This week's question to consider:
I have heard that there is bias in media. How can I tell? How can I assess the veracity of a media piece? Does it matter? Do I need to just stop watching the news in all its forms?

Pro tip: There is no such thing as a lack of bias. The trick lies in identifying the bias, so that we can take in information within context. Sometimes, the bias is glaring, clear. Sometimes, it is subtle. But it is always there.

Today I'd like to talk about the news. You know, the news? We get it in many ways now: network television, radio, and newspapers, whether in print or online. Essentially, it is the adult version of [doomscrolling](). (Shh, spellcheck, that is a legitimate compound word, just ask Merriam-Webster.)

Image source: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/media-bias-in-canada

For those of us who take in the news, how do we take bias in media into account? Does this mean we have to avoid it? That was a rhetorical question, because of course not. Now, it *is* probably healthy to take a break from consuming the news in all its forms if it happens to be taking an emotional toll, but I am in no way advocating for a permanent news break. More like the occasional news hiatus. The spiral of doom must be averted, and we've got to protect our mental health, you know? It's hard on the head and heart to be constantly aware of the bad news that is everywhere.

And this is kind of the point. There is no separating taking in news, and the effect that news has on our mental state. It's very rarely purely good news anywhere, unless we're talking about specialized shows like *Some Good News*, John Krasinski's answer to the gloomy feeling collectively felt at the onset (and continually felt!) of the pandemic, in response to the news cycle of doom. Naturally, that show is also not without its biases, but I digress.

Indisputably, there is bias in media. In recent memory, the loudest instance of obvious bias asks us to look no further than the way the war in Ukraine has been covered, most especially the shock that so many journalists displayed in early days. It is difficult to argue. Journalists covered news of the conflict while exclaiming their surprise that it could happen to people who looked

like them. In Europe. In civilized places. They weren't far from stating, outright, "I can't believe this is happening to the white people in the white places."

For example, Charlie D'Agata, of CBS News, in February 2022: "[…] but this isn't, a place, with all due respect, you know, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades, you know, this is a relatively civilized, relatively European – I have to choose those words carefully too – city where you wouldn't expect that or hope that it's going to happen." Much criticism ensued, and D'Agata apologized the next day (at the end of this video).

This example is by no means an isolated one. Reporters all over the world shared this flavour of shock. The Daily Show's Trevor Noah did a bit on it that shows the breadth. The situation was so ubiquitous that TikTok comedians parodied the trend in their skits. A measure of having gone very far indeed.

To be clear, this focus is not to condemn the reporters who exclaimed their surprise, showing underlying biases and opinions they held (and may or may no longer hold) about African countries. There's no one right way to talk about a conflict. It's a major conflict. It is likely to stir up feelings, especially if you have a connection to the place. There isn't something inherently wrong with recognizing someone's humanity. What's interesting is that it was such a widespread reaction that it highlighted a widespread problem in how we collectively view certain countries. It goes back to the notion of perceiving some countries as third world countries.

That said, is it disappointing to have people react as if it is the first conflict they have experienced? Sure. Is it upsetting to realize that we are more affected by conflict occurring in certain locations? Of course. This isn't even the first time this has happened. In 2015 with the Paris attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, the ensuing outpouring of attention and dialogue reflected similar biases. You may remember seeing *Je Suis Charlie*, a slogan of solidarity emphasizing the protection of free speech. I remember watching, on a smaller scale, those around me care deeply about that, and wondering why they cared about this, when they hadn't cared much about the 2011 Egyptian revolution. They hadn't shared my devastation at how the government was responding to protestors in Tahrir Square. I remember mulling this over, wondering, thinking about those who are learning.

It's been years now, this mulling, and I have come to a few conclusions. First, we all have biases, journalists included. Second, highlighting this isn't about pointing blame. It is about how we move forward with the new knowledge.

It is more important to think about how to go forward with new knowledge of our inherent biases and working to be aware of them so that we can move away from them. This is such a crucial aspect of all social justice efforts. To become more actively antiracist, we must work to identify our racially themed biases, and we must take care to realize them to develop a broader context. It is with the sensitivity that we have previously held those biases that we become

more articulate in moving antiracism forward. In becoming aware of these biases, identifying them, and naming them, we can move forward, ultimately leaving them behind.

Understanding previously held biases means we can articulate how we moved from having them, to no longer holding those points of view. We then become bridges to a new understanding. Understanding that there is bias in media, and that our consuming media feeds our biases if we never examine those potential biases, helps us create an antiracist world.

The best part about the initial shocked reaction of journalists around the world was the immediate and widespread criticism of the racism displayed. This is an example of calling out being effective. It shows that people are noticing. People are asking for a change.

Recommended Resources:

The Canadian Encyclopedia (J. Tattrie, May 2020) | Media Bias in Canada
Science News for Students article (A. Pierce Stevens, June 2017) | Think you're not biased? Think Again
League of Women Voters Interactive Map | How Reliable is Your News Source? Understanding Media Bias 2022

Admittedly biased, but continually working on seeing those biases,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
Therese Trofimencoff *(she/they)*