

# Gender and Communication Policy

By May Elian  
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Courage is the main virtue to seek the language of the world" [... Le courage est la vertu majeure pour chercher le langage du Monde ... (Paulo Coelho)]

Women's representation in the Media is gaining great significance in our region day by day. On reflecting on such an issue, many questions come to mind: Are women well proportionally represented in this field? Is their gender an obstacle to a career? Is it just a question of gender or capacity and qualifications?

Even though women working in the field of journalism in Lebanon have managed to secure a place for themselves, leading positions are always reserved for men. Women reporters often cover fields that are considered less serious such as the environment, society, culture, women's magazines, etc.

Even though the majority of women are not in decision making positions, some Lebanese women have managed to reach top ranking and decision making positions. In fact the first woman

Journalist in the Arab world, Afife Karam, was of Lebanese origin. She lived between 1883-1924 and worked for "Al Houda" newspaper owned by Naoum Moukarzel.

## Working Women in the Field of Journalism

"We can say that the difference between the representation of women in news on television and news in the newspapers is that the former need to empower themselves through physical appearance and deal with the star system which is extremely competitive and can cause a hasty decline and eventual defeat. Meanwhile the press journalist is supposed to be serious, profound and cultured and should rely heavily on research. This kind of journalism demands hard work and a longer span of time to reach the ultimate goal of

recognition". (Gibrane Tueni, Chairperson and CEO of *An-Nahar*)

The number of female media professionals working in the news section at the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI) adds up to almost 70%. Besides, 85% of the news section staff at Murr Television (MTV) are women. Women make up 50% of the staff at the English news department at Future television (FTV) as opposed to 100% at the French department. Moreover, in the Arabic news department the distribution is 10 women to 3 men. This high percentage of women journalists working in Television contrasts with the fact that the top ranking positions have been and still are monopolized by men.

The Newspaper *An-Nahar* has 45 female reporters and 118 males among its staff. In spite of that Suha Baasiry has managed to become editor in chief at the International and Arab desk. Moreover, *As-Safir* newspaper has 53 men to 34 women. Mr. Yasser Nehmeh general manager of *As-Safir* asserts that "the representation of woman in the media has increased in the last ten years and women in the field have managed to gain this position after their success in television. In the past, the percentage of women working in the newspaper *As-Safir* was only 5%. In the 1990's the situation changed to reach around 40% women reporters. Seventy percent of the staff at the **Daily Star** are women. The situation changes at **L'Orient le jour** where all the editors are men. For their local page they have 9 men and 11 women as opposed to one woman for the international and economic page.

## The Percentage of Female Students in the Faculty of Information

Dr. Ali Rammal Director of the Faculty of Information and Documentation at the Lebanese University (Branch 1) maintains that "80% of students in Media are women, and the reason is that they are more talented in languages than men."

Dr. Georges Kallas, Director of the Faculty of Information and Documentation at the Lebanese University (Branch 2) affirms that "85% of the students in the various Journalism and Communications fields are women. But Kallas main-



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tains that female journalists work for restricted and limited years particularly that the work demands a huge effort that would interfere in their own work and home environment. One could say in this context that only very few women prefer their career to their family and private life.

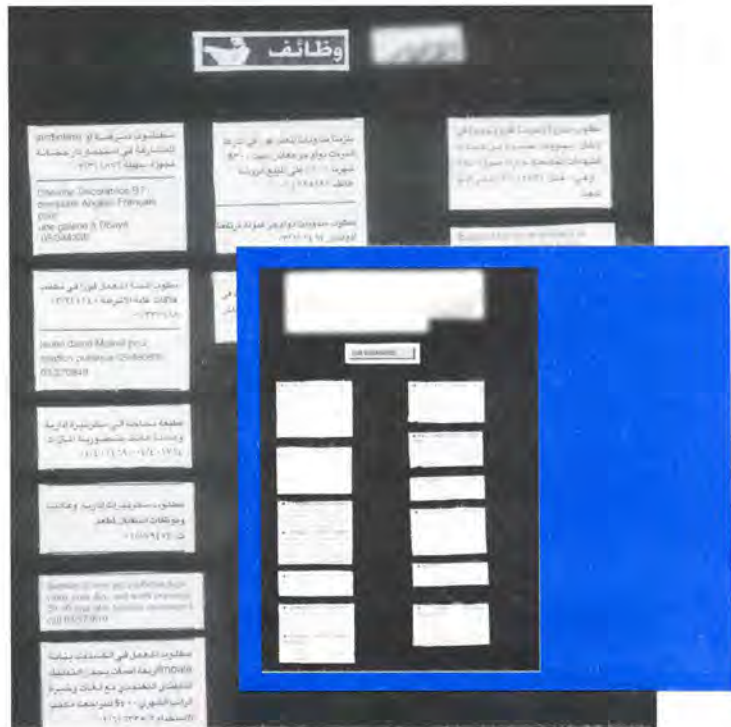
### Advantages of Being a Woman in the Field of Journalism

1. The report taken from UNICEF shows once again that the education field in Lebanon is virtually dominated by women. It's 77% for males and 84% for females. And then comes the United Arab Emirates with 74% for the males and 81% for females. This is one of the few countries in the region, where the rate of female education is higher than male education. Other countries include: Kuwait 64% males 64% females; Jordan 63% males 63% females; Egypt 80% males 68% females; Tunisia 63% males 59% females; Morocco 44% males 33% females; Turkey 67% males 45% females; Greece 99% males 90% females.
2. Women have the chance to access some sources of information, more easily than men, and sometimes exclusively.
3. The new generation of men tend to be more understanding about what this kind of work entails and are more supportive of their wives who work in the field of journalism.

### Obstacles that Prevent Women from Access to the Different Kinds of Media

Young Lebanese female graduates in journalism are confronted with many obstacles. To be successful in the media is not easy for a woman and that is for several reasons: [The comments below are the opinions of some male and female journalists]

- Women journalists are (stereotyped as being) wrongfully accused of being shy and less aggressive. Thus they are given work in the cultural sector while politics is assigned for men.
- Women who apply for a job in Television are selected on the basis of their physical appearance which is detrimental to women who have the real talents and capabilities.
- Again if she is beautiful, a woman has the problem of not being taken seriously. At the same time, she is used as an attractive "merchandise" or an appealing "object" especially on TV.
- The woman is viewed as more temperamental than men which can be an obstacle in her work.
- Usually woman is not in the position of editor in chief since this kind of work demands a great deal of labor: she is supposed to spend more than 18 hours at work and most of the time work until after midnight.



### My Own Experience

When I was in my first year in the school of journalism at the Lebanese University, most of the students were females. This was mostly due to the fact that men preferred majoring in money making fields such as engineering and medicine. The rate of women was high because most of them dreamed of fame or of realizing one of their most precious dreams namely appearing on television. The confusion started for the majority of them when they realized that journalism was about reading different kinds of books and newspapers and dealing with politics which most girls did not like. That is why most of my female colleagues did not have enough patience or passion to pursue the "career of trouble", as we refer to it in the field.

### Some Solutions

We must try to integrate the study of Journalism into our schools, at least at the secondary levels, so that people and especially "young women" would not be misguided by what they know of television and journalism: a beautiful and well dressed up woman reading some information written by someone else. Despite all these problems, there are still Editors in Chief who are very supportive, that give you the chance to prove yourself taking you for your own qualifications and giving you a push once in a while and believing in you, no matter what your gender is. Finally, I would like to add here that for me, personally, it is not a problem of gender. What counts is the individual. As the Greeks used to say "our destiny is greatly defined by our character".