

The Perspectives of a Democracy

Democracies are propelled by the views of the people, views informed by media and codified by law. Thus, diversity and representation in these fields are critical to a balanced perspective of a nation. Women's rights activist Susan B. Anthony said it best: "as long as newspapers are controlled by men, every woman...must write articles which are reflections of men's ideas... [and] women's ideas and deepest convictions will never get before the public."¹ Likewise, while women are excluded from courtrooms, their viewpoints will be absent from legal debates on women's rights.

Gender parity in news media has not yet been achieved. According to a recent study conducted by the Women's Media Center, female anchors report only 5% of news stories at one major news outlet, and women across the field are significantly more likely to cover soft news than hard news.⁴ However, pioneering investigative journalist Nellie Bly, demonstrated that women were just as capable of covering hard-hitting news. Bly gained fame for her asylum exposé *Ten Days in a Madhouse*, a piece that resulted in a grand jury investigation and a budget increase \$850,000 for the Department of Public Charities and Corrections, a considerable sum in 1887. According to the president of the Women's Media Center, "a woman in the anchor seat is more than a symbol; she...[makes] sure that who defines the story, who tells the story, and what the story is about, represents women and men equally"⁴.

In line with Anthony's quote, the dearth of women in law is a barrier to equal representation. Despite gender parity in law school graduates, only 36% of legal professionals are women⁵. The absence of women is particularly pernicious when it comes to cases about women's rights. In *Muller v. Oregon*, 208 U.S. 412 (1906), the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously found Oregon's state law prohibiting women from working overtime was not a violation of the

Fourteenth Amendment. Justice Josiah Brewer wrote the majority opinion for the all-male Court, stating that, “as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest.” The well-meaning Justices insinuated that women were unequal to men and that women were mothers first and employees second. A century later, the archaic misconception has endured, as women in law still see the choice between “their families or their careers...as an either/or decision.”⁷

If Nellie Bly demonstrated the competence of women, and Muller v. Oregon revealed the consequences of their absence, then the question remains: when will we finally reach gender parity in fields of law and media? Education is the influence that can pique the interest of more women, as they’ll begin seeing professional media and legal roles as a viable path if exposed to both fields early on. As gender equality becomes a more notable topic, women are starting to trickle into these vastly important fields.

Works Consulted

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