



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

P.O. Box 70603, Friendship Heights, MD 20813 Tel: 202 338-4820

Website: www.womensclearinghouse.org

JANUARY 2006

Women in the Media: At Home and Abroad

Whether we rely on newspapers, magazines, television or radio, we are all dependent on the media to provide information and keep us in touch with the world from domestic politics, science, health or fashion to international issues. The roles of reporters, editors and management in the media are of great importance in shaping what is covered and how it is transmitted to us and to governments around the globe. We need to be aware of the position of women and how they are faring in their careers in various fields of the media.

Our speakers reflect widely diverse backgrounds and varied careers in journalism:

Bonnie Erbe is well known as founder, producer, and moderator of *To the Contrary* on public television and radio, a very popular weekend program discussing women's issues as viewed by an always lively panel of liberal and conservative women. She also writes a weekly column in 400 papers, has a law degree, and has covered major economic and political issues in the press.

Mal Johnson was the first African American female journalist employed by Cox Broadcasting and covered five US Presidents for them over 27 years. She was the founder of the National Association of Black Journalists and has been a leader in many feminist organizations. She attended all the U.N. Conferences on Women and recently organized a conference for 58 women journalists from around the world.

SPEAKERS: BONNIE ERBE, Host, *To the Contrary*
MAL JOHNSON, Int'l Association of Women in Radio and Television

TOPIC: Women in the Media: At Home and Abroad

DATE/TIME: Tuesday, January 24, 2006 / 12 noon – 1:30 p.m.

PLACE: American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle, 8th Floor, Kellogg Room
Bring brown bag lunch; soft drinks available from a machine

IMPORTANT NOTICE

A photo ID must be shown at the security desk of One Dupont Circle. Please come a little earlier than usual because there is a new, slightly more time consuming, sign-in system. In case of a snowstorm and/or closing of government offices, the meeting will be cancelled. Please listen to radio reports.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 28, 2006

Program Summary – November 2005 Meeting

Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment

At the November meeting, CWI members Bernice (Bunny) R. Sandler and Harriett M. Stonehill discussed their recently published book, *Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment K-12*. Sandler is a nationally recognized expert on the legal implications of sexual harassment, and strategies to prevent and respond to it; Stonehill has extensive experience in dealing with schools and school/community programs.

Sandler introduced the program with an old nursery rhyme: *Georgie Porgie puddin' and pie, Kissed the girls and made them cry,* pointing out that today Georgie Porgie would be called a sexual harasser. Stonehill asked "What kind of person will Georgie Porgie grow up to be if the school and his family do not teach him that this behavior is not acceptable?"

In recent years there has been growing awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace, but few schools have developed policies, provided staff training or offered educational activities to deal with unwanted sexual behavior among young boys and girls. Stonehill and Sandler wrote the book to increase awareness of the seriousness and extent of this increasingly critical problem, how to respond when it occurs and how to educate staff, students and families to prevent student-to-student harassment from occurring. There is not enough information about the subject, and administrators, teachers and families need help in establishing policies and methods for handling sexual harassment incidents.

Stonehill explained how student-to-student sexual harassment is a form of bullying: one student attempts to intimidate another using sexuality as a weapon. It may be verbal or physical, or both. It may be between students of either or the same gender; and sometimes it involves a group harassing others. Whereas bullying

generally is not illegal, sexual harassment is. She pointed out that public institutions are liable for damages if such activity is ignored, and added, "Although some schools have anti-bullying programs, they rarely include sexual harassment, and it is often neglected in schools because staff may not recognize the seriousness of such behavior."

Sandler stated that unwanted sexual behavior among youth takes place at all levels of the K-12 system, occurring more frequently in middle schools. Surveys have reported that 70 to 90 percent of students (K-12) say they have experienced some form of harassment in school. In contrast, only 30 percent of students experience traditional (non-sexual) bullying. Six out of ten students reported that student-to-student harassment happens regularly; 52 percent of girls and 47 percent of boys, and more than 67 percent of African-American girls experienced unwanted sexual attention and behavior. Gay and lesbian students were more likely to be harassed than any other groups.

She gave examples of peer sexual harassment, which includes sexual comments, offensive touching and groping, and pulling down underwear. Sandler served as an expert witness in one case in which "an 11-year old boy put a door stop into his pants, pretended it was his penis and then told the girls what he wanted to do with them." Harassment also includes sexual jokes, graffiti, obscene gestures, and insults: calling girls sluts and whores, calling boys fags and pussies. In one case, a girl with big breasts was called a cow and boys "mooed" at her. Computer harassment and telephone messages are emerging areas of concern, she said. Incidents happen in bathrooms and school buses, but occur also in classrooms, hallways, lunch rooms and on the way to and from school.

Program Summary – November 2005 Meeting

Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment continued

Most incidents of student-to-student harassment go unreported, Sandler declared. School personnel are often present when incidents occur, but may ignore the behavior. In part, this is because policies are not clear or they do not know what to do. Students often do not know to whom they should report incidents or what will be done if they do. They worry that they will be blamed for the harassment or if they report it, it may get worse.

“Many schools do not recognize the fear that sexual harassment can cause,” Stonehill said. Unfortunately, the impact of sexual harassment on recipients is serious. Students feel unsafe, she said. They may become fearful and uncomfortable; they may feel shame and humiliation; they may become unable to concentrate. Staff and parents often think of peer harassment behavior as a normal part of growing up, and they sometimes argue that the child will become stronger if he or she learns how to deal with unwanted behavior. (“Boys will be boys.”) Yet the impact on victims often lasts throughout their adult lives. In addition, students who harass others are learning poor social skills. What is learned in grade school becomes the foundation for adult behavior later.

It is important for adults to listen to children and encourage them to speak about their experiences. However, some members of the audience, during the question period, wondered if we go too far with rules, especially for younger children. They worry, for example, that children are not allowed to play many games or touch each other in innocent play. It was pointed out that, the aim is not to prevent “innocent play” but to prevent harmful sexual harassing behavior.

Sandler noted that “We have to teach children the difference between tattling and reporting. To tattle and get someone in

trouble is very different from reporting an incident that hurts anyone or threatens someone’s safety.” Schools need to help students understand what will actually happen if they report incidents; they need to know that they will be protected against retaliation. The reporting process can be made easier by having multiple ways for students to report harassment –to a teacher, the nurse, a guidance counselor, or a hot line, instead of, for example, requiring a written report or requiring that all incidents must be reported to the principal.

Lawsuits are increasing, with schools paying damages or settlements of several hundred thousand dollars, some in excess of \$500,000. Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions, also prohibits student-to-student harassment. Criminal laws prohibiting sexual assault and abuse and civil laws which address such issues as “intentional infliction of harm,” may also apply.

Stonehill said, “Schools are not the only institutions that need to develop an awareness of sexual harassment behavior in young boys and girls. Other community groups, such as scouts, churches, athletic teams, and youth activities of all kinds often become a setting for harassment.” She added, “An effective way to develop awareness is to bring groups together to develop a wider understanding and develop policies that deal with harassment throughout the community.”

The bottom line, Stonehill and Sandler say, is teaching staff, students and families about respect. Schools are ultimately responsible for protecting students and culpable when they do not protect them from harassment. The book includes more than 700 suggestions for dealing with the K-12 sexual harassment problems.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year to all! We have 32 productive years behind us and are ready for many more. We have great plans for 2006 as our programs continue to focus on public policy issues of concern to women. Spread the word about our excellent speakers who graciously share their experiences and knowledge with us. As always, your input and suggestions are most welcome.

Cheers! Ellen

GETTING TO KNOW BOARD MEMBERS

LINDA FIELLY: Linda has served as CWI treasurer since 2001. She also served several years as vice president for membership in the 1990's. Linda is a retired federal employee, having spent much of her career as an occupational specialist in the Office of Personnel Management. She is active in a number of women's organizations, including the Women's Action Coalition of Prince George's County, the Southern Prince George's Business and Professional Women, and Maryland NOW. She served for many years on the board of directors of the Family Crisis Center, Inc., of Prince George's County and continues to support activities that have to do with providing services to victims of domestic violence. Linda lives in Prince George's County, Maryland, with her husband and two dogs.

MINIMUM WAGE

Working women and people of color are the largest group that would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage of \$5.15, which has been in effect since 1997. It is not adjusted for inflation and since 1997 it has lost 17 percent of its purchasing power and is now 56 percent of the average U.S. wage. A full-time minimum wage worker earns about \$10,700 a year, which is \$5,390 below the 2005 poverty line for a family of three and \$8,650 below the poverty line for a family of four. Although at the bottom of the wage scale, these workers earn too much to receive cash welfare assistance, and need many other government services to get by. Democrats in Congress, including Senators Ted Kennedy and Hillary Rodham Clinton, are encouraging an increase to \$7.25. Various news reports assert that during this same period, the House and the Senate have voted themselves seven raises and eight raises, respectively.

(Culled from the Center for Policy Alternatives and the Oakland County Welfare Rights Organization Newsletter -Michigan)

FROM WOMENS eNEWS:

CHEERS: Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, an anti-choice Republican, now supports a new state law that requires hospital to offer emergency contraception to rape victims, reversing a previous stand. (Dec. 10)

A \$160,000 federal sex education grant was rejected by the state of Maine (Nov. 29) because of requirements that it be spent on abstinence-only education. This possibly conflicted with a state law and mandates teens be taught about contraception. To receive the grant, Maine also would have been required to spend an additional \$120,000 in matching state funds.

2006 Women's Legislative Briefing

Sunday, January 29, 2006 from 12:30 to 4:00 p.m.

National 4-H Conference Center, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD

You are invited to attend the 26th annual Women's Legislative Briefing to learn from a distinguished group of experts about important legislative initiatives affecting women and families that will be introduced in the upcoming sessions of the Maryland General Assembly and the U.S. Congress.

PROGRAM

12:30 - 1:00p.m. REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS

1:00 - 2:00p.m. OPENING

Keynote Address **Susan F. Wood**, the former FDA official in charge of women's health issues who recently resigned her post to protest the politicization of science when the FDA ignored scientific and clinical evidence, overruling its own staff recommendations regarding "the morning after pill."

2:00 - 2:30p.m. PLENARY SESSION

Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women

2:45 - 4:00p.m. WORKSHOPS

Understanding the Budget and Legislative Process
Reforming Health Care
Protecting Women's Bodies
Ensuring the Economic Well-Being of Our Families
Confronting Issues Impacting Immigrant Women

4:00 p.m. RECEPTION

To Register Online go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw or call (240)777-8330.

WOMEN WORK! NATIONAL CONFERENCE – Arlington, VA – APRIL 5-7, 2006

Join Women Work! for our 2006 annual conference, *Programs, Policies & Partnerships: Building for the Future*. This year education and training professionals, women leaders, advocates, and government and corporate officials will gather to build skills, strengthen networks and increase opportunities for women. Plan now to attend the premier conference on the issues of women, work and economic security! Early registration is available until February 17, 2006. For more information or to register call the conference planners The Balcom Group at (703) 807-2281 or email womenwork@balcomgroup.com or visit <http://www.womenwork.org/>

CWI NEWSLETTER NOW AVAILABLE VIA E-MAIL

Members wishing to receive the CWI Newsletter via email instead of U.S. mail can send their requests by e-mail to cwinwsltr@aol.com. The newsletter will be sent in PDF format. The first issue after the request is received, the newsletter will be sent via e-mail and U.S. mail. The following month, the newsletter will be sent via email only, unless cancelled. Requests to discontinue the email version and re-establish the regular mail version can be sent to the above email address. If you have questions concerning these procedures, please call Sheila Willet, newsletter editor at 202 408-1777.

COMING EVENTS

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- JANUARY 24 CWI Meeting. Topic: Women and the Media. See page 1.
- JANUARY 29 2006 Women's Legislative Briefing. National 4-H Conference Center, 7100 Connecticut Ave., Chevy Chase, MD. See page 5.
- FEBRUARY 1 Deadline to Submit articles and event announcements for February CWI Newsletter. Email your submissions or questions to cwinwsltr@aol.com
- FEBRUARY 9 National Capital Chapter Older Women's League Meeting 12 n – 2 pm Topic: Medicare For All. Call 202 408-1777 for location.
- FEBRUARY 28 CWI Meeting. Topic: The Importance of Organizing Younger Women: Issues and Strategies in Building the Next Generation of Women Leaders
- APRIL 5-7 WOMEN WORK! NATIONAL CONFERENCE See page 5.

CWI Board of Directors, July 2005 – June 2006. OFFICERS: President, Ellen S. Overton; Vice President Program, Sue Klein; Vice President Membership, Jean Landweber; Treasurer, Linda Fihelly; Secretary, Harriett M. Stonehill. BOARD MEMBERS: Alvin Golub, Harriett Harper, Roslyn Kaiser, Ruth G. Nadel, Jacqueline Scherer, Clara G. Schiffer, Joy R. Simonson, ex officio.
Sheila A. Willet, Newsletter Editor

CWI

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