

# **The Struggle and Strategies for Women's Equal Participation in Journalism**

What challenges do women face in terms of achieving equal participation in journalism and how might those challenges be overcome? Illustrate your answer with historical examples.

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## **Introduction**

Currently, women have not yet achieved equal participation in journalism, and there are still many challenges they face and need to overcome, such as gender discrimination, unequal promotion opportunities, and precarious working conditions. Although the situation for women in journalism has improved, it is not optimistic. For example, in the 1980s, the number of women in American journalism schools increased rapidly, and the emphasis on hiring women increased (Rush et al., 2005). However, between 1982 and 1992, the proportion of women working in the news media did not change significantly (Rush et al., 2005). Even so, women journalists are still striving for equal rights and status. The "Me Too" movement erupted on social media in 2017, inspiring people's attention and condemnation of sexual harassment and assault and revealing decades of sexual violence committed by powerful men (O'Keefe, 2021). This article will explore the challenges faced by women in journalism in terms of gender stereotypes, unequal gender representation and job opportunities, unsafe working environments and unstable working conditions. Discuss overcoming these challenges by raising awareness of women and social equality, implementing legal guarantees and establishing equality awards and institutions.

## **Challenges**

First of all, society has gender stereotypes and discrimination against female journalists. Women's appearance and clothing are more discussed than their abilities. Female journalists are news creators, but they inevitably become news content and conversation

topics. Male journalists are usually viewed as professionals, but female journalists are often constrained by gender characteristics, and their work is defined and evaluated based on their feminine temperament (Chambers et al., 2004). In 1975, Angela Rippon was hired as the BBC's first permanent female newscaster, marking the initial hiring of female news anchors for their appearance rather than their journalistic abilities (Chambers et al., 2004). The demandingness of women's appearance and the emphasis on women's physical attractiveness are also reflected in age. Women comprise nearly half of younger TV reporters, but almost none among older reporters (Steiner, 2017).

The exploitation of women's appearance and the neglect of their abilities means that women working in journalism will be more challenged and criticized for their right to manage and choose their appearance. For example, female television news anchors and reporters often face complaints from management and viewers about their clothing, hairstyles and tone of voice. They are scrutinized more closely than their male counterparts (Chambers et al., 2004). When people place more demands on women's appearance, the stereotype of women will be deepened, and their recognition will only be based on "particularly gendered capabilities and interests (Baker, 2015, p. 9)". This limitation on women deepens the abnormal judgment and impression of society that women are not suitable for male positions (Baker, 2015), making it more difficult for women to survive in journalism.

Because of these stereotypes, news content about women is also restricted. The presence of women's pages may not contribute to gender equality but may exacerbate gender discrimination. News about women is ignored or exaggerated, and female readers are labelled as only interested in gossip (Chambers et al., 2004). The female page was born and survived within a patriarchal framework because the appearance of the female page was not initially a sign of the rise of female power but was created by male editors to expand the female audience (Fahs, 2011). Even if women's pages are optimized and improved, it does not represent gender equality because women should not be limited to "women" unless women can also do the same news as men. However, society has long assigned ingrained social roles and expectations to men and women, respectively. According to data collected by the Women's Media Center (WMC) from newspapers, radio, news websites and news agencies, men are more likely to cover news about politics, criminal justice, science, and technology. At the same time, female journalists are more likely to cover soft news categories, such as education, religion, and lifestyle (Steiner, 2017). This also shows that in unequal circumstances, women often do not have the right to make independent choices. Women are denied employment due to their gender, and most jobs are rejected by men with the reasoning that these positions are unsuitable for women (Chambers et al., 2004).

Secondly, the reason why men can determine the situation and fate of female journalists in journalism is because there are more men than women in journalism leadership. This also means that men and women have unequal voices and opportunities. In the 1970s,

program leadership or core positions were almost exclusively male-dominated, such as program producers and directors, newspaper editors, and news decision-makers (Chambers et al., 2004). In a 1914 speech, Melbourne Age journalist Henrietta McGowan noted that it was easier for men to get positions than women and that even when women were ambitious, they were often prevented from advancing to higher positions (Baker, 2015). The proportion of women in the media industry is also deficient, which means that women's participation and development space in the journalism industry is hindered. In the U.S. telecommunications and cable television industry, SBC female directors account for 29%, almost the highest proportion. The electronics industry has the lowest proportion of female directors, at only 8% (Rush et al., 2005). Countries such as Australia, Hungary, and the United States only have about 33% female journalists (Rush et al., 2005).

In addition, in a journalism industry characterized by precarity, women's working conditions are not optimistic. They face unsafe working conditions and unequal work benefits and wages. Gendering brings workplace harassment to women. Journalist Liz Trotta had NBC live producers banging on her door after she refused to cover President Lyndon Johnson's daughter's wedding (Chambers et al., 2004). In a joint IWFMF and INSI report on violence and threats against female journalists, many respondents said sexual harassment was too common and part of the job (Barton & Storm, 2014).

Female journalists also face severe violence and threats. A 2013 joint report by the IWFM and INSI noted that nearly two-thirds of 1,000 women surveyed said they had experienced intimidation, threats, or abuse at work, with the majority occurring in the workplace (Barton & Storm, 2014). Most perpetrators are male bosses, supervisors, and co-workers (Barton & Storm, 2014). These threats have caused severe psychological trauma to women, with some female journalists starting to use pseudonyms and others stopping their reporting or having to give up their journalism careers due to safety concerns (Barton & Storm, 2014). Even though women are normally engaged in the workplace, they are subject to scrutiny and attack because of their passivity and unequal environment. "Women can be defamed and ostracised for speaking alone with male sources, working late hours, or challenging the status quo (Barton & Storm, 2014, p. 3)."

Although women possess absolute reproductive capability, they have not received targeted protection. In Japan, influenced by the idea that men are responsible for the work and women maintain the family, many companies worry about the participation of women, fearing that women's maternity leave and childcare leave will hinder the development and progress of work (Byerly, 2013). In the face of mass layoffs in conglomerated newsrooms in Australia, many women who survived said they had to work harder and longer than men to get the same salary as men (Byerly, 2013).

## **Overcome challenges**

Women should unite in refusing unfair treatment, constantly improve their workability, and bravely defend their rights. Society should also strengthen equality awareness education, support and promote the solution of gender inequality. In 1987, Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* revealed that women were forced into roles expected by others in a male-dominated society, which could be at the expense of their femininity, proving the significance of women's independent choice of lifestyle (Turk, 2015). Therefore, it is important for women to actively integrate into society and fight for their place, as women's efforts in journalism are closely linked to their role in wider social change and are part of their fight for gender equality and self-expression (Byerly, 2013). Moreover, women in journalism also play an essential role in revealing values, contributing to the shaping and development of modern gender consciousness. This awareness was also used in the fight for suffrage, embodying new modern gender identities in political expression (Fahs, 2011).

In addition to supporting gender equality ideologically, laws and regulations are also needed to implement equality policies. Before the introduction of equal opportunity principles and laws at the end of the 20th century, women could only hold decision-making roles in alternative media, and opportunities for women in traditional mainstream media were almost limited (Chambers et al., 2004). Therefore, the law can protect women's legal and equal rights to a certain extent. Nevertheless, many laws in history have been formalistic, potentially sexist, and have even exacerbated women's plight. For example, in 1917, Justice Isaac Isaacs in the Commonwealth Court of

Conciliation and Arbitration noted in the first Federal Journalist Awards that female and male journalists in Australia were paid equally for equal work (Baker, 2015). However, newspaper bosses were trying to reduce the wages and working conditions of female reporters, and women were restricted to cheap jobs (Baker, 2015). Its purpose was not to ensure equal rights for female journalists but to protect the working conditions of male journalists from the threat of cheap female labour (Baker, 2015). However, in regions where newsrooms are valued, such as Eastern and Northern Europe, women have been able to enter the workforce in ways that facilitate their advancement, protected by laws and policies that governments have long implemented (Byerly, 2013).

Additionally, safety training can be provided for journalists, and foundations or awards can be established to protect, encourage, and recognize women. The International News Safety Institute, established in 2003, provides safety advice and training for journalists and provides female trainers for female journalists to ensure their training and work safety (Barton & Storm, 2014). The International Women's Media Foundation, founded by American women journalists in 1990, believes that only when women have an equal voice can the world's news media be truly free and representative (Barton & Storm, 2014). The Foundation also established the Courage in Journalism Awards and The IWMF Lifetime Achievement Awards to recognize the courage, excellence, and pioneering significance of female journalists (Barton & Storm, 2014).



## **Conclusion**

Above all, there are many challenges for women to participate in journalism. Social stereotypes and genderization of women aggravate the harsh criticism of women and underestimate or ignore women's workability. As a result, news content about women has become a tool to deepen male power. There is inherent gender bias in the division of responsibilities in journalism, and it is difficult for female journalists to get involved in various news fields. The unequal proportion of men and women in journalism and the overwhelming male occupation of leadership mean that women have a narrow space for survival and development. The precarious nature of journalism has more pronounced consequences for women. Sexual harassment, violence and threats, and unequal pay and benefits reveal unsafe working conditions for women. Therefore, overcoming these challenges requires women to unite to resist unfair treatment and strengthen social equality concepts and ideas. Improve and implement equality policies through the introduction of laws and regulations to fundamentally protect women's rights. Provide safety training for journalists, especially women, and establish foundations and awards to inspire and showcase women's capabilities.

Women are an indispensable force in this era, but women can still not achieve equal participation in all walks of life, including journalism. By discussing the challenges and overcoming methods faced by women in achieving equal participation in journalism, we can help society recognize and pay attention to the problems, reflect on and improve the current situation, and pave a solid and smooth road to achieve true equality.

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