

The real causes of 'missing white woman syndrome'

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Reporters looking for insight and research around the phenomena of "missing white woman syndrome," please see comments from Syracuse University professor of communications Carol Liebler of the Newhouse

School.

"Missing white woman syndrome" is a term that refers to the practice of [news media](#) focusing exclusively on the missing person cases of white women. This is not to say these cases are not newsworthy but rather that similar cases of Black, Latino and Indigenous men and women get overlooked or not given the same sort of intense coverage.

Liebler, who has studied this issue and has commented on it as early as the Jon Benet Ramsey case, says that "missing white woman syndrome" or MWWS, is nothing new and it is time to start delving deeper into the factors that cause it.

"The news [media](#) have once again 'discovered' the MWWS following criticism of their saturation coverage of Gabby Petito. We should not be satisfied with this [self-reflection](#), as it's happened before after other similar cases," said Liebler.

"The causes for MWWS are complex and reflective of dominant ideologies of white supremacy and beauty ideals. It's not just that Gabby Petito was white: She was young, thin, fit, blond. In other words, she fit societal definitions of beauty," said Liebler.

"News media are extremely reliant on [law enforcement](#) in covering missing people. My research shows that police, not journalists, are the real gatekeepers in determining which missing people media pay attention to," said Liebler. "Racial and misogynistic biases in [police work](#) are then reflected in what missing person cases are communicated to news media. Families are often shut out because news media rely on official sources."

Provided by Syracuse University

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