Guidelines for a Letter to the Editor

**“This is NOT OK!”[[1]](#footnote-1) template**

*Sexism:*

*: Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex. (Oxford dictionary)*

*: Behaviour, conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex. (Merriam Webster)*

*: Any system of beliefs, attitudes, practices, social norms or institutional forms that functions to create or perpetuate invidious social distinctions among persons on the basis of their actual or presumed sex. (Encylopedia.com)*

Sexist attitudes, behaviour and actions are sometimes unintentional or unconscious, yet they are harmful especially to women and girls. Not only is sexist reporting harmful, but it also contravenes standards of professional journalism, as set out in national legislation and media ethics codes.

**Sending a *“This is NOT OK”* letter to the editor calls out sexist reporting in newspapers, television and radio newscasts, and online news. It contributes to breaking the cycle of unquestioned acceptance and/or non-response to journalism that is prejudicial, stereotyped and discriminatory against women.**

How to tell editors that “This is NOT OK” when you see sexist reporting:

1. Find:
   1. A copy of the national media standards document or gender media policy in your country;
   2. A copy of the editorial policy and/or gender-related guidelines of the media house in question. Contain the media house if their editorial policy is not posted publicly, for instance, on a website.
2. Draw inspiration from the guidelines here to craft your letter to the Editor.
3. Check with the newspaper, news site or broadcaster for the address to which to send the letter, what the word limit is and other details on the submission guidelines.
4. Add your contact details to allow the Editor to follow up with you.
5. Email us a copy of your “This is NOT OK!” letter at [GMMP@waccglobal.org](mailto:GMMP@waccglobal.org) or let us know which media outlet and the article you were responding to.

7 March 2024

Dear Editor,

On [DATE] you [aired/published] a story [titled\_\_\_, OR IN THE CASE OF A NEWSCAST, about\_\_\_\_\_] reported by [NAME OF JOURNALIST IF AVAILABLE].

As a media professional, you are aware of the basic principles of journalism, as well as the ethical standards set out in [CITE THE CODE/POLICY] that media in [STATE COUNTRY] are expected to abide by.

Clause [X] of the code states that: [INSERT CITATION]

However, the way in which the story was [presented/reported] not only raises questions about your [paper’s/station’s] commitment to professional ethics, but is also harmful to women who are 50% of your [readership/viewership].

This is NOT OK.

*Checklist. Pick (3) most pertinent*

* **Headlines**. How was the story introduced? Did the headline reflect the essence of the story fairly, or did it convey a sexist stereotype? Was it relevant to the story, or unrelated?
* **Sources**. Were any of the sources presented in a way that questioned their credibility or reliability?
* **Language**. Was overtly sexist language used? Were adjectives relevant and objective, or did they convey biases and stereotypes? Was there a difference between the language used to describe women and men - e.g. in relation to physical attributes or emotion? Were the descriptions relevant to the story? Did the language use idioms or phrases that perpetuate stereotypes?
* **Visual images**. Did the images (video, photos or drawings) illustrate the content of the story fairly, or did they convey stereotypes? Did the image emphasise or exaggerate physical aspects (especially related to the person's sexuality)? Did the image degrade the dignity of women or men? Was the image relevant to the story? Would a different image have been more appropriate? In the context of the story, what was the overall message about women, and men, conveyed by the images?
* **Story angle and perspective**. Did the story take a position or make a judgement - either explicit or implicit - which could reinforce sexist stereotypes? Did the story's perspective help to challenge prevailing stereotypes? What was the overall impression of women, and of men, given by the story?

Here’s why.

[EXPLAIN WHAT IS PROBLEMATIC ABOUT THE REPORTING APPROACH AND JOURNALISTIC CHOICES. USE THE CHECKLIST HERE --🡪]

[EXPLAIN HOW THE STORY AS IT IS PRESENTED IS POTENTIALLY HARMFUL TO WOMEN. INCLUDE STATISTICS RELEVANT TO THE ISSUE ADDRESSED IN THE STORY]

[EXPLAIN HOW THE STORY COULD HAVE BEEN PRESENTED DIFFERENTLY]

I urge you as the Editor to make sure that basic ethical standards are met across all future content published.

It is an issue of accountability to your audience as well as your professional obligation.

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

1. Title inspired by [a front-page article](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/telegram-journalist-harassment-1.3738023) in August 2016 by Canadian journalist Steve Bartlett, managing editor of what was at the time the St. John’s Telegram, in response to the 'huge lack of respect' for female journalists and women in general. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)