

21 March 2019

Country: United States, Global



In honor of International Women’s Month, Media Diversity Institute joined a Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) panel titled, *Does the online space allow women in the media to challenge stereotyping and misrepresentation?*

The event was held as part of the United Nation’s Commission on the Status of Women in New York City.

“The digital world is a space that is accessible to everyone, provided that technical obstacles are surpassed,” said Dr. Snjezana Milivojevic of the University of Belgrade’s Media Studies department, who represented Media Diversity Institute on the panel. Fewer financial and political barriers empower women to produce media, rather than simply absorb it. Women like fellow panelists Moroccan filmmaker [Sonia Terrab](#) and Egyptian publisher [Namees Arnous](#) are able to use the Internet as a platform for ground-breaking pieces that challenge sexism and stereotypes, in a way they might not be able to in traditional media.

However, patriarchal structures still exist within both the media and digital spaces. While there are hundreds of thousands of female journalists around the world, the higher one goes up the ranks, the fewer women there are in decision-making positions. Technology platforms preach about plurality and diversity, but many of the most profitable and influential ones (Facebook, Microsoft, Google, Amazon) are still dominated by men.

“Offline sexism transfers very smoothly into online sexism,” Dr. Milivojevic continued. “In many ways, cybersexism is not that different than regular sexism.

For women, self-expression also comes with exposure—which also opens them up to online harassment, attacks and threats. While prominent men are also attacked online, Dr. Milivojevic pointed out that most men are attacked for their political opinions or disagreeing with an argument. They are never attacked or discredited on the basis of their gender, alone.

“This is an extremely important political and democratic issue that is disguised as an attack on women, and their individual morals,” Dr. Milivojevic said, arguing that the personal nature of hate speech pushes many female journalists to treat it as an individual issue, that is not worthy of public attention. As a result, scandals like “ [La Ligue Du LOL](#) go years without being exposed.

Feminists have taught us that the personal is political,” she continued. “These issues should be brought up, and taken as an attack on freedom of expression and democratic values—not an issue for individual bloggers or journalists in the industry.”

Check out more of our work combatting online hate speech [here](#) .