

One for One: It's Only Fair A CEM Initiative

Problem: Women are significantly under-represented on television. This contributes to two major problems.

First, because male roles on television are associated with the use of violence for problem solving, the over-representation of men results in more role models who use violence to resolve problems. Simply put, the more men on television, the more likely violence will be shown. Because violence on television has been shown to significantly contribute to higher levels of violence in the real world, increasing female roles on television is a step toward reducing violence.

Second, the under-representation of women, and the way women are portrayed when shown (for example, disproportionately as victims and rarely as leaders), subliminally communicates the message that women are not only less important than men but also less capable. A balanced numerical representation, along with more positive role models for girls and women, will counter these unhealthy misimpressions. This equitable representation of women and men will help counter the documented problem of girls' low self-esteem. It will also provide for boys and men a more realistic and less biased perception of girls and women (for example, countering the contempt expressed by boys in studies where they are asked to imagine themselves as girls). Because women have stereotypically been associated with non-violent and caring behaviors, it would also increase the number of positive models for conflict resolution.

Goal: Our long term goal is to increase the quality and quantity of female roles on television. Because women make up slightly more than 50% of the population, there should be equal representation on television. For every major male role there should be a major female role — there should be one woman for every man on television.

Objective: Our immediate objective is to increase awareness about the under-representation of females on television. Increasing awareness is the first step to mobilizing pressure on those who have the power to increase female roles: writers, producers, advertisers, and media executives. Our primary objective, then, is to get this issue on the media and public agenda.

Activities: 1. It is essential to get a women's organization to take on this issue. We can use a one page proposal based on this document to get on the agenda of meetings of various women's groups. We can ask them to support the concept by publicizing it through their newsletters and linking it to other activities. Groups should be asked to contribute some amount of money to support an organizer for this project. 2. Girls organizations should also be approached. For example, *New Moon*, a magazine for girls aged 7 and older, might be approached to ask their readers to fill out a basic checklist on the frequency and nature of female roles on television and send in results to the magazine. (Alternative is to have *New Moon* do a reader survey of attitudes toward females on television.) 3. George could be asked to do a new study on the ratio of women to men on television and this would be released in conjunction with a major women's

group that has signed on to the initiative.

Media activities: Once we have something to say, it would be reasonable to get some media coverage, and media coverage is the way to build awareness, provide legitimacy to our issue, reinforce our allies, and gain new supporters to our cause. Each of the activities above provides a media opportunity to build visibility of the One-for-One Initiative. The announcement of a major women's organization to take on this issue is a newsworthy event. The release of a survey by *New Moon* is a newsworthy event. The release of a new study of gender roles on television is a newsworthy event. Ideally each of these events could be supported by news conferences around the country. For example, George might have a news conference in Philadelphia and other CEM groups could have local conferences and develop local pegs for the story. Local groups could also develop op-ed pieces and also meet with editorial boards at their local papers.

Strengths: We have a great idea which is easily communicated, it directly affects over 50% of the population and indirectly 100%, and is of great interest to many. We need a group of committed advocates who are willing to take this issue on as part of the CEM agenda. We already have the involvement of George Gerbner, and at the last board meeting a number of people expressed enthusiasm for the idea.

Barrier: The major barrier we face is getting started. We simply don't have anyone who will take the next step, and organize support for the initiative. We also need an event to introduce this issue to the public. Can Peter Wirth suggest something here?

Strategies for getting started: This is a great project for CEM. It addresses both the violence issue and the gender issue. Could CEM, in its communications with funders, pitch this as a separate project?

It would take a 50% organizer to get women's groups and local CEM chapters involved, funds for mail and phone to coordinate with the groups, a volunteer to write a brief position paper/strategy document, support for some basic monitoring research to update male-female counts and roles, and one of our measurement colleagues to put together a "popular" monitoring guide for girls' and women's groups to implement. By the way, we should not exclude men's groups. In fact, the involvement of men's groups would increase the news value of the story.

Unless we have a "center" to the One-One activities nothing much will come of it. Isolated media events, no matter how well done, won't accomplish much unless they are tied to a larger strategy. This strategy must include a clear statement of what we want to happen (we need to say more than one-for-one), who has the power to make the change we want, and who must be mobilized to apply the pressure to those we want to change. Pronouncements won't work, we need a strategy that ties together organizing, media, and policy change over the long term.

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