

**United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
Expert Group Meeting on
“Participation and access of women to the media,
and the impact of media on, and its use as an
instrument for the advancement
and empowerment of women”
Beirut, Lebanon
12 to 15 November 2002**

**A Call For A Global Grassroots Campaign To Enhance Women's Access,
Employment And Image In The Media Through Creating Additional
Standards For Paid Legal Notices**

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** The views expressed in this paper, which has been reproduced as received, are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations*

Introduction

Women have been prevented from full participation in the news media in the United States, which has resulted in their inability to enjoy the full fruits and responsibilities of citizenship.

Their presence in the newsroom influences and reflects their status in U.S. society. For example, in the 1940s, during World War II, women were encouraged to enter journalism, only to be sent home when the war ended and soldiers returned and claimed their rights to employment. Not all women left, however, and others trickled in until the 1970s, when the second wave of the U.S. women's movement created changes in every aspect of U.S. life. In that decade, women flooded into the journalism schools and the newsrooms. Those with seniority began to chafe for raises, promotions and other demonstrations of equal treatment. Several class actions were brought by women against major media companies, include *Boylan v. New York Times*, recounted in *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men and The New York Times*, by Nan Robertson (Random House, 1992).¹

Most of the litigation was settled with the media companies not making any admission of wrong doing but agreeing to make token payments to the women who sued and promising to do better. After the cases were settled, the conventional wisdom became that leaders in major media companies need not take any steps to hire, promote or retain women because the journalism school classes by the early 1980s had become predominately female, with some schools in the 1990s reaching the level of 70% female.

Not touched by the litigation – and rarely mentioned or measured within the profession – is the connection to women in the newsroom and in news media leadership and the coverage of women in public life and issues of special concern to women. It is widely assumed in the industry that the news is the news, regardless of who is carrying the laptop or camera, and, in fact, in order to gain and retain stature in her profession, female journalists often must demonstrate that her presence on the story does not alter how the news is covered.

A separate but related issue is the legal protection provided print, broadcast and Internet media in the United States. The Bill of Rights that is part of the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, religion and the press. Our courts are loath, as a result, to interfere with the operations of media companies and media companies are quick to exert their constitutional rights to forestall any attempt of government regulation. Therefore, while the Bill of Rights is fundamental to the success of the American democracy, its existence and related legal decisions make it unlikely that women could successfully seek any regulation of the news industry. In fact, the general trend in the U.S. has been toward deregulation of all industries. As part of this deregulation trend, the oversight over the broadcast industry once exercised by the Federal Communications Commission has been dramatically curtailed – including affirmative action requirements.

Current Statistics

Women's presence in U.S. newsrooms began to be measured systematically and annually for the first time in 1999. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) had conducted a newsroom census of members of racial minorities since 1980, but had not been willing to expand its annual survey until the board received extensive pressure from members of the Journalism and Women Symposium, the only U.S.-based professional organization for female journalists. Subsequent to the ASNE expansion of its newsroom census to include women, other institutions began measuring the women's presence in the news media and related topics. Thus, the data is all very recent.

- A September 2002 survey of news room personnel conducted for the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism² found that 64% of all women who see their opportunity blocked identify management preference's for the opposite sex – men – as standing in their way. Only 6% of men in a similar situation saw sexism as a barrier. Only one in five of the nation's top female editors say they definitely want to move up in the newspaper industry; one in two say they expect to either leave their company or the news business entirely.
- A July 2002 report issued by the Media Management Center of Northwestern University³ stated that the number of women in the very top jobs at daily newspapers had increased slightly since 2000, to 14% of all chief executive officers, presidents and publishers – up from 8%. Yet, women lost ground in their portion of all executive jobs, dropping to 26% from 29% in 2000.
- In its second annual analysis of women's presence in media management, the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania issued a report in August 2002⁴ that found that fewer than one in five board members of the nation's largest communications companies are women. The study, examined 57 of the largest companies and conglomerates in the entertainment, telecommunications and cable, publishing and e-companies, as well as individual operating units within those companies. Among 10 entertainment conglomerates, women comprise 13% of directors and 14% of executives. Fox Entertainment Group, Inc., and USA Networks, Inc., for example, listed no women among their top executives in their 2001 annual reports. Of the 23 largest telecommunications and cable providers, women account for 12% of directors and 16% of executives. And among the 13 most successful e-companies, women make up only 8% of directors and 18% of executives. Women seem to fare better in the area of publishing, where they make up 17% of directors and 22% of executives in the 11 largest companies. Scholastic Inc. had the best record overall of publishing companies, with women comprising 52% of top executives and 31% of board members.
- The earlier report released in March 2001 by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania⁵ found that only 13% of top executives of media, telecommunications and e-companies were female, and that women held only 3% of the "clout" jobs.

- ASNE issued similar findings a month later. The society's most recent annual newsroom census⁶ found that two out of three newsroom supervisors were male, as were 60% of the reporters. Yet, women were nearly half of those leaving newsroom jobs in 2001. The percentage of women in newsrooms has remained static even though women for two decades have been a majority in journalism schools and in 2000, women comprised 65% of the graduate students in journalism.
- While anecdotal evidence indicates the earnings of women in the media remain below their male counterparts, little research has been done to determine what, if any, wage gap exists. One study, however, found that the wages in the Internet Technology sector during the height of its boom followed the same pattern of discrimination found elsewhere. The *Industry Standard*, a weekly business magazine largely dedicated to coverage of the Internet economy, conducted a survey of nearly 2,600 of its newsletter subscribers to find out just how much money Internet workers are earning in each year. The results, released in September 2000 indicated that the median cash compensation – or base salary plus bonus and commission – of an Internet economy worker to be \$83,000. However, when the *Industry Standard* dug deeper into the compensation data to find out if this prosperity was being enjoyed across gender lines, the data indicated that the median base salary of women working in the Internet business is \$60,500, or 24% less than the \$80,000 median base salary of men. In addition to inequality at the base salary level, fewer women reported receiving a bonus as part of their compensation package. While 64.1% of men received a bonus as part of their compensation package, only 60.6% of women said the same. And the median bonus received by women – \$7,000 – was half of the \$15,000 median bonus reported by men.

The study's author wrote: "At the end of the day, it can be hard to feel sorry for Internet economy workers, both male and female. The nationwide median salary of Americans working full-time in the third quarter of 2000 was \$32,000 per year. That's only 43% of the \$75,000 median base salary of Internet workers. But this does not change the reality that the Standard found the compensation of women to be inferior to that of men at every job level, every level of education and every job sector of the Internet economy."

- Women's presence in the news columns is similar to their presence in media management. In the most authoritative content analysis of newspapers to date, a study of 100 daily U.S. newspapers by the Readership Institute of the Media Management Center at Northwestern University⁷ found that in the 3,500 front-page stories it analyzed, male sources outnumbered female sources almost 3 to 1. Moreover, the Institute found, men were more likely to be quoted in stories about politics, business, parenting, religion and science. Women, its report said, were more likely to be quoted about health, home, food, fashion, travel, education and travel.
- The absence of women's voices in news management and news columns is compounded by the lack of women's views on the nation's opinion pages and Sunday morning talk shows. Geneva Overholser reported on National Public Radio that during the first week after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* – the two dailies most read by policymakers – together had 65 signed opinion pieces. Four were by women. In the *Los Angeles Times* national editions that week, 22 out of 23 commentaries were by men. In December, the White House Project announced similar findings on Sunday talk show

appearances⁸. The project said its research indicated that women constituted only 10.7% of guests on these high-profile platforms before Sept. 11, and were even less visible in the following months, at 9.4% of guests.

The Result of Women's Absence in the Leadership of the News Industry

- The gathering and dissemination of news on public policy issues of specific concern to women is low priority, leaving many women without basic information to guide their decision-making;
- The coverage of public policy that directly affects women, such as federal assistance to low-income families, is *not* reported by news organizations as a women's issue, leaving many citizens uninformed about significant implications and consequences of major public policy initiatives;
- The voices of women who wish to participate in the nation's public policy debate are muffled, as they are unable to reach the large audiences necessary to build public support for pro-women policies.

Recommendations

Given the political and regulatory framework that U.S. media operate within, and given the apparent reluctance of the U.S. media to hire, promote and retain women – and the subsequent failure to provide women and issues of special concern to women access to its pages or broadcasts – the ordinary strategies for seeking social change through legislation, lawsuits and public awareness campaigns seem unlikely to be effective.

However, one rarely discussed but vital intersection of government agencies and the U.S. print media could be the source of considerable leverage.

Many government agencies, ranging from municipal governments to federal authorities, including many courts, either are required to or require others to advertise legal notices in news outlets with general circulation in the communities in which they are published. For many newspapers, these legal notices, as they are called, provide an important stream of revenue, and often make the difference between breaking even and profitability.

I recommend that each local women's organization within the United States:

- Take note which government agencies advertise with their local news media outlet;
- Ask the publisher or owner to provide the relative number of women employed in the same news media outlet and the number of clout positions are held by women;
- Arrange a meeting with the media outlet's publisher or chief executive officer to further refine the assessment;

- After further refinement, and, if the numbers are unsatisfactory, to begin lobbying local government agencies to require a statement of non-discrimination to be filed annually with that agency by each news media outlet paid to publish legal notices.
- The statement of non-discrimination, in addition to noting the media's compliance with the Equal Opportunity laws, should include the numbers of women in each of the news media outlet's departments – editorial, circulation, advertising and so forth, in comparison to men. Further breakdowns should include the persons of colour of both genders and should itemize the numbers of women and persons of colour in supervisory positions.
- It should be required that this statement be updated annually for the news media outlet to continue its eligibility to receive paid legal notices.
- The notice should be a public document and published in the news media outlet's own publication annually.

Taking these steps will likely generate discussion within the media establishments as well as government agencies and non-governmental organizations, which should be enormously fruitful in accomplishing increased awareness of women's access to, portrayal by and employment in the media as well as set the stage for improvement in each of the three areas of concern to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

ENDNOTES

¹ Betsy Wade was the name plaintiff in the case, using her married name, Elizabeth Boylan. Wade is now retired from The New York Times and is a member of the advisory board of Women's Enews.

² *The Great Divide: Female Leadership in the Newsroom*, September 2002. A survey conducted for the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, conducted by Seltzer & Company, Des Moines, Iowa. Link to PDF at: <http://www.pewcenter.org/>

³ *Women in Newspapers 2002: Still Fighting an Uphill Battle*, June 2002. A report published by the Media Management Center at Northwestern University, by Mary Arnold Hemlinger, Ph.D and Cynthia C. Linton. Link to PDF at: <http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/center/web/publications/win2002.htm>

⁴ *The Glass Ceiling in the Executive Suite: The 2nd Annual APPC Analysis of Women Leaders in Communication Companies*, August 2002. A report by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Link to PDF at: <http://www.appcpenn.org/reports/2002/glass-ceiling-v2.pdf>

⁵ *Progress or No Room at the Top?: The Role of Women in Telecommunications, Broadcast, Cable and E-Companies*, March 2001. Report by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Director of Research, Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Link to PDF at: <http://www.appcpenn.org/internet/publicpolicy/progress-report.pdf>

⁶ *Newsroom Employment Census*, April 2001 and 2002. Published annually by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Link at: <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=1138>

⁷ *Newspaper Content: What Makes More Readers Satisfied*, June 2001. A report by the Readership Institute of the Media Management Center at Northwestern University. Link to PDF at: <http://readership.org/resources/reports.htm>

⁸ *Who's Talking? An Analysis of Sunday Morning Talk Shows*, December 2001. Report by The White House Project. Link to PDF at: http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org/research/who_talking_full-report.pdf