



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 4
Issue 6 July

Article 7

July 1977

Women in Communications

Janice L. Booker
Temple University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Booker, Janice L. (1977) "Women in Communications," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 6 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol4/iss6/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



WOMEN IN COMMUNICATIONS

Janice L. Booker, B.Sc.
Lecturer
School of Communications
Temple University

Rosalind Russell and Joan Crawford spearheaded the image in the forties; their perennial screen portrayals of newswomen scooping the men in the office and then falling in love with the hard-hearted city editor, or guiding the reorganization of the nation's number-one-rated-but-faltering-magazine to a successful resurgence attracted the identification of many aspiring young women. Abetted by Superman's reporter sidekick cum love-life Lois Lane and the magnificent Brenda Starr of the comic strips, the image was complete; what did many creative, talented and ambitious young women want but to become newshawks with editorial aspirations.

These fictional portraits provided the leitmotiv for many young women who wanted a glamorous career, who were not afraid of hard work, and who would be accepted by men in counterpart positions once they "proved themselves."

Newspapers are not the only field that lured working women away from sewing machines, sales counters and the ubiquitous shorthand pad and typewriter. As consciousness was raised concerning media as a force in the sociocultural point of reference, the field of communications emerged as meaning more than how people speak to one another. Technological advancement was the obvious component which created many new categories within communications and expanded the parameters of journalism to include electronic broadcast media.

Women in Communications Incorporated, a national professional organization, lists the following professions as encompassing the field of communications: editorial personnel, mid-level editors and business management; upper level editors, production on air (radio and television); owners, executives; public relations; advertising; classroom teachers; authors; feature and article writers. Loosely speaking, these umbrella lexicons include the work categories of journalists in newspaper, magazine, broadcast and electronic media; feature writers and editors in these media as well as women in production work. Publishing contributes a large number of women as readers, editors and publishers' representatives, with the majority holding the vague definition "editorial assistant." These designations would co-exist in book publishing and magazine publishing. In addition, we can include writers and production personnel in advertising and public relations, whether for agencies or private companies, government or social agencies. The

limited number of screenwriters and authors would find themselves in the communications category, as well as free lance writers who contribute to magazines or do free lance public relations and publicity work, primarily institutional. Also included are women who write and produce house organs and newsletters for industry and non-profit organizations and the small number of women who are in ownership or management categories for newspapers, magazines or broadcast media.

The communications field has always attracted women in numbers beyond their population proportion. Historically, this field has not been as hostile to the inclusion of women as perhaps science and business. However, this acceptance has been true primarily within the lower echelons of the profession. As is standard practice within office hierarchy, women have not traditionally filled the roles of top executives. While this is changing due to affirmative action programs and the demands of women to be recognized as management potential, the ascension is gradual and more apparent in advertising, public relations and the smaller magazines rather than the vast broadcast media networks and newspaper and book publishing conglomerates.

In a job and salary survey published in April, 1974 and conducted by the national office of Women in Communications Incorporated, the first statistical data was provided by 70% of the membership totalling almost 4,000 respondents. The total of 3,929 replies included 2,881 full time women, 438 part time, and 610 free lancers. The largest employment categories were daily newspapers, educational institutions, and editorial or public relations activities for business firms. Statistical data referred to on the following pages will reflect information gleaned from this study, which is probably the most comprehensive survey for women in this field. Plans exist to update it every five years.

The following information delineates a percentage breakdown within professional groups: 25% of those responding to the survey were reporters, specialty writers, editorial writers, copy editors, or columnists. Specialty writing far outweighed general assignment reporting. Another 19% were engaged in public relations or served in public information capacities. One-fourth did so for educational institutions, almost exclusively college level. Other major employers in the public relations category included non-profit organizations, government agencies and business. The survey showed 9.7% of the membership holding upper level editorial positions on magazines and business publications while 4.7% were in mid-level editorial positions centered primarily on daily and weekly newspapers. Mid-level business management accounted for a bare .8%, primarily with business publications.

A total of 5.9% were owners or top executives, mostly in the business category with the remainder heading up public relations and advertising agencies or working with business firms. Other job categories were: feature article writers, 4%; authors, 1.2%; directors and producers, .9%.

A total of 1% appear under "not specified and other" - a conglomerate group including circulation, sales, traffic, marketing, art directors, photographers, research, camera technician.

The field of communications has a particular appeal to women for many reasons, not the least of which is that opportunities for part time and free lance work are an integral part of the profession and cannot be discounted in any statistical data which reflect salary or growth potential. This is one of the unusual fields which, with the contributions of magazine article writers, book authors, newspaper stringers (reporters who cover a specific outlying territory for a large newspaper) and small public relations accounts for institutions, actually encourages working from home. Most jobs, regardless of hierarchal level, require the physical presence of the worker. Office materials and the interaction of other personnel make it mandatory to co-exist in a central office. Communicators, whose major function is writing, need only their telephone and typewriter for companions.

Loneliness is a common by-product of working alone. While women whose major creative expression is writing would not relinquish their by-line for less ego satisfying or gregarious work, it is a solitary pursuit, with non-sharable frustrations. Also, no experience is self-contained; the professional writer sees all involvement on two levels: while actively experiencing she also incorporates the experience while it is happening as something to be translated into writing.

Technology has played an important role in the proliferation of the field of communications. Utilizing the home as a base office rather than as an adjunct to a professional career is an important consideration for free lancers. Technological resources such as portable tape recorders make on-site interviewing convenient, and the feasibility of legitimate tax deductions for home offices serve to enhance employment possibilities in communications. These factors enhance the work possibilities for women who need to take advantage of the flexibility of hours provided for part timers and free lancers. Those who wish to, or need to, combine professional work with more traditional housewife/mother roles can find a panacea, albeit hectic, in the role of communicator. Many popular newspaper columnists are testaments to the use of family situations as fodder for creative output.

Concomitant with the advantages of part time and freelance opportunities are some obvious and not so obvious disadvantages. The wide range of employment benefits, company pension plans, vacation and other accumulated times off do not figure in the employment picture for these personnel. Frequently pay levels are quite low because women who work in this way are eager to accept as much work as they can handle in order to represent themselves as responsible professionals; therefore, they are tempted to accept relatively low scale fees which must be renegotiated for each new assignment. In the magazine and newspaper free lance

field, it is the employer who determines the pay rate and most women, anxious to keep their name in front of potential employers, take what is offered without the benefits of negotiation.

Although numerically the field of communications is a popular arena for women they tend to remain at entry level jobs or advance to mid-management level and stay there, skirting key positions. An article in the October 1975 issue of Press Woman, reprinted by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, corroborates the minimal number of women in top management positions. Tallies in electronic communications showed only 9% of 5,515 managers and officials at 609 television stations in 1972 were women, and 12% of 7,925 professionals. A Federal Communications Commission survey of 584 stations revealed women comprised 22% of employees, but only 6.4% were in the top five pay brackets.

It was once typical for professors of journalism in universities to tell their male students to begin news work at a copy boy level and wait to prove their mettle at a city desk opening; women students, however, were given different advice. They were encouraged to seek a secretarial position in a news or magazine office which might eventually lead to filling a vacancy created by an editor or reporter. With the climate fostered by feminism, it is unlikely that many young women are willing to go this route, even assuming it might be productive in producing the leap frog from clerical to professional status within the same setting.

The broadcast media provide the strongest avenues for success fantasies. Images of Barbara Walters, Leslie Stahl, Shana Alexander, and Ms. Walter's replacement on the "Today" show, Gay Pauley, who literally skyrocketed to fame and fortune overnight, provide the ultimate role model for women hopefuls in radio and television. Magazines and newspapers have produced media stars such as Gail Sheehy, Gloria Steinem, Nora Ephron, Betty Friedan, and Sylvia Porter, whose popularity and professional accolades have come not only from their talent and public recognition, but also from their ability to influence public opinion and affect the vanguard of popular movements.

This, then, is another motivation to strive for top positions in all media. Women who have achieved a level of status where their opinions are effective barometers of public sentiment, and whose point of view provides impetus to affect legislation and the formation of national movements, have achieved a rarified position in today's society. The atmosphere is heady and the appeal pervasive. Certainly, virtually every woman whose ambition and talent isolates communications as her ballywick must visualize herself in the role of some of these provocative media models.

However, national recognition via electronic or print media is not the only satisfaction possible for communicators. The quickened pulsa-

tions of a by-line in a news story, a "letter to the editor" praising a writer's article in a national publication; even the limited on the street recognition of a local newscaster for television or radio provide hard to beat ego satisfactions. The "star quality" permeates our consciousness and even a limited appearance within that constellation provides enormous rewards, often mitigated by low salaries coupled with high attrition and competition.

The future of women in communications is probably promising in terms of reaching compatible salary goals with men in the field and advancing into executive positions. However, with the influence of the Watergate revelations made by media, the field is burgeoning with young hopefuls. A recent ten year projection, according to the Occupational Outlook Handbook of the United States Department of Labor is based on maintenance of high level employment trends and the assumption that the United States will not be at war. "There will be an estimated 107.7 million persons in the labor force in 1985, including those in the armed services. The market will be glutted with college communications course graduates. Currently, there are an estimated 35,000 enrolled with 39.5% of these women, but relatively few women graduate. There has been an average of 20,000 newcomers per year in communications."

The broad field of mass communications is expected to continue to expand due to rising levels of education and income, and increasing expenditures for newspaper, radio and television advertising. The proliferation of trade and technical journals and company publications requiring competent interpretive skills adds to the expanding markets available to communicators.

The WICI survey overview indicated that diversity of occupation is the major characteristic of women within their membership. The two top fields recorded were editorial personnel which might range from magazine and newspaper editors to publishing firm readers and public relations personnel. The largest single employer is under the heading of educational institutions. This would include such diverse occupations as teachers or journalism in universities and those in public relations, publicity and development categories in schools and colleges.

Next in line as largest employer were the daily newspapers and wire services. However, employment of women in mass communications in media is lagging. In newspapering there has been only a 2.4% gain in hiring women since 1969, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The 26,000 now in the nation's newsrooms comprise 45% of the total. Broadcasting shows the lowest gain hiring women among five industries, the other four comprising advertising, motion pictures, newspapers and periodicals. A total of 19.5% of all persons employed in the five are women. Only 13.7% of those in broadcasting are women. Some gains are being made, however, at the three major television networks. The percentage of women in the total employed as officials and managers -

ABC 19%, CBS 17% and NBC 12%; professionals - ABC 21%, CBS 25.5%, NBC 24%; technical - ABC 2.1%, CBS 2.9%, NBC 4.5%; and sales - ABC 26%, NBC 10%.

The salary mode for full time personnel employed in the communications field was \$9,000. to \$11,000. However, there was a respectable percentage (18.9%) who reported annual salaries in the \$13,000. to \$15,000. range. 26.3% reported \$6,000. to \$9,000. range, close on the heels of the above mentioned first category.

As would be expected, part timers and free lancers reported considerably less income; more than half earning \$6,000. per year or less. Consulting and public relations appeared to be the most lucrative endeavors for both part time and free lance personnel. The highest salaries were seen in public relations and advertising agencies, but government agencies showed the best track record for rewarding experience with increased pay.

To expand on the general term "editorial work," approximately 25% of the respondents involved in the Women in Communications Incorporated survey were reporters, specialty writers, editorial writers, copy editors, columnists. Both for full timers and part timers, specialty writing far outweighed general assignment reporting as subject matter. Perhaps as a reflection of our community oriented trend and the effect of the women's movement, the majority of women engaged in specialty writing were in the field of medical/health rather than women/food/home category, a former enclave for women writers. Only a bare 6% constituted owners or top executives in communications firms (presidents, vice presidents, executive directors, managing directors,) notwithstanding Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham, with the largest number in the business category and the remainder involved with public relations and advertising agencies and non-profit organizations.

Weekly newspapers provide the best opportunity for part time and free lance work, with nearly one third of women finding employment in this area.

While the title "editor" is an impressive response to the question "what do you do," it is best not followed by a supposition that an impressive salary is commensurate with the title. Upper level editors are in the same salary mode as the general communications field: \$9,000. to \$12,000. For magazines and weeklies the salary mode for editors, managing editors, assistant and associate editors dropped down to \$6,000. to \$9,000.

Inequality is not peculiar to communicators in the United States. Salary surveys made in the past five years in Sweden, Finland, Norway and England confirm wages are 10 to 20% less for women than men on daily newspapers and magazines and in broadcasting.

Though their responsibilities and stresses are similar to their male counterparts, various surveys indicate their pay is "significantly lower," except where equality minded management encourages equal pay policies. Women professional and technical workers, including communicators, earn 34.8% less than men, and women managers and administrators 45.7% less, according to the United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau.

In 1974, 17 newspapers' guilds approved contracts sanctioning lower pay scales - \$19. to \$80. per week - for women's news reporters, despite the fact that equal pay has been a guild goal since 1934. Men hold 95.2% of corporate titles on dailies, 97.4% of editorial and news department titles, and 73.2% of advertising titles, according to studies by Women in Communications Incorporated.

At the middle editing level, salary range was \$6,000. to \$9,000. More than half of the full time upper level editors worked on magazines or business publications while 66% of middle income level editors were on daily newspapers and another 20% on weeklies.

In the owner and executive categories, a little more than one fourth had yearly incomes of more than \$21,000. Most of them owned or directed business firms, public relations or advertising agencies or non-profit organizations.

Public relations agencies constitute the best place to be if salary is a prime objective where the mode was \$15,000. to \$21,000. Salary drops drastically when the public relations work is being done outside of a public relations agency, such as free lance or for a non-profit group. Similarly, for advertising, work done outside an advertising agency generates considerably less salary than for personnel within an agency setting. The major employers in advertising are business, daily newspapers and radio-television.

Some general salary patterns emerge of a comparative nature: for the vast majority, a part time or free lance job is not a road paved with monetary rewards. Compensation is low and women appear resigned to accept these salaries because of the opportunities to remain within their professional milieu. According to Press Woman, (October 1975) women shruggingly perpetuate discrimination by accepting minimal pay for communications work. This is especially true of those with other means of support, usually husbands, or those who must work and are intimidated by fear of losing their jobs if they ask for more pay. Of course, the magazine and weekly newspaper business often operate on marginal budgets with dedicated employees who would rather work for low wages than see the publication fold.

Impressive titles in the field of communications, especially for women, do not automatically create impressive salaries. While the creative writing of books, plays and poetry has been destined to be the

least remunerative, these are closely followed by part time work on newspapers and magazines as well as by classroom teaching. A narrow ribbon of opportunity does exist, however, if work is confined to consulting, public relations and public information. Even part time top level editors, at least by title designation (editor, managing editor, executive, assistant, associate editor) earn less than \$6,000. per year. Electronic media seem relatively unreceptive to part timers, while public relations and public information work are receptive to work on a part time basis as opposed to free lance contributions.

While free lancers have the obvious advantages of choice of time and dedication of effort, the possibility of earning reasonable money is highly limited. Those free lancers who do earn respectable salaries often find themselves needing to keep long and regular hours and require of themselves more discipline than regularly scheduled employment might.

It is difficult to speculate on the impact of the woman's movement on a field which women have considered traditionally available to them, at least in some areas such as publishing, magazines, public relations and advertising. However, there have been glaring realignments in those aspects of the field previously dominated by men such as the electronic media. The last few years have seen the emergence of television news anchorwomen, talk show hosts and radio personalities.

The high visibility of media people would make it appear that communications is wide open to women and while there are many more opportunities within broadcast media due to the climate, the management end of this business remains essentially male and will take a longer time to penetrate.

Is it possible to characterize the personality components of women who aspire to careers in communications? No more so than it is possible, or even feasible, to generalize for any field. Clearly, however, because success in this field requires an underlying ambition and talent, for at least initial recognition, it is safe to conclude that persistence, a desire to be successful, creativity and willingness to risk - and fail - would have to operate within women who enter this profession.

Additional possibilities for employment in the communications area are limited but some possibilities are seen. The need for technical writers will increase with the need to translate technical subjects into understandable language for managers and those purchasing and using the new technology. Government spending levels, especially defense and aerospace related, will have an impact on job availability. Health service is the nation's largest industry, and represents opportunities for competent communicators.

For the re-entry woman, the communications field possibly offers a softer landing surface because of the possibility of easing one's way in via part time and free lance work. As the quoted survey has indicated, women have long utilized communications as a means of staying in the field and working from home while occupying traditional housewife/mother roles at the same time. While the juggling process of doing this may have created some tensions in the process, it may also have produced a more sharing lifestyle within the household even before it became popular to aspire to this. This aspect of communications has created a woman who has been able to maintain some lifeline to her field, so that when she is ready to resume full time responsibilities she probably does not need to start at the beginning. The woman who abandoned her career entirely to raise a family is in the same position of re-entry as anyone else who is attempting to overcome ten to twenty years of non-experience in a field burgeoning with talent, excitement and assertive young women.

REFERENCES

Women in Communications, Inc.
Professional Papers #4

Press Woman, October 1975
"Competition Keen in Communications"

Women's Bureau
Employment Standards Administration
United States Department of Labor