

Voices

for

MEDIA DEMOCRACY



**Women's
Institute
for
Freedom of the
Press**

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Summer 2013

Women and Media

Award

The Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press has announced the first recipient of its first "Women and Media Award," an award to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to women's media and supporting the advancement of women's voices. The first recipient of this honor will be Maurine H. Beasley for her extensive work on behalf of women and the media.

At the August 1st ceremony, Dr. Beasley will give a brief talk about women of the Washington press and be available to sign copies of her most recent book, *Women of the Washington Press – Politics, Prejudice, and Persistence*. Dr. Beasley is the Interim Graduate Director and Professor Emerita of Journalism at the University of Maryland. She retired from her tenured position at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism in 2009 but was asked to stay on as a part-time lecturer to advise Ph.D. students. In June 2012

she was asked to take a half-time position as the interim director of graduate study. Her specialization is journalism history with an emphasis on the history of women in the field.

Maurine Beasley has been a staff writer for the *Washington Post*. She has been named a Distinguished Senior Scholar by the Educational Foundation of the American Association of University Women and received the Eleanor Blum Distinguished Service to Research Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

A few of her books include *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady*, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media*, and *First Ladies of the Press*. Maurine Beasley was one of the authors of WIFP's first book, *Women in Media: A Documentary Source Book* in 1977 – a book that has been reissued and updated several times. She has written numerous well-researched

books and her latest is outstanding.

If you are attending the AEJMC conference, you may want to know that Maurine Beasley will also be presented an award at the conference on August 9th. Dr. Beasley's book *Women of the Washington Press* received the Frank Luther Mott/Kappa Tau Alpha award for best-researched book on journalism/mass communication in 2012. As an Associate of WIFP for 36 years and one of the authors of WIFP's first book *Women in Media: A Documentary Source Book*, in addition to all her own work, she was an ideal recipient for this award.



Women of The Washington Press: Politics, Prejudice, and Persistence

Author: Maurine H. Beasley

Book Review By Martha Allen

(Northwestern University Press, IL, 2012)

Maurine Beasley provides wonderful accounts of what women in journalism faced over the years. This is a valuable contribution to women's media history and the full story of journalists. Reading these accounts I started marking the amazing ones but found that page after page contained my markers until I just gave up and experienced my emotions as I read. It is not that these stories are surprising, having some idea of the early female journalists' journey in media, but it is riveting reading nonetheless.

I'll share a few accounts with you to give an idea of the valuable contributions to women's press history and the fascinating reading you will have when you pick up the book.

The male-owned "women's magazines," magazines aimed at women and selling to women, in the early days did not even try to have female edi-

tors. They reinforced women's traditional roles as did other media. Beasley wrote: "In 1949 *Mademoiselle* magazine discouraged it readers from newspaper work, relying on a survey of editors of twenty-seven daily newspapers who claimed women were too emotional to handle news except on women's and society pages." (p. 116)

In the 1940s and 50s women of the press faced great challenges and Beasley recounts the stories of journalists who made strides despite the atmosphere of the times. Referring to what women experienced after WWII, Beasley wrote, "Women who sought to cover the same news assignments as men faced intense discrimination. Some returned to the women's pages because they had no other option." (p. 115)

Yet individual women had small, hard-earned successes. In 1947 Alice Dunnigan became the first Afri-

can American woman to be accredited to the Capitol press galleries, White House, Supreme Court, and State Department. The next year, she became the first woman to travel with the press corps covering Truman's campaign, having to cover her own expenses to do so.

Sometimes women refused otherwise promising employment moves when they were accompanied with indications that they would not be treated as seriously as their male colleagues. Mary McGrory stood out with her columns at the Star on the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954, resulting in a job offer at the *New York Times* Washington Bureau. She turned down the offer, she told a fellow journalist, because she was made to feel as though she was wanted to work the telephone switchboard part-time.

During these decades another journalist, Doris Fleeson, made a name for herself. McGrory described Fleeson as an “able, tough reporter, an ardent feminist who was very kind to me.” (p. 121). And another Washington woman journalist who gained a national reputation was Marguerite Higgins of the *New York Herald Tribune*, the first woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize for reporting.

The National Press Club (NPC) refused to allow female members or guests. Since many press bureaus had offices in the National Press Club building, this meant that women reporters were not allowed to enter the bar, even to contact their bosses or to have a quick meal. More critically, the refusal to allow women reporters to the newsmaker’s luncheons restricted their ability to cover the news. The State Department arranged for world leaders visiting Washington to deliver speeches there, as did others.

By November 1955 the NPC agreed to allow “any member of the working press” to cover luncheon addresses by noteworthy speakers but women

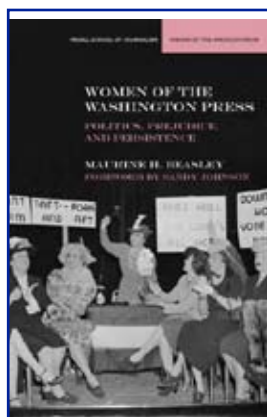
had to stay in the balcony. The balcony became a symbol to women journalists of their second-class status, Beasley wrote, because it was hot, crowded, uncomfortable, and the location made it difficult to hear and see. Bonnie Angelo, then with the *Newsday* Washington bureau, stated decades later, “You entered and left through a back door, and you’d be glowered at as you went through the club quarters. It was discrimination at its rawest.” (p. 127)

Newswomen petitioned speakers not to appear there unless women received dining room privileges. They made efforts to reach the State Department, foreign embassies and members of congress. In 1959 Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev declared he would not speak unless women reporters were treated equally with men, forcing the NPC to allow 33 women reporters to have lunch with male members during his address. “After the Khrushchev event, the women were relegated again to the balcony,” Beasley wrote, “giving rise to additional years of struggle to cover news events at the NPC.”

It was not until 1971 that the NPC finally voted to admit women. In 1979, the Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press began holding the first six of our annual conferences at the National Press Club.

Women also sought to open the annual all-male White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner to women members. A breakthrough came when Bonnie Angelo, president of the Women’s National Press Club (WNPC) in 1961-62, took up the issue with Pierre Salinger, President Kennedy’s press secretary. As a result, President Kennedy let it be known that he was not going to the dinner if women members were not allowed. The club changed its policy.

By 1970 there were an estimated 300 full-time women journalists in Washington and challenges still remained. In 1972 *Cosmopolitan* magazine highlighted ten white Washington women journalists with a photo of the group smiling and striding down the street in business attire. “Far from flattering the women, however,” wrote Beasley, “the article was titled



THE WITCHES OF WASHINGTON, with the subhead, GET TO KNOW A COVEN OF NEWS-WOMEN WHO CAST SPELLS, EX-HUME STORIES, AND, BRRR! MEET THEIR DEADLINES." (p.161)

Not only did women of the press experience not receive the respect accorded their male colleagues, they faced discrimination and sexual harassment. Eileen Shanahan, who covered economics for the *New York Times* from 1966 to 1977, said she did not report the sexual harassment because it was such a common occurrence. She was a plaintiff in a class action sex discrimination suit brought by women at the *New York Times*. The suit was settled in 1978 and WIFP published a 16-page special 13th issue of *Media Report to Women* dedicated

to the case (December 31, 1978).

"Newsrooms remained inhospitable places for women in the 1960s and 70s, when they began to hire women in larger numbers," Beasley wrote. (p. 173) In 1974 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) concluded that the *Washington Post* "restricts the opportunities of female employees to occupy its higher positions." (p. 175) Slowly efforts were made to improve the situation.

About thirty women reporters picketed the gender discrimination of the Gridiron Club in 1971. "Composed of fifty high-level Washington newsmen, the Gridiron existed to lampoon the current president at an annual black-tie dinner attended by him and the cream of the political establishment," Beasley wrote. To counter protests against its male-only policy by inviting a few women to its 1972 dinner, a group formed called Journalists for Professional Equality. Most of the invited women, including Katharine Graham, Coretta Scott King, Margaret Chase Smith, declined with Rep. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman to serve

in Congress, stating, "Guess who's not coming to dinner." Graham, *Washington Post* publisher, couldn't get herself to join the picketers but joined them afterwards at the home of Eileen Shanahan for a buffet supper. It was not until 1975 that the Gridiron admitted its first woman member, Helen Thomas.

Maurine Beasley shares stories and accounts of the experiences of women of the press. This important documentation provides a history of the little-known struggles of women journalists in Washington to be taken seriously and given rights that male members of the press took for granted. It is a fascinating history that Beasley tells and one that is an outstanding contribution to the field of journalism and women's studies.

Women of the Washington Press is a book that can be enjoyed by everyone and will keep you turning those pages.

**Women of the Washington Press:
Politics, Prejudice, and Persistence**

Author: Maurine H. Beasley

Review by Ada Malamud

Maurine Beasley writes a fascinating account regarding women's struggles and successes with entering the media world over the years. I was particularly drawn to the chapter about Eleanor Roosevelt, titled "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Newspaper Girls", and how she contributed to the rise of women in the media during her time in the White House. Beasley depicts Eleanor in such a way that the reader can see the whole woman in an unbiased perspective. Having read Beasley's biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady*, I was impressed at the honesty and sensitivity Beasley poured into the stories of this misunderstood and extraordinary first lady.

Eleanor Roosevelt was perhaps the first of all

the past president's wives to actually step out from her husband's shadow and contribute to the political and economical world. In turn, she received a salary from all her media contributions, but donated most if not all of it to charity.

After Franklin Roosevelt won in a landslide in the 1932 election, Eleanor's immediate concern was keeping women journalists working and employed in Washington during the depression. In order to help presswomen remain afloat in the media world, Eleanor began to give women-only press conferences. The women of the press were thrilled with this opportunity, allowing them to gain information about the White House and politics that their male counterparts could not obtain.

Publication companies sent their female

employees to these press conferences and some even hired women in order to have someone attend the conferences. Although President Franklin had complete faith in her, many believed she was incapable of tending to media issues.

The press conferences disappointed some women, often times lacking biting political news. Eleanor was prohibited from talking about the key political points, which remained for her husband to communicate to the nation. Instead, Eleanor was cornered into talking about the White House, her day to day activities, and future event. Occasionally the women gleaned interesting political news.

The women were grateful to Eleanor and wrote pieces that portrayed her in a positive light. They applauded her for being the "eyes and ears" of Franklin and put their friendship with the First Lady above their career motives.

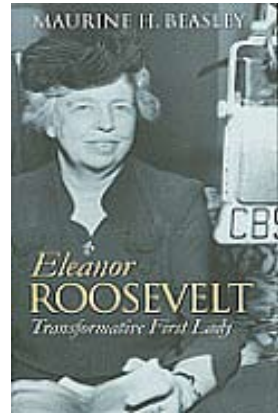
Eleanor tended to ramble and could talk on and on, occasionally letting pieces of controversial information slip. The presswomen watched over her, catching her on her slip ups and choosing not to write about things that would smear the first lady's reputation.

I liked the way Beasley portrayed Eleanor as a dynamic figure, a woman with flaws and talents. Throughout her life, Eleanor was very self conscious of her appearance and social anxiety. She had to constantly fight her

inclinations to hide from the public and rise to the side of her ailing husband to address the nation. As Franklin became more and more sick, Eleanor gained more influence. She even started writing her own news column, "My Day," which was at first scoffed at by other reporters, but gained popularity as she used the column to break news stories.

Towards the end of the press conferences more than 115 women were attending. The news they were receiving were usually gender segregated, but the

journalists survived professionally during the Great Depression. Elenor had noble motives and wished to help women journalists succeed, but was limited by the time period and her status.



Beasley's biography of Eleanor Roosevelt

WIFP Associate News

Robin Morgan

You'll love Robin Morgan's radio show: Women's Media Center Live With Robin Morgan (<http://wmclive.com/>) at 1580 AM in Washington, DC and streaming world wide: www.UStream.TV/channel/wmcstream.

The program airs Saturday from 11 AM to 12 PM on Gov.Biz Radio 1580 AM in Washington, DC and worldwide on WMCLive.com. It is a progressive talk program with fresh, original, lively news, guest and commentary for women and men of conscience. It is designed to educate, stimulate, and entertain and make women and girls more visible and powerful in the media.

Martha Allen joined Robin Morgan for a program on the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press July 13, 2013. You can listen to this show and the interesting past shows on podcast. Podcast archive: www.wmcilve.libsyn.com

Carmen Delgado

Carmen Delgado Votaw was selected as one of "One Hundred Puerto Ricans" and honored by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY, as a significant Puerto Rican in Public Policy on May 28th. The Centro will collect the archives of Puerto Ricans who have left an imprint in the United States.

She was also honored last year by the Montgomery County Commission of Women on its 20th Anniversary as one of the 40 women who have played significant roles in Montgomery County and Maryland's advancement.

Carmen is currently serving on the Board of Directors of the Maryland Women's Heritage Center and Museum of Baltimore.

Dr. Carolyn Byerly

Carolyn Byerly's book, an edited volume, will be out in October 2013: *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Journalism*, Palgrave Macmillan publishers. It contains 32 chapters, including reports from 29 nations in all regions of the world, extending the research of the Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media, published in 2011.

Elayne Clift

Birth Ambassadors: Doula and the Re-emergence of Woman-supported Childbirth in the United States by Christine Morton with Elayne Clift will be published in the fall by Preclarus Press. Elay's novel, *Hester's Daughters*- a contemporary, feminist take on *The Scarlet Letter*- was published last year (OGN Publications) and is available from Amazon.com (paper & Kindle).

Dr. Frankie Hutton

WIFP intern Jada Rogers enjoyed a lecture that Dr. Hutton gave on Cosmic Consciousness in Baltimore on June 30th. Frankie Hutton discussed a series of topics including meditation, positive energy, and having a peace of mind. She also discussed the power of plant life.

Frankie Hutton's Book *Rose Lore: Essays in Cultural History in Semiotics* will be published in Mandarin language this fall in China.

Jean Kilbourne

Jean Kilbourne spoke at the Edinburgh International Festival last summer and will return this summer.

Peg Johnston

Peg Johnston is more active than ever in the independent abortion provider filed in both the Abortion Care Network, where she is publishing a “Did You Know?” e-newsletter with content about the abortion experience. The mailing list is open to the public at www.abortioncarenetwork.org. And, the Abortion Conversation Project is awarding small grants to encourage productive conversations about abortion (www.abortionconversation.com).

Locally, she is involved with a group called the “Department of Public Art”, which is promoting murals and other public art in Binghamton, NY. She is also connected with the Happiness Project, which posts vintage photos of people who are visibly happy onto abandoned buildings around town. She manages the Independent Media Center’s open publishing progressive news site at www.binghamtonbridge.org. She can be reached at PegJohnston@stny.rr.com.

Dr. Jennifer Abod

Jennifer Abod is in the process of completing a 13-year project that needs finishing funds. “Passionate Pursuits of Angela Bowen” is a documentary portrait of race, class, gender, age and sexuality in one woman’s life. The film depicts Bowen’s life in her historical context (1950’s to Present) with rare archival footage, photographs and engaging interviews with student’s, national and international social justice activists, artists, colleagues and family members.

Support Jennifer Abod’s work on indiegogo: <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/passionate-pursuits-fundraising>

Haruko Watanabe

Haruko Watanabe was WIFP’s first international associate in 1978. In 1979, she brought her film team to Washington to record WIFP’s “First Annual Conference on Planning a National and International Communications System for Women.”

Since joining the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of Japan (FCCJ) in 1981, Haruko Watanabe has served on the board five times (vice president three times, director-at-large and Kaji (office auditor)). She chaired various committees 19 times including five times on the Election Committee.

“The Women Pioneers” video series changed its format into DVD and are being distributed by Osaka Prefecture Equality Center (Dawn Center). Both DVD and texts of bilingual dialogues between the women pioneers and Yoko Naita are utilized by various universities and prefecture and/or municipal equality centers all over Japan (women centers changed their names to “equality centers”).

In conjunction with the long-anticipated DVD release of the ground breaking Japanese series, the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of Japan (FCCJ) organized Special Screening and Panel Discussion: Women, Media and the Future of Japan on March 2, 2012 with top women and male journalists of FCCJ.

Dr. Carolyn LaDelle Bennett

Dr. Carolyn Bennett has a new book out: *No Land An Island, No People Apart*, a book that will be featured at the New York Library Association Book Exhibit in Niagara Falls, N.Y. on September 25 – 28, 2013.

“This book is unconcerned with political figures per se (or their parties),” Bennett says, “but rather with a malignant system maintained by a parade of tentacled regimes whose official (elected) base of operation begins in the capital of the United States, a system that is seemingly endorsed by the people of the United States.” The author maintains that the United States has created and entrenched a narrow worldview, espousing an attitude that all land and peoples belong to America to use and abuse, to pillage and plunder.

In this work, Dr. Carolyn LaDelle Bennett takes a second look at U.S. relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen, Libya and Somalia; and sees a continuing BREAKDOWN that worsens in act and consequence. She then presents her own ideas and worldview; and a challenge to embrace a nonviolent, transformative, inclusive progressivism imbued with a sense of global society, a sensibility that inspires constructive, continuous forward movement.

Bold and daring, NO LAND AN ISLAND NO PEOPLE APART is an educator’s guide, a philosopher’s critique, a news writer’s eye, an internationalist’s sensibility chronicling U.S. foreign relations violence and the human costs—East Africa crossing the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden into Persia, the Middle East, South Central Asia.



Hosts and Organizers of the Women and Technology Policy Forum

WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY FORUM

BY JADA ROGERS

The Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press (WIFP) was one of the hosts of the Women and Technology Policy Forum held June 4 at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, here in Washington, DC.

Mignon L. Clyburn, currently serving as Acting Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission following her appointment by President Obama on May 20, 2013, was honored and spoke to an enthusiastic group of leaders in the public and private sectors whose focus is technology innovation and the development of public policy.

Chairwoman Clyburn is the first female head of the FCC and the first African-American in this position. She is in her second term as a Democratic Commissioner.

Previously she had worked for over a decade for the Public Service Commission

in South Carolina. She was the publisher and general manager of the weekly Charleston newspaper, The Coastal Times (1984-1998) that focused on issues affecting the African-American community. Clyburn had studied banking, finance, and economics at the University of South Carolina, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree.



Chairwoman Clyburn strongly believes that everyone should have access to the Internet and broadband, and gain communication technology skills. Particularly she has worked to make it easier for the handicapped, disabled, and deaf impaired to communicate more easily.

Commissioner Clyburn is a member of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Federal-State Joint Board on Separations, and the Federal-State Joint Conference on Advanced Services, all of which she chaired for three years during her first term at the FCC.

Appointing an African-American woman as Acting FCC Chairwoman is an important first step and we are delighted that Mignon Clyburn was given this position, however brief. Now we need to have a woman in the position without "acting" in her title.

Minority Media and Telecommunications Council Conference

WIPF interns attended the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council's 11th annual Access to Capital conference, where they had the opportunity to participate in engaging dialogue, learn from experts at the top of their field, and make important connections with professionals in media. From the Policy Taskforce to the Civil Rights Roundtable, interns were exposed to a new array of issues and solutions that are currently being discussed in influential circles nationwide. Here, two interns share their most impactful experiences from the conference.

Jada Rogers: I attended "Spurring Innovation: Shortcuts for Tech Entrepreneurs Who Want to Turn an Idea into a Business. This panel provided great insight for me as a young entrepreneur on topics from how to wrangle investors to formulating business plans.

I learned that it is more important now than ever to network with people who already have successful businesses because young entrepreneurs face additional burdens in collecting capital in our current economy. My encounter with writer, producer, and director Issa Rae was very inspiring because her sitcom "Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl" went from a hobby to 20 million views for one of the best web series on YouTube. I also met innovator Karen Wishart, the manager of Sean Combs' new television network Revolt TV. Overall, the panel taught me anything is possible with dedication and hard work.

Medha Chandorkar: The Wealth Gap Roundtable was an incredibly educational experience for me. I knew that there was a wealth disparity in the U.S., but I didn't know exactly how stark the inequality was.

On average, I learned at the roundtable, a black family has close to 1/16 the wealth or capital of a white family. After highlighting such an immense problem, the roundtable quickly progressed to finding solutions. They called for greater resources into education in minority communities, recourse for the digital divide between non-Asian minorities and whites, and greater minority entrepreneurship in the field of media. Apart from being educated on an issue that I had rarely heard about, I had the chance to network with leaders in media and communications from California to New York. The perspective I gained from these discussions was a unique, enriching experience I could not have found anywhere else. I left the conference feeling empowered to work towards greater media democracy.

New Story Leadership Conference

By Ada Malamud

On July 6th I attended the SAIS and New Story Leadership (NSL) Middle East conference at John Hopkins University. I had no idea what NSL was and I was excited to learn that the organization’s mission is to change current Middle East discourse by bringing proactive and dedicated Israeli and Palestinian students to Washington DC for an extensive eight week course to learn about leadership, negotiation, and narrative technique. The conference mainly consisted of the students telling their personal stories and experiences living in Palestine and Israel. Each student had created a project that would help promote positive communication between Palestinians and Israelis.

I was eager to hear about all the possible ways the conflict in the Middle East could be amended. One particular pair of ladies, Coral Kasirer and Shorouk Badir, thrilled me with their idea to create an after school daycare for Israeli refugee children. Immediately after the conference I ran up to Badir and asked her how I could help their project. She happily gave me her email address and thanked me for my support. The conference was thoroughly inspirational and has led me to take steps of my own to support positive communication and change in the Middle East.

Trans-Inclusive Feminism

By Andrea Fulmer and Roberto Zuppa

The National Council of Women’s Organizations hosted a Trans-Inclusive Feminism Brown-Bag lunch Tuesday, July 16. The event featured noted speakers Dawn Edwards of the Transgender Education Association and Sharon Brackett, Board Chair of Gender Rights Maryland, and Dana Beyer Executive Director of the same organization. Dawn got the ball rolling by providing the gathering with some terminology and basic knowledge regarding the trans community. There were many good exercises to illustrate to all present how trans people feel about themselves and their environments. Other topics covered included difficulties facing couples when one comes out as trans, the lack of laws protecting trans individuals in the workplace and outside it, how being trans has changed over time, especially with the introduction of the internet, and the best ways to include trans women in feminist activism. There was an interesting discussion that built on the topic of the lack of legislation topic and how it affects trans individuals, particularly when it comes to health insurance, which often covers a myriad of issues but rarely the necessary surgeries and treatments trans individuals undergo. The lunch ended with a Q&A session. For more information about the transgender community and ways to take action, visit www.transequality.org

**Reframing Our World :
The Need for Black Women Subjectivity
in Cinema**

By Alethea Russell

Proposed by Aristotle in *Poetics*, art—which has since then expanded to many facets—is supposed to be true to life. The human condition so tightly folded into pieces of literature; pulsating through speakers; etched and colored on concrete and linen.

But no art form is as versatile and powerful as film. It encompasses a multitude of mediums—photography, performing arts, animation, writing, and music, just to name a handful. According to a Russian filmmaker, it is distinctively the most realistic of all the arts. Though it draws influence from things like literature and theater, it’s profitability, dynamic quality, and resonance is unparalleled.

“Most important is the role of the cinema in the construction of peoples’ consciousness,” Mauritanian filmmaker and actor Med Hondo declares. He continues by saying, “Cinema is

the mechanism par excellence for penetrating the minds of our peoples, influencing their everyday social behavior, directing them, diverting them from their historic national responsibilities.” Such characteristics distinguish it from the members of its creative family.

Let’s not forget cinema is a business. The United States movie industry alone brings in upward of \$100 billion a year. Our entertainment, language, and policies dominate global industries—meaning American culture and attitudes infiltrate international consciousness. Therefore, the repetitious and shallow portrayal of certain social groups are met with acceptance by both domestic and foreign consumers as true to life.

Considering 90 percent of the world’s media is a product of six major

corporations—from newspaper, magazine and book publications,

radio and television broadcasts, movies and music, video games, and cell phone

and internet services—it’s no wonder why the mainstream sounds and images we consume daily are monotonous—boasting in stereotypes, misogyny, and vanity—pursuant of the capitalistic and colonialistic ideals of its creators, covertly preying on the proletariat.

The words and pictures in our mind, cohesive and deliberate, form association. It is the same type of programming used on toddlers to teach them how to say their ABCs and spell. Only we’re not dealing with fruit and colors. We’re dealing with people and how we perceive each other.

So if life imitates art and art imitates life then what does the content being produced by Hollywood and the influx of art house films created by Black African-oriented creators say about our society?

A comedian once said Hollywood lets audiences know exactly how it feels about women and black people. The messages I read in media go as follows: women are merely sexual objects subjected to voyeurism, possession, and male pleasure; racial minorities are exotic/otherworldly creatures, sometimes completely invisible in an increasingly multicultural world.

No one knows the weight of both existences better than black women. As an African American woman my worldview differs from others, even those within the African Diaspora. That is to say that the black experience is diverse. So to assume one image or perspective is more valid than the next suggests bias and carelessness.

Fortunately, there's hope. Women and racial minorities are emerging in numbers to challenge the status quo and write from their point-of-view, a perspective deficient in mainstream literature, journalism, and script-writing and so often dictated by privileged, middle-aged, Euro-minded men.

It is the stubbornness and lack of forward-thinking on behalf of studio execs

and not, in fact, the consensus of the public that deem black cinema unmarketable and undesirable.

“Pariah,” the short-turned-full-length-drama by Dee Rees about a teenager learning to love herself was turned down by many film execs who the creator claims used coded language to dismiss the story as being “too black” and “too gay.” Since its release it has won 25 awards, including the GLAAD Outstanding Film Award last year, and received over three dozen film festivals acceptances. Such a response leads Rees to believe “audiences are progressive” and “want to see different kinds of stories.” Unfortunately, Hollywood isn't supportive of Black Cinema, especially when the subject is a woman of color. And with competition from TV, on-demand services, and piracy the film industry is slowly losing its appeal and

audience.

For a decade Ava DuVernay worked as a movie and television publicist, representing some of Hollywood's top directors, including Clint Eastwood and Michael Mann, before taking the leap into filmmaking. She even owned her own firm called DVA Media & Marketing.

Her hard work behind industry greats prepared and compelled her to pursue filmmaking. In 2011, she developed AFFRM, the African American Film Festival Releasing Movement



DuVernay (r) with Venus Williams

which distributes black owned art films—a total of six so far—and is responsible for the release of her debut narrative “I Will Follow.”

Produced solely out of her own pocket, the movie is emphatically a “personal story” which spends twenty-four hours with a woman (played by Salli Richardson-Whitfield) who has to pack up her beloved aunt’s (played by Beverly Todd) belongings following the cancer-stricken relative’s death. Though comprised of a black cast, the story about the loss of a loved one and those who are left to survive them is universal.

The success of her introductory film and the sophomore effort “Middle of Nowhere” correlates to Ree’s sentiments that there is an audience for black cinema. Furthermore, according to DuVernay, films of color don’t have to be the typical action, comedy, or historical account to get movie lovers’ attention.

While she may not have profited much from her first couple of projects, the entrepreneur and artist is well on her way to

developing an imitable model for producing quality indie films. She values the work of volunteers, social media, and cultivating relationships with other like-minded creatives in addition to traditional PR tactics which have allowed her to produce, promote, and distribute her films without interference from a major studio. She has chosen this path as a way to ensure indie black films continue to be made and are given the platform to be displayed.

Just recently ESPN aired “Venus Vs.,” a short documentary directed by DuVernay highlighting Venus Williams’ dedication to continue trailblazing athlete Billie Jean King’s pay equity campaign for winning grand slam women players. This comes just months after the filmmaker won Sundance’s 2012 Best Director Award, the first time for an African American female. She was actually approached by the sports network to develop a documentary on a subject of her own choosing for their Nine at IX series celebrating the 40th anniversary of Title IX, the legislation that forbids any feder-

ally funded academic program or activity from exercising gender discrimination.

“There’s something very important about films about black women and girls being made by black women,” the filmmaker begins. “It is a reflection as opposed to an interpretation, and I think we get a lot of interpretations about the lives of women that are not coming from women.” Having grown up in the same neighborhood as the enterprising tennis star, DuVernay felt compelled to share this much overlooked story. In the style of her previous work the narrative revolves around the POV of a black woman. We are given a glimpse into Williams’ character. Not as an afterthought or a victim. Non-stereotypical. Multidimensional. Heroic. Human.

Recently DuVernay became the second black woman invited to join the Academy Awards’ director branch. Kasi Lemmons preceded her in 2012. This means more women of color in places of influence.

With several movie and TV projects on the way it appears life these days

is moving fast for the 40 year old South Central L.A. native.

“It’s a great time to be a black female, or female filmmaker,” DuVernay boasts. “This is the time where we can pick up our cameras and make the films we want to make.”



Jessie Maple: first black woman to direct two feature length films

Black women creators have been making films and history since the early 20th century. DuVernay and Rees walk in essence of other illustrators of black female subjectivity such as Tressie Souders, claimed to be the first black woman to direct a film in the U.S. (“A Woman’s Error,” 1922); Ayoka Chenzira, the Spelman College professor noted as the first African American woman animator (“Hairpiece: A Film for Nappy Headed People,” 1985); Joy Shannon, the first African American,

first black woman to receive a home video release (“Uptown Angel,” 1989); Euzhan Palcy from Mozambique, named the first woman of African descent to direct a major feature film (“A Dry White Season,” 1989); Julie Dash, the first African American woman to

have her film distributed nationally (“Daughters of the Dust,” 1991); Leslie Harris, the first black woman to have her film distributed by a major theatrical distributor (“Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.,” 1993); Audrey Lewis, the first to write and direct a sci-fi feature (“The Gifted,” 1993); Tsitsi Dangarembga, writer of Zimbabwe’s highest-grossing film and the first black Zimbabwean woman to director a feature film (“Neria,” 1993); “Everyone’s Child,” 1996); Pratibha Parmar, the Kenyan-born Indian who has dedicated her career to community outreach and using cinema as a tool for educating

audiences about topics like lesbianism and FGM (“Warrior Marks,” 1993); Darnell Martin, first black American woman to direct a feature film produced by a major studio (“I Like It Like That,” 1994); Dianne Houston, first and only black woman nominated for an Academy Award for a short film (“Tuesday Morning Ride,” 1995); Cheryl Dunye, writer, director, and star of the first African American lesbian feature film (“The Watermelon Woman,” 1996); Kasi Lemmons, creator of the highest-grossing independent film of 1997 (“Eve’s Bayou”); Gina Prince-Bythewood, writer and director of the highest-grossing film by an Afro-American woman (“Love & Basketball”); Aishah Shahidah Simmons, rape and incest survivor, activist, LGBT Studies lecturer and documentary filmmaker (No! The Rape Documentary,” 2006); Rahel Zegeye, responsible for “Beirut,” a documentary inspired by her frightening experience as an Ethiopian migrant and domestic worker

in the Middle Eastern city (2006); Issa Rae, the writer/director/producer/TV show hostess whose popular web series “Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl” is one of few monetizing through YouTube; Maureen Aladin, Jessica Hartley & Ella Turenne, founders of SistaPac Productions and creators of “Kindred,” a web series that follows three African American women dealing with life issues such as sexual harassment, cheating, substance abuse, fatal diseases, racism, and homosexuality; Dash Harris, an Afro-Panamanian whose documentary “Negro” explores black Latino identity (2012); and Mara Brock Akil, creator of the number one scripted show on cable (“The Game”) and BET’s first original drama (“Being Mary Jane” which debuted this summer to record numbers—making it the year’s top weeknight movie premiere for the 18-49 demographic thus far).

A major part of film or art in any form is self-expression. It’s important that media be free, diverse, and ever-evolving. Democracy gives voice to the stories,

beliefs, and overall existence of its constituents. If we are shown only a fragment of the world as told by Hollywood or even our Diasporic brethren then so many significant figures are made invisible.

For the same reason silent film began including sound and black & whites blossomed into color, these objects—sound and color—are true to life as is the case with black women. They exist in variations of beauty, background, and intelligence and until we view them as necessary components to understanding language, culture, history and humanity then their stories get diminished.

Of the recently emerging black women filmmakers I think Amma Asante, Hanelle M. Culpepper, Nikyatu Jusu, Wanuri Kahiu, and Stacey Muhammad—the first that come to mind—show promise. Through self-created, proactive imagery all those mentioned in this article and others alike show us sides of Black and female identities we hardly see: a nursing student who chooses to postpone her academic career to support her

incarcerated husband; set in the early 1900s, the traditions of a small Gullah group is threatened as members plan to migrate elsewhere; a widow abandoned and misused by family in her rural Zimbabwean town; a gifted 17-year old Brooklynite adamant to graduate early in order to escape the ghetto and attend medical school; a successful professional who can’t seem to find success in her romantic or familial life; a documentary on the involvement of women like Fannie Lou Hamer and June Jordan in the Civil Rights, Feminist, and Black Power movements; a post-World War III tale set in Africa following a museum curator who believes there is life outside her indoor community although water is scarce and nature’s extinct.

As a student of film I say thanks to all the fearless lens holders and storytellers. Since the owners of media refuse to value us we shall continue forging our own paths, decolonizing cinema. I shall make no more excuses which keep me from shaping my own world and declaring my existence, one frame at a time.

Sexism Sells: The Misogynistic Depiction of Women in Advertising

By Medha Chandorkar

The second-class citizenry of women is nowhere as evident in the industrialized world as it is in the fashion advertising industry. The primary consumers of fashion are females, and yet, if one were to glance through a stack of fashion magazines, the primary audience would seem to be male.

Women are invariably portrayed as sexualized objects, with bags over their heads and bruises on their bodies or in subservient, sexual positions to men, no matter what is being sold. The infamous 2007 Dolce & Gabbana ad (shown) that depicted a gang rape received great backlash, but such images have become even more popular today. To cite just a few recent examples, Johnny Farah depicted a woman being strangled by a belt, Red Tape menswear had scantily-clothed women in vending machines, and boutique store Blender hung sexualized parts of women's bodies on hooks dangling from the ceiling. Women, the message seems to be, are literally just



meat.

Objectifying women is obviously damaging to the struggle for gender equality, but what's worse is that the pre-eminent creative minds behind these ads are not lowly designers who must follow the tide or risk losing profits. They standard of sexism is set by the elite of the fashion world: the Tom Fords and the Jimmy Choos. Their creative departments and ad designers have deep pockets and the influence to set the tone for the industry, yet they continuously revert to the same trope: women as victims, their bodies as sex.

Why? It's simple. Only 3% of U.S. creative directors are female. When men are the only ones creating the ads, they will create it from their own viewpoint of what is attractive and desirable. Male sexual aggression and passive, objectified women

become the norm, and when companies are confronted with the sexism inherent in their images, they deny it. In response to the backlash against their gang rape ad, Gabbana refused to apologize because he was just portraying "an erotic dream, a sexual game." One might think that sometime during the lengthy creative process, someone would have mentioned that being held down by four men is much more a form of threatening, scary, and harmful sexual violence than an erotic game, but that would have required a woman's perspective. And because women aren't present in the boardroom or the design room or any sort of room in these companies, their voices are not heard and their perspective goes unnoticed or, worse, dismissed.

Furthermore, in the words of Jean Kilbourne, creator of the award-winning

“Killing Us Softly,” advertising is not meant to sell us objects, but concepts. Companies want us to keep buying their products, so they portray women as inferior and flawed, while presenting their objects as the cure to become beautiful and perfect. Of course, the cure is temporary, until next season’s fashions, or impossible to achieve, with ever-skinnyer models helped by PhotoShop. But when their goal is to create an endless demand, they must set an impossible standard and ensure that women forever feel “not good enough.”

These tactics, though sickening, are not just relegated to the world of fashion. They are prevalent throughout the entire advertising industry. Women’s bodies are used to sell everything from food (think beer commercials) to better mortgage rates. And because they’re so prevalent, it’s impossible to be unaffected by them.

The average American woman sees 400-600 advertisements every single day, and each one is a single subconscious reinforcement. One may think that they themselves are immune to this form of

media, but the effect of quantity adds up quickly but silently. Studies have also shown that exposure to sexually explicit advertisements results in both men and women more strongly enforcing gender norms, accepting rape myths, and, specifically in the case of men, acting sexually aggressive towards women. Misogynistic advertising is yet another link in today’s rape culture.

Unfortunately, the problem is only getting worse. First, through globalization, the beauty ideals of the West are spreading around the world. A study comparing US and Indian magazines, for example, found that female models in India were beginning to copy Western poses and gendered stereotypes, with the added complication of racism through lighter skin. Second, the objectification is now also being applied to men. Kraft’s latest ads portray nearly-naked men with suggestive

taglines (“The only thing better than dressing is undressing.”). This is not the gender equality in advertising media that feminists seek.

Advertising that demeans women is the norm in the industry today, and the problem is only compounded as we increase and expand our media consumption. Unfortunately, it’s also the kind of issue that seems too big to solve. How do we begin addressing a creative direction that spans almost all industries? In the past few decades, that question has been ignored for being too expansive, but the only thing that has changed is the number of misogynistic ads – and that number is only increasing.

We cannot hope to change rape culture if we do not change how we view women. We must begin with increasing the awareness that objectifying and humiliating women in the media is dangerous for everyone.



Rape Culture and American News Media

By Andrea Fulmer

Culture can be a beautiful thing, especially when the convergence of cultures creates a space to meet new people and learn from new experiences. But what happens when a dangerous component of a culture quietly persists? You are far less likely to hear about the pervasive dark side of culture, though it does exist. In America, one of the most persistent and troubling is rape culture. More troubling yet is how our news media, our most popular information outlet, perpetuates and encourages it.

Before delving into the news media's role in rape culture, we must first define rape. According to Merriam-Webster, rape is 'unlawful sexual activity carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is incapable of valid consent.' It also defines it as 'an outrageous violation.' Statistically, in America, 1 out of every 6 women has been the victim of an attempted

or completed rape in her lifetime. For girls between the ages of 16 and 19, the likelihood of being a victim of sexual assault is four times higher than the general population.

But what is rape culture?

Susan Griffin, a well known writer and eco-feminist, wrote in "Rape: The All American Crime": "I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age, I, like most women, have thought of rape as part of my natural environment – something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning." This is a strong sentiment, but one that most women would agree with and which emphasizes that rape culture is so engrained that it has become constant and expected. For women, the following will likely sound very familiar: Is my skirt too short? Can I run in these shoes if need be? When I leave, which friend can walk with me? The laundry list that must be considered to supposedly protect oneself from rape is endless.

Added to these false safety measures are rape myths, or ideas that people believe to be true about rape but are generally used to dismiss the severity of it. They include the idea that women enjoy rape, ask to be raped, and lie about being raped. In conjunction with the U.S.'s patriarchal norms, which give men higher status over women, the prevailing social mindset places the responsibility of preventing rape on women and implies that to have been raped at all is the fault of the woman. These attitudes lead to victim-blaming and victim-shaming, designed to silence the survivors of rape and discourage them from seeking support.

Though the blame for rape culture lies with several sources, the media is easily the largest perpetrator. The vast majority of Americans get their news online and via television courtesy of major media outlets and, because journalists and reporters are deemed experts, viewers trust what they report and how they report it. Unfortunately, the major media outlets today are heavily ratings-based,

seeking to placate viewers by providing news that caters to their tastes and stays in their comfort zone.

The direct impact is that rape is not usually discussed, unless the case is extremely bizarre or includes a famous personality. On the rare occasions when it is discussed, the overwhelming dialogue on both conservative and liberal channels is framed in victim-shaming, with rapists receiving sympathy from journalists who are both shaped by and shaping the society around them.

Nowhere is this clearer than the reporting on the recent Steubenville rape case where a 16-year-old girl was sexually assaulted and raped while unconscious. While reporting the guilty verdict of the judge's sentence, a CNN reporter stated that it was "incredibly difficult, even for an outsider like me, to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star football players, very good students, literally watched as they believed their lives fell apart..." By completely disregarding the victim, who had been socially ostracized in her town and

was receiving death threats, and by downplaying the serious, violent crime that the rapists had committed, CNN was once again telling women that the assailant's self-esteem is more important than the victim's pain and suffering.

But rape culture is not inevitable. If the news media, instead of ignoring or misaddressing the issue, were to embrace open dialogue about rape, it would greatly diminish rape myths and victim silencing. By sharing facts and statistics, allowing victims to tell their own story, showcasing advocacy groups, looking critically at how rape is handled in America, and offering solutions, the media could help appease the damage that it has done.

Don't tell me that you feel bad that a rapist is being sentenced; tell me that only 3% of rapists will serve even a day in prison. Don't tell me that the victim was walking at night; tell me that there are 17.7 million female victims in the U.S., who were attacked at all times of the day. Don't tell me that girls are asking for it; tell me that our entertain-

ment media unequivocally paints women as sexualized objects and men as their masters.

Tell me that rape is a 17th century crime that has no place in a 21st century society. Tell me that though rape is never going to be eradicated completely, we cannot and should not ever condone it. Tell me that the battle against rape is long and hard, but that we cannot afford to not fight it. Most of all, tell me that women and men are equal, and that rape, as a tool of power and oppression over women, is a choice made by rapists that is disgusting, devastating, and unacceptable.

FGM: A Human Rights Issue

By Roberto Zuppa and Alethea Russell

Africa is the face of AIDS and HIV, famine, hunger, poverty, slavery, and war—our attention placed so diligently on the unfortunate circumstances permeating a large portion of the continent rather than raising awareness at the occurrence of these dilemmas as global issues. Malnourished children do not only reside in third world countries in alarming disproportion to the national population and some of the wealthiest and most technologically sound nations have large numbers of unemployed and financially unstable citizens. The lack, conflict, and eruption of disease is rooted in the abuse of power determined to control various social groups based on ability, age, class, cultural identity, and gender. Of these, young black women of African orientation tend to experience the most debasing and undignified acts threatening removal of their position as manufacturers

of culture. Instead, they are subjected to dangerous conditions encouraged by custom adherence, ignorance and coercion.

Among the large number of human rights violations and forms of gender-based discrimination, one of the most serious and common is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also recognized as such by the international community as a whole. Preventing and eliminating FGM is an important goal of feminists and others who see it as human rights abuse. FGM is “a crime that is being committed in many countries,” as Senegalese model, author and human rights activist Waris Dirie puts it.

FGM is usually carried out on young girls between 8-16 years old and sometimes on adult women. Annually, potentially 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing surgery.

The procedure is carried out in four different ways.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) the major types of procedures are:

Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris). Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are “the lips” that surround the vagina). Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris. Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing,

incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

tions and newborn deaths;the need for later surgeries.

Female genital cutting is anti-feminist. It is a sexist principle that focuses on male sexual pleasure, disregards female sexual pleasure and health, and holds women to male standards of attractiveness. Moreover, it places the lives of young women at risk. About one-third of those who receive the surgery do not survive.

The effects of such a harsh practice could be seen in these ways:

Short-term: severe pain; shock; disturbances in eating; hemorrhage (bleeding); tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection); urine retention; open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue; sense of fear resulting in low self-esteem

Long-term: recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections; cysts; infertility; an increased risk of childbirth compli-

It may be culturally acceptable, but it poses a threat to a woman's well-being. The cruel practice is generally carried out by a woman in the community who follows traditional methods, most frequently using razor blades or knives that are rarely sterilized. Girls are not given anesthetics or pain killers during the procedure. The fact that the practitioner is an important and respected individual--sometimes a member of one's own family--contributes to the pressure to carry out the procedure. Girls are not considered marriageable or pure if they do not undergo this cutting so there is pressure on parents as well to allow this procedure to be performed on their daughters.

Yet, relatives are not the only ones responsible for the enforcement of female cutting. Health care providers are also enablers. Medical professionals who or-

chestrate female genital mutilation usually come from cultures where it is acceptable so they encourage the practice. In some cases where the surgeon does not share the same views on FGM as the patient, the operation is still done out of respect for the patient's beliefs. Not only that, finances received from performing the surgery may also be an incentive for providing the service. The main difference between the two groups of practitioners is that it is easier to justify female circumcision when it's done by a professional under sterilized conditions.

Some reasons given for the procedure: While most Muslims say FGM is not part of the religion but is a cultural practice, others say FGM is built on religious factors, the correct application of the rule from the Qur'an that it is the manifestation of the Islamic way of life (although the Prophet acknowledges that all harmful acts are forbidden). Considered necessary to be clean and modest;

rites of passage from childhood to adulthood (womanhood) in order to be ready for marriage; reduce women's libido in order to avoid them having illicit sexual behaviors; honor for men, family and tradition; increases male sexual pleasure.

It is the willful participation of the women who initiate the surgery and allow their daughters to be cut in this manner that add to the problem. Women, as caregivers and teachers, are known to maintain culture. Many of their society's atrocious practices can be terminated at the authority of well-informed, resourceful and empowered women and with an allegiance of male advocates.

Contrary to the fact that millions of girls and women throughout continental Africa are circumcised and it is estimated that the amount will increase each year, a significant number of males and females disapprove of the custom. In Benin and Burkina Faso, almost 50% of each country's

female population don't see FGM as beneficial. The percentage is even greater in Kenya at 59%. More males than females in Chad and Sierra Leone are against it. Specifically, in Guinea where about nine-in-ten females have been cut, 23% more men think FGM should cease than their female counterparts.

Female genital cutting is common practice in at least 28 African countries, which explains why people may associate it with being an African epidemic. Unfortunately, it affects citizens in other areas, including parts of the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe. In the UK, it has been considered a serious crime since the mid-1980s. In 2003, legislation was sought to give offenders up to 14 years of imprisonment for performing FGM on any UK citizen abroad. No one has been prosecuted under this law yet, but the implementation of the law goes to show that victims reside all throughout the world and need protection and care provided by their

Women are suffering the consequences of FGM procedure, most of them in Africa.

In 2001, estimates by the National Demographic and Health Survey produced the following statistics of rates of FGM, at the time overwhelming: 96% to 100% of women in Somalia, 99% in Guinea, 94% in Mali, and 72% in Burkina Faso. Elsewhere percentages decrease: 12% in Togo, 5% in Niger, 5% in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
 "Undergoing FGM"
 - Pierre Foldes

home countries. Culture and tradition is often given more consideration than individual rights. Legally, women are protected under a large range of international instruments such as the Convention on Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The United Nation's Division for the Advancement of Women explains CEDAW: Awareness, education, counseling, post-operative healthcare services,

and public policy will be the keys to dealing with the problem in most of the countries where it is still common. It is possible, by setting up public policy based on the law (at national and international level), to reduce and/or eliminate such a cruel practice. Within the last fifteen years state parties around the world have already taken up powerful actions, including one involving European Women's Lobby which set up a European campaign on Women Asylum Seekers requiring recognition in the law for the prosecution of some of the the worse crimes against women such as FGM. The main purpose of such campaigns is to comply with international obligation in particular with the government's duty to respect, protect and fulfill rights as set forth into the CEDAW:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often

described as an international bill of rights for women. By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms.

Mass media also has a significant role to play but thus far has done little to contribute to the eradication of this particular human rights abuse. Only where individuals have spoken up and written about the procedure has there been coverage.

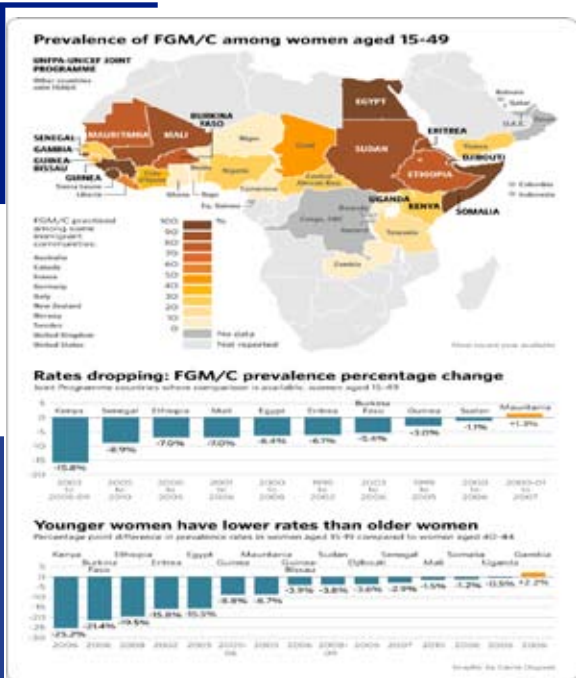
The World Health Organization (WHO) stands in agreement with Sister Fa about the importance of mass media spreading information and promoting dialogue. Indeed, WHO found that dramas, poetry and songs used to educate about FGM issue increased public awareness and started to reach ministries of government. It led them to create better policies and helped break down the wall of silence. When mass media does give coverage to the important issue of FGM, the potential for progress on the issue increases. For instance, *The Guardian* has had articles promoting campaigns and there

have been TV programs aired, despite government discouragement. The work of women and organizations around the world, as part of the international community, has an important impact.

To fill all the gaps that the law is not able to cover by itself requires the effort from women and organizations in the struggle against FGM. The activism of women like Sister Fa and Waris Dirie does not go unnoticed. It is a necessary element for women who have undergone female genital mutilation to tell their own stories and sound the horn for current and potential victims. Education and community activism must accompany laws or there will be no change.

Waris Dirie

A survivor of female circumcision for which she experienced at the impressionable age of three, Dirie has spent over a decade dedicated to combatting FGM. Through her organization, the Desert Flower Foundation, she works to put an end to the practice by raising public awareness, creating networks, and organizing events and educational programs. Additionally, the Desert Flower Foundation provides support for victims.



Sister Fa, Senegal’s queen of hip-hop is one of the first well-known women breaking the taboo on this topic. Relying on her hard work the United Nation wrote its first report in 2008 remarking “[The] success rates with more than 6,000 villages and communities in six countries already abandoning the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) – also known as cutting or female circumcision – with the numbers growing every month.” - *The Guardian*, Africa shows sings of winning war against female genital mutilation, February 2011.

Centre for Reproductive Rights:

This is an organization working actively on the ground to protect, respect and fulfill basic rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights through a global legal advocacy program that has proven that big changes has been done.

MAENDELEO YA WANAWAKE ORGANIZATION (MYWO) designed and implemented a strong advocacy strategy which brings significant improvement to the community, such as: Promoting good cultural practices and sensitizing community on cultural practices that fringe on Human Rights
Encourage Formation of parents and youth support groups
Promoting alternative rite of passage (ARP) for girls
Capacity building of trainers on the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, and the related laws.
<http://mywokenya.org/>

Similar accomplishments reached by other NGO’s

- African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF)**
- Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF)**
- Tanzania Women Association (TAMWA)**
- Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT)**

Women's Russian Punk Group Sparks the Rise of Media



By Ada Malamud

On February 21, 2012, five members of the Russian feminist punk collective, Pussy Riot, stormed into Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Masked in brightly colored balaclavas to hide their identities, the women performed a thirty second song titled "A Punk Prayer". The song criticized the Orthodox Church leaders for supporting current Russian President Vladimir Putin during the election and encouraged the destruction of the Putin United Russia Party. The performance was broken up by church security officials. Three women, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich, were arrested by the Russian police and were charged under alleged machinations, characterized with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred or hostility."

The performance was recorded and uploaded to YouTube, where it quickly received over one million views, becoming an internet sensation. People around the world were inspired or enraged by the performance and voiced their opinions passionately through social media websites and other media forms.

Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina are currently facing two years imprisonment in a penal colony. Samutsevich was released having argued that she had not even begun to strum her guitar before the performance was stopped. The other members of Pussy Riot are making the trial and their cause to organize and promote their anti-Putin agenda, as well as their feminist ideals through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Russia's Vkontakteto and other less known sites. The sites are used by mem-

bers to post upcoming Pussy Riot events, discuss and encourage political and feminist ideals, and show support for the band. Street performances are still carried out by the women's group, dressing in their signature neon balaclavas and punching at the sky to colorful lyrics.

Although Pussy Riot members refused to plead guilty, they have stressed their respect for religion and offered an apology for offending people who were insulted by the performance. They assured the public that their performance was purely an act against the relationship between the church and state. Russian news stations documented the trial heavily and although the women interviewed separately, it quickly became evident that they stood as one.

An HBO documentary titled *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer* was filmed showing the trial and spread more information about the band itself. The documentary helped summarize the allegations for people who did not witness the case first

hand in Russia. It portrayed the women as fearless revolutionists with sharp tongues that defiantly challenged the judge. The filmmakers included clips from the court case and interviews with ardently proud family members. The position taken by the filmmakers helped humanize the three women, masked with the balaclavas to promote their idea of the importance of community over ego.

Since the arrests, protestors against Putin have become vocal and energized, forcing the authorities to strengthen their hold and making even more arrests. The Russian government had not expected the global cry for the women's release and inflicted a severely harsh punishment as a response. People have gone through extreme lengths to show their support for Pussy Riot. One Russian artist, Petr Pavlensky, sewed his mouth shut in protest against the women's arrest.

Individual feminists and established feminist groups throughout the world took this event in stride, using media to keep a deluge of streaming information encourag-

ing support. Marches and riots have been carried out demanding the women's release. This last August, a march was organized in San Francisco, where the crowd broke out in thunderous instrumental song in support for Pussy Riot. World renowned celebrities such as Madonna, Yoko Ono, and Paul McCarthy spoke out against the verdict, further increasing public awareness.

It has become apparent how media, especially social media, plays a vital role in the real world. These protective sites allow the spread of information, where the government has more difficulty censoring than they would on the streets. Unfortunately, they can't control the negative attention Pussy Riot has gathered, unleashing several insidious Pussy Riot murders. Two women were found dead with numerous stab wounds on August 26th. The slogan "Free Pussy Riot" was scribbled in blood on their apartment wall. The band denounced the murders and assured the world that they absolutely did not support these actions. Pussy Riot encourages peaceful protest and many believe this was

an attempt to malign supporters and members of the band. Pyotr Verzilov, husband of Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, says that "This is an attempt to strike at all supporters of the group."

The trials of the Pussy Riot members have demonstrated just how prominent the evolution of media has become. Three young women were able to bring to attention Russia's inordinate state, flaming up protest with only a thirty second video that went viral. People have used the media to band together in support and opposition towards those that limit their freedoms. Whether it has been positive or negative attention, the media has accelerated the ticking time bomb for not only Russian politics, but women's freedom of speech.

WIFP ASSOCIATES

The following individuals are some of the hundreds of associates of WIFP. Many have been with us since the early days of the 1970s. Not all of those we work with are Associates, but the network of Associates helps us experience continuity in our endeavors over the years. We've shared projects and ideas. We've lent each other support. We continue to look forward to the energies of the newer Associates joining with us to bring about a radical restructuring of communication that will bring about true democracy in our countries.

Dorothy Abbott
Jennifer Abod, Ph.D.
Jo-Ann Huff Albers
Martha Leslie Allen, Ph.D.
Donna Caledonia Allen
Mark Allen
Ana Maria Alvarado
Emily Ballengee
Christian Barclay
Maurine Beasley, Ph.D.
Julia Beizer
Carolyn Bennett, Ph.D.
Nana Farika Berhane
Eleanor Biddle
Eleanor Blalock
Ester Bloom
Kathy Bonk
Marcia Boruta
Denise Bostrom
Pamela K. Bradshaw
Christen J. Brandt
Jennifer Braudaway
Carissa Brooks
Annie Brown
Susan Brownmiller
Amy Buck
Martha Burk, Ph.D.
Sara Burns
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Dyannah Byington
Lilia Cajillog
Patricia Campbell, Ph.D.
Lydia Carey
Bonnie Carlson
Jessica L. Chestnutt
Sena Christian
Danielle Chynoweth
Elayne G. Clift
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Reverend Cheryl Cornish
Nikki Craft
Pamela J. Creedom
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Dorothy Dean
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