

WOMEN REPORTERS

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most often from a coworker or superior.

"I wish I could say those days are over, but I know of at least one young female journalist who, in the last four or five years, had to continually navigate a male boss who relentlessly asked her to go out with him for drinks after work, to concerts," Blake wrote. "And this was a guy who would have a say in her annual review, and with whom she was often basically alone in the newsroom on night shifts, putting her in that awful position of not wanting to piss him off but certainly not interested in dating him."

In the 2017 report from the Women's Media Center, women make up a mere 38 percent of print journalists. While the study notes the wage gap between men and women is shrinking, it still exists — particularly for minority women.

"I experienced the absolute reality of the gender pay gap," Blake said, "learning only by accident, salary talk was a total no-no, that I was paid significantly less than male counterparts who held the same rank but over whom I had years of seniority and outnumbered many in journalism awards. I hope that reality has changed."

By Bowman's account, the *Citizen Times* has been both supportive and fair. As a mom of a toddler, whose partner also works at the paper, she said she found a sympathetic ear with both her direct boss, a father himself, and the news director, a mother of two.

"It is so hard, I can't describe just how hard it is. It is hard when you are a stay-at-home mom, and it is hard when you work," Bowman said. "The more support you can get from your coworkers and your bosses makes it so much easier to do your job effectively both as a mom and as a reporter."

Bowman said the struggle leads to frustration at the demands of the job.

"You feel guilt, then you feel stubbornness. Like, I am a career

woman!" Bowman said, slamming her fist on the table, then sighing. "It is a balance and I am lucky to have both a supportive partner and work environment."

Bowman said most of her editors have been male, which makes sense given female editors number about one in three, according to the WMC report.

Not the case at the *Mountain Xpress*, according to Virginia Daffron, managing editor for the local weekly.

"All our editors are female," she said. "My theory is that we are all women who have gotten to a certain age — middle age — and have other commitments in life. Most of our editors are part-time and that allows them to maintain that flexibility."

Daffron said her limited experience in journalism did not give her much perspective to draw from. She came to the field in a nontraditional manner, starting in 2015 at the weekly after a career in freelance writing for trade publications. She said one thing still strikes her daily.

"The biggest thing that I confront within the office and with sources is that men of all ages just talk over me. Interrupt me. Why do they do this?" Daffron said. "I really don't get it. I have to overcome my socialization and speak up," she said, closing her eyes as she shakes her head.

Every woman interviewed agreed. Be prepared to be interrupted. Be alert for yourself and others.

"Maybe as women we just internalize it and just think, 'That's the way it has been, that's how it goes, just let it go.' But, that's why we aren't having these conversations enough. It has just become ingrained and you just let it slip off and keep going," Bowman said. "But that's not the right thing to do either."

Women reporters rake up the muck

Men make up many of the big names in journalism history, but Tarbell gets the credit for being the first investigative journalist.

According to her biography, she used her research skills to dig down deep, bringing to light the corruption of John D. Rockefeller.

Following in her footsteps 118 years later, Forsyth tells of being drawn into in-depth reporting slowly. "I wanted to be a journalist because I love to write and to tell people's stories," Forsyth said. "The investigative bug came later. As I got more experience and saw waste, corruption, cruelty or injustice in the lives of the people I covered, I desired to expose those who were to blame."

Forsyth explained her passion for investigations grew with her awareness of the world.

"Just one story can spark the flame. It's the one story that makes you want to dig deeper and to figure out who to hold responsible for the wrongdoing and how to prove it. I have put crooks in federal prison and helped to change state and federal laws," she said.

Now, as deputy chief at *Wall-Street Journal*, her passion lights the way for others. In describing her job, Forsyth emphasizes the hard work each piece takes.

"Many of the best investigations involve the patience of reading reams of documents. One of the secrets of this job is to read everything you can get your hands on — books, magazines, government reports, consumer blogs, even cereal boxes," Forsyth noted.

Bowman, too, described a grittier version of the job. She scoffed at the portrayal of female journalists in shows like *Parks and Recreation* and *House of Cards*. She said she spends most of her day answering emails, reading court cases and going to public meetings.

"I believe this is a really good age for journalism, despite the public opinion," Bowman said, looking both worn out and inspired as she speaks. Down the street and up the stairs in the offices of the *Mountain Xpress*, Daffron brings up an advantage women in this town have over their male counterparts.

"In Asheville, on the government

side, they are all women. The mayor is a woman, the city attorney is a woman, as is the assistant city manager and the executive director of the tourism development. As many of the decision makers are women as they are men," she said.

According to Margaret Ellis, manager for Buncombe County Human Resources, women account for 55 percent of the county government.

The numbers from the WMC prove the truth in her statement. Women journalists use female sources 42 percent of the time, compared to just 27 percent of their male counterparts. The argument for the need of the female perspective becomes particularly apparent in the numbers on reproductive health reporting, where women only account for 37 percent of articles.

"You see men who may not fully understand the impact, or even be aware of an impact that women may face every day. Whether it is a shortage of doctors that are women specific, or the access to Planned Parenthood, or the struggles of working moms," Bowman said with a sigh. "It is a lot easier if a woman is in the room to offer input, offer ideas, offer counterpoints too."

Despite the statistics on pay inequality, harassment and threats, women continue to hear the siren's call. UNC Asheville reports for the 2018 spring semester, 60 percent of mass communication students were female. The number reflects findings of a nationwide survey in 2013, which found two-thirds of all journalism undergraduates were female.

For now, the next generation can follow the advice offered by each of the journalists interviewed for this article. Blake said it best.

"Your number one, non-negotiable assets are your integrity and your reputation for fair, unbiased and factually correct reporting and writing," Blake said. "With those, you can stand tall and rest easy no matter who challenges you."