Since enrollment in journalism programs has become predominantly female, the field could benefit from an infusion of feminist theory that would change the way courses are taught. Female journalism students need to find suitable role models, acquire basic skills in writing, consider new ways of combining family life with their careers, and learn how to market their skills so they can compete with men. Feminist thinking in journalism education would raise the consciousness of women and enable them to insist on fair pay. More women faculty members are needed to help women students develop a professional identity. Women who possess basic English skills may find the language of newswriting foreign because it is based on male values of assertiveness, conflict, and controversy. Finally, women students must be able to cope with the competitive job market; some women must adjust to returning to work after a pregnancy. One solution might be workshops and short courses to facilitate this return. A better solution would be to develop a greater commitment in women to their careers and to devising means to eliminate long career interruptions. Journalism curricula need examination to determine what structures for career preparation exist and to what degree content pertaining specifically to women should be incorporated. (SRT)
Application of Feminist Thought to Journalism Education:
A Descriptive Analysis

Submitted to the Status of Women Committee for the AEJMC Convention, Norman, Oklahoma, August, 1986

This paper was prepared as part of a research project funded by the Garrett Foundation
Abstract

Journalism education needs an infusion of feminist thought to meet the needs of its student body, 60 percent of which is now women. This paper contends women students need special attention to learn how to market their skills, find suitable role models, acquire basic writing skills and combine family life with their careers.
Abstract

Journalism education needs an infusion of feminist thought to meet the needs of its student body, 60 percent of which is now women. In this paper four aspects of journalism education are viewed from the standpoint of feminist thought. They are: (1) The need for women journalism students to learn how to market their skills so they will not be forced to settle for less than men; (2) the need for women journalism students to find suitable role models; (3) the need for women journalism students to acquire basic skills in writing; (4) the need for women journalism students to consider new ways of combining family life with their careers. The paper concludes that the needs of women journalism students, socialized as they have been to be subordinate to men, will continue to be ignored unless feminist values are made a pivotal part of the journalism curriculum.
Application of Feminist Thought to Journalism Education: A Descriptive Analysis

If there was ever a field of professional endeavor in need of feminist theory, it is journalism education. Since 1977 the balance of enrollments in schools and colleges of journalism nationally has switched from predominantly male to predominantly female and today women represent about 60 percent of those studying journalism. Yet journalism schools continue to teach the same subjects in the same way, oblivious to the changing nature of their student population and oblivious to the experiences that their women graduates will encounter in the job market.¹

Unfortunately as the number of young women studying journalism has swelled, the salaries paid entry-level persons entering journalistic occupations have remained low. A 1984 survey of journalism graduates found the female majority to be about 59.2 percent out of a total of about 86,000 students. The pay that both men and women could expect to get when they entered the job market did not compare favorably with that offered entry-level college graduates in other occupations.²

In general, this is due to an overabundance of journalism graduates in the job market. As the director of placement at Michigan State University put it, "We're turning out more people than we can find jobs for. We have hundreds of students in
journalism. It's a very popular field." Indeed, the journalism major is so popular that a study of 1984 graduates by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund showed that only 38.7 percent found work in news organizations, while another 17.1 percent found work in public relations and advertising. This meant only 55.8 percent or a little more than half of the journalism graduates, found media work at all. Of the remainder, 32.5 percent went into non-media jobs or graduate school, while 11.7 percent were reported as unemployed or not responding to the survey.

In terms of salary, the study found that journalism graduates do not fare well. The median starting pay per week on daily newspapers was $230 compared to median starting pay of $290 in public relations and $255 in advertising. Broadcasting paid the lowest with a median starting salary of $215 weekly. On a yearly basis that meant daily newspapers paid $11,960 while public relations offered $15,080, advertising $13,260, and broadcasting a paltry $11,180. At the same time the College Placement Council gave $17,724 as the median yearly salary for humanities graduates in general and $19,306 as the median for graduates in engineering, computer science and business. The most recent survey of newspaper salaries found the pay somewhat improved - with $13,500 the median for 1985 graduates. Yet it showed the pay in public relations has declined to $14,560.

It seems hard to escape a message of great concern to feminist thinkers: Journalism graduates, who now are predominantly
female, are being forced to settle for less than graduates of other fields as they enter the job market. Yet almost no thought is being given to this subject by journalism educators. At a recent conference at the University of Oregon to discuss the future of journalism education, no attention was given to the fact that journalism enrollments have switched from predominantly male to female in less than a decade.  

It is the purpose of this paper to look at four aspects of journalism education from the standpoint of feminist thought. These are: 1) The need for women journalism students to learn how to market their skills so they will not be forced to settle for less than men; 2) the need for women journalism students to find suitable role models; 3) the need for women journalism students to acquire basic skills in writing; 4) the need for women journalism students to consider new ways of combining family life with their careers.

First, it is essential for the males who dominate in journalism education to recognize that they are turning out an increasing number of graduates who will face the economic discrimination endemic in a patriarchal society that historically has undervalued women's achievements. It is a well-known fact that women college graduates fall behind men, even if they start out on par with them. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median total income from all sources for male college graduates over the age of twenty-five was $31,800 in 1983, while
the comparable figure for women was $20,251.  

Journalism educators must face up to the feminist contention, amply proven by economic analysis, that women's occupations generally provide below-average pay and limited opportunities for advancement, tending not to require a long-term career commitment or geographic mobility. Lack of commitment is crucial to understanding the problem of women establishing a meaningful identity in a society that devalues them, according to sociologists. "The system of sexual statification which prevails in American society not only burdens women with domestic responsibilities that draw them away from the economic marketplace but accords higher value to masculine endeavor, making maleness itself a condition of intrinsic worth," two sociologists stated in a study of nurses conducted in California. They found that the nurses chose their occupation because of short-run opportunities to work that were expected to be secondary to marriage and child-rearing. These were the activities through which the women planned to establish socially-approved identities.  

As the study of the nurses pointed out, important factors in pay discrimination include the attitudes and preparation of women workers. If women continue to enter "women's occupations," then pay and working conditions can be expected to decline further, according to Nancy S. Barrett, former deputy assistant secretary for economic policy and research, U.S. Department of Labor.
Her recommendations, growing out of an Urban Institute project, called for women to receive counseling on career planning as well as for changes to be made in the organization of the workplace to help women maintain job continuity. In addition, she recommended men be encouraged to enter predominantly women's jobs and vice versa.  

Yet journalism education is not paying attention to the economic problems bound to be encountered by its women students. Coursework and job placement procedures follow paths laid out decades ago when most of the students were males who could expect to move without great difficulty into the job market. Women are not being alerted to the discrimination they are likely to encounter. As a 1978 graduate of one of the largest journalism schools put it: "Journalism school did a good job with skill preparation mechanics but it taught no workplace setting skills. It has the 'ivory tower' syndrome."  

Studies of the earnings of women versus men in the public relations field, rapidly changing from male to female, show overt discrimination. In a 1981 study conducted in San Diego, women in public relations were found to earn lower salaries than men, even when the influences of education, professional experience and tenure with current employer were taken into account. The study showed males in public relations earned an average of $31,310 annually, while females earned $22,250. When
indicator of preparation for advancement were equalized (by taking into account education, experience and seniority), males were found to earn $5,770 more annually than women.  

A later study of members of the Public Relations Society of America found the same differences in education, professional experience and tenure between male and female practitioners. When these were equalized, the study showed the men made $10,660 more in salary annually. Both studies also determined that women were occupationally segregated into the role of communications technician, with 34.1 percent of the women in the national study classified as technicians compared to 21.3 percent of the males. Technicians, those who carry out tasks such as preparing booklets and writing press releases, earn lower incomes than public relations practitioners who play broader roles and enter into management decision-making.

At the technician level, public relations exhibits characteristics typical of jobs generally held by women, according to Barrett. These include lack of authority and vicarious, rather than direct, satisfaction, gained by helping "bosses" succeed instead of competing for oneself on an individual basis. Also technician jobs may include repetitive tasks, which women allegedly are better able to perform than men.

In the newspaper field, women comprise 38 percent of the daily press workforce, but only 4.5 percent are top managers.
and 11.5 percent are mid-level managers, according to the American Newspaper Publishers' Association. A 1983 study reported top women newspaper managers earned about 60.1 percent of men's salaries for comparable jobs, with the actual dollar gap given as $18,147 annually.  

A study of 59 women who attended management training sessions from 1980 to 1982 concluded the group, eighty percent of whom worked on daily newspapers, was indeed dedicated. Over half were single with 25 percent never having married, and 71 percent childless. Fifty percent cited failed or never developed relationships as "personal sacrifices" made for their careers.  

But even though they had built their lives around their jobs, they did not expect to be promoted quickly. Not one mentioned she hoped to make it to a top position in five years. Ardyth B. Sohn, assistant professor of journalism at the University of Colorado, commented, "If top management is looking for women who will give maximum hours to the job, this is a good group to consider. In addition, they are not too expensive, with all this only costing employers an average of $20,000 in annual salary."  

"... the cruel truth is that journalists as a group are not economically average, they are below average," an article in The Quill, publication of the Society of Professional Journalists, SDX, stated. Yet the industry itself is healthy.
"With buyers willing to pay twenty to twenty-five times after-tax earnings for newspaper properties, we suggest the industry's long-term prospects are very favorable," the article concluded.  

An infusion of feminist thinking into journalism education would mean that the status quo no longer would be accepted. Simply raising the consciousness of women would be a vital first step in enabling them to insist on fair pay. A 1982 survey of 200 recent graduates of the School of Journalism at the University of North Carolina who had worked on newspapers showed that men and women differed in salary and years worked since graduation. The average salary classification for women on a 1-to-6 scale was 1.98, while the average for men was 2.34.

Also when the careers of men and women who were graduated the same year were compared, the men had more job experience than the women. James H. Shumaker, director of placement at the University of North Carolina, explained it this way: "Women don't stay. They drop out, then come back. Or they move because of their husbands' jobs."

Unequal starting pay may be related to several factors: Unequal job responsibilities; cultural bias by employers who give men more because they think they need to support a family and women don't, and low expectations by women themselves. According to the North Carolina study, "Men know that women underrate themselves. ... women will be considered cheap help as long as they accept less than they are worth." One item
on the survey bore out this thesis that women have been socially conditioned to undervalue themselves. Women rated themselves less able than males to meet deadlines.

Feminist theory holds that women tend to be handicapped in their dealing with employers in part because of the difference in the language used by men and women. According to experts, women's speech is less certain, more euphemistic and lacking in power when compared to the language of men. Its emphasis on courtesy and correctness is characteristic of subordination. Women's communication pattern relates to women's traditional function of serving in the family and maintaining harmony in the home.

Feminist theory affords students an explanation of why they are likely to encounter sex discrimination in pay and promotions. It also offers a rationale for students to become acquainted with techniques of negotiations with employers through more assertive styles of communication. It provides the social conditioning necessary for women to break through old molds and either position themselves to break into the management ranks of patriarchial institution; or to develop their own alternative systems of communication. Feminist ideas, however, cannot reach the masses of students within journalism schools unless the present composition of faculties is changed.
A second aspect of journalism education that must be addressed deals with the need for women journalism students to find more suitable role models. Approximately 300 educational institutions teach courses in journalism/communications, according to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, but relatively few faculty members teaching journalism are female. A survey conducted at Syracuse University in 1983 found a striking imbalance between the percentage of women students and faculty members. While women constituted 59 percent of undergraduate enrollment, 52 percent of masters' candidates and 36 of doctoral candidates, they represented only 20 percent of faculty members. Only two of the 86 accredited programs were headed by women.  

Indeed, the ratio of women faculty members to men is lower than that for higher education as a whole. About 27 percent of all full-time college faculty members are female, the Association of American Colleges reports. In spite of their large proportion of women students, journalism schools have only a few more women faculty members than science and engineering faculties where the proportion is about 19 percent. As in higher education in general, the women teaching journalism tend to be clustered in the lower ranks. Only a total of 17 percent of women faculty included in the Syracuse University study were at the rank of associate professor or higher as compared to 42 percent of male faculty.
From a feminist perspective the absence of women faculty members is one way in which women students are victimized by subtle bias that undercuts their own aspirations. The Project on the Status and Education of Women of the Association of American Colleges has termed the classroom climate for women quite "chilly" under circumstances which can be applied in particular to the study of journalism.23

Certainly the vocabulary of the news field itself carries blatant sexual overtones. Front-page news stories that detail action are referred to as "hard news," while feature stories that appeal to the emotions are called "soft news." Traditionally men reported the "hard news" and women the "soft news." By assigning women students feature stories, for example, and men straight news stories, instructors can easily perpetuate a sexist climate in the classroom. The same principle holds true in teaching assignments. If men faculty are assigned to general reporting courses, and women to feature-writing and introductory newswriting, students receive the same message—that women are consigned to subordinate places in news operations.

While women students may be taught just as competently by males as females, the lack of women faculty reduces opportunities for women to develop formal and informal contact with same-sex role models of achievement. One study has shown that contact of this type is highly significant in the development of
professional identity. It indicated that women Ph.D.'s who themselves had women dissertations advisors produced more scholarly publications than those advised by men. 24

The imbalance of women faculty also means that women journalism students have relatively few opportunities to take coursework dealing specifically with women and the media. Although a few men have developed courses in this area, most of the classes now offered have been designed by women who teach them from a feminist viewpoint. Sixty-eight such courses have been identified by Dr. Donna Allen, director of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press. These courses, however, are not taught in the majority of the educational institutions offering journalism. 25

A prime aim of these courses is to raise the level of aspirations of women students by making them aware of the history of women in journalism, the sex-role stereotyping common to media portrayal of women and the problem of discrimination in media careers. Often these courses are not scheduled frequently by administrators who see them only as "frosting" on a curriculum cake made up of more essential ingredients. Yet such courses can be extremely valuable in aiding women students to develop the positive self-image necessary for professional success.

Women studies courses within journalism schools also help make women aware of how they use the media in their own life.
According to Doris A. Graber, there are differences in the way men and women select news items for attention and in their rankings of what is and what is not important. She concluded, "Women must realize that politics concerns them as much as men. ... Women must also become more aware of the role they must play in pressing for politics that advance women's interests. This requires greater attention to news concerning women's issues."  

But women in media courses, as presently constituted, cannot be a panacea for raising the motivational level of large numbers of women students. To expose all students to women's issues, feminist thought calls for new definitions of news that treat subjects related to women as important components of all coursework. To date, relatively little emphasis has been placed on research dealing with women and the news. Among notable exceptions was a survey done by Carol E. Oukrop, associate professor of journalism at Kansas State University, on reporting of rape cases. Employment of faculty with a feminist approach can be expected to invigorate a tired curriculum and give women a visibility that now is lacking. 

A third element within journalism education that demands attention from a feminist standpoint is the need for women journalism students to acquire basic skills in writing. At first it might seem that there is nothing gender-based in the training of newswriters. Sadly, however, this is not true.
Journalism education is dependent on attracting bright students who have an appreciation of good prose and an aptitude for writing it.

Today journalism schools in general are not recruiting students of this type. According to Irving Kristol, a professor at the New York University Graduate School of Business, the best high school students choose sciences, the next best law or medicine or graduate school and the third best business school. Those at the fourth level go into journalism schools, while those at the bottom enter schools of education, he contended. His conclusion: "... from schools of journalism, they [the media] are recruiting young men and women who don't think very well and who don't have the habit of thinking."28

A feminist educator, however, would point out that this criticism of the caliber of journalism students overlooks the fact that the majority of undergraduates are women, only a minority of whom express interest in news-editorial careers. These women have come into a predominantly male environment for which many have had relatively poor preparation. Even those who have mastery of basic English skills may find the language of newswriting foreign.

Journalists write in terms of winning and losing, conflict and controversy, as the late Catherine S. Covert, a journalism professor at Syracuse University, pointed out. She cited
examples from a journalism history textbook: "The press wins a beachhead;" "the rise of the fourth estate," "the press and the expanding nation," "the race for news," "a revolution in communication." This is the language of male winners, not that of women as a group, Covert argued.  

American journalism itself has celebrated "independence and individualized autonomy," Covert stated. These are male values symbolized in the image of men as strong, self-reliant, and assertive. By contrast women have developed relationships over the centuries based on "concord, harmony, affiliation, community," she continued. These values, which emphasize consensus more than controversy, appear better suited to the fields of public relations and advertising than to news. Perhaps this is why the percentage of students specializing in the news-editorial sequence has declined steadily as the percentage of female students has risen.  

Feminists long have been aware that the achievement of women tends to decline in college while that of men does not. As one women's studies textbook put it, "It is often assumed that the only reason the young woman goes to college is to catch a husband. Sometimes it's true. After all, that's what she has been taught is her main purpose in life."  

Women who expect to define themselves in terms of a husband's status are not likely to be in the top strata of students as
measured by scholastic aptitude tests. They are not likely to be those who want to become scientists, doctors or lawyers. But they are likely to want to work before marriage and/or in "feminine" jobs after marriage that will allow them to identify themselves primarily as wives and mothers. An increasing number of women of this type appear to be enrolling in journalism.

To many marriage may be perceived as an alternative to a serious career. According to Barbara Walters, the best-known woman in television news in the United States, the tendency of women to drop out keeps them from perfecting their skills. "If I didn't have to work at one point to support myself ... I would have stopped," she stated. "I mean, the way most women stop. I would have gotten married or had babies or let Daddy support me. Most men can't do this. They go through all the dreary jobs. . . ." 32

One outstanding woman student at a large metropolitan journalism school told a woman faculty member in 1985, "I've even had girls tell me their parents sat down with them and said, 'Look, we're paying all this money to send you to college and we expect you to get a husband out of it at the end of four years.' These girls want to go into public relations or advertising because they think these are glamorous, romantic fields." 33

To feminists women journalism students, like women students in general, represent a group of classic underachievers, "an
untapped reservoir of woman talent that is pulling down the whole average," as one University of Maryland professor expressed it. Faculty members must recognize that instructing women, as well as men, involves attention to social and psychological dimensions as well as to the subject matter. The expectations of young women must be raised before newswriting skills can be successfully imparted. 34

It also is essential for journalism education to help women students consider new ways of combining family life with their careers - the fourth element of journalism education to be considered in this paper. To begin with, women students must be made more aware of the realities of the job market. Young women who have been conditioned to dream of Prince Charming need to know that they will be members of the labor force for most of their lives.

This is not a message transmitted by the media of which these students aspire to be a part. Consider recent headlines on stories about highly-educated women who have succeeded with their careers only to encounter upsetting conflicts. "New Study Finds Children of Working Mothers Suffer in School"; "Hittin' It Big & Kissin' It Goodbye"; "Parenthood and Career Overtax Some Women Despite Best Intentions - Many Find Job Stress Rising, Productivity Declining." These articles present the dark side of women's liberation - difficulties of child care,
career burnout, role conflicts as women try to juggle demanding careers and family duties.  

Carly Rivers Lupo, coauthor of a book on career planning for women, described the implications of this message from a feminist standpoint. "It's nothing but the old bigotry, only now it's candy-coated," she wrote. "The new scare stories are simply an updated version of the old myth that women will get sick if they do too much [important] work." She concluded, "Does anyone call a man who has a good job and a family "Superman?" 

Issues of this type rarely are addressed in journalism classes, except possibly in courses on woman and the media, yet nothing is more germane to the question of career planning for women journalism students. Socially conditioned to think in terms of romance, marriage and children, many women in college do not face the reality of what they will be doing for most of their adult lives. There is no doubt an overwhelming majority of women will be working for many years.

This point is stressed in a report by the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, based on 1981 census data. The facts:

* Of all woman 18 to 64 years of age in 1981, workers constituted 62 percent, compared with 91 percent of men in the same age group.

* The more education a woman had the greater the likelihood of paid employment, with three out of five women with four or
more years of college in the labor force.

* The average woman 16 years of age (in 1977) could expect to spend 27.7 years of her life in the work force, compared with 38.5 years for men.

* Woman workers with four or more years of college had about the same income as men who had only one to three years of high school, $12,085 and $11,936, respectively, in 1981.

* The majority of women work because of economic need. Two-thirds (66 percent) of women in the labor force in March 1982 were single (25 percent), widowed (5 percent), divorced (11 percent), or separated (4 percent), or had husbands whose earnings in 1981 were less than $15,000 (21 percent).

* About 55 percent of all children under age 18 (32 million) had working mothers in March 1982; 46 percent of all children under age 6 (8.5 million) had mothers in the labor force.

The implications for women journalism students are unmistakable. They will be working. The question is whether they will make use of their journalistic training or move into other occupations. Particularly deflating is the prospect of returning to journalism after taking time out for child-rearing. "I know I'm losing ground while I'm at home for five years," a 1972 graduate said in a telephone interview. "I might bag journalism altogether ... who'd take me after all this time out."
Yet this news-editorial graduate had an impressive record as a former press secretary for members of Congress and also had obtained a master's degree in political communication.38

One possible solution to the problem of enabling women journalism graduates to combine careers with family responsibilities would be to set up workshop and short courses to enhance the ability of alumnae to return to the job market. Such programs would correspond to those offered by nursing schools to allow graduates to retrain prior to returning to the labor force. They represent the response of a feminized occupation to the needs of an intermittent work force. Yet retraining is unlikely to provide a means of allowing women to compete more equally with men.39

A better solution lies in developing greater commitment in women journalism students and in devising means of restructuring jobs so it is not necessary for women to have long periods of career interruptions. Extensive feminist literature points out that aspiration itself is a powerful stimulant to career success. If women truly are committed, they may be able to avoid the kinds of interruptions that force them out of the field for which they prepared. A study of women and well-being, financed by the National Science Foundation and conducted by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, found that the women who scored highest in terms of mental and physical well-being were married, had children, and worked at high-prestige jobs.40
Therefore it becomes the task of journalism educators to help women develop high aspirations. Historically this has been difficult, in part because the news business, like other social institutions, has been male dominated. Two studies of news values, one in 1979 and one in 1977, showed that standards of newsroom behavior on newspapers, whether exhibited by males or females, were male standards. 41

One researcher, for example, found that among accepted news values was the discrediting of news stories in which the principal actor was a woman, even when the decision on the stories was made by women editors. McAdams pointed out that women seemed particularly likely to conform to newsroom norms. She theorized: "Perhaps this is essential to their survival in the newsroom. ..." 42

What is needed in both journalism education and in the media itself is commitment to a philosophy of equality for both males and females - the key principle of feminist thought. Major shifts in the social roles of men and women already have taken place. Journalism education must recognize these and strive to help women students develop new ways of looking at the issue of family versus career instead of becoming mired down in outworn, either/or arguments.

In conclusion, it is essential that feminist thought be applied to journalism education if this field is to meet its
obligations of preparing the majority of its students for entry into media careers. If the occupation of journalist is not to suffer the devaluation accorded to other fields dominated by women, journalism educators must take action now to address the concerns of the preponderance of their students. To pretend that men and women are being given equal preparation to enter their chosen field of endeavor is simply untrue. The needs of women, socialized as they have been to be subordinated to men, are not being met and will not be met unless feminist values are made a pivotal part of the journalism curriculum. In particular, research is needed that surveys the journalism curriculum already in place in colleges and universities to determine what structures for career preparation now exist and to what degree they should, or do, incorporate content pertaining specifically to women.
Notes


2 Ibid., 3-4.


Telephone interview with Janice Colvin conducted by Kathy Lemke, May 9, 1984, as part of project to survey men and women alumni of the University of Maryland to determine if educational and employment experiences differed.


Ibid., p. 17, 22.


Ardyth B. Sohn, "Goals and Achievement Orientations of Women Newspaper Managers," Journalism Quarterly 61 (Autumn 1984), 604-05.

Ibid., p. 605.


Ibid.


Survey results given in report by Judy Turk, Nancy Sharp, Sharon Hollenbeck, Linda Schamber and Edna Einsiedel, Syracuse University, April 1984.


Ibid., pp. 11-12.


33 Interview with Karen Waters, April 15, 1985, College Park, Md.

34 Telephone interview with Benjamin F. Holman, April 14, 1985, Camp Springs, Md.


38 Telephone interview with Loretta Robinson by Laurie Evans, June 24, 1984, College Park, Md., (part of project to survey alumnae).


40 Lupo, "If You Ask Me: Superwoman's a Myth...," p. B5.


42 Ibid.