

March 24, 2018 Speaker Series--Education & Status of Women and Human Rights

Making Sense of Politics in a “Fake News” Era: Thinking Critically about the Ontario Election

Our speakers for the Education plenary were **Maija Saari**, Associate Dean of Film, TV and Journalism, **Nicole Blanchett Neheli**, professor in the Journalism diploma and Film and Television degree programs, both from Sheridan College and **Ann Rauhala**, Associate Professor, Ryerson School of Journalism and Teaching Chair, Faculty of Communication and Design. Along with research and teaching at the post-secondary level, all have extensive front-line journalism experience working in news organizations.

Maija started with naming the problem, exploring the rise of propaganda--intentionally misleading and deceptive stories combined with a rapid decline in discernment on the part of media consumers. The decline of "old media", including newspapers and nightly news broadcasts which generally were carefully researched, has changed to a non-stop mass consumption multi-media news cycle. Frequent leaps of logic not necessarily based on facts are presented as "breaking" news. Many consumers believe there is a media bias in the news reports, with splits similar to the USA in that conservatives tend to perceive a pro-liberal bias. Partisan identity creates a fractured basis upon which people perceive what is true, including political and scientific stories. Repeating false information gives it credence.

Nicole focused on an analysis of how data is increasingly used to slant what is presented to on media platforms, including on-line news stories. Algorithms determine the flow of information, can be embedded with bias and become the gatekeepers of how news stories are presented to individual consumers. This personalization can limit contradictory information, essentially providing news that reinforces the consumer's biases or beliefs rather than an impartial factual presentation. Millions of Facebook user's data was taken without consent and Canada's Privacy Commissioner is now investigating the impact of the breach on Canadians. Analytics were used to target and manipulate voters in the US and UK (Brexit); at this point the actual impact is still unclear. Analytics help determine which stories will be covered in order to entertain and attract a large audience, shape the formatting of stories and determine promotion/placement of content on websites and social media feeds. Interpretation of "news" is socially constructed and misinformation is easily spread. "Getting the mainstream media to amplify rumour and disinformation is the ultimate goal of those who seek to manipulate. Without amplification, disinformation goes nowhere." (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) Nicole's power point, including references and resources is available through twitter: @NicoleBlanchett

Ann focused on the impact of the information and disinformation currently on media. The fundamental principles of ethics requires journalist to verify but that is increasingly not the case with news on social media. The current 24 hour news cycles focuses on being first to break a story; verifying using multiple reliable sources takes time. While in the past there was a clear difference between objective reporting of news stories and an opinion piece, that is now often blurred and hard to unpack. Being mindful of the news source and possible biases is essential.

“The abundance of content on the internet combined with new forms of distribution have contributed to a crisis of confidence in journalism where it is hard to distinguish verified facts from untruths, ‘alternative facts’, or information that is laced with extreme agendas.”
(Newman et al., 2017, pg. 26)

Women continue to be in the minority in politics, journalism, as CEO's, and as directors/producers of media of all kinds. In news organizations--print and other media, women are still underrepresented in hard news and overrepresented in what are considered women's stories/sections. While employment equity legislation is changing in Federal institutions, it has not arrived in the private sector. For significant change, women need to have the power to control what gets talked about.

Solutions require an informed and involved electorate, using a variety of credible "fact checked" news sources. Generally reliable information can be found on: CBC News, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, Maclean's Magazine, CNN, BBC World News, MSNBC, TVO Current Affairs and Documentaries & TVO's The Agenda, The Conversation Canada, Policy Options Politique, The Canadian Journalism Foundation (Newswise), The Manchester Guardian (paid subscription) and Snopes (fact checking website). All news feed needs to be viewed/read with a critical lens.

Our speakers view the Canadian Federation of University Women as a watchdog, citing our mission to Foster Education and Lifelong Learning, Advocate for the Status of Women, Girls and Human Rights, and Promote Active Participation in Public Affairs. CFUW and other non partisan, well-researched advocacy groups are an important part of the solution.

For updated information regarding issues of concern to CFUW members, please check the CFUW Ontario Council and National websites regularly <http://cfuwontcouncil.org/> <http://www.cfuw.org/> and follow us on Facebook. If you are thinking of hosting your local candidates, note the February 6th posting and link on the OC website--[Questions to ask your local candidates in the 2018 Provincial Election](#).

Kathy Wosnick
Education Chair
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