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

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Appendix A

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

I can't speak for all women editors. I can only speak for myself and from my own experience with [another newsroom].
That there is no category of women editors that captures all, and like men editors there are differences and they are … made up of individuals. ..So I can speak for myself and my experience.

I think I have an awareness of what the M&G is and what the M&G could be. So I keep that concept in mind…

I have an awareness of gender in the media. And have been fortunate to have strong role models and female mentors such as Colleen Lowe-Morna, Barbara Ludman … giving an awareness of how newspapers are and how they should be… I have been fortunate to have such strong female mentors in my life.

How do you think that comes across in the publication?

Hopefully it would come across in the number of voices represented in the paper.
… it will come across in who edits the paper and who writes in the paper… and it should come across in what we cover and the issues we cover, … strong… images, our sources, in the language used and in how we portray women;
Are they victims on the front page? or are they shown in a variety of ways and roles?
That it would come across in how we cover issues and what we choose to cover…
I don't always succeed in producing a gender balanced paper…
It is something … or sometimes I see that …
Newspapers… sometimes… are a manifestation of society and it is a lot easier to find male sources than female sources…
I think there is a lot of societal work that needs to be done as well to achieve that gender balance…

We are … have recently published a book of 300 women leaders in different fields. One thing we hope it will be able to do is to encourage … and raise women's profiles… as experts in different fields.

Was there ever a time where the expectations of the newsroom were in conflict with your identity as a woman?

I'm a strong woman and would never allow that to cause me to edit or do stories do anything in ways that I am not comfortable with
So … I'm the sort of person that would …work really hard at …… changing that culture
I would never choose to do an article that I wouldn't want or to write something that is in contrast to my values. It also has to do with the choices you make and … with choices of where you work.
And I wouldn't go work for an organisation that would put me in a position that would require me to do things were contrary to my values.

How do you think your management style is influenced by your gender

I think I have a more collective and cooperative work style … and whether that is gender or that is just me, I'm not sure.

And I run a flatter newsroom than my male colleagues…

I tend to talk through issues until people are sick of them and am more sympathetic and tend to listen more

But I have also learned that there are times when you need to take a leadership role on things and I have learned to make and take tougher decisions and to take action and implement them.

There are very few women who hold leadership positions in the newsroom, why have you been one of the few that has succeeded?

I think that …Being an editor is a hard life. It is stressful and unpredictable…
Issues such as potential lawsuits up to the value of a million Rands such as a currently a potential lawsuit with Jacob Zuma…
legal costs this year of R 1 Million.

…and I think part of it can be attributed to the fact that I don't have a family.
I have a husband, but no children and can be working up to 12 midnight and be taking calls in the morning as early as six from radio shows
And it's a position that doesn't fit in well with roles that woman play
I think before my appointment as an editor, there was an image of a 'male editor', it has been always a male figure, but hopefully that has changed now.
This would be an interesting study looking at [another editor]
And [another editor] at SABC Radio News …

How has your concept of news developed?

I think at the Mail & Guardian, it is an investigative newspaper and so news must be what you haven't been able to read somewhere else.
So it is very much non … you wouldn't read for example stories about the petrol pump crisis in the M&G… It is also a weekly paper and that affects what it deems as news. … and it is one with a political base as well.

Give some examples of when in your time as a journalist, gender was an issue in the workplace?

Honestly there have been few and I was trained at the Weekly Mail with strong women roles models . There was no gender breakdown on assignments, or beats and no tendency to breakdown news into soft news or hard news and the history of the paper Mail & Guardian not the same as say [another newsroom] where there I experienced more of a 'old boys club' which was hard to penetrate…

But I think that is very unusual.

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?

The most obvious one is that you… inherit or find an already established structure in an organisation… and people tend to work at the M&G for a long time and that sometimes mean you can't make the changes that you want to make… and that makes it tougher to change.

Sometimes you need to wait for positions to open up. Also I look for brilliant journalists and not women first. If I find a brilliant journalist and if she is a woman, …all the better.

Another is… from our training project three of the woman journalists found other jobs within the first weeks and the skills pool is small and competition tough and we tend to loose talent to corporate or government.

What are some of the common expectation of the newsroom environments in the different newsrooms that you have worked in?

a. to break a story and tell it first
b. tell story well
c. tell it first in radio or television
d. tell them better at the M&G – because it is a weekly newspaper

Each job, I have always had a gender agenda. And covered issues like women's progression in the workplace, sexual violence, business women's issues … .

What is your understanding of Objectivity ?

No one can be truly objective…I gave that up a long time ago. You will always have your own way of thinking, your own culture that influences you and the way you view things…

I look for things such as balance, accuracy and fairness.

For example the Zuma case, Zuma has a side and his Aid has a side. You must treat the story half and half.

How does this concept influence the everyday functioning in the newsroom?

I tend to hold stories back when they are not balanced
Or if I see they are not balanced, I will insist on changes,… ie the case of Nadine Gordon Biography,…
We covered an excerpt from the book with an opinion piece,…

News is somewhat of a dictated agenda. It has to do with court cases and what's happening during the course of the week...

We are doing some long term planning such as running a series next year called survivor – looking at how the poorest communities survive
Gini – looking at some of the wealth gaps that exist in society.
That way we can do more in depth journalism instead of always pursuing the weekly diary

There is a theory that the process of news selection in an organisation is influenced by advertisers and stakeholders, what has been your experience e of balancing the expectations of being a business minded woman and a journalist given your position?

Independence it not just political, but an independence from commercial issues as well. Things like selling a diary tends to happen that the editorial, has an advertisement that links, for example a feature of a CEO, than has an advert later, but closely connected to the article. Or placed editorial in relation to adverts and we are seeing more of that now.

I think that the National Editors Forum will deal and should address some of these issues with a seminar they run called the Bottom Line at their conference…

There have been numerous studies that have highlighted gender biases in the media and specifically the news, do you deal with fender representation differently from other people in your position?
I think I do, but I have been trained to do so. Trained to look at things like who is writing the opinion, look at sources,… but am trained to do so…

I don't think that this is a responsibility only for women editors but all editors, men included

Some theorists suggest that some of the issues such as gender representation will be addressed naturally as a result of increased number of women in the workplace. What are your thoughts on this theory?
That's crap!… I don't believe it is a natural thing by virtue of being a woman. If you look at the magazine industry for example, mostly run by woman editors and the number of mags that openly endorse things like bolox treatments, implants… Is that a positive portrayal of woman?
Is that encouraging positive self-esteem or endorsing what and who we are, I think it takes an awareness and consciousness of issues and politics in order to do those things? And it is not a case of osmosis or natural occurrence…

Comment on the state of women in media in South Africa in general?
I think we are seeing a trend of women moving into middle management but I think there is a crisis we are not seeing at entry level, and that there are still relatively few women at higher management positions.
Going forward and looking at South Africa, I hope in future women editors are more representative and that I am not one of the few around.