Editorializing Your Expertise: How to Craft and Pitch a Successful Thought Piece

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Abstract

Public discourse all but excludes women, who are woefully under-represented in print, audio, and televisual media. According to a recent report titled "Who Narrates the World" by the Op-Ed Project, female authored stories constitute less than 25% of the content at major media outlets, including the New York Times, Washington Post, and LA Times. A 2008 Rutgers University study found that 97% of op-eds by scholars in the Wall Street Journal, the U.S. newspaper with the greatest circulation, are by men. Arianna Huffington's Huffington Post boasts the highest percentage of women contributors, but the site's 36% female authorship hardly constitutes gender parity. The overwhelming majority of female-authored stories are on "pink topics" (a.k.a. "the four F's": food, family, fashion, and furniture/home) rather than general interest topics (e.g., economics, politics, history, art). Although the landscape is slowly changing, the voices that dominate and shape the news still come from western, white, privileged men. In this presentation, I will share my experience as a 2015 Public Voices Fellow with the Op-Ed Project and a 2016 Mellon Public Humanities Fellow, focusing on effective strategies for writing and pitching a thought piece and/or op-ed. This will involve a practical, hands-on exercise and, time permitting, a conversation about the larger sociological and pedagogical implications of cracking media's glass ceiling. Of interest to the group might be a discussion of the following topics: Should our knowledge have a public purpose? How do competing politics and public philosophies shape and inform our identities, aims, and practices as (female) scholars? How does public engagement expand the topics and scope of inquiry in our work? What kinds of interdisciplinary conversations are necessary or enabled by these projects? What distinctive things do the arts and humanities have to offer to the work of public engagement?

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