Bias In The Media

There is a problem affecting millions across the United States and it is even affecting you. This problem makes it impossible for any american to be fully informed and given the truth. That problem is bias in our media. You hear everyday, no matter which news channel you watch or website you browse. We may look over bias as something that had no effect on our lives, but it is a much larger issue than it seems. Society has filled the media with bias in many shapes and forms, however, there are solutions to getting a fair and balanced view in the world.

Today there are many forms of bias, and some of them are harder to detect than others. The dictionary describes bias as, "...a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone." ("Bias") The media is full of bias because the definition can be put over any news source. There are many types of bias, including bias by story selection, bias by labeling, and bias by placement. However, there are three main types of bias that are the most dangerous and most used. ("Media Bias")

The first type of bias that is commonly used is bias by omission. This is when one position or side of a news article is left out. A great example of bias by omission is through headlines, and a recent event can portray the side that news sources lean to. A quick google search for "Nancy Pelosi" (As of February 11, 2020), shows many headlines from popular news sources that are full of bias. One from the New York Post states, "Petulant Nancy Pelosi is everything wrong with Democratic Party: Devine." This article clearly shows bias towards the right using words such as Petulant (child like) to get their point across.. In contrast, there is a headline from New York Magazine that reads, "Now Trump Is Charging Nancy Pelosi With Fake Crimes, Too." This headline shows bias by giving a strong statement with the word "fake", which could mean whatever the reader interprets the word as.

The second form of bias that comes along as much as the one mentioned above is bias by spin. This form of bias is when the reporter only gives their impression of the story and leaves out key details to distort the facts. An example of this is when CBS reporter Ray Brady reported on the decline in home prices on October 12, 1989. He stated that, "In the past, the American dream of owning your own home always had a sequel — live in it, then sell it at a huge profit…So another dream has faded," not highlighting that fact that this was good for buyers. In less than a year on March 16, 1990, the prices on homes had risen again and instead of giving highlights to how this was great for sellers he said, "So they keep looking. Thousands of young couples like the Wares, looking for that first house, looking for what used to be called the American dream." The bias by spin in his coverage is shown by only giving the negative side to the story and never highlighting the good parts of it. ("Media Bias: 8 Types [a Classic, Kinda]")

The last type of bias that is very prevalent in modern media is bias by selection of sources. This can be through only quoting one side (having only conservative quotes and vice versa) or using news sources that support one side. This form of bias most likely follows one of the others since biased headlines and opinion articles are backed up with sources that are biased towards their side. This is alway why it is important to make even academic papers have equal amounts of sources from both sides if you are looking for unbiased reports.

Bais like this has been forming for years even with it dating back to the 19th century, when most newspapers were made for or linked to a political party. Even though they had ties to those parties, they were for the most part unbiased and straight news. Bias started to form in newspapers when journalists came out of college, where they were formed by the ideas of the college and not their own (“A Brief History of Media Bias”) These biases lead to news being filled with more opinion and bias, over straight news. At the same time when news began to have more bias there were limited sources available for viewers who wanted to see multiple sides of a story. In contrast, today there are thousands of news sources to look at with the invention of the internet and form your own opinion and see a different side to a story.

The Society of Professional Journalists states, “[The Code of Ethics] as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.” They give a code of ethics on their website for all journalists, and many parts of the code directly speak against bias. It states that, “Journalists should avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.” Secondly it says, “Journalists should avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality.” It also states, “Journalists should never deliberately distort facts,” and lastly it says, “Journalists should avoid stereotyping.” All of these points show that there is no room for bias in journalism since it is clearly against the code of ethics. The only issue is that these codes are lighty enforced if at all (“SPJ Code of Ethics - Society of Professional Journalists”)

With all the bias going around in the media there is always the question is bias in bad. There is no simple answer to that question. Tom Griffiths says that it is rational to be biased when solving inductive problems (“Bias is Always Bad”). We all have some form of bias no matter who we are, and it’s hidden in things we do in our everyday lives. What restaurant to go to, what clothes to put on, what videos to watch and so on. There are also certain forms of bias that are biologically in humans. A great example of that is status quo bias. Experts describe status quo bias as everyone wanting to do the same things, sticking to the norm, and not changing anything. This could be explained by news sources that wouldn't want to change the way they are based or the way information is given out. Also, in thinking about how bias is bad, how does it affect younger generations who will go on to vote and make large decisions in life. People should learn their opinions from the world around them and not have someone tell them what to think. Because at some point in our lives bias is gained, but it is our own bias.

Bias is very much out there, and it’s in many known news sources. Fox News is an example of a biased news source. According to M. Huitsing at Media Bias Fact Check, Fox news has bias in the right and according to Pew Research Center their audience mainly consists of conservatiove. They also state that Fox News was the main source of 40% of Trump Voters. With that, some of their reporters are Trump supporters, leading them to only say parts of stories or air stories that favor Trump. Also, they are strongly biased in their headlines by using titles such as, “2016 Russia Collusion ‘Witch Hunt’ Now Extends to Jill Stein” (“Fox News”).

Now in mentioning Fox News there is also a fair share of liberal programs in the Media. MSNBC is one of those programs. According to M. Huitsing at Media Bias Fact Check, MSNBC has bias in the left and their audience mainly consists of liberals according to Pew Research Center. As with Fox News, there are some non factual comments that were driven by bias. An example is when a reporter quoted President Trump saying that he wanted to exterminate latinos, which he had never said. Even more so, MSNBC was considered to be the third most biased news source by the Knights Foundation in a 2018 survey, behind Fox News in second (“MSNBC”).

If new channels were not already spreading bias and false information, social media is the most misleading platform by far. First with the fact that many campaigns use social media to use targeted ads to pull in votes. In 2018 JB Prizker spent over $11 million on online advertisements online, and if anyone in Illinois was on social media, there was no way to avoid them (Pearson, Rick). These ads were targeted towards certain groups as well, and there had been issues in the past with targeted ads and some find it to be an invasion of privacy. In 2018, Facebook faced issues with privacy after it was revealed that an app in Facebook was storing people's private info and using it to make ads. ("The Cambridge Analytica Scandal, in 3 Quick Paragraphs")

Another issue with social media is that many false facts and info are posted and spread. Not just spread, but spread fast. Many people hit share before checking facts when the information they saw could be completely false. Influencers on social media could also be victim to this and cause the false information to spread faster. In the recent months, Instagram has rolled out a way for independent sources to fact check posts and stories, but this comes with its downsides. A lot of photos are victim to an algorithm, which can make some stories which are true be labeled false, and keep the false stories untouched.

With all the bias being spread there are steps that can be taken to know if there is bias in a story. The first step to take is to see if the news article is listed as opinion, because like the name suggests this is more thoughts than fact. Second, make sure that both sides are included in a story. This is very important because articles can give just facts from a liberals point of view or conservative point of view to hide the other side to the story. Lastly, if the article has facts that are distorted or have interpretations that only reflect one side of the story, then it is baised. There are websites that are dedicated to fact checking bias in the media, or conspiracy theories being spread on social media. Polifact.org is very good at giving evidence for theories spread over social media and the website Fair.org is dedicated to sourcing bias in the media and even gives ways you can contact administration to go against bias in your local media.

Many news sources claim to be "independent" or "unbiased", but in reality they are not. The closest form of unbiased news is BBC news. They are a very good source of information for global news and tend to be towards the center, but can lean to the left at times. BBC is not 100% perfect in any shape or form since it is also global news. Another source of news that is in line with BBC is CNN 10. CNN 10 is CNN's student news and even though CNN is known for being liberal it gives very straight news. Lastly, there are websites like Allsides.com that let the reader form their own opinion by giving them both sides of the story and facts.

To wrap it all up, there is a definite abundance of bias in the media and there is no way to completely stop it. It is up to you to scout out each side and form your own opinion and not let others say it for you. Information is the most important thing in the world and how it is displayed is even more important. And I have a message to all news casters, reportersm, journalists, and you reading this. Information is power, and like the great Uncle Ben once said, "With great power, comes great responsibility."