



WHAT ONLINE HARASSMENT TELLS US ABOUT OUR NEWSROOMS: FROM INDIVIDUALS TO INSTITUTIONS

A WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER REPORT

FOREWORD

Newsroom leaders must do more to protect journalists from digital threats



Online abuse, harassment, and hate are shaping media in unprecedented ways. Facing tactics ranging from rape and death threats to impersonation and privacy invasions, journalists have necessarily had to alter how they select, investigate, and cover the news.

Ever-expanding digital threats to journalists are usually considered from the perspective of how individuals should protect themselves from external bad actors. This report, however, looks at online harassment and its connection to internal corporate culture, shedding light on the relationship between online harassment and systemic bias in the newsroom. In it, we share research, recommendations, and interviews, in addition to key insights drawn from an October 2019 convening, “What Online Harassment Tells Us About Our Newsrooms: From Individuals to Institutions.”

This symposium focused on why online harassment is a global threat to freedom of expression, the press, and democracy. Participants included industry leaders Mitra Kalita (senior vice president, news, opinion, and programming, CNN Digital & Programming); Raju Narisetti (who has overseen news operations at *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and Gizmodo Media Group, and is founder of India’s *Mint* newspaper); Nicole Carroll (editor-in-chief, *USA Today*); Soraya Chemaly (director of the WMC Speech Project); and Siri Chilazi (research fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School), an expert in advancing women and promoting gender equality within organizations.

We hope that this report will further shape the discussion around online abuse and harassment in America’s newsrooms and lead to change that ensures the safety of journalists.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Burton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Julie Burton
President and CEO
Women’s Media Center



ONLINE NEWS ASSOCIATION 2019 CONFERENCE

What Online Harassment Tells Us About Our Newsrooms: From Individuals to Institutions



Mitra Kalita

Senior Vice President, News,
Opinion, and Programming,
CNN Digital



Raju Narisetti

Previously managed news
operations, *The Washington Post*,
The Wall Street Journal; former
CEO, Gizmodo Media Group



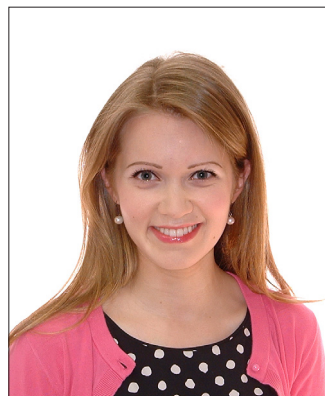
Nicole Carroll

Editor-in-Chief,
USA Today



Soraya Chemaly

Director of the
WMC Speech Project



Siri Chilazi

Research Fellow at the Women and
Public Policy Program at the Harvard
Kennedy School

WHAT ONLINE HARASSMENT TELLS US ABOUT OUR NEWSROOMS: FROM INDIVIDUALS TO INSTITUTIONS

Attracting and retaining diverse media talent is crucially important to fulfilling the obligations of a free press. In addition to clearly influencing how journalists work, online harassment also affects organizations' ability to recruit, retain, and reward diverse staff and cultivate inclusive media environments and leadership. The daily challenges of online harassment, and how a corporate culture manages those challenges, are directly linked to inclusivity and diversity at every level of media management and production.

Studies consistently show that for women; ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities; as well as gender-nonconforming people, online harassment is more frequent and intense and likelier to result in self-censoring. Yet in many newsrooms, support for targeted journalists is inconsistent, poorly defined, and anemic at best. Journalists are usually responsible, as individuals, for "staying safe" online, and a long-standing journalistic tradition urging journalists to "grow a thicker skin" frequently inhibits genuine understanding of the dynamics of abuse. This approach to online harassment means that those in media management often marginalize diverse voices and experiences, an imbalance that results in organizations persistently ill-prepared for the virulence of online hate and harassment.

Taking online harassment seriously is at the core of an inclusive newsroom and a critical step toward ensuring free speech for all. Given the media's crucial role in transmitting information and analysis to large, diverse audiences, media makers and managers must be in the vanguard in combating both harassment and the internal biases that exacerbate that harassment, as a key step to ensuring a robust, free press that represents a wide array of experiences and perspectives.

Women in particular are often encouraged to "stay safe" by taking personal and individual steps to remove themselves from potentially high-risk investigations and topics. Indeed, studies show that women, already by necessity hypervigilant about offline violence, alter their online habits and behavior to avoid harassment in ways that men do not, for example, by censoring or silencing themselves. In order to retain marginalized voices, newsrooms need to shift from a culture that puts the onus on individuals to protect themselves — and free speech — to one that makes an institutional commitment to support and defend them.



"Online harassment has absolutely altered the way I work and behave. I haven't changed the topics I cover, but I certainly make an effort to be less confrontational and nicer. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean I take a lot of the fire out of my voice and work."

— Jill Filipovic, contributing opinion writer,
The New York Times; freelance writer

WHAT EXACTLY IS ONLINE HARASSMENT?

A recent survey conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that 90 percent of female journalists surveyed in the United States and Canada believe online harassment is the biggest safety threat facing women in the profession.

What are we talking about when we talk about online harassment? The term itself is an anodyne catchall expression that masks the severity of tactics and effects. Online abuse comprises a range of tactics and malicious behaviors that includes sharing embarrassing or cruel content about a person, impersonation, doxing, stalking, electronic surveillance, violent threats, and the nonconsensual use of photographs. The online harassment of women, sometimes called cybersexism or cybermisogyny, is gendered abuse targeted specifically at women and girls online. It incorporates sexism, racism, religious prejudice, homophobia, and transphobia. It is carried out not only by noxious individuals — sustained, persistent harassment is also a known tactic employed by **networked political actors** and **malicious government agents** that are hostile to freedom of the press.

The purpose of harassment differs with every incidence, but it usually includes wanting to embarrass, humiliate, scare, threaten, silence, extort, or, in some instances, encourage mob attacks or other types of malevolent engagements.

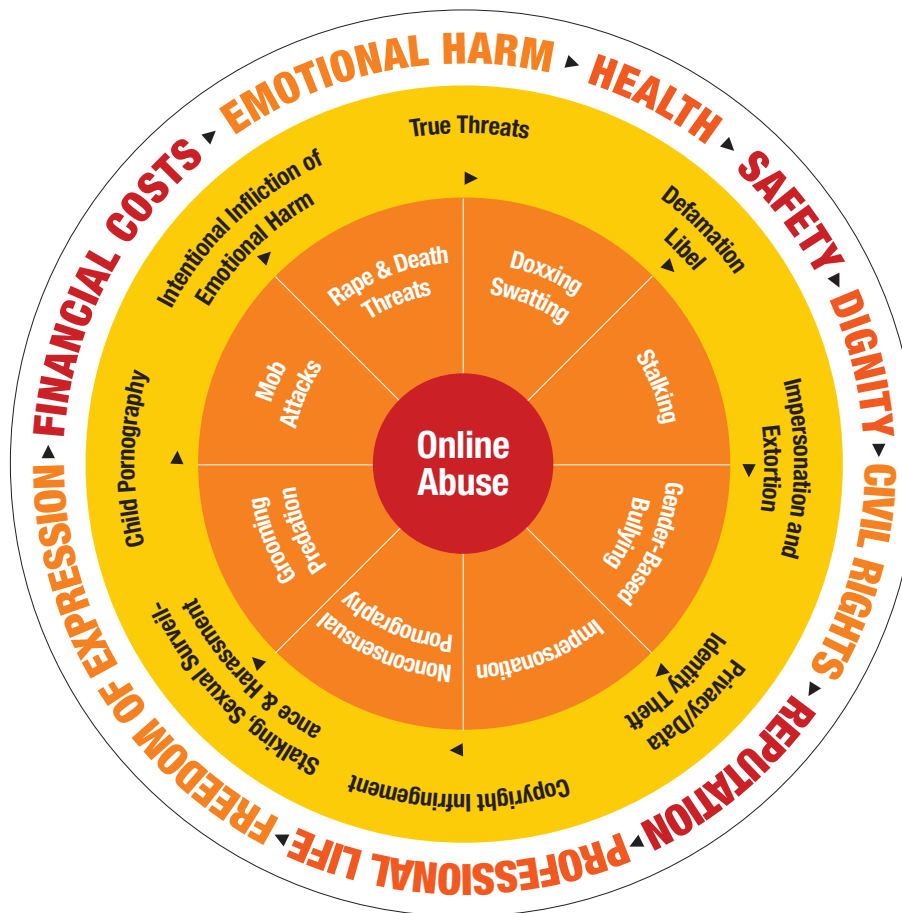
Harassment can compromise the civil rights of those targeted and has emotional, financial, physical, and professional impacts.



“Online harassment affects me greatly. I frequently self-censor in social media. I try not to let it make me shy away from the actual subjects I cover. Both trans issues and reproductive rights come with a significant amount of harassment. I know what’s coming even before anything is published.”

— Katelyn Burns, freelance writer (Rewire, Vox)

WMC WHEEL OF ONLINE ABUSE AND HARASSMENT



● Tactics ● Legal Issues ○ Impacts

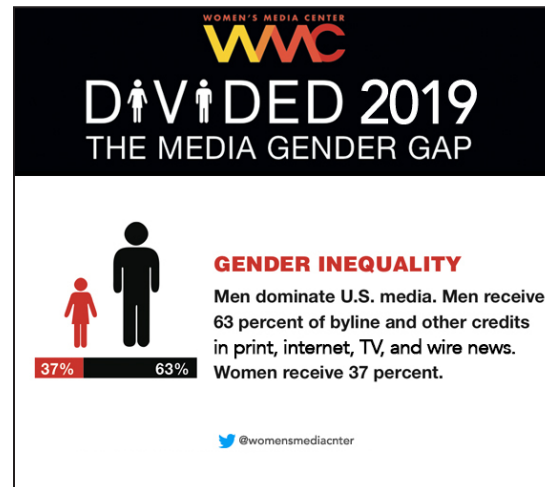
© Copyright 2020, Soraya Chermaly and Debjani Roy



LET'S TALK ABOUT BIAS IN NEWSROOMS

Bias permeates the media industry. Men still dominate the media landscape; that domination is both a result and a cause of the industry's systemic bias. Across all news platforms, men receive 63 percent of bylines and other credits, according to WMC's *"The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2019"* report.

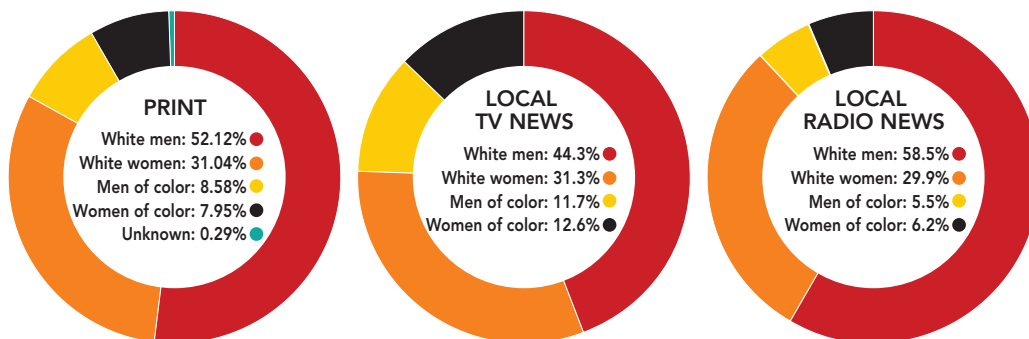
Despite women making up the majority of students in journalism schools and the industry overall, there are still very few in the upper ranks of the field, in part because systemic biases prevent them from gaining seniority, tenure, and experience. Ninety percent of the top editors at the 135 most widely distributed newspapers are white, and 73 percent are male, the *Columbia Journalism Review* found. This has worrying implications for both how and whether news gets covered and for the career advancement prospects of women and people of color. Women of color made up just 7.9 percent of traditional newspaper staff, 12.6 percent of local TV news staff, and 6.2 percent of local radio news staff, according to research from the American Society of News Editors and the Radio Television Digital News Association that was published in WMC's *"The Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media 2018"* report.



News coverage is still deeply gender-segregated for a number of topics, especially ones that garner massive audiences (such as sports, which is covered by a press corps that is 79 to 90 percent male), make the biggest headlines (such as international news and politics, or the

Women of Color are Underrepresented in U.S. News Media

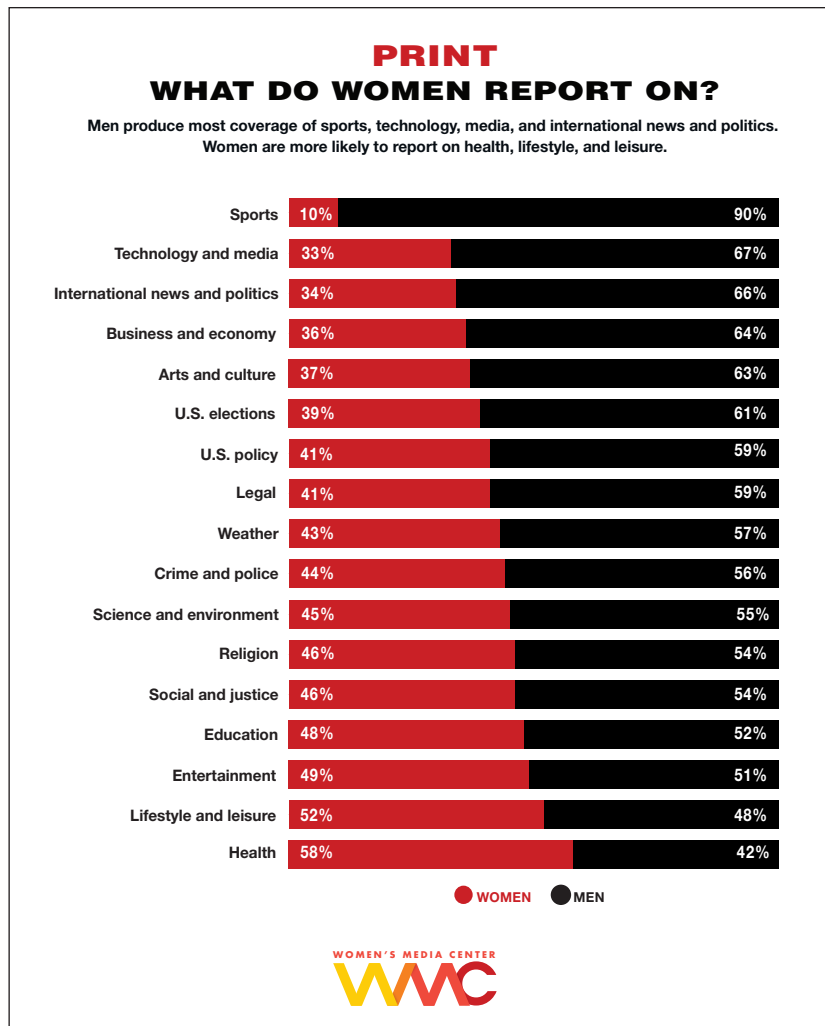
Women are more than half of the U.S population and people of color nearly 40 percent. But those who staff the nation's news organizations hardly reflect that diversity.



Source: American Society of News Editors. Print numbers are based only on the fraction of newsrooms that responded to ASNE's survey. The chart shows white and minority percentages of overall workforce, including both newsroom leaders and all others. Radio Television Digital News Association. Percentage estimates based on random sample.

Note: There is no data on both the race and gender of online-only news staff.

*Unknown: The race of a very small number of employees at some organizations is listed as "unknown" because those individuals desired not to provide the information.



U.S. elections), or contribute to journalists' professional visibility and success. Even if women make it in the door and last beyond the 10-year mark, they often struggle for high-profile beats and important assignments.



Raju Narisetti,
previously managed
news operations, *The
Washington Post*, *The Wall
Street Journal*; former CEO,
Gizmodo Media Group

"Inclusion is really not only an important moral issue, but has to be seen as a business problem, as a quality of our journalism problem, as a trust issue, as both an organizational and a legal issue," said Raju Narisetti, a former professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Before joining Columbia, Narisetti was CEO of Gizmodo Media Group and an executive and editor at several major newspapers, including *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal Europe*. To emphasize the essential importance of making the media more inclusive, he cited demographic trends predicting that by 2028, half of 18- to 34-year-olds in the United States will be of color.

The lack of diversity, especially at senior levels, poses a range of problems. When people in power hire only people who

look like them, it perpetuates a dangerous cycle. And when recruits from historically under-represented groups see a leadership of mostly white men, it discourages them from wanting to join that newsroom. In addition to creating blind spots in news coverage, failing to diversify newsrooms also means large audiences — markets, that is — go underserved.



Gloria Steinem,
co-founder, Women's
Media Center

"Missing women of color in the newsrooms of this country is an injustice in itself and an injustice to every American reader and viewer who is deprived of great stories and a full range of facts," explained activist, writer, and WMC co-founder Gloria Steinem.

Although some major news organizations have made public commitments to featuring more diversity in stories and storytellers, progress has not come nearly fast enough, and commitment to these objectives seems anemic. In 2019, only 428 out of 1,883 newsrooms answered the [diversity survey](#) of the News Leaders Association (formerly American Society of News Editors and Associated Press Media Editors), sending a clear, disheartening message that this issue was not a priority. This industry shrug spills over into how hostility to diverse voices — from internal biases to systemic obstacles to online harassment — affects minority staff and news coverage.

It is often easier, and more profitable, to default to traditional norms and ways of doing business. "We're in a stressful business, and we feel like every decision we make and every story we assign, it's got to be a home run, because we don't have that much time or money or resources," explained Nicole Carroll of *USA Today*. "Sometimes the folks make those assignments, like, well, I'm going to go with a winner, I'm going to go with this person who's been covering hurricanes for 30 years, so this person is going to go cover the hurricane." As she noted, this thinking is both unjust and unsustainable.



Nicole Carroll,
editor-in-chief, *USA Today*

HOW DOES HARASSMENT PARTICULARLY AFFECT WOMEN AND GENDER-NONCONFORMING JOURNALISTS?

Studies conducted by [Pew Research](#), [Amnesty International](#), the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), and the [International Women's Media Foundation](#) have documented both quantitative and qualitative differences in the ways that men and women experience harassment.

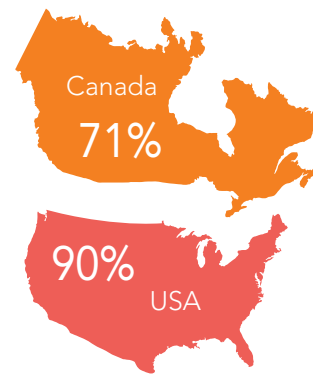
"I recently wrote a couple of articles that I knew would have a significant backlash. It's basically a permanent setting for me in Twitter that I only see notifications from people I follow. It gives me a little more control over my level of engagement with the nasty messages."

— Katelyn Burns, freelance writer (Rewire, Vox)

The harassment men experience tends to be one-off incidents of name-calling, perpetrated by people they do not know, often anonymously. Women, on the other hand, are targeted in more sustained ways that include sexualization and that are frequently tied to forms of offline gender-based violence, such as stalking and surveillance. Anonymous perpetrators are a problem, but anonymity should not be the only or primary source of concern. Female journalists are targeted by members of the public (readers, listeners, and viewers), but they are also far more likely to be targeted by people known to them, such as ex-spouses, classmates, acquaintances, and members of their own industry. For example, women journalists were targeted with abuse for years in a private Facebook group called Ligue du LOL. Its members included many French male journalists who regularly engaged in targeted harassment of their women colleagues.

Women also register higher “emotional resonance,” meaning that the harassment elicits more feeling and response. They are more likely to silence themselves or limit their behavior and exposure online. “Emotional resonance” may suggest that women are thin-skinned or less rational, but women’s reactions are not the result of “hurt feelings” or a lack of fortitude but rather reasonable responses to the threat of harm. Still, in an environment that rewards visibility and audience engagement, women and minorities who as a result of being targeted reduce their social media presence may lower their chances of career advancement.

While the exact relationship between online harassment and staff churn is unknown, the correlations seem clear. Dealing with online harassment, even the possibility of it, can contribute to higher burnout rates for women journalists. In addition to recent CPJ findings, a 2018 survey of almost 600 journalists and media workers by the International Women’s Media Foundation and TrollBusters.com found that nearly two-thirds of respondents had been threatened or harassed online at least once, a higher figure than the share of women reporting physical threats or harassment. Of those who had been harassed online, roughly 40 percent said that they had avoided working on certain stories and topics as a result. Although it’s hard to estimate how many people the profession has already lost due to harassment, we do know that online harassment, particularly on Twitter, a platform often used by journalists, is widespread and far more intense for **women of color**.



Ninety percent of U.S. journalists and 71 percent in Canada described online harassment as the biggest threat facing journalists today.

And 50 percent of those surveyed said they have dealt with online threats. But only a handful had received digital safety training.

Source: CPJ

A large orange fraction "2/3" is centered in the box.

Two-thirds of female journalist respondents have been harassed, with more than half experiencing attacks within the past year.

Source: IWMF and TrollBusters

Instability in the media industry also exacerbates the costs and risks generated by online harassment. Corporate consolidation, the winnowing and closing of newsrooms, and the high rates of women's churn out of newsrooms all contribute to expanding numbers of freelancers, who are even less likely to have access to institutional resources or support.

"I would love to see publications taking a stronger stand against harassment for all of their writers, not just those on staff. Some have done this by hiring official comment moderators, so at least their own platforms aren't used to harass their writers. But they don't seem to extend that to Twitter or social media, where I ... see writers from publications engaging in harassment and pile-on campaigns. It would be great if publications didn't just support their own writers, but refused to hire and employ harassers."

— Jill Filipovic, contributing opinion writer, *The New York Times*; freelance writer

Persistent sex segregation of news coverage is related to online abuse in several ways. For example, online harassment is often most severe when journalists are perceived to be acting outside their designated spheres of influence. Newsrooms are not immune to larger societal biases, leading to gender-based decisions about assignments. Editors are more likely to have male reporters cover "hard news" topics, such as politics and technology. And those same biases result in a higher likelihood of a woman journalist being targeted online when covering male-dominated, high-profile beats, such as sports, national and local politics, and extremism.



"I am definitely cognizant of avoiding topics that I know will bring out harassers, especially on Twitter. I have always had to deal with this in some capacity because I started out covering sports. If you are a woman covering sports, once they see your byline and realize you are a woman, you are going to be a target. At ESPN, one of the first things that we are told, at employee orientation, is about their security measures. They have the resources to provide security, legal backup, and more."

— Soraya Nadia McDonald, culture critic, *The Undeclared*, ESPN

Online harassment of women journalists exists on a broader spectrum of gendered harassment. Women face double jeopardy when they cover sexual harassment and violence and are also subjected to sexual harassment and violence in their own field. Unsurprisingly, women who write about sexualized violence, harassment, and threats are more likely to be targeted with harassment and threats of sexualized violence. Given the risks women face covering stories of sexualized violence as institutional corruption, managers and editors need to understand this double jeopardy and take steps to reduce related workplace hostility to women doing this work.

“Vox is very supportive in terms of online harassment. They asked, for example, if I wanted their social media team to manage my Twitter account. That was a significant change in my experience. Steps like this, when an institution knows that a topic is controversial, are easy and make a difference, so that we don’t have to depend on friends and family when something goes megaviral.”

— Katelyn Burns, freelance writer (Rewire, Vox)

How online harassment is perceived and dealt with in newsrooms sheds light on how we think about objectivity and inclusion. It is still dominantly the case that mainstream understanding of “journalistic objectivity” is conflated with men’s, particularly older white men’s, subjectivity. When the voices of women and people of color are disproportionately silenced, this de facto standard of objectivity is reified. People who experience the world differently — as young people who are more likely to be digital natives, for example, as people of color vulnerable to racism and xenophobia, or as women subject to misogyny, sexual harassment, or intersectional hatred — lose out, and so does the larger public. In regard to online harassment, that subjectivity often results in newsroom managers not taking online threats seriously, minimizing harms, and gaslighting staff who experience stress or fears as a result of being targeted.

23%

Nearly a quarter (23%) of women surveyed across eight countries said they had experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, ranging from 16% in Italy to 33% in the U.S.

Source: Amnesty International

Lastly, maintaining a leadership corps that does not reflect the diversity of less-senior staffers creates significant perceptual and experiential gaps. One consequence is a trivialization of the systemic harms of online harassment. Another consequence is a degraded public understanding of critical issues that results from talented journalists altering the way they produce news, changing what they focus on, or even leaving the field due to online harassment.

41%

Alarming, 41% of women who had experienced online abuse or harassment said that on at least one occasion, these online experiences made them feel that their physical safety was threatened.

Source: Amnesty International

IT’S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCLUSIVITY, ONLINE HARASSMENT, AND THE ROLE OF A FREE PRESS

Any discussion of bias in the media raises key questions about freedom of speech and journalistic ethics. Whose freedom of expression matters? Who can afford to remain in the news industry without fear, and who feels safe enough to speak freely and honestly? Who can cover the subjects of most critical importance? Whose speech is an institution willing to defend?

Freedom of the press has to be focused on the freedom of those members of the press who are at the greatest risk of being threatened and harmed. Harassment can be traumatizing, frightening, and isolating, and a lack of corporate support heightens vulnerability. If newsrooms do not recognize the disproportionate share of harassment targeted at certain groups of employees and take action to ensure their safety and rights, they risk losing the valuable contributions of these journalists and columnists — and so do news consumers.

Downplaying the effects of harassment is a symptom of larger systemic biases that maintain a distinct homogeneity in newsroom leadership. A lack of diversity at the top of the media profession is one of the primary reasons that online harassment and its effects on staff and news production are often not taken seriously at the institutional level. The same biases that shape the news we read and the entertainment we consume also influence how harassment is understood ... or not.

“When we were doing the feminism project at The Washington Post, in our early meetings, even before we’d solidified the topics to be covered, there was a staffer that explained that we had to put safety measures in place. We had to be prepared for abuse and harassment. We had a major paper dedicate resources to feminism, and there are people who would be unhappy about that.”

— Soraya Nadia McDonald, culture critic, The Undeclared, ESPN

Women reporters often encounter double standards in how newsrooms treat threats against them. In January 2020, *Washington Post* reporter Felicia Sonmez was threatened and doxed after she tweeted a news article about recently deceased Kobe Bryant. Instead of publicly defending her against threats, editors suspended Sonmez, arguing that in sharing information about a sexual assault case in Bryant’s past she was “hurting this institution.” In response to her safety concerns, a senior manager suggested that she get a hotel room. In a show of solidarity and support, more than 200 *Washington Post* staffers condemned the actions taken by the *Post*’s leadership and urged that, instead, the institution “immediately provide Felicia with a security detail and take whatever other steps are necessary to ensure her safety, as it has done in the past when other reporters were subject to threats. The company should issue a statement condemning abuse of its reporters, allow Felicia to return to work, rescind whatever sanctions have been imposed and provide her with any resources she may request as she navigates this traumatic experience.” In 2019, after a male colleague’s personal address was similarly published online, editors reportedly paid for an armed security guard to provide 24-hour security for three days.

ONLINE HARASSMENT IS AN INDUSTRY AND INSTITUTIONAL RISK

Online harassment is a matter not only of individual risk, but also of institutional risk. Although institutional leaders are taking steps to acknowledge that some members of their organizations are more vulnerable to online abuse than others, few understand that those vulnerabilities become institutional vulnerabilities as well. When a woman journalist’s credibility is undermined and threatened, so too is the credibility of the institution she represents. When

a bad actor targets a journalist, whether that bad actor is an individual or a state, her news organization and, more broadly, freedom of the press are targeted as well.

Organizations that are inclusive and diverse are better able to assess risk. The ability to assess risk is particularly important in media organizations, which are responsible for public information and understanding of that information. A newsroom dominated by white men, for example, is less equipped to assess and characterize risks that a more diverse newsroom would be sensitive to.

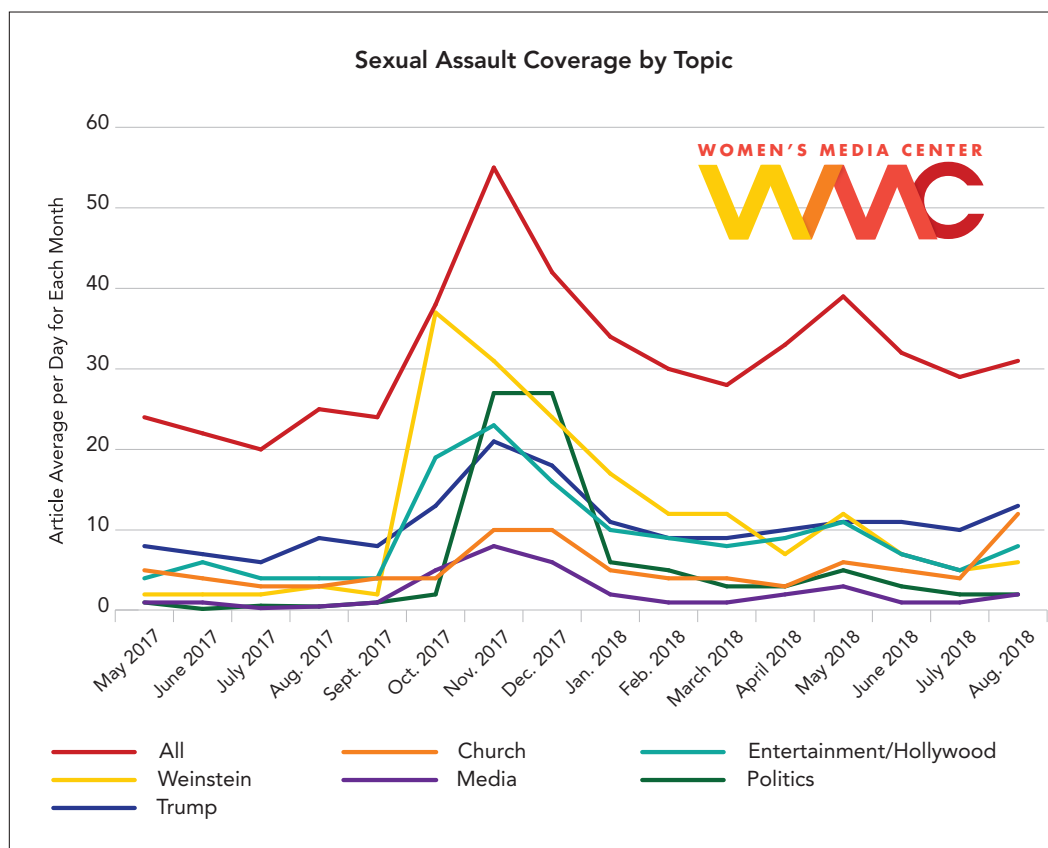
#MeToo stories have repeatedly illustrated that many news organizations not only failed to investigate and report on stories of sexual malfeasance in media organizations, but in some cases actively covered them up and rewarded perpetrators who went on to write about gender, politics, and power in biased ways.

The risks to women and institutions posed by sexual harassment and sexualized violence are still not being adequately addressed in newsrooms. “Media and #MeToo: The Women’s Media Center Report” documented 15 months of sexual assault and harassment coverage in 2017 and 2018. The report found that while media has aggressively covered sexual harassment and assault in other industries, it has stayed away from in-depth coverage of #MeToo media stories

46%

Across all countries, just under half (46%) of women responding to the survey who had experienced online abuse or harassment said it was misogynistic or sexist in nature.

Source: Amnesty International



RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT NEWSROOM LEADERS CAN DO

1. Commit to understanding the relationship of inclusivity, online harassment, and free speech in your newsroom.

Who faces exceptional challenges when doing their job? Is your newsroom one of those experiencing high rates of turnover among women? Are you retaining people of color up the ladder? If not, why?

Start with data. Meaningful improvement starts with having the right data, which means marshaling resources for data collection. *Climate surveys are essential.* Quantitative data (such as numbers on gender and racial diversity) might not be enough to truly understand how newsroom staffers experience their jobs. Regular climate surveys can provide valuable information on whether journalists feel supported in their jobs, feel safe from online and other harassment, and see growth opportunities within the newsroom.

“What gets measured, gets done,” explained Carroll. When Carroll began her tenure at *USA Today*, staff diversity was a priority. “I vowed that once a quarter, I would tell the entire staff how we were doing,” she said. Carroll went a step further and shared the paper’s data publicly.

Data, advises researcher and diversity consultant Siri Chilazi, should first be shared internally, to build trust and ensure accountability in-house, but it should also be used to set targets and goals, and shared publicly to increase accountability. Chilazi described Ros Atkins’ commitment to inclusive programming on his BBC show, *Outside Source*. Atkins began counting how many female and male contributors he had on the show, with a goal of reaching 50 percent female sources each month. The initiative, now called the 50:50 Project, has expanded to include more than 500 BBC teams, and more than 35 other media companies from Australia, the United States, South Africa, and Europe are applying the methodology within their organizations. Participants include *Financial Times*, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, WNYC, and Voice of America. Teams that have participated for a year or longer now consistently produce gender-equal programming. *Financial Times* and Bloomberg have also set targets and minimums for women quoted in stories. Separately, MSNBC’s *All In With Chris Hayes* and *AM Joy* have excelled at consistently tracking and maintaining gender and racial inclusivity and representation on their shows.



Siri Chilazi,
research fellow,
Women and Public
Policy Program, Harvard
Kennedy School

2. Acknowledge bias and begin engineering around it.

All of us hold stereotypes, prejudices, or unconscious biases about groups of people that shape how we view members of those groups. Unfortunately, simply raising awareness of these biases or acknowledging they exist is not sufficient to eliminate or unlearn them. In fact, raising awareness, **studies** suggest, may exacerbate biases. What is needed instead is institutional change that does not rely on changing people’s individual behaviors: designing processes and systems engineered around biases in order to facilitate

fairer outcomes. Create and share benchmarks for change and establish mechanisms for accountability.

Another way to reduce hiring bias is to enlarge cohorts of candidates by hiring for multiple positions at the same time. “When we make multiple decisions at the same time, and when we get to compare a bigger group of people against each other, as opposed to looking at people in isolation, we make less biased decisions,” said Chilazi.

Entering as a cohort, noted Mitra Kalita of CNN Digital, a diverse group has a better chance of effecting change than if that group’s members entered individually.

Bias also influences job reviews and promotions. If there are fewer women and people of color in senior positions, has an effort been made to really figure out why? When and why are they leaving or not getting promoted? “Burnout” is not in and of itself a reason for staff churn. Solutions could include appointing a central decision maker to allocate work for junior staff assisting more senior staff, rather than letting the senior staff choose juniors directly. Middle managers are also often catalysts for change who can both model and reward career-enhancing behavior.

Performance reviews can benefit from bias evaluation. Women of color often receive **worse evaluations** than their white colleagues, and yet evaluation processes themselves are not subject to analysis.



Mitra Kalita,
senior vice president,
news, opinion, and
programming, CNN
Digital & Programming

3. **Genuinely embrace difference as an asset.**

Leadership must commit to clarity and diversity in hiring. Newsroom leaders should be clear that the hiring process must include a diverse slate of candidates. This can be achieved by creating relationships with groups representing women and journalists of color to expand networks. Alternatively, institutions can make it a priority to diversify their staff and support that intention with benchmarks and metrics. At Deadspin, the sports website owned by Gizmodo Media Group, editors understood the value of hiring more women to cover sports. “It changed the way sports is covered and what sports are covered,” said Narisetti, “and didn’t do anything to the audience except increase the audience, because it brought in more people.”

Move from “diversity” to inclusivity. It is possible for an organization to be diverse but not inclusive. Diversity often means inviting people into a space and expecting them to perform in “traditional” ways. Inclusivity, on the other hand, means that “traditional” ways evolve to so that norms change. That difference is highly salient to how institutions and leaders respond to threats posed by online harassment.

In one example shared during the symposium, senior editors at a major news organization, all white men, had encouraged new women reporters to engage with commenters on their stories. One woman refused out of reluctance to expose herself to sexist commentary and rape threats. Her editor felt that she was failing to do an important requirement of her job: engage with readers. He had not considered how negative and threatening comments affected her ability to work effectively or how her experiences

as a woman might affect her ability to engage. After a climate survey revealed that between 28 and 30 percent of women in the newsroom had experienced sexual assault and/or intimate partner violence, the manager, who expressed shock at the number, better understood her resistance, and he committed to organizing a comment management and intervention team for the newsroom.

4. Desegregate coverage and diversify viewpoints and perspectives.

Managers must also take the initiative to develop their talent pipeline, even in the face of time and resource constraints. There are two primary areas of focus in doing this: one, increasing minorities' and women's bylines and other credits in "hard news" areas and sections where clear deficits exist, and two, addressing imbalances in visual representation and sourcing. Both factors are measurable and lend themselves to easy tracking and benchmarking. Junior reporters, paired with a more veteran reporter, can be assigned to cover big stories. Inviting different people into key meetings and rotating leadership of meetings to generate new and different story ideas are other productive steps. Newsroom leaders can also call on normally quiet colleagues to ensure their voices are heard. One tactic Kalita uses is to leave the last few minutes of editorial meetings open to the floor, to see if anyone who hasn't spoken has anything to add. One comment from an unexpected voice during the morning news meeting, she explained, can shift CNN Digital's homepage coverage for the entire day.

When more voices are present, the tone of coverage can shift. Carroll described how the weeks surrounding the 2018 hearings of then-nominee for the Supreme Court Brett Kavanaugh were difficult for many in the *USA Today* newsroom. Rather than hide emotional responses in the name of objectivity, Carroll encouraged her colleagues to "[bring] our true selves to the table," a process that inspired a series of stories on self-care and how women across the country were feeling. "I think we were still able to do objective journalism, but we were able to bring a lens on that story that perhaps the table full of [only] men wouldn't have had," she said. In the same vein, as #MeToo stories and coverage of sexual harassment and violence have surged in recent years, Kalita provided newsrooms with pertinent educational materials, such as *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes*, by Columbia Journalism School Professor Helen Benedict.

Special consideration should be given to how stories about sexual harassment, assault, and violence are covered. Newsroom leaders must not only be open to more and different coverage of related stories, but they must be honest and open with their teams, ensuring that everyone understands that, in their own newsrooms, harassment is taken seriously. Kalita and Carroll stressed that the safety and security of their journalists is a top concern at their organizations, which they said have instituted measures to protect journalists.

Carroll also said that she leads by example at *USA Today*, showing that she is as subject to harassment as anyone else, despite being at the top of the newsroom: "I can be the role model to say, 'I got this horrible email, and, wow, it really upset me.' To lead the way on that and invite that conversation, I think, is really important." Just as importantly, Gannett, *USA Today's* parent company, has an internal harassment policy with clear steps to be taken, such as documenting it with screenshots and referring it to human resources.

5. Make support policies and resources clear and accessible.

There are two primary ways to support journalists in media environments in which toxicity and abuse are pervasive. First, provide them with guidance and, if possible, training in digital safety and privacy best practices. Second, have a clear cultural commitment to supporting targeted journalists. Supportive newsroom managers and editors can make a big difference, but beyond that, there should be tech, legal, and health resources available as well when staff need assistance. Survivors need to be central to the design of support programs.

Many journalists don't know what, if any, resources are available to them. Is there a way to pass on comments moderation, so that a third party is monitoring the content? Is there a way to determine if the tactic of harassment is illegal and, if so, are there resources available to support legal action if desired? Does a company's health insurance policy cover the costs of work-related therapy? Is there an IT department and, if so, do they conduct digital security best practices training? Will the company pay for reputation tracking services to help reduce the chances of impersonation and doxing? Does the company offer any support to freelancers? Newsroom policies and practices should be well-defined, published, updated, and circulated.

Policies should be communicated to reporters during orientation, and staff should receive regular reminders that the newsroom is unreservedly behind them and that they will not face negative repercussions for reporting harassment, whether that harassment originates externally or internally.

A public commitment to an affected journalist is also advisable. *USA Today*, for example, has a policy of defending its reporters on Twitter using its own national brand account, which helps protect the reputation of both the journalist and the media outlet.

6. Rethink notions of "objectivity."

When newsroom leaders make space for and support a variety of experiences and responses to harassment, they are, in some sense, leaving behind the old journalistic standard of a singular "objective" viewpoint. This is OK, said Narisetti, who noted that even journalists of different ages have different experiences and perspectives. Younger ones, he said, are often digital natives who may spend much of their time online. For them, harassment can have far more damaging effects than for an older reporter who is more habituated to switching off the computer and living offline when work winds down. These differences are not to be ignored but embraced. Establish "reverse mentorship" programs to orient senior staff to digital native realities.

Standards around other issues, such as reporting on sexual assault, also have much more room to evolve, said Kalita. As a young reporter trained at the Associated Press, she was taught to report on an alleged assault only if it had first been reported to the authorities. "The authorities essentially determined our news agenda," she said. But over the past few years, with the revelations of so many stories of assault that went unreported to law enforcement, and with greater public understanding of racial bias in the criminal justice system, the news industry has witnessed "a complete upending of whether we can trust the authorities or their version of events," said Kalita. "Every story is becoming more nuanced in front of our eyes." Women are telling their stories and voicing their opinions.

And despite the harassment they face, said Kalita, many of the women she works with won't be silenced. "They write again," she said.

7. Make journalists' safety a company-wide priority.

Addressing the negative impacts of online harassment requires multidimensional responses. In large institutions, tech, legal, marketing, and editorial departments need to be working together to find the best support and response solutions. In smaller media companies, where those divisions may not be relevant, a leadership commitment to understanding and providing support is even more critical. In some cases, even when harassment is recognized, a news organization may lack the resources to, say, assign a full-time security officer to its reporters or investigate every incident of harassment. Michelle Ferrier, founder of TrollBusters.com and dean of Florida A&M's School of Journalism & Graphic Communication, suggested newsroom managers should function as a buffer between reporters and their harassers, reviewing social media posts and having someone from the newsroom liaise with the technology companies on whose platforms the abuse is unfolding.



Michelle Ferrier,
dean, Florida
A&M's School of
Journalism & Graphic
Communication

8. Work with social media companies to develop escalation channels.

It is often the case that online harassment is happening across a broad range of social media platforms. Media companies that restrict their responses to just their own platform fail to provide the kind of support that journalists being harassed and threatened need. A media company has more influence and a greater ability to engage with social media companies than journalists as individuals do. The time to develop relationships and escalation channels for journalists at risk is not when they are under attack but before an incident occurs. If media companies were to band together to negotiate better escalation channels when one of their journalists is being attacked, their amalgamated influence would likely be greater still.

To learn more about online harassment and our commitment to expanding women's civic participation, leadership, and freedom of expression, please visit our website at <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/speech-project>.



Raju Narisetti recommends several concrete steps newsroom leadership can take:

1. Create a cross-newsroom team of diverse staff that is given the time and space to meet once a month and provide feedback on product and practices, with top leadership committing to attend.
2. Attend industry events and particularly seek to engage with leadership training programs such as ones run by the Online News Association, Poynter, and the Asian American Journalists Association, which are annual programs that host industry-wide fellows for short leadership programs.
3. Build a tracker into your CMS to measure how the newsroom is doing in terms of sourcing and quoting women so this becomes a widespread, ongoing practice. (GenderMeme.org offers a free API that is being used by *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and others.)

CREDITS

Women's Media Center Wheel of Online Abuse and Harassment
<http://www.womensmediacenter.com/speech-project/online-abuse-101>

Committee to Protect Journalists Survey and Safety Tips:
<https://cpj.org/2019/09/cpj-releases-safety-kit-in-response-to-risks-ident.php>
Graphics: <https://infogram.com/cpj-safety-survey-sept-2019-1h0n25jdd3zo6pe?live>

Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting
<https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf>

Women Journalists and Online Harassment Center for Media Engagement, University of Texas at Austin
<https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Report-Women-Journalists-and-Online-Harassment.pdf>

Women's Media Center The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2019
<http://www.womensmediacenter.com/reports/the-status-of-women-in-u-s-media-2019>

Pew Research Center Online Harassment
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>

Amnesty International and Amnesty International IPSOS MORI poll
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/>

Women's Media Center Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media 2018
<https://www.womensmediacenter.com/reports/the-status-of-women-of-color-in-the-u-s-media-2018-full-report>

Women's Media Center: Divided 2019
<https://www.womensmediacenter.com/reports/divided-2019-the-media-gender-gap>

The Guardian, "The Dark Side of Guardian Comments," an analysis of 70 million Guardian comments <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments?>

Writers Guild of America East Know Your Rights <https://www.wgaeast.org/know-your-rights/>

"What Works: Gender Equality by Design" by Iris Bohnet

"Tackling the Underrepresentation of Women in Media" by Aneeta Rattan, Siri Chilazi, Oriane Georgeac, and Iris Bohnet



Research, Reports, Publications, and Content Channels

Women's Media Center Status of Women in the U.S. Media (2019, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012)

Divided: The Media Gender Gap (2019, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2012)

Women's Media Center Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media (2018)

Media and #MeToo: The WMC Report (2018)

SuperPowering Girls: Female Representation in the Sci-Fi/Super-Hero Genre" (2018 — WMC and BBC America Report)

Superpowering Women in Science Fiction and Superhero Film: A 10-Year Investigation (2019 — WMC and BBC America Report)

WMC Media Watch: Women & Elections — Where Voters Saw Most Sexist Treatment of Women Candidates in Media (2016)

WMC Media Watch: Women & Elections — #WhoTalks — U.S. Presidential Election Tracking of Cable/TV News Show Analysts by Gender and Race (2016)

(Partnership project with the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics and GenderAvenger)

WMC Investigation: Analysis of Gender & Oscar Non-Acting Nominations (2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2010)

WMC Investigation: 10-Year Analysis of Gender & Oscar Nominations in Non-Acting Categories (2016)

WMC Investigation: Review of Gender & Emmy Primetime Nominations (2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2014, 2013, 2012)

WMC Investigation: 10-Year Review of Gender & Emmy Nominations in Non-Acting Categories (2015)

WMC Media Watch: The Gender Gap in Coverage of Reproductive Issues (2016)

WMC Media Watch: Writing Rape — How U.S. Media Cover Campus Rape and Sexual Assault (2015)

Women's Media Center Media Guide to Covering Reproductive Issues

Name It Change It: The Women's Media Center Media Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Women Candidates & Politicians

10 Do's and Don'ts on How to Interview Sexualized Violence Survivors (2017)

Name It. Change It: An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance

Name It. Change It — WMC Infographic — Stick Figures Explain Negative Impact of Appearance Coverage on Women Candidates (2013)

Bias, Punditry, and the Press — Where Do We Go From Here? (2008) (Report from the Women's Media Center, the White House Project, and the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education)

Unspinning the Spin: The Women's Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language (2014)

WMC Women Under Siege Syria Crowdmap

WMC Women Under Siege Reports: Sexualized Violence in Conflict Zones (Burma, Mexico, North Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Darfur-Sudan, Rwanda, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Colombia, Bangladesh, Holocaust, Nanking)

WMC Speech Project Wheel of Online Abuse and Harassment (2016)

WMC News and Features

WMC FBomb

WMC Speech Project

WMC Live with Robin Morgan



WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Jane Fonda
Co-Founder



Robin Morgan
Co-Founder



Gloria Steinem
Co-Founder



Julie Burton
President



Maya L. Harris
Co-Chair



Pat Mitchell
Co-Chair



Helen Zia
Co-Chair Emerita



Janet Dewart Bell
Vice Chair



Rebecca Adamson



Soraya Chemaly



Anita L. DeFrantz



Lauren Embrey



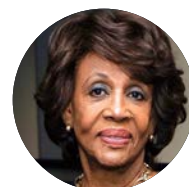
Judy Gold



Erica Gonzalez



Regina K. Scully



Congresswoman
Maxine Waters



THANK YOU

The Women's Media Center extends special thanks to the Wallace Global Fund, Stewart R. Mott Foundation, and NoVo Foundation for their vision and generous support that made this symposium and report possible.

THIS REPORT'S AUTHORS



Soraya Chemaly is an award-winning writer and media critic whose writing appears regularly in national and international media including *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *Verge*, *Quartz*, *TIME*, *Salon*, and *The Guardian*. She speaks frequently on topics related to inclusivity, freedom of speech, gender roles in human systems, data, and technology. Chemaly is co-founder and director of the WMC Speech Project and spearheaded multiple successful campaigns challenging corporations to address inclusivity, online harassment and hate, and algorithmic bias. Her book, *Rage Becomes Her*:

The Power of Women's Anger, was named a Best Book of 2018 by *The Washington Post*, *Fast Company*, *Psychology Today*, and *Book Riot*.



Anna Louie Sussman is a writer and editor based in New York, with extensive experience reporting on gender, economics, and arts and culture. Her first published story, an engrossing account of the hunt for the perfect prom dress, appeared in *Teen Vogue* circa 1999. A decade later, she was reporting from the Middle East on women's lives, and in 2011 she became the senior writer and editor of *Newsweek/The Daily Beast's Women in the World Foundation*.

Project Co-Director

Project Co-Director

Editor

Copy Editor

Fact-Checker

Designer

Graphic Design Associate

Social Media Manager

President and CEO

Cristal Williams Chancellor

Kate McCarthy

Barbara Findlen

Faye Wolfe

Krista Kane

Pamelyn Burke

Tiffany Nguyen

Frances Nguyen

Julie Burton




“Newsroom leadership must commit to providing better protection for all journalists, but especially for women; ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities; and gender-nonconforming people.”

Pat Mitchell, WMC Co-Chair



womensmediacenter.com

 @womensmediacntr

Copyright © 2020 Women's Media Center. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission in writing from the Women's Media Center.