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It seems the media is finally waking up to the problem of homogeneous newsrooms. Many publications are pointing out the disparity between the racial composition of newsrooms compared to the cities that they cover. Some are trying to rectify the problem by opening up trainee schemes targeting young journalists from minority backgrounds.

There is a clear need for a range of different voices to cover the issues facing our world today. Increasing xenophobia—whether racism, antisemitism or Islamophobia—is shaping the political narrative in countries around the world, impacting everything from our experience of social media to the prevalence of physical hate crimes. Movements like #MeToo or the push for gender-neutral bathrooms show the importance of having female and gender non-conforming reporters shed light on the major stories of today. It is not difficult to argue that without representative journalists, our media cannot expect to produce accurate news. However, as we rally for greater newsroom diversity, it is important to also interrogate the role of newsroom diversity; it isn't just about covering certain issues, but about making the media more diverse as a whole.

To flesh out this issue, we spoke to [s.e. smith](#), who founded the online database ‘[Disabled Writers](#)’, together with [Vilissa Thompson](#) and [Alice Wong](#).

“We were concerned about the limited coverage of disability issues and by the fact that it was produced almost entirely by non-disabled white men” s.e. smith shares, describing their first goal: eliminating the “we can’t find any” excuse that editors and journalists use when they are too lazy to find disabled reporters or sources for a story about disability.

However, their second goal is to show that disabled journalists can—and do—cover issues that have nothing to do with disability.

“A disabled attorney may have expertise on reproductive rights,” s.e. smith continues.

“A disabled cultural critic may focus primarily on urban design and transit, integrating some coverage of accessibility into that work. A venture capitalist may have valuable insight into Silicon Valley and why some companies rise while others fall.”

All too often, members of underrepresented groups are asked to write and speak only about their lived experiences—trans* people are expected only to write about trans* issues, and visually impaired journalists are expected to only write about guide dogs and living while blind., from the trans person expected to focus solely on trans issues to the blind woman expected to only discuss vision impairment and guide dogs.

For s.e. smith, championing journalists from a range of backgrounds to cover all sorts of different topics is a key part of newsroom diversity.

“It's key to stop trying to force people to tell personal stories or make themselves the news; some people just want to report,” s.e. smith continues. “True newsroom diversity must include acknowledging people as experts in fields that have nothing to do with their identity.”

It is not only accurate representing important issues, or creating a more level playing field for journalists of all backgrounds. Recent studies show that a lack of diversity in the newsroom has a disastrous impact on overall trust in the media—something that cannot be ignored when trust in the media is at an all-time low. It is worth noting that British print media has the lowest rating for trust across Europe, and is [94 percent white, and 55 percent male](#) .

Logically, improving diversity will only improve trust—something we desperately need. However, it is important to remember that newsroom diversity does not stop at hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is also about changing policies, broadening source databases and changing how journalists go about reporting.

It is also important to remember that there is variety within diversity—just a few hires is only the beginning.

“It is important to be aware that diversity and inclusion shouldn't cater to a limited number of people — if all the disabled people getting hired for newsrooms are white, heterosexual, cis men with a limited number of disabilities, that's not good,” s.e. smith elaborates, saying that it is only by hiring disabled people of colour, trans* individuals, and queer people that a newsroom could fully represent the breadth of the community.

So, what is the role of newsroom diversity? It is so much more than simply hiring a diverse team of journalists to cover a narrow set of specific topics. It is essential to levelling the playing field for journalists of all backgrounds, and ensuring that our press accurately portrays the people it claims to report on—from the sources who inform the story, to the reporters who gather it, the photographers who visualize it, all the way up to the editors who shape, and finalize the product. Only then can we be assured that our newsrooms are truly diverse.