left out and in leaving out those certain facts, the paper contributed to misinformation and to stereotypes.

Is that objectivity?

THE 'OBJECTIVE' MEDIA

Although reporters may strive for objectivity, or even just to be fair, they are restricted by their owners' and publishers' intentions and agendas.

In practice, mainstream media suffers from economic, political and industry pressures that often prevent it from performing its ideal role of providing a wide variety of views. Coverage rarely threatens the status quo and criticism remains within acceptable boundaries. As a group, media tend to, by their neutrality, serve economic and political power holders, especially when these groups organize to use media to their advantage. In other words, media often

allow current repressive forces to maintain and increase their influence.

Many studies of the media support this view. They find overrepresentation of elite sources of news (government, business, etc.); themes of reporting showing a bias toward dominant social and community values; women figuring less prominently than men in news stories; and minorities and outgroups receiving differential treatment which bears little relation to their numbers or significance.

As ownership in mass media becomes more concentrated, these issues are amplified.

This is one good reason why student journalists not only need to abandon the myth of objectivity, but consciously examine what positions they're advocating. Are we simply adding to this wall of disinformation or are we posting an alternative?

For more information on these issues, try reading Ben Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly*, the findings of every Canadian Senate Commission on Mass Media, books by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Extra?* magazine, *Lies of Our Times* magazine and others.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

We all know that sources are an essential part to any news article. We must interview and report on all sides of a story. We must balance each view with the others, ensure that every voice is heard.

You must watch that you don't give voices unfair play though. In an article pub-

lished in the May 2006 issue of *Vanity Fair*, titled "A Convenient Untruth", author Michael Shnayerson illustrates how sound-bite artists like Myron Ebell perpetuate doubt about global warming, despite the fact that it has been given credibility by the majority of scientists around the world. Ebell works for a think tank called the Competitive Enterprise Institute, where he is a source for journalists which promotes the 'alternative viewpoint' of global warming.

Remember, a source can tell you anything, but is what they say true? Shnayerson daringly debunks Ebell even as he gives him a voice.

"It was warmer in the Arctic in the 30s and 40s than it is today," said Ebell. "This is how you cook the data, and this is what these people are all about."

Shnayerson cleverly undermines Ebell by following his statement up with a quote by the American Meteorological Society's Dr. Robert Corell, who said, "We have historical records that go back 400,000 years. The whole Arctic is warmer today than it's been in the last thousand years."

Which source is more credible? Does the inclusion of the honorific "Dr." change your opinion of Corell's credibility? What about the use of statistics in his quote? Remember when quoting people to double check any numbers they throw at you — they're just as fallible when quoting numbers as you are. When you are thinking about your sources, think about balance. For example, 500 people strongly believe that your school should put a pop machine in the student union building and one person thinks the plan is a bad idea. If you write a story in which one person



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from the group of 500 gets a quote, and the person who thinks the plan is bad gets a quote, you may need to consider whether or not your story is balanced.

UNOFFICIAL SOURCES

The word from the street is necessary in order to plug into the heartbeat of the average reader. But the choice of voice is important when it is impossible to represent all voices in a single article. Which voice represents which people? Are the people you have chosen to quote informed about the issues that you're asking them to comment on?

As with official sources, quoting poorly informed unofficial sources can serve to make the official sources look more credible than they really are, or to delegitimize what could otherwise be legitimate opposition or support. When you quote average readers, make sure that they know what they're talking about before you put their words on the page.

POLITICS AND JOURNALISM

Politics is the organized struggle for power and control of resources. It is a whole different ball game from journalism. While student activism does not entail allegiance to an entire doctrine of thought, organized politics, at whatever level, involves a belief in a set of policies and responsibility for the decisions made.

Direct participation in student politics jeopardizes the credibility of student journalists. In such cases, journalists are no longer perceived as being motivated by anything other than political power.

You might be confident that you can maintain a position as vice-president external for your student council and write for the student paper (not covering the student council, of course) without losing the respect of readers. However, as a member of the paper's staff, you will undoubtedly influence its editorial direction. You're unlikely to endorse anything that works against your own political interests.

As a student politician, you are often perceived as having too much power. Having politicians' names associated with the student media, which are often the only challengers to student politicians, will simply weaken the readers' confidence in both institutions. Avoid creating even the image of a conflict of interest. Your job is to either inform or decide, it can't be both.

FREEBIES

Freebies come in a variety of forms and almost always represent an effort to influence your coverage. At some commercial papers, the mere acceptance of a free coffee is cause for a reporter's dismissal.

Most arts sections do accept freebies, in the form of tickets, CDs, books and even "press junkets" — free trips to interview the star of an upcoming release. Even these types of gifts are questionable and student papers are often vulnerable to conniving promoters.

Many student papers find that after several uncomplimentary reviews of a major promoter's concerts, tickets are not as free-flowing. Promoters can afford to do this because student press coverage is not always crucial to the success or failure of an event.

If you find you are being less than honest in your reviews in hopes of obtaining tickets for the same company's next event, your criticism is virtually useless. Your readers have been unknowingly betrayed. If you can afford to, it is always better to resist any kind of gift. ◀

With files from Mary Jankaluk, Deanne Fisher, Krishna Rau, William Wolfe-Wylie and Amanda McCuaig

Krishna Rau is a former editor of the Gargoyle and the Varsity at U of T. He has since worked as a reporter for the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star.

Amanda McCuaig was president in CUP
70.



Anti-bias guidelines

BY MARY JANKALUK

- Inherent biases surrounding issues and people develop whenever writers have insufficient education about, or contact with, communities outside of their own.

That includes most of us.

Without guidelines, many writers will find themselves limited in their ability to understand their story, which will present problems with language and style. The following ideas could be incorporated into official bylaws or simply retained as recommended readings for new reporters.

All anti-bias policies should include educational sessions to discuss their value and presentation. These suggestions are intended to help people understand the world around them.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Inclusive or non-sexist language:

This is language that does not exclude one sex or give unequal treatment on the basis of gender.

Negative or unequal sex-role portrayal:

This refers to language, attitudes or representatives which tend to associate particular roles, modes of behaviour, characteristics, attributes or products to people on the basis of gender, without taking them into consideration as individuals. Negative or unequal portrayal of women and men can be both explicit and implied.

Systemic discrimination:

This refers to action or treatment by organizations or a society that is categori-

cally prejudiced against an individual or a group, for example, on the basis of race or gender, and denies an individual or group opportunity and advancement.

AVOIDING RACIAL AND ETHNIC BIAS

Special attention should be paid to the portrayal of racial and ethnic minorities, including First Nations. The presence of the varied racial and ethnic minorities which constitute Canadian society create complex challenges for media.

Be aware of words and situations which suggest that all or most members of a racial or ethnic group are the same. Stereotypes may lead to assumptions that are unsupportable and offensive. They cloud the fact that almost all human attributes may be found in all groups within a society. For instance, a writer may unconsciously assume that all minority employees or community members are 'poor' or 'deprived' when many are actually well off and highly-educated. Just as society at large has its poor and its highly educated elite, so too do all minority groups. Pay attention to the representation of different groups within the larger collective of "poor."

Avoid qualifiers that reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes

A qualifier is information added that suggests an exception to the rule. For example, an account of an event might read, "The intelligent black students were guests as part of an orientation programme . . ." Under what circumstances would someone write, "The intelligent white students. . ."? To determine whether or not a qualifier has

been used, imagine a sentence with the word "white" in place of "black" or substitute an Anglo name for an Asian one. Bias is subtle. The more deeply it has been assumed, the more difficult it is to uncover.

Avoid racial identification except when it is essential to communication

Why identify a race? Few situations require it. For example, announcing the appointment of the company's first black president might be appropriate in some circumstances, but don't continue to refer to race in subsequent articles unless such information is an important part of the message. Race need not be the hidden subject of every piece that happens to include reference to a person of minority heritage.

Avoid using ethnic clichés

Too frequently, we reach to make a connection that is trite or inappropriate. Don't let ethnic clichés substitute for in-depth material. The media must avoid continuing to reinforce and perpetuate distorted views of any racial subgroup. Focused on the individual.

Do not use derogatory slang terms

Terms such as Huns, Krauts, Frogs, Japs, Chinks, etc. are derogatory terms that evolved historically for the purpose of instigating antagonisms and hatred. Perpetuation of these terms only aggravates and promotes divisions between people.

Be aware of the possible negative implications of colour-symbolic words

Choose language and usage that do not offend people or reinforce bias. In some instances the words "black" or "yellow" have, as the language evolved, become



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associated with the undesirable or negative. While some implications are less openly disparaging, others, such as a “black reputation” or “yellow coward” are extremely offensive.

Be aware of language that, to some, has questionable ethnic connotations

The fact that a word or phrase is not personally offensive to the communicator may not be an adequate test. Because our language has evolved from a Eurocentric, mostly white, culture we see a cultural bias between a “heroic” cavalry charge and Indian “massacre”.

Avoid patronizing and tokenism with regard to any racial or ethnic group

Minorities should not be presented as if they are a burden to the rest of the world. Non-white Canadians are often asked, “How long have you been here?” or told “You speak English very well.” The assumption is that all non-whites are foreign-born, thus denying the history and contribution made by non-whites in Canada.

Grant equal respect to people in visual media, without regard to racial or ethnic group

No matter how subtle, the implication in many visual representations is that certain groups belong in particular roles. Be careful with the dynamics of photographs and graphic images. Be aware of every element from stereotypes represented to who is pictured larger or smaller, dominant or submissive to whom.

STEREOTYPED REPRESENTATIVES: PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MEDIA

Aside from using non-sexist language, it’s important to realize that stereotypes of women that easily slip into your writing. Here are a few observations from the Women’s Action Alliance study of media and advertising in the early 1980s. Twenty years later, see how surprisingly little has changed.

Women are relatively invisible

Men outnumber women two to one in television commercials. Women are particularly absent from advertisements for expensive products and from advertisements shown during prime time. Black women and lesbians are particularly invisible in the media. The implication is that they are not worthy of any sort of regard — positive or negative.

Women are relatively inaudible

While women are only rarely seen, they certainly aren’t heard. The typical television ad features a voice or authority over the visual image.

Women are not shown in varied occupations

Despite the increase in women’s employment, the representation of women working outside the home has not changed substantially.

Women are shown doing housework

Here the percentages probably capture the sad reality. Women in magazine ads do housework approximately 11 times as often as men.

Families are emphasized more for

women than for men.

Newspaper articles about women are more likely to mention a spouse than do articles about men.

Women’s bodies are used differently from men’s bodies in advertisements

In magazine advertisements, women are more likely than men to serve a decorative function, such as being seductively dressed or caressing a liquor bottle. Men’s faces are more prominent in magazines and newspapers while women are more likely to be shown with their whole bodies.

This being said, in recent years magazines like *Details*, *GQ*, and *Esquire* have begun to use men in similar fashions. They can be seen scantily clad in advertisements for everything from jeans to watches.

ANTI-LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL BIAS

- Distinguish between the gay and lesbian communities. References only to the gay community will not necessarily speak to both groups.
- Disregard stereotypes that imply all gays are sex-crazed, all lesbians are either butch or femme, all gay men are effeminate, that all dykes are into folk music, that lesbians hate men, etc.
- Don’t refer to the gay community whenever you write about AIDS. But don’t ignore the devastation that AIDS has caused in the gay community either. Mention it if it is part of the story, don’t if it’s not.

- Don’t refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual



3 Anti-bias guidelines

lifestyles as ‘alternative’. ‘Alternative’ implies it is not normal or regular. Similarly, don’t call someone an ‘avowed’ homosexual unless you refer to all straights as ‘avowed hets’. Only make reference to sexuality where it’s relevant.

- Represent varying views and opinions amongst gays, lesbians, bisexuals. Don’t assume they all have the same politics or are ‘progressive’.

BIAS AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

There’s more to covering disabilities than wheelchair access. But here are a few points to keeping your language less biased when writing about these issues.

- Stress ability over disability.
- Measure people with disability against their own criteria, not so-called ‘normal’ ability.
- Do not define any person solely according to their disability. Avoid using adjectives as nouns (i.e. ‘the blind’ for ‘blind people’) and unfairly limiting people.
- Use words and phrases that appropriately describe and do not offend. Ask members within your community whether they prefer ‘physically challenged’, ‘disabled’ or ‘people with disabilities’ — don’t make up their mind for them. Avoid stigmatized words like ‘crippled’, ‘lame’, ‘dumb’, ‘retarded’.

FURTHER GUIDELINES FOR AVOIDING BIAS

- Don’t use general terms such as “people”, “women”, “doctors”, etc., to refer only to straight, white people, and then label everyone else. This creates and reinforces the assumptions that straight whites are the norm, the real people, and that all others are aberrations. It is seeing some people as the center, and everyone else as variations on the theme.
- The concept of ‘progress’ is not universal, and should never be used as a measurement for judging peoples’ work.
- Don’t portray a class/group of people as victims. ‘AIDS victims’ should be ‘People with AIDS’.
- Don’t generalize or portray a group/culture as speaking in one voice/holding one opinion.
- Don’t use one person to represent his/her race.
- Use inclusive language in occupational titles. Use “fire fighter” instead of “fireman” and avoiding the exclusive use of masculine words in making general references, e.g. “synthetic” instead of “man-made”. ◀

Mary Jankaluk is a former typesetter from the Excalibur at York University (1989-90).