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Women making headlines: influences of women editors on newsroom socialisation and the news agenda

Luimes-Sindane, Wilhelmina Henrietta

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Appendix D

How does a woman editor influence the publication on gender issues such as women's representation in news selection, if she does?

[The editor] brings a woman's touch to the paper and there are more features now than previously. She has also made me more aware of gender issues such as women's representation in not just copy, but pictures as well and phrases like spokesman versus spokeswoman and not talking about the man on the street.

Newsrooms have a culture that influences how you work as a journalist, What specific examples can you tell me of times where the expectations of the newsroom were in conflict with your identity as a woman? How did that affect your work?

I can't really think of something.

How do you think your management style is influenced by your gender, if at all?

I think that I'm a lot softer on my team than a man would be. But I don't think that that is a negative thing, I think that that is a positive thing, and I take into account personal issues and see a bigger focus than just the work at play which I think is a positive thing. Also only women report to me, I don't have men on my team. I don't think the men in the newsroom often appreciate how I treat my team. **They may view it as being rather weak, they would prefer me to take a more aggressive stance.**

There are very few women, who hold leadership positions in the newsroom, why have been the factors in your success?

I would like to think that it comes down to my performance and my ability. Yeah… obviously I'd like to think that it was that… most probably the relationships that… I would have forged with my superiors.

How has your concept of news developed? How does it influence the process of news production? News selection?

I can't say that… I'm really… because I am more on the sub-editing side, I'm not really in control or involved in the news selection.

You are in the sub-editing position… if you have concerns, or think something shouldn't go to print … do you raise them.

…If there are concerns I will raise them with our news desk. I trust my news desk and I trust my editor, and if I do have concerns, I will bring it to my news editor and expect her to sort out my problem. We have an open door policy and can come and discuss things with her …

Give some examples of when in your career gender was an issue in the workplace? Positive or negative.
I can think of one incident, where a meeting was called to discuss attitudes … or negative attitudes…. About misogynism… in the newsroom… it would have been about three years ago, under a different editor. There were complaints that some women journalists were not

being taken seriously and that there was still a bit of an old boys club within the newsroom. I think often just along that line…**I think that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish what we think as sexism, can also be ageism. Because normally when gender becomes an issue it is often with an elder… elder male.**

What restrictions are there on you, as an editor, when you implement changes you think are necessary within the newsroom in regards to gender bias?
I think that I have quite a big influence, myself and my editor, and one of the things that my editor stresses to us is that she wants the subs desk, predominantly women, to feel empowered. And that is one of the most important criteria for me … so I feel I am quite influential.

What have been the common expectations of newsroom environments during your progression as a journalist within the different newsrooms you have worked in?

I have found is that most people want me to be more aggressive in my management style. I have only been a manager on this paper. There is always a call for more aggression and I was told my a deputy editor, male, who told me that… In all other newsroom where there has been a chief sub, … they would throw his or her weight around and shout. You need to shout. You need to use your temper… show people that you are angry.

On a completely different level, my boss now, female admires the fact that I don't loose my temper and views that as a strength and as a positive attribute, rather than a negative attribute.

Do you think that the expectation that you should lose your temper as part of your management style is a result of gender bias?
Definitely, I think its is definitely a result of gender bias.

What is your understanding of objectivity?
To remove yourself from the situation and be able to see both sides of the story and not bringing your personal feelings into it. But not always possible.

How does this concept influence the everyday functioning of the newsroom?
Since it is not always possible to be objective, there is an everyday subjective influence that affects all aspects of the newsroom.

What other factors can you identify as influencing the production of news outside of the newsroom?
I think politics and other issues, social relations and personal opinions.

How are these issues managed?
I think that that is a function of our news desk and again for me it is a matter of trust, that I am trusting their judgement on a story.

There is a theory that the process of news selection in an organisation is influenced by advertisers and stakeholders, what has been your experience balancing the expectations in your role at the paper?
In the paper portion we separate advertising and editorial. The only place where we may have some concerns is our supplement section where we might run a feature to try and attract advertising.

Name some stories that highlighted gender-related issues in the newsroom during your time at the *Mail & Guardian*?
The Zuma rape case and the fact that some newspapers named the woman. The Judge Desai case, another story about a child rape and a picture **… rape seems to be the issue that sparks debate.**

Did the gender of the editor influence the method in which the stories were addressed?
Can't comment.

There have been numerous studies that highlight gender biases in the media and specifically the news, do you a woman editor deals with gender representation differently?
I don't think so but like I said I haven't been on discussions and I'm not aware of what impact she would have…for example, in a rape case.

Some theorists suggest the some of the issues such as gender representation will be addressed naturally as a result of an increased number of women in the workplace. What are your thoughts on this theory?
Yeah…I think more gender issues would be addressed more if there were more women journalists and more women editors. The whole idea that there would be more of a balance in how the media represented the different genders if women were better represented in the newsroom.
In our newsroom I think we do have a lot of women, I don't think that … that affects the editorial content.

I know you are not directly involved the news selection, but give that there are more woman in this newsroom, do you think that influences the way the M&G deals with issues like women's representation?
I should be but it again depends on whether the issues were newsworthy… just because a land reporter is female it doesn't mean to say that she is only going to write on land issues according to that…

No, I understand that… but the question would be as a female reporter, would she be more sensitive to say gender issues regarding land. Would she be more sensitive to writing a story which used women sources as well as men, would she be more sensitive to making sure that within her article, making sure that all voices are represented than a man would. Do you think there is a difference?
… maybe there would be in that … maybe her sources and that… would be shaped by her gender… in that who she… who she got to know and who her connections would be… but… I don't know … It's hard for me to say.

Has the environment of the newsroom changed under the leadership of a woman?
I feel the newsroom has opened up and now has more communication. It also doesn't have as many cliques within the organisation.

Where do you think woman are in South Africa in the media industry and where you see them going?
It appears to me that more and more women are getting involved in the media. It concerns me that it seems that there are still old boys within newsrooms and divisions of power. **I**

wouldn't like to think that gender can hold you back, maybe it still does. And I think that having a female editor now is more of a once off rather than a trend and that following this, we'll again have a male editor.