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

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Appendix E

How does a woman editor influence the publication on gender issues such as women's representation in news selection, if she does?
I think probably that there is an influence as a woman you are just more aware of those issues by virtue of you being a woman. And it has more of a resonance with you and you would want to see more of that highlighted within the paper. I think specifically that since we have had a woman editor, we have had a much bigger focus, not overtly so much, but that we've had a focus on gender issues, where as in the past there have been far less stories. I would like to think that we have more articles that deal with issues that relate to woman.

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 does this affect your work?

Those do arise in issues such as woman dealing with a rape, and I think that as a woman I should really be more sensitive to dealing these kinds of articles more sensitive to both the victim and the perpetrator. And being careful to be 100% sure … of the perpetrator, case in point being the Zuma issue, rape issue at the moment. But I think that no matter who they are, I think that both the victim and the perpetrator shouldn't be named before they have appeared in court. …. Often the issues that have important people involved in them….we had a similar discussion this morning where I was of the opinion that we shouldn't mention the name of the woman in the Zuma rape case. The rest of the newsroom said it has already been done in other newspapers, we might as well go ahead. My feeling, as a woman is obviously in conflict with that. But at the end… We named her.

How do you think your management style is influenced by your gender, if at all?
I would like to think that I am more compassionate and understanding as opposed to a male manager, by virtue of the fact that I have children. And it might sound a bit condescending to say I look at my reporters as my children, you know, some of them are older than me, But yeah, I think that plays a huge role that I'm not as strict and to not kind of just judge,… I give other people a chance. I think that is definitely influenced by my children.

There are very few women who hold leadership positions in the newsroom, why have you been one of the few who is well on her way up the ladder?

I think that a lot of it boils down to being at the right place at the right time. And luck…plays a role in that as well. Having the right managers or editors who believe in you. I've proven myself in the M&G in previous positions that I have held. I'm reliable, responsible and that I am good at what I do. So I don't want to kid myself and think that … if there wasn't a woman editor in this office, I'm not sure that I would have gotten to where I am so quickly, but I think that the culture of the M& G is quite different to other newspapers. It is based, or has always been built on a culture of equality and of … that just across the board that gender shouldn't be taken into regard. It hasn't always been as obviously in the newsroom, but I think with the last three editors that culture has come to the fore again. Like I said, completely based on being in the right place at the right time.

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

I think that my concept of news is based on what I think is relevant and what I firstly find interesting. Then I kind of look at, okay, what I think a reader will make of this. And the M&G specific readership, and the demographic into account. That obviously has changed from time to time. Different things, politically, socially, all have a role to play in that. I mean politically at the moment, anything with regards to Zuma and The Presidency in regards to the fight in the ANC is completely newsworthy in my mind. Anything that comes out of that we need to look at. But the importance of issues changes.

Give some examples of when in your career gender was an issue in the workplace? Positive or negative.

Negatively, in my previous position. Where I was the deputy chief sub and had been for like two or three years and went on maternity leave. And when I came back the editor in the newsroom decided to reassign me without any discussion with me because it would be easier for me because I was now, a mother. **Basically it amounted to me, having been demoted.**

How did you deal with that?
Well, the options were to take it up within the organisation and try to either get my old position back or to try and work out an alternative
The options were either to go to the CCMA and to lodge a complaint or to just leave. I chose to leave because it was going to be a long drawn out process. No matter what happened at the CCMA, the relationship had been irrevocably destroyed. My trust in the company had gone down so badly that even if I had wanted to remain, I don't think I would be happy there again. So … where circumstances were in dispute. That was my single… most bad experience.

Others?

Not to such a great extent. That was the big one. There are smaller ones **where people tend to treat you differently because you are a woman, male members of the newsroom might tend to talk down to you regardless of your background and your experience** and whatnot. **And they think of themselves as father** figures, you're the little girl. That is quite common and those are the things you deal with on a daily bases.

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 don't think that there are that many restrictions because I've got the full support of my editor. If need be we would be able to implement. I think that we are quite lucky at the M&G because we don't really have too many of those gender bias issues. I think that those people who are discriminatory on the bases of gender are in the minority and they soon find that that sort of thing is just not on.

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

Obviously breaking the news is always top of the list. There is always the issue of the editor being in the know of whatever is happening… and to a more internal extent, keeping to deadlines. And being able to get the copy in timiously and before deadline.

What is your understanding of objectivity?
My understanding of objectivity is being able to form or at least pretending to see both sides of the story. To give both parties, or however many parties involved, a chance to actually state their case. That's my understanding of objectivity.

How does this concept influence the everyday functioning of the newsroom?
There is always, for every article that we are dealing with there is always an opportunity given to those people mentioned within the article to respond. And often we have articles that are held back because we didn't get comment… There will obviously be time where we can get away with a no response, just before deadline but with bigger issues, we simply cannot do that. Especially when something is liable to things like defamation, …

What other factors can you identify as influencing the production of news outside of the newsroom?

I think the political environment has a lot of influence on what is considered news. There is always outside political interference, as well as judiciary issues. The freedom to publish is also a factor, and I think that is under threat, through things like interdicts.

How are these issues managed?
I think in the newsroom there is an awareness of what to watch for. And we are alert to those who have their own agendas and try to use the media. To make a specific effort to be sure that you are not being used, by sources.

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 of being a business-minded women and a journalist given your position as editor?

At the M&G advertising does not dictate what is written and we've never pulled a story because of advertising.

Name some stories that highlighted gender-related issues in news coverage during your time as editor of the *Mail & Guardian*?
The Desai case. There was a certain amount of taking sides in the newsroom regarding this case. By virtue of being a woman, I didn't feel that any of the names should have been published.

There have been numerous studies that highlight gender biases in the media and specifically the news, do you deal with gender representation differently from other people in your position?
I think I am more cognisant of issues related to women and as a result more sensitive. It's an increased level of awareness that influences how you approach your work when dealing with these issues.

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?
I agree in the sense that the more women you attract into an organisation, it can … makes the gender balance in the newsroom more equal. I think there are more senior women in the newsroom today than previously.

Has the environment of the newsroom changed under the leadership of a woman?
I think that with the appointment of a woman editor the women in the newsroom feel more empowered, and there is a sense that there will be more opportunities for women to progress and we will be able to rise within the company. I think in the M&G the environment is better for women that in other newsrooms. I think that with [this editor's] appointment as a woman editor, the perceived glass ceiling has been removed.

How is the process of news selection affected by women's leadership?
I think as a woman, I am drawn to stories of issues pertaining to me, things like violence against women, and other issues…

What about the role of women in media in South Africa?
I think women have come a long way in South Africa and I think that there are a lot more senior women now than in the past. Although only two woman editors in newspapers, I think that there is more scope for women now and I think that the two woman editors are pioneers so to speak within the industry…. I think they are being recognised for their efforts…