



ACTION ALERT

Women and Media Truth or Lies?

Women only won the right to vote in 1920. But that right is meaningless without broad exposure to a broad range of information-information that will let women know when their rights are at risk and allow them to make informed decisions about their future and the future of this country. –Terry O’Neill

Media advocacy is an important way women can make contributions to ensuring a just society. All media (including media tools such as the internet), and particularly broadcast media, have an obligation to “fulfill its obligation to act in public interest.”² Equal opportunity and representation are in the public interest. The ability to decode layers of truth/fiction about women and their role in society is critical to shaping, advancing or obstructing women’s societal effectiveness and political opportunities. Many Americans “have minimal understanding of how women are at a disadvantage in exercising their rights to access information, express their views, and disseminate information.”³ “Secondly, there is the problem of representation by mass media that aggregates gender discrimination. Commercialism of the media creates a flood of pornography. Television programs and weekly magazines are flooded with representations that condone violence against women and reinforce sexual stereotypes... Gender discrimination is often expressed in conjunction with other types of discrimination such as discrimination against ethnic minorities, the [disabled], the aged, and sexual minorities”⁴-and women of different physical sizes.

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 identified the media as one of its Twelve Areas of Concern. The importance of this issue was reaffirmed at the Beijing +5 gathering in June 2000.

It becomes increasingly troubling as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal agency responsible for policies related to the U.S. communication infrastructure, relaxes rules governing ownership which contributes to consolidation. Such changes have an impact on who we see, what we see, and what we hear. It is vitally important for an individual to have enough diversity to separate truth from lies. Today, most cities have only one major newspaper, and often the television and the AM and FM radio stations are owned by the same company. This same company may also own all media outlets in several cities. Does such a monopoly of a national discourse and representation contribute to democracy and informed decision-making? Today, six media conglomerates (Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, News Corp, Bertelsmann, and General Electric) own 90 percent of the U.S. media market.⁵

Charles Benton and Jim Goodman wrote:

“When broadcasters embrace their roles as journalists and protectors and proponents of the public interest, we benefit far beyond what TV stations can recover in advertising: People are engaged as citizens; government power is checked; waste and fraud are exposed; and we can value our televisions as much as broadcasters value our well-being. Without public-interest obligations, our country’s most time-honored broadcast values of *competition, diversity, localism* and *democracy* might all be toast.”⁶

(over)



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The United Methodist Women's Television Monitoring Project in 1975-1976 set out to "examine the influence of media, television, radio and newspapers, on the socialization of women." The Women's Division published a report, Sex Role Stereotyping in Prime Time Television, in 1976.

In 1995 and 2000, United Methodist Women took part in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) that was organized by the World Association for Christian Communication. On February 16, 2005, United Methodist Women members took part in the Global Media Monitoring Project again to monitor the role and representation of women in the news media. A distinctive feature of this monitoring is an additional component, namely qualitative analysis.

The results of the monitoring from 76 countries have been analyzed by a data analyst group, Media Monitoring Project (MPP), in South Africa. Very little has changed since the 1995 and 2000 analyses.

In total 12,893 news stories were analyzed on TV, radio and newspapers. The findings show news is mainly reported by men. The only exception is among television presenters. On TV, 57 percent of the news stories are presented by women. In newspapers, however, only 29 percent of newspaper items are written by female reporters.

Female reporters are more likely to be assigned to cover "soft" news. Men tend to cover the "hard" topics - news that is perceived to be "serious." Only 32 percent of stories on politics and government are reported by female journalists, as compared with 40 percent of stories pertaining to social issues such as education and family relations.

Only 10 percent of new stories worldwide have women as their central focus. Only three percent of the stories challenge stereotypes, compared with six percent of the stories that reinforce gender stereotypes. Of the worldwide news stories, 96 percent do not highlight issues of gender equality and inequality. Stories that do highlight gender equality or inequality comprise only four percent of news stories.

Men are the primary subjects in all news stories. Even when women are featured in the news, they are more likely to be found in "soft" stories such as celebrity hype and the arts, where they make up 28 percent of news subjects, and least likely to be found in "hard" news stories concerning politics and government (14 percent) and the economy (20 percent).

From February 16 to March 8, 2006, the World Association for Christian Communication will organize Three Weeks of Action, focusing on gender and the media. The Global Report will be widely distributed during this period.

-Source Glory Dharmaraj, Executive Secretary for Justice Education, Women's Division



Join the "Three Week of Action for Media Justice." The World Association of Christian Communication will produce toolkits to facilitate the advocacy activities of the GMMP 2005 participants. The advocacy toolkit will provide a series of "how to" materials on key elements of doing advocacy work for the promotion of gender equality in the media. The Global Media Monitoring Reports and the tool kit for advocacy will available on www.globalmediamonitoring.org.uk If you have any questions, please contact Glory Dharmaraj, Executive Secretary for Justice Education, Women's Division at Gdharmar@gbgm-umc.org or (212) 682-3633.

You can begin by monitoring Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee activity on H.R. 310, the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act, which if passed, will raise the Federal Communications Commission's fines for "obscene, indecent, and profane material." Also, monitor S.2126, which is being considered by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. This bill will limit children's exposure to violent video games. To contact the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, visit their website at <http://commerce.senate.gov/> or call (202) 224-1251 or (202) 224-0411. Senator Ted Stevens (AK) is Chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

For more information on women and the media visit www.seejane.org See Jane is dedicated to balancing the number of male and female characters in children's television and movie programming.

For United Methodist initiatives, read *Book of Resolutions 2004*, Resolution # 42, *Pornography and Sexual Violence*, pp.166-169.

¹ New FCC Rules Threaten to Shut Out Women and People of Color from Media Industry. www.now.org/press/06-03/06-04.html#printable

² FCC and UCC. http://www.acfnnews.org/religion/fcc_and_ucc.html

³ *Women 2000, Japan NGO Alternative Report* by Japan NGO Report Preparatory Committee, 1999.08.13.

⁴ http://www.ica.apc.org/fcm/bpfa/NGOreport/1_en_Media.html#1

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concentration_of_media_ownership

⁶ Beton, Charles and Jim Goodmon. *Let's define the public interest.* <http://www.reclaimthemedias.org/print.php?story=05/03/21/8977256>