



## MEDIA AWARENESS NETWORK

[www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca)

**Level:** Grades 9-12

### About the Author

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### Lesson Plan

## Too White: Minority Representation in News Media

### Overview

In this lesson, students explore the issues surrounding representation of non-white people in the newsroom and in daily newspapers. The lesson begins with a class discussion about diversity and the ways in which visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples may be misrepresented or under-represented in mainstream media. Students examine diversity statistics of Canadian newspapers and respond to an article about the lack of diversity in Canadian newsrooms. Activities include creating a mainstreaming checklist for journalists; conducting a diversity audit of Canadian newspapers; and writing letters to the publishers of Canadian newspapers.

### Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- ♦ awareness of the imbalance that exists in the representation of First Nations peoples and visible minorities in Canada's daily newspapers
- ♦ understanding of the effects of under-representation, negative coverage and stereotyping on non-white people and on society's perceptions and attitudes towards them
- ♦ awareness of the challenges facing visible minority journalists

### Preparation and Materials

To better understand the ethical issues pertaining to inclusiveness in journalism, read [Cultural and Racial Diversity in Canadian Broadcast Journalism](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/diversity/diversity_journalism.cfm) <[http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/diversity/diversity\\_journalism.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/diversity/diversity_journalism.cfm)>.

- ♦ Collect a week's worth of daily newspapers from four or five different parts of the country. Talk to the manager at your local magazine store and request back-dated, unsold issues, or visit your public library. Other members of the staff, or your students' families might also be sources. If this is not possible, a week's worth of your own city's newspapers will suffice.
- ♦ Download "[Crime Not Black and White](#)" to read to your class.

Photocopy student handouts:

- ♦ [Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Canadian Newspapers](#)
- ♦ [Diversity in the Newsroom](#)
- ♦ [Diversity Audit](#)
- ♦ [Invisible: Diversity in Canadian Newsrooms](#)

## Procedure

- ♦ Do you think that First Nations peoples and visible minorities are well represented in Canadian newspapers?
- ♦ What are some of the problems surrounding representation of these people? *(The problem surrounding the representation of ethnic minorities in Canadian newspapers is twofold: there aren't enough non-white journalists and newsroom staff and there is bias in how minorities are represented in the news.)*
- ♦ In which sections of the newspaper do we usually find stories about non-whites? *(Non-whites are most represented in sports and entertainment sections. When stories about non-whites appear in the news section, most are negative, and few stories reflect the interests of Aboriginal and visible minority communities. Under-representation is most acute in business and lifestyle sections.)*
- ♦ What perceptions does this bias create? Read "[Crime Not Black and White](#)" to your students and discuss the bias and assumptions within the article.
- ♦ Our newspapers are supposed to reflect the concerns of our society. How might you feel if you didn't see yourself in the newspapers? *(Under-representation may leave individuals feeling marginalized when they don't see their concerns and interests reflected in the society in which they live. Negative representation and stereotyping can also lead to feelings of anger and frustration.)*
- ♦ Ask students to respond to the question: "Can newspapers afford to be out of touch with their communities?"  
Distribute [Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Canadian Newspapers](#) (Carleton University) and [Diversity in the Newsroom](#) (Ryerson Polytechnic University) to your students and discuss.

The Ryerson study was conducted in 1993. In 1995, the Canadian Newspaper Association issued a revised Statement of Principles. Although it makes no specific mention of the representation of visible minorities, the section entitled "Community Responsibility" instructs its members to treat all people equally.

It states:

*The newspaper should strive to paint a representative picture of its diverse communities, to encourage the expression of disparate views, and to be accessible and accountable to the readers it serves, whether rich or poor, weak or powerful, minority or majority.*

- ♦ Comparing today's newspapers to the 1993 statistics in their handouts, do students think that the situation has improved?

### **Homework Assignment**

- ♦ Have students read Invisible: Diversity in Canadian Newsrooms and answer questions. Answers can be submitted, or taken up as a class.

### **Class Activities**

#### **Activity One**

The Ryerson study recommends that Canadian papers should create a "mainstreaming" checklist. In their journals, have students create their own checklists to promote diversity in news coverage. Share these checklists as a class. (This list should include an action plan for reporters, assignment editors and senior management. For a master list of suggestions, see the Canadian Race Relations Foundation tip sheet Reporting on Diversity: A Checklist <<http://www.crr.ca/Load.do?section=26&subSection=38&id=322&type=2>> (At the bottom of the page))

#### **Activity Two**

- ♦ Divide class into five groups
- ♦ Distribute copies of the Diversity Audit to group members
- ♦ Distribute newspapers from one city to each group and have them complete an audit
- ♦ Have each group present the results of their audit. As a class, discuss the findings. Rank the newspapers according to diversity representation.

#### **Activity Three**

**Guided Discussion:** Earlier, we discussed what you would do if you didn't see the concerns of yourself or your community reflected in your daily newspaper. Often, Aboriginal and non-white people turn away from the big dailies to the smaller community newspapers that reflect their concerns. But it doesn't look as if the big papers are listening. The Ryerson study found that newspaper publishers ranked "managing and covering diversity" 19th on a list of 21 secondary issues affecting the industry, behind "circulation cost control" and "competing with Canada Post."

Amnesty International uses the slogan: "Stand up for rights – sit down and write." As concerned members of the public, it is important to let the publishers of our daily papers realize that this is an issue that concerns and affects all Canadians.

## Homework Assignment

- ◆ Students are to compose letters to the editors of the newspapers audited by their groups.
- ◆ In their letters, they should express their concerns regarding this issue, in light of the results of their surveys (it is hoped that not all the letters will be negative – some students might congratulate a publisher on their newspaper's accurate, unbiased coverage.)
- ◆ One copy of the letter will be given to the teacher for evaluation, the second will be forwarded to the newspaper.

## Extension

- ◆ The statistics used in the Ryerson study are from 1993. Interested students might like to update the statistics regarding the hiring of nonwhite journalists by contacting the Canadian Newspaper Association.

## Evaluation

- ◆ Homework assignment
- ◆ Diversity audit and group presentations
- ◆ Letters to the newspaper and journal entries

## Crime Not Black and White



by **Randall Denley**  
***The Ottawa Citizen***  
July 28, 1994  
*Reprinted with permission*

### COMMENT

**Sometimes to see an issue right way up, you need to stand it on its head. Imagine a story that read like this:**

Ottawa police are swamped in their attempts to stem a wave of crime that ranges from fraud, to dealing drugs, to murder.

"There's one common thread in all of this," says Ottawa Police Chief Brian Ford. "In each case, the criminals are white."

While statistics on crime are not recorded by race, Ottawa police estimate that fully 90 per cent of crimes committed locally are by whites.

Police are calling for the hiring of more white officers, to help them better understand the customs of the white criminals.

Ford, who is white, is frank about the racial element in the crime spree. "Some of these families have been in Canada for generations. The scary part is, the criminals look just like you or me."

Police sources say that white criminals often wear sports gear or even business suits, but there is no distinctive dress code that could alert potential victims to the presence of a white criminal.

Spokesmen for local whites were shocked by the numbers, but defensive.

Jacquelin Holzman is a member of Ottawa City Council, an all white group that is believed to exert considerable influence within the white community. She goes by the street name The Mayor.

"Certainly the white people I know are the exception here," Holzman said.

"Land developers, lobbyists, people like that. All fine citizens. We sometimes forget about them when the media write another story about white crime."

The figures on white crime are "stunning, spectacular, stupendous" said Counsellor Richard Cannings. Cannings, who is white, is proposing a series of one-way streets and road closings to keep white criminals out of his ward.

Some criminologists question whether race is the dominating factor in determining criminal activity, pointing to poverty and lack of jobs.

"If government could find a way to put white people to work, many wouldn't need to turn to crime," says Prof. John Smith.

Spokesmen for Canada's native peoples were relieved that the white crime problem has finally been brought out into the open.

"We want genealogical testing done on these people so they can be deported to their homelands. Let England and Ireland deal with their own problems," said one.

Sounds silly when you put it that way doesn't it? Almost as silly as having to seriously discuss the notion that because some blacks are criminals, all blacks are no good.

We have read in the last few days about Jamaican posses, the latest ethnic crime threat. Now Jamaican-Canadians have to defend themselves again. Like when Ben Johnson, the famous Canadian runner became a Jamaican again after he used steroids. Like when Clinton Gayle, accused of murdering a Toronto police officer, became a Jamaican although he has lived in this country since he was eight.

One has to feel sorry for Jamaican-Canadians coping with the exaggerated publicity and no doubt fearing the white crime wave too.

## Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Canadian Newspapers

### Portrayal of ethnic minorities in photos (1995)

Newspaper	Positive Portrayal	Negative Portrayal	Neutral Portrayal
Toronto Sun	50%	42%	8%
Toronto Star	40%	35%	25%
Montreal Gazette	52%	31%	17%
Vancouver Sun	46%	29%	25%
Winnipeg Free Press	46%	30%	24%
Calgary Herald	22%	44%	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	45%	36%	19%

Only the Montreal Gazette managed to equal the number of photos/stories of ethnic groups, percentagewise, in the population it serves. Of all newspaper stories about minorities: 43% are news; 36% are sports; 6% are lifestyle; and 3% are business.

*Source: Reporting Diversity: Workbook for a Coverage Checklist, Carleton University, June 2-3, 1995.*

## Diversity in the Newsroom

In 1993, two studies conducted at Ryerson Polytechnic University by Professor John Miller and graduate student Kimberly Prince came to some sobering conclusions regarding diversity and Canada's newspapers.

### Newsroom Staffing

- ♦ In 41 daily newsrooms surveyed across Canada, there are 2,620 professional journalists (supervisors, reporters, photographers, artists and copy editors). Only 67 are nonwhite. That's 2.6 percent, or five times less than the percentage of non-whites in the Canadian population.
- ♦ Just four native Canadian journalists and 16 blacks work in those newsrooms.
- ♦ No one seems to think these low numbers pose a problem. Ninety-three percent of the editors feel the climate in their newsroom does not discourage either the hiring or promotion of non-whites. Yet only 11 of the papers say they have a strong commitment to hire minorities. One cites "backlash from whites" as an excuse for not doing more.

### Depiction in Print

- ♦ If you read the largest newspapers in five of Canada's most cosmopolitan cities, it's easy to form the following impression of visible minorities: Half are either athletes or entertainers; if they're in the news otherwise, they're probably in trouble; and few make any contribution to business or have noteworthy lifestyles.
- ♦ Minorities were depicted in 420 of 2,141 photographs published in a random week's editions of the *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Sun* and *Montreal Gazette*. Only six percent of those pictures ran in lifestyle sections; and only three percent appeared in business sections. Thirty-six percent were pictures of athletes.
- ♦ Only 14 percent of the 895 local news stories in those papers mentioned minorities or were about issues that directly affected minorities. This is far less than the 20 percent minority share of the combined populations of the five cities. Minorities also tended to be portrayed more negatively (49 percent) than positively (42 percent) in those stories.

### Diversity in Local News Stories

In this study, a story was considered positive if it was about a person of color achieving something, or if the angle tended to represent a minority viewpoint. This

would include, for example, a September 25, 1993 *Toronto Star* article about Aboriginal director Alanis Obamsawin winning a film award, and a *Vancouver Sun* story the same day on an Asian-Canadian launching a human rights discrimination suit against a private school that wouldn't admit her son.

This study saw great discrepancies in the tone used by these papers in stories concerning non-whites.

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|---|
| ◆ <i>The Calgary Herald's</i> margin was 75 percent negative to 19 percent positive   |
| ◆ <i>The Toronto Sun's</i> was 61 percent negative to 21 percent positive   |
| ◆ <i>The Montreal Gazette</i> wrote positively about minorities 72 percent of the time, and negatively 17 percent of the time |
| ◆ <i>The Toronto Star</i> and <i>Winnipeg Free Press</i> tended to be more balanced   |

The Ryerson study suggests Canadian papers could benefit from policies being adopted by large American papers to promote diversity in everyday news coverage. A "mainstreaming" checklist issued to all news staff at *The Seattle Times*, for example, suggests that reporters and editors should ask:

1. Have I sought diverse sources for this story?
2. Am I employing 'tokenism' by allowing one minority person to represent a community?
3. Am I furthering or battling stereotypes?

The study concluded that "Change doesn't happen without commitment from the top. So far, most Canadian publishers just don't seem willing to make that commitment." Has the situation improved?

**Source: Adapted from "How Canada's daily newspapers shut out minorities." by John Miller in *Media Magazine*, July, 1994.**

## Diversity Audit

Date of issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of stories, columns and opinion pieces in paper: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # stories, columns and opinion pieces that talk about or feature Aboriginal peoples / visible minorities: \_\_\_\_\_

Using only the stories that talk about or feature Aboriginal peoples or visible minorities, fill out the following form.

	Article 1	Article 2
<b>Headline</b>		
<b>Page/Section where story appears</b>		
<b>Writer:</b> -staff -wire service		
<b>Topic:</b> -politics -business/ economics -sports -education -culture -health -humaninterest		
<b>Portrayal of Aboriginals/visible minorities in the story:</b> -positive -negative -neutral		

## **Invisible: Diversity in Canadian Newsrooms**

By Federico Barahona

IN 1973, Ashok Chandwani arrived in Vancouver from India with three university degrees and three years of experience working for daily newspapers in English. As he set out to look for work, Chandwani says he went to see the man who at the time ran the Vancouver bureau of the Canadian Press. Soon Chandwani was offered a job — as an elevator boy.

It turned out to be Vancouver's loss, as Chandwani moved to Toronto, where he continued his job search. In 1974, he met with the editor of the *Toronto Star*, who expressed regret that he couldn't hire him.

"He said, 'I'd like to hire you, but we had a problem with somebody we hired from Sri Lanka, so I'm not going to take a chance,'" says Chandwani, now deputy managing editor of the *Montreal Gazette* and likely the highest-ranked print journalist of colour in Canada.

And that was Toronto's loss.

Ironically, Chandwani tells me the *Toronto Star* was among the first newspapers to offer him a reporting job when the *Montreal Star*, where he had finally found employment, folded in 1979.

On a rainy evening in Vancouver, as the city is paralyzed by a public transit strike in its first week, Chandwani sits with me in the lounge of an upscale downtown hotel; he says these two stories are meant to provide context. Minutes earlier, he talked about how much progress Canadian print journalism has made in terms of racial diversity in the past few years.

He means progress, considering how things started for him: "We come from that level of prejudice, so there has been progress," he says.

Chandwani is right, of course. It would be hard to argue that the landscape of Canadian journalism hasn't changed in the past 28 years, given Chandwani's current position.

But then again, Chandwani is not about to over-stress the case. He says, Canadian publishers and editors pay only "lip service" to newsroom diversity.

The fact is there aren't that many journalists of colour working for Canada's daily newspapers.

Here, almost all roads lead to John Miller, former chair of the diversity committee of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association (CDNA) and a professor of journalism at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto. In 1993, Miller conducted a survey for the CDNA, a body that has since morphed into the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA), which set out to do something that had never been done before, at least in Canada — count how many people of colour were working for the nation's daily newspapers.

"Surprise, surprise, we didn't find many journalists of colour," says Miller of the findings. Out of 2,260 professional print journalists, only 67 people of colour were working for the 41 Canadian newspapers surveyed. While only 10 newspapers had non-white supervisors, 16 newspapers reported having all-white staffs.

On the line from his office in Toronto, Miller explains this lack of diversity in Canadian newsrooms is due mostly to one thing – what he calls institutional racism.

And he says it's happening all across Canada.

"People hire people that they are comfortable with, that look like them, think like them," Miller says.

Chandwani says he does not believe there is a conscious effort to keep out people of colour. Rather, he says, there are institutional barriers, some of which are subconscious.

"You have to be pro-active about it," he says. "But you can only be pro-active if you are in a position of responsibility."

Almost eight years after Miller's survey, nobody knows if things have gotten better or if there are more journalists of colour working in the newspaper industry.

This is where my study comes in. I interviewed eight senior editors and managers from major newspapers across Canada about representation in their newsrooms. I also talked to the heads of all the professional associations of journalists, writers and editors in Canada, as well as the two major groups advocating newsroom diversity in the United States. What I found is a Canadian debate on diversity that ranges from concerted effort to frustration, confusion and silence.

There is crisp frustration in the tone of his voice and he doesn't deny it. In fact, Nicolas Hirst labels the tone for me. "If you hear a level of frustration in my voice, then I've got a level of frustration in my voice," he says.

Diversity is something he knows quite a bit about, he says. It's something he has tried to tackle but without much success.

Hirst has been the publisher of the *Winnipeg Free Press* for the past four and a half years. Yes, he says he has identified the absence of people of colour, and particularly the absence of Aboriginal people in his newsroom, as a concern. (Aboriginal people make up roughly 10 per cent of Winnipeg's population; the city also represents the largest concentration of Aboriginal urbanites in Canada.) And yes, he has tried to tackle the issue with a number of initiatives, which include establishing a scholarship at the local college and various other outreach programs. In fact, Hirst calls his attempts to bring Aboriginal people into his newsroom a "dismal failure."

"I have had zero success. At this point, I don't know what to do next," he says.

However, Hirst may be over-stressing his case. His attempts to increase newsroom diversity haven't all been crushing failures. For instance, while he says there is not a single person in his newsroom who could be considered a person of colour or an Aboriginal, Hirst has tried to improve the diversity of the paper by bringing in

outsiders – specifically an Aboriginal columnist writing weekly, and an Aboriginal writer who covers city issues with a white reporter in a non-journalistic style.

But it is the failure to bring in Aboriginal people into his staff that frustrates Hirst the most.

Compounding the issue is the fact that his newsroom is not a very fluid one, says Hirst. Reporters and other staff at the *Free Press* tend to stay put. For instance, Hirst says that of the current management group, the people reporting directly to Hirst, there is not a single person who was hired by the newspaper before he arrived. That is, every single manager was an internal promotion. That makes tackling diversity a really difficult task, he says, adding that four and a half years ago, the managers at the newspaper were all men too. Hirst says that short of firing them all off and hiring new people – which he says he can't do – it's a very hard thing to address.

On top of this, Hirst says his recruitment drives have not had the impact he had hoped for. Last year, for instance, Hirst says he tried to set up a scholarship, specifically geared for students of colour and Aboriginal students, at Red River College's journalism program in Winnipeg, but the students did not apply.

I ask if he didn't have enough applicants.

"No, they did not wish to apply," repeats Hirst, matter-of-factly. "They told their instructors that they did not wish to enter into a competition where they were chosen because they were members of visible minorities."

"I need to think again about how I do that kind of thing," says Hirst, who also says he killed his newspaper's 'diversity page,' which existed before he joined it.

"It was a ghetto. If you're going to write stories that influence all people of different of ethnic backgrounds, then write them. But write them because they fit into your overall philosophy of news coverage, not because you think you ought to write something about Aboriginals, or Sikhs or anybody else. Do it because it's a story and your philosophy includes those things as stories."

In Montreal, Chandwani says he has moved in a similar direction. Not that long ago, he says, the *Montreal Gazette* had a multicultural page, which some ethnic readers resented as they felt it labelled them as different and others tolerated because it was better than nothing. Chandwani calls for integrated coverage, where a reader runs into stock analyst George Stonopolis regularly: "I don't have to say that he is Greek, he is there as something absolutely normal and common place rather than something exotic and different."

In the same vein, Hirst says that what happens in the Filipino and Sikh communities of Winnipeg are stories because they affect everybody. "We've written stories about the fact that immigrant doctors – we've campaigned on this – can't get work as doctors here, and they can only get jobs as taxi drivers. You can say that's a story about ethnic diversity, but I argue that I wouldn't."

Although some editors are pushing for better representation, another issue that surfaced in many of my interviews was that diversity is not on the national agenda — but should be.

"Is there such a thing as a national journalistic agenda?" counters Hirst.

I think of the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA), which funded John Miller's research in the early nineties, the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), as well as the Canadian Association of Newspaper Editors (CANE). In the United States, for instance, newsroom diversity became a pressing issue only when national bodies like the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) bought into it and made it a top concern. The ASNE has established benchmarks and sends out a survey annually to daily newspapers on newsroom representation. Because the results are published once a year, there is an ongoing discussion on how to best approach these issues.

But Hirst says Canada is a completely different story, suggesting there are no national organizations with a focus wide enough to consider these issues. At any rate, even those organizations are not all that diverse. For instance, Hirst sits on the board of governors of the National Newspaper Awards (NAA).

"That's a bunch of white guys," he says. "There are white women, too, but it's a bunch of white guys. I think it feels good about itself because it's got a gay person on it.

"But I would be hard-pressed to say whether there was a national agenda, in terms of newspapers at all, outside of a commercial agenda," he says, adding that the CANE is a "weak trade organization." (CANE is an offshoot of the CNA with about 60 active members and a new Web site.)

When I turn to CANE president, Carolyn Ryan, editor of the *Saint John Times-Globe*, I find a similar situation: an organization still trying to articulate its role within the Canadian newspaper universe.

Ryan, who sounds genuinely interested in this research and asks if I have encountered more current numbers, hesitates a little when I ask if her group has identified diversity in the Canadian newsroom as a concern.

"Not yet because we are so new," she says. "We're still trying to figure out what we should do and in what direction we should go."

The organization only formed last year, Ryan adds, after a group of editors in management positions decided they wanted to keep in touch throughout the year, as opposed to meeting at an annual conference. When Montreal journalist Michel Auger was shot earlier this year, CANE issued a statement condemning violence against journalists, but Ryan is careful to say the organization is not sure whether it wants to become training-oriented, or a group for advocacy. She suggests raising racial diversity would require CANE to become more of the latter.

"If we wanted to get into research or advocacy that would be a major decision about the focus of the organization, and we'd welcome discussion on that. So far it hasn't come up," she says.

Well, should it be addressed?

"I think it is being addressed by individual newsrooms. We'd certainly be willing to consider it as an organization, if members felt that was important," answers Ryan, who then admits diversity is more of an issue for some newspapers than others,

given regional differences.

When I ask her if, meeting with other editors across the nation, newsroom diversity comes up often, Ryan says she has only had casual conversations about it.

But the morning we speak, Ryan says she has just finished filling out a survey on newsroom diversity for the Newspaper Association of America (NAA).

I ask Ryan if CANE would consider sending out a survey, much like the survey Miller sent out in 1993, to measure how many people of colour are currently working for daily newspapers.

But Ryan raises budget constraints, saying CANE has about \$1,000 in the bank the morning we speak, as a barrier to carrying out that kind of research. Currently CANE members pay dues of \$25, and Ryan says she can't see raising them much higher. "We're concentrating on professional development for editors, on many issues," she then adds, suggesting that kind of enterprise might be something the CNA, with a larger budget, should be doing.

Ironically, I later find out the annual survey the ASNE sends out yearly is a cheap initiative, according to LaBarbara "Bobbi" Bowman, diversity director of the ASNE. Although she can't say specifically how much the survey costs to do, Bowman says all the organization does is mail it out, tabulate the answers, and release the results. Bowman says they shoot for a response rate of 65 per cent. If they happen to fall under that, she adds, then ASNE people hit the phones and complete the surveys that way.

Rob Cribb, president of the 1,500-member strong Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), says his organization has not really looked at newsroom diversity either, at a national level as a prime objective. As a national organization where people volunteer their time – the organization has only one employee in its national office, for instance – the CAJ is limited by the interests of its membership and the amount of time people are willing to dedicate to an issue.

Does he see a scenario where the CAJ could become more active on diversity?

"Our objectives are largely decided by our members," says Cribb, who is an investigative reporter with the *Toronto Star*. "We do what they tell us to do. If we had a call for a particular project, yeah, we're certainly open to anything like that."

Should it be an issue for the CAJ?

"I think it's an important issue," he says. "I think it's being realized in newsrooms and I think to some extent, although I think your thesis might go some towards answering this, there have been changes. Certainly in my newsroom there have been. It's certainly not the kind of invisible issue that it was five, 10 years ago."

"For example, we had a student caucus that is now dead, essentially, because there were no champions behind it, they moved on and they didn't do it anymore. So it's totally grassroots. If any member wants to start a caucus, we'd support them with resources," he says.

However, newsroom diversity is not necessarily a concern everywhere. In fact, the

editors whom I talk to seem concerned with the merit principle being pushed aside in favour of increasing diversity at all costs.

When I ask Gerry Nott, deputy editor of the *Calgary Herald*, whether racial diversity in the newsroom has been identified as a concern, he says it has not: "Not by our readers and certainly not by our managers."

He suggests he is not sure newspapers should be even trying to increase the ethnic make-up of their newsrooms per se. "I don't think the media should go out and socially engineer the demographics of its newsroom to reflect the demographics of its readership," says Nott. "I think that the best candidate for a job should get the job."

What newspapers have to do, he adds, is make sure that job opportunities are advertised to the widest base of applicants. Nott says newspapers do not advertise job openings as well as they could.

Because newspapers tend to generally advertise openings in other mainstream publications – excluding other forums like, say, ethnic publications – the pool of applicants is not always as diverse as it could be, Nott says.

"I don't think we do a very good job of giving people the opportunity to apply. The distinction there is that once you do that, and if we did do that, the best person wins," says Nott. "All things being equal and we've widely searched through different ethnic media, still the best person will win."

The intent is not to be purposely exclusionary, he adds, saying it has more to do with the issue not registering in "newsrooms' radar's very often."

Toronto broadcaster Hamlin Grange, president of the 100-member strong Canadian Association of Black Journalists (CABJ), agrees, saying often people of colour are just not part of traditional professional networks, which can result in them not knowing about potential openings, if they are not well advertised.

"I'm not prepared to say that the reason why non-whites are not in newsrooms in the quantities they should be is because the media are racist. I'm not prepared to say that," says Grange, who believes there might be other dynamics at work.

It is exactly this kind of barrier which Paul Woods – manager of employee relations with the Canadian Press (CP) in Toronto – says is part of his job to ameliorate, as he pushes his managers to ensure they are getting as wide a pool of applicants as possible.

In fact, a report looking at racist discourse in Canada's English print media by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation pointed out that people of colour are particularly vulnerable to these type of networking barriers. The report's authors said that examples of systemic discrimination include the reliance on referrals in hiring from white producers, writers and editors; the lack of comprehensive outreach programs for the employment and training of people of colour; and the lack of recognition for qualifications and experience gained outside of Canada.

"Racial diversity?" answers Fabian Dawson, who was born in Malaysia and is news editor of the *Province*, the largest circulation daily in Vancouver. "No, we don't have much of that."

Mike Bocking, president of the local of the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) representing the editorial staff of the Vancouver Sun and the Province, and who started out as a reporter at the Sun 20 years ago, says he has seen things improve over time. He does acknowledge that the Sun has "a number of reporters" who are not white. However, he adds: "It's only a handful and it's not sufficient. There was the opportunity to have made a bigger difference if they had chosen to do so."

Woods says achieving equity is a slow process. Because the newswire is federally regulated, it falls under the Employment Equity Act, which means that it tracks the make-up of its work force, something no newspaper in Canada is required to do. Woods says in 1999, there were 20 visible minorities working for the full-time newswire, while its entire workforce of journalists clocked at 301. Barely two – one woman, one man – were Aboriginal journalists.

When I ask how many reporters of colour work in his newsroom, Dawson starts listing names but his voice trails off after two reporters. "But you see, it's only a handful," he says, adding that it's difficult to balance the need to hire good reporters who have gone to school and have experience, against the need to hire an ethnically diverse staff.

Oddly enough, the only group I find really doing something on diversity is the Professional Writers Association of Canada (PWAC), a national organization of about 500 freelance writers, which has been running a series of workshops titled "Challenging Racial Barriers in Journalism." The workshops, which cost PWAC approximately \$14,000 and are partly funded through grants by the federal Department of Canadian Heritage, are an attempt to initiate a dialogue on issues of representation in Canadian media, says moderator Raheel Raza, a freelance journalist who appears frequently in the pages of the Toronto Star and immigrated to Canada from Pakistan 10 years ago.

With three workshops already in the bag – in Toronto, Winnipeg and Halifax – PWAC is now getting ready for its final workshop, which will take place in Vancouver this summer.

Maybe it makes perfect sense that a group like PWAC would be the only journalistic organization looking at diversity in Canadian media. The group does, after all, lobby for freelance writers; it is, by default, a group of outsiders, with many people of colour in its membership, says former PWAC president Frances Backhouse.

Two years ago, PWAC started an online symposium where journalists of colour discussed issues of representation. The online dialogue focused on the barriers people of colour faced accessing mainstream media – and it is from here that the idea of a workshop series spun, says Raza, who worked as a journalist for 20 years in Pakistan before immigrating to Canada.

When I ask what kind of stuff comes up in the workshops, Raza laughs. In an earlier e-mail she had described to me the Winnipeg workshop, which she says stretched her skills as a moderator. "A lot of resentment comes up from people who feel frustrated," she says, "but then, of course, you have to understand that the people who are on the panel are usually those who have succeeded, so from them we get a lot of positive input."

It is that frustration, of folks who haven't been able to overcome real or perceived barriers, which makes a discussion on race a difficult, emotional task, she adds.

"You always have a few [people] who are frustrated because they have tried, and for them it can be very challenging and they tend to vent their frustration at these events, and that's fine, as long as it stays within the boundaries of our framework," says Raza.

And she says it is a challenge – every single day is a challenge.

There is still a lot work to be done, she says, adding that when she calls newsrooms asking about diversity training, editors often respond by asking her why that kind of training is necessary.

Raza says language was a huge barrier when she first came to Canada, explaining she had to re-adjust the way she told a story—in a sense re-learning to write, but for Canadian audiences.

"It was difficult also to prove that a minority Asian woman had something to say that was of value to the Canadian reader," says Raza, and adds that often the barriers faced by journalists new to Canada are things like re-establishing their credibility and creating a network of contacts. Raza says those are specific barriers new immigrants face.

A member of the CAJ, she recommends that other people of colour join it, as journalists of colour tend not to join mainstream organizations. "I don't know if it's insecurity, or a fear of being isolated, and being one of a kind," she says. "I've gone to some of their conferences and found that I am the only Asian woman there, but that is not something that has to deter us. That is something that should urge us on to make contacts within the community, and for me that has been very helpful."

Source: Federico Barahona, "Invisible: Diversity in Canadian Newsrooms." In *UBC Journalism Review Thunderbird Online Magazine*. April 2001: Volume iii, Issue iv. Used with permission.

## Questions

1. According to this article, has the landscape of Canadian journalism improved in terms of diversity?
2. What is “institutional racism?” In what ways does it exist in Canadian newsrooms?
3. List some of the initiatives that have been developed by publishers to promote the training and hiring of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples. Have these initiatives been successful? Why or why not?
4. How might multicultural or diversity sections in newspapers “ghettoize” groups of people?
5. Why isn’t diversity part of a national agenda for journalists and newspaper publishers?
6. What are some of the reasons that are offered by newspaper organizations to explain the lack of diversity in Canadian newsrooms? Do you consider them to be valid?
7. How does the “merit principle” relate to diversity? Where do you stand on this issue? Why?
8. List the ways in which newspapers could improve their hiring practices to attract a broader cross section of applicants.
9. Have there been any significant initiatives to promote diversity in journalism? By whom? Do you think they have been effective?
10. According to Raheel Raza, what barriers exist for journalists who are new to Canada? What is her advice to these journalists?