

GENDER IN THE MEDIA

Corrective lenses needed

Imagine a visitor from another planet trying to get a handle on the make-up of Earth's inhabitants using the mass media as a mirror: TV, radio, films, the web, newspapers, magazines and advertising.

In all probability, that extraterrestrial might return home without realizing that females occupy more than half of the planet's inhabited space. The alien might conclude that...

- males greatly outnumber females
- adult females are routinely younger than males
- females are valued more than males for their youth, looks, sexuality and fertility
- females routinely bare more skin than males
- males do more of the work that matters
- few females have professional expertise
- male points of view are more significant than female.

Even as women continue to produce much of the world's food, bear, raise and teach the world's children, care for the elderly, complete advanced education and assume positions of authority, the picture of female-male balance in the media is still much as above. Just check the following statistics from the fourth Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2010), co-sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).

According to GMMP findings, only 24% of the people who appear in the mainstream news are female. It will take an estimated 43 years to achieve gender parity in the media if women's less than 1% annual rise in visibility in the media since 2000 does not improve.

In addition, just 13% of all media stories focus specifically on women. One analysis found that less than 1.5% of media attention targets topics of special interest to women, such as gender-based violence, women's participation in the economy, poverty and peace. Only one out of five experts interviewed in the media is female.

- Other GMMP findings:
- Overall, fewer news stories are reported by women.
 - News stories by female reporters are nearly twice as likely (7%) to challenge gender stereotypes than those by males (4%).
 - Almost half (46%) of news stories reinforce gender stereotypes, while only 6% challenge them.
 - Women are four times more likely than men to be identified by marital and family status and gender-specific roles such as wives and mothers.
 - Journalists are almost twice as likely (22%) to mention the ages of female subjects as male (12%).
 - News stories by females have more female subjects than those by males (28% vs. 22%).
 - Only 6% of news stories highlight issues of gender equality or inequality.



ILLUSTRATION: GLENN HARVEY WWW.GLENN-HARVEY.COM

FAIRER FOCUS Women need a stronger voice as makers and purveyors of news.



CENTRE FOR HUMAN PROGRESS

Positive gains since 2005

- ✓ More stories on TV are presented by older women than in the 3rd GMMP. In 2005's report only 7% of stories were reported by women ages 50 to 64. In 2010, 51% of stories by presenters in this age bracket were presented by women.
- ✓ Since 2005, the percentage of stories reported by women has increased in all areas except science/health.
- ✓ International and national news is reported by women almost as frequently as are local stories: just under 40%.
- ✓ Women are inching closer to parity as people interviewed for popular opinion in the news: 44%.

The GMMP believes that monitoring the media and using solid data to persuade media practitioners to represent the sexes more realistically will ultimately result in less gender-based violence and greater freedom for both sexes to pursue their full potential and humanity, unburdened by restrictive gender stereotypes. And the hard data it collects is crucial to that end. "Gender

equality activists always need effective, simple and direct ways to convey why structural and cultural changes are important," says Georgia Love of Women's Media Watch Jamaica. "The GMMP findings offer that. They demystify this feeling that women are on top now and we live in a 'post-gendered' world. It's hard to argue with the data."

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Breaking out of the gender box

This report focuses on the findings of the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP): *Who Makes the News?* (www.whomakesthenews.org). The



CHIAPAS MEDIA

Who Makes the News? (2010) is the fourth report of the Global Media Monitoring Project.

GMMP is the world's longest and broadest ongoing study on gender portrayal in the media. Supported by the Toronto-based World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and other agencies, it began monitoring

the treatment of women in the news media in January 1995 and produced its first report later that year. GMMP research is done by teams involving an estimated 5,000 volunteer monitors in 108 countries. Participants range from grassroots communication groups and students to university researchers and media professionals.

The GMMP believes that gender bias and stereotyping are restricting for both sexes. "Patriarchy reproduces itself by conditioning both males and females," says WACC president Dennis Smith. The project remains committed to making societies more just and equitable through the promotion of empowering, reality-based portrayals of women and men in all news media. Fair gender portrayal must be a fundamental principle of honest and accurate journalism.

Since the 1990s, the GMMP has raised awareness of how gender stereotyping undercuts the quality of journalism. "It's also offered guidelines for approaching editors and publishers—including those in faith institutions!—to underline the importance of taking seriously the issue of gender representation," says Smith.

The GMMP has helped create advocacy alliances between grassroots women's groups, journalists and academics. "The project has been instrumental in creating viable local, regional and global networks for gender advocacy in the media. These have impacted reporting standards and national legislation," says Smith. "And a number of countries have set up ongoing media monitoring projects based on GMMP methodology."

The next GMMP report is tentatively scheduled for 2015.



ILLUSTRATION: GLENN HARVEY WWW.GLENN-HARVEY.COM

SIDELINED The media often marginalize the female perspective.

Reality check required

If women are under-represented in the mass media, they are undervalued in society. If women are perpetually portrayed therein as victims, sometimes willing, that invites exploitation. If the media show women as dependent, unskilled and contributing little of value, women can be more easily abused.

The media are key spaces for the creation of meaning in contemporary culture, says Dennis Smith, president of the Toronto-based World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). "Media discourse and media images that represent violence and fundamentally distorted views of male-female relationships and human sexuality can skew how we relate to other people in real life," he says. Furthermore, the representation of women and men in the news media—combined with the roles of women and men in delivering news—distorts our understanding of how the two genders interact in the home, in politics, in business and in society in general. "In news coverage, women are seriously under-represented, and when they do appear, it tends to be as victims or in roles that are subsidiary to men. In the real world, my life isn't like that!" Smith says.



The distorted reporting of non-representative journalism fails to depict accurately the role that women (and therefore men) play in society, adds Chloe Shanz-Hilkes, a Toronto CBC radio producer and a former project assistant for the GMMP. "It turns to men for expert commentary far more readily than women. It portrays the work that women do as less newsworthy than work done by men. News is delivered by male anchors and written by male freelancers," she says. "This helps to reinforce and even worsen existing gender imbalances within society." Simon Fraser University's Kathleen Cross, GMMP's national Canadian co-ordinator, cautions that complacency is a blind spot in developed countries. "Popular mythology suggests we've been successful at solving gender disparity."

Adding her voice, Lakshmi Puri, acting head of UN Women, says, "Gender stereotypes in the media are influential socio-psychological factors in how women and girls are perceived. They also influence their self-esteem and relationships between the sexes." Puri stresses that we must not let negative depictions of women erode the hard gains made in women's empowerment.

Story by story, ad by ad, the picture is slowly changing for the better, but we must continue to be critical of and vocal about skewed gender portrayals in countries both developing and developed. Let's support the Global Media Monitoring Project in its quest for realistic and gender-balanced media. Everyone stands to gain. —DIANA SWIFT, SPECIAL REPORT EDITOR

BRINGING THINGS INTO BALANCE

Two journalists' views

In many parts of the world, social norms, education and economics have hindered women's advancement as makers and presenters of news, but these factors cannot be easily blamed in developed countries. "In the U.S., for example, women make up about 60% of enrolment in college journalism and communications programs. Yet women still lag behind as key decision-makers and sources in the media," says Debra Mason, director of the Center on Religion & the Professions at the University of Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia and a former WACC North America executive committee member. "The absence of top women managers means media miss the voices of half the world's population.

"Because women hold far fewer CEO or similar decision-making positions, journalists must work harder at intentionally seeking out their voices," she adds. "That takes time, and today's 24/7 news cycles make those efforts harder."

Though not a fan of quotas, Mason says journal-



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Journalists must drill down into an institution's hierarchy to find women spokespersons.

—Debra Mason
University of Missouri
School of Journalism

ists themselves can help "by drilling down into an institution's hierarchy to find women spokespersons." And media companies should expand news con-

tent in areas of particular interest to women, including faith and values, social action and child health and safety. "Groups like WACC should continue to fund the research that enlightens us about media inequities," she adds. "It's not an easy or quickly fixed problem, but we can't relax our focus on the goal."

Chloe Shanz-Hilkes, a Toronto radio producer, notes that it can be challenging even for well-intentioned journalists to produce gender-representative material.

Female professors are far more likely to defer interviews to male colleagues than vice versa. And in her experience, female story subjects and eyewitnesses are far more likely to shy away from the camera or tape recorder than their male counterparts. "So it's up to the people behind the news and the people making it to ensure that media consumers are greeted with an accurate reflection when they turn on their radios or open their morning papers," she says.



The monitors code the story overall, the news personnel in the story and the people in the story and also undertake a qualitative analysis."

—Sarah Macharia
WACC's global co-ordinator for the GMMP

HOW TO MONITOR THE MEDIA

GMMP methodology

The GMMP carries out its critical monitoring of the news media with an estimated 5,000 volunteers in 108 countries. After training sessions with national and regional co-ordinators, volunteers carefully scrutinize single items in print, broadcast and online news across several criteria.

They note the topic, the role, sex and approximate age of the reporter, news-reader or news anchor. They also note the sex, role, occupation and approximate age of each subject in the story. They make qualitative observations on gender stereotyping and the importance assigned to women in each item.

Monitors then record their observations manually in coding grids customized to print, radio, TV or online news. The next

step is to transfer the coding into a country database and email this to WACC for quality control and inclusion in the global database. "We require that monitors post to us recordings of the TV and radio news analyzed, copies of the first pages of the newspapers analyzed and screen grabs of the Internet sites monitored, with the original stories analyzed intact," says WACC's Sarah Macharia, global coordinator of the GMMP. "This helps our data analysis team cross-check the national databases for validity, clean up codes where necessary in dialogue with monitors and co-ordinators, and ensure a reliable dataset." After analysis, the data is used to generate charts, graphs and tables that eventually end up in the global report.



SUDIPTORANA

REBELLIOUS REGATTA Women villagers in West Bengal challenge the men to a boat race in the winning entry in WACC's 2009 photo contest, "Portraying Gender."



NOTES FROM NEPAL

In mountainous Nepal, the Asmita Women's Publishing House, Media and Resource Organization (ASMITA), has been working for more than two decades toward making the media less biased. "ASMITA has built a strong rapport with mainstream media through continued advocacy for gender-sensitive content and media literacy campaigns," says Manju Thapa, ASMITA's Kathmandu-based executive director and GMMP co-ordinator for Nepal.

Responding to pressure, Nepalese producers agreed to listen to criticism if comments were raised by everyday media consumers and not only by experts and analysts. "This consumer feedback then helped shape a media literacy campaign to groom conscious, critical and active media consumers," says Thapa.

Advocacy has brought improvements in local media content, particularly in FM radio and local newspapers. "News of activities involving women is being published and broadcast on main news pages and in prime time. Some sexist advertisements are no longer aired," says Thapa. "For example, one FM radio station in Baglung agreed to amend an advertisement that had denigrated women and later broadcast a corrected version." Other FM stations deleted demeaning themes from ads in which women were referred to by men as "Fatty" and told to "shut up and stop nagging."

Media coverage of women's issues and articles written from a female perspective continue to increase, and producers now interview women more often as resource persons. "More women's opinion articles and letters to the editor are being published in newspapers, as well," says



ASMITA

Parvati, a Kathmandu volunteer, records her findings.

Thapa.

When a weekly newspaper in Jhapa started a new column on women's issues called "Housewife's Chat," readers reacted harshly to the name. When the name was changed to "Women's Chat," readers spoke out again, persuading the editors not to identify women by their husbands' names and positions.

ASMITA stresses that ongoing interaction and follow-up, even with cooperative media producers, is a must. "They need regular feedback from consumers to see opportunities to integrate a gender approach in their work," Thapa says. Despite exciting gains, however, she believes it is imperative to lobby decision-makers to implement laws for self-regulatory guidelines and codes of conduct that will institutionalize gender sensitivity.

Thapa concedes that it's not always easy to lobby media for gender-sensitive journalism. Counter-arguments include such questions as: How can changes in local media be meaningful in the face of global sexist media? Isn't the demand for media regulation contrary to press freedom?

Hopefully such questions will recede in importance as the positive effects of fair and balanced gender coverage become clear.



GUATEMALA GOES AFTER BAD ADS

Advertising notoriously relies on the profit-making capacity of highly sexualized images of women. And taking decisive action against demeaning ads is another area WACC engages in, reports Dennis Smith, president.

In November 2007, Smith was working in the Central American country of Guatemala. "We awoke one morning to find disturbing new display ads at bus stops in some of the most upscale zones of Guatemala City," he recalls. The photos showed young, dressed-to-the-hilt females sporting high-fashion shoes made by MD, a Salvadoran company. The models were made up to look like pale cadavers in a morgue and placed in sexually suggestive positions.



WACC

Dennis Smith

Smith says. "To run this ad campaign in Guatemala in 2007 was an outrage. That year, 462 women had been murdered in the country, which has one of the world's highest rates of femicide."

Different groups responded immediately to the affront. "Many of us who had been involved in the GMMP in Guatemala over the years wrote letters to the editor that were published in local newspapers," he says. One letter called for an immediate boycott of MD shoes.

"The ads' slogan—*Está de muerte*—roughly translates into English as 'Shoes to die for,'"

Another suggested that both MD and the agency that designed the ads, Ogilvy El Salvador, invest in a publicity campaign against femicide.

Soon, Fundación Sobrevivientes (Survivors' Foundation) took up the cause. "This is a Guatemalan NGO that assumed the terrible task of visiting the Guatemala City morgue every morning to document the cause of death of the women found there," says Smith. NGO women picketed MD shoe stores with posters bearing photos of recent victims. "Within a few days, Ogilvy took down the ads."

It was a victory for media vigilance, critical activism and local advocates of combating gender-based violence.



ADVANCES IN ARGENTINA

In 2009, Argentina passed its groundbreaking Audiovisual Communication Services Law, making significant egalitarian changes in the media landscape and paving the way for a more realistic portrayal of women in Argentine media. But there's still a long way to go.

"The media in Argentina are sexist because our society remains sexist," says Argentine writer Marcela Gabioud, GMMP co-ordinator for Argentina. "The media typically show women doing domestic work like 'proper women.' Men are the powerful ones and have knowledge of all the world's important things—including women's problems!"

Now the communications law and a law prohibiting violence against women (including the symbolic violence of the media) are poised to change things for the better. "Both laws together are excellent tools to effect change



WACC

Marcela Gabioud takes the mic at a WACC seminar.

in the media," says Gabioud. The country's sizable feminist movement is doing major advocacy work with the media and with RedPAR, a journalists' network supporting a non-sexist communications sector.

For Gabioud, the GMMP reports are valuable assets for revealing the status of women as newsmakers and presenters. "We understand that if more people are aware of the GMMP's results, it will be easier to convince them of the unequal situation."

And Argentines are listening. Last December, Argentina's federal government used

GMMP results to introduce a regulation for public media on the proper representation of women. "In addition, many NGOs are trying to organize media observation and monitoring groups, and some government agencies and public universities have them as well," says Gabioud.

Interactions with grassroots organizations are growing, and the RedPAR connection is strengthening the GMMP's media influence. "In the city of Mar del Plata, we and some partners in radio produced a manual on achieving better journalism by incorporating a gender perspective," she says.

Her hope is that Argentine society will take women's issues seriously in the interest of producing better citizens now and in the future. "I would like to see real change in the media and in journalists. I want them to use the lens of gender perspective to produce more ethical work."



HEATHER PLETT

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES A Bangladeshi father cares for his children.



IMBALANCE IN WESTERN MEDIA

Women in developed regions enjoy wide access to higher education, yet for them, too, the media hold up a distorting mirror. A 2013 study by Washington-based Pew Research reported that in 40% of U.S. households with children, women are the primary breadwinners. But according to a study by the University of Southern California (USC), Annenberg, and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media, female characters “are still sidelined, stereotyped and sexualized in popular entertainment.”

Fewer females than males work in prime-time shows and in family films. And on screen, females are often portrayed more as peripheral decorations than as committed professionals, showing more exposed skin and having unrealistic body characteristics.

Led by USC sociologist Stacy Smith, the researchers analyzed almost 12,000 speaking roles in prime-time TV programs, children’s TV shows and family films. They also looked at female



GEENA DAVIS INSTITUTE ON GENDER IN THE MEDIA

“If she can see it, she can be it.”

—Actor Geena Davis

characters’ occupations, clothing and body size. On prime-time television, 44% of females were gainfully employed, compared with 55% of males. As for speaking roles, only 28% of characters in family films, 31% of characters in children’s shows and 39% on prime-time television were female.

Looking at gender balance in the 100 top-grossing films of

2007 to 2009, Smith found that women were assigned less than a third of all speaking roles. And when Linda Holmes, a Washington, D.C. resident, surveyed movie showings in the metropolitan D.C. area, she found that 90% of 617 showings featured stories about men or groups of men.

Things are not much different in the U.K., says the University of Liverpool’s Karen Ross, GMMP co-ordinator for Europe. “Very little has changed since 2010, other than more research which shows the same disappointing trends.”

USC’s Smith concludes that young females need to view many more aspirational role models across a variety of media platforms. As Geena Davis has famously said, “If she can see it, she can be it.” Boys, too, need to see female decision-makers, political leaders, managers and scientists as the norm, not the uncomfortable exception. As adults, they must feel at ease working with and for women in positions of authority and advanced expertise.



RICHARD CHOE FOR WACC

A Personal Invitation from the Rev. Dr. Karin Achtelstetter

After reading the articles on *Gender in the Media* and learning about our efforts at WACC to promote gender equality in and through the media through our GMMP worldwide monitoring, you might be asking yourself:

How can I help?

As one who is concerned about fair, unbiased and balanced reporting of women and men in all regions of the world, consider this as an invitation

to assist us in making changes that will motivate people to become aware of unfair gender representation and, most important, to ensure women’s voices are heard! After all, it’s everyone’s right to speak, to voice opinions and to be heard—equally!

Education and awareness are the keys!

Here’s how you can help!

Bring your friends, associates—even your congregation—together and **start monitoring the media reports** you are exposed to on a daily basis. **Consider contacting the media** in which you perceive biased content or unfair reporting of the facts.

For those interested in **joining the WACC Monitoring Team**, coordinators will be recruited beginning in 2014. Check the WACC website whomakesthenews.org for updates.

Follow us on **Twitter @whomakesthenews** and **Facebook at Global.Media.Monitoring.Project**. Your comments will make others aware and motivate them to participate and educate others.

Persuade your contacts to **help with our funding** of this most important initiative by calling WACC

directly at **416-691-1999, ext. 224**, to make a much-needed donation. You can also **donate online at waccglobal.org** or simply complete the donation form below. *All donors will receive a tax-deductible charitable receipt.*

Ask one of our **WACC associates to speak at your gathering** about our many projects around the globe and about how the GMMP initiative can and will mobilize people in general and the media in particular about gender inequality and its consequences. To make arrangements, simply email us at: gmmp@waccglobal.org

or call us at **416-691-1999, ext. 224**, to speak directly with an associate. These are just a few steps you can take to start making changes. By bringing media attention to gender bias and lack of balanced reporting in the media, together we will shed much-needed light on an issue that has been ignored for far too long.

Thank you for your concern and involvement.

The Rev. Dr. Karin Achtelstetter
General Secretary
World Association for Christian Communication

YES,

I would like to help WACC in its mission to promote fair representation of gender in the media.

Please accept my contribution of:

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ Postal Code _____

Phone _____

Please email me periodic updates on WACC activities and programs around the world.

Email _____

Cheque, made payable to WACC

Credit Card: VISA MC AmEx

Card # _____

Expiry _____ / _____

Signature _____

*Would you like to become a monthly donor?
Please fill in information to the right.*

Visit www.waccglobal.org to donate online.

Or donate directly: **416-691-1999, ext. 224**

Monthly giving makes sense!

FOR YOU, it means being able to budget for a larger contribution over 12 months. It provides the World Association for Christian Communication with a dependable and predictable source of income. Please be as generous as you can.

I authorize WACC to withdraw on the 1st or 15th day of every month,

\$10 \$20 \$30 Other \$ _____

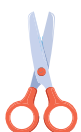
from my Bank Account (I’ve enclosed my cheque marked “VOID”)

Credit Card: VISA MasterCard AmericanExpress

Card # _____

Expiry _____ / _____ Signature _____

A charitable tax receipt will be provided for each donation.



World Association for Christian Communication • www.waccglobal.org

308 Main Street, Toronto, ON M4C 4X7 Canada • Charitable Registration #83970 9524 RR0001 • Sept. 2013