

Women's Groups and Workplace Reform at Network Television's Corporate Headquarters

On Tuesday, January 20, 1970, Judith Hole, a researcher, and Josephine Indovino, who worked in accounting, wore pants to their jobs at the CBS Broadcast Center in New York City. They were just two of thirty women across the company in creative, clerical, technical, and operational positions who wore pants to work that day. This action defied the company dress code policy for women and merited the attention of the *New York Times*, which published pictures of the women in the newspaper's "food, fashion, family, and furnishings" section. With this placement, news of women wearing pants at CBS appeared on the same page as the budget for First Lady Pat Nixon's home decorating plans, advice on children's activities in the city, and a Bloomingdale's advertisement for face moisturizer, thereby characterizing the protest as yet another lifestyle choice or fashion statement for women. The "Pants Ban" article reinforced this perspective by taking care to describe the physical appearance of the women workers involved and the sartorial choices each of them made.

Despite framing the day by conventionally feminine and arguably superficial elements, the article also relates the significance of the one-day protest. Along with descriptions of "a delicately-boned blonde in navy pants and a sweater" who "could have stepped out of the pages of *Mademoiselle* or *Elle*" and an array of fashions—tweed bell bottoms, beige cuffed trousers, gray twill trousers, a white silk shirt matched with an orange cardigan, and a "flowing brown print scarf"—the article provides a useful accounting of the "radicalized" women involved in the protest.¹ Regardless of how tongue-in-cheek the description of "radicalized" women may be, given the rather dismissive tone of the article, the day's action attests to the collective will and organizing potential of women at CBS. In addition to Hole and Indovino, participants in the pants-in included Irina Posner, assistant producer of

documentaries; Angelika Oehme, who worked in the local operations department; Grace Diekhaus, unit manager for news specials; Merri Lieberthal, secretary for journalist Mike Wallace; Jean Dudasik, secretary for news anchor Harry Reasoner; and Mara Posner, secretary for science reporter Earl Urbell.

Although Indovino herself described the one-day “pants-in” as “laughable,” she identified the protest’s value in the communal awareness it generated. “If it’s a way to bring a lot of women together,” Indovino noted, “maybe one day it’ll bring us together for something important.”² Indovino’s assessment acknowledges the number of women involved in the pants-in and a community of CBS women who had, by the time of their protest, come into feminist consciousness. Soon after the protest, Indovino’s hopes were realized. The kernel of activism embedded in the pants ban protest of 1970 grew into full expression as women started to organize formally at the headquarters of all three US networks and lobbied for politically progressive workplace conditions and practices.

From 1971 to 1973, women workers founded what generally came to be known as “women’s groups” at NBC, ABC, and CBS. Composed of creative and clerical personnel, the groups represented the interests of workers who provided support for network executives and on-air talent, created programming and content, and helped conduct the wide-ranging business of the corporation. The groups called out sexism at the networks, helped change company policies on a range of issues affecting women, and built collective political action among women workers across organizational divisions and occupational hierarchies. This chapter focuses on the in-house reform efforts of these women’s groups throughout the early to late 1970s with an emphasis on the most successful of them, the Women’s Advisory Council (WAC) at CBS. WAC changed labor conditions for women within the corporation and, in doing so, articulated priorities of the women’s movement at the very center of the broadcasting industry. This was a feat that no feminist group formed outside of media organizations had accomplished to the same degree or in the same fashion. To consider WAC, then, is to broaden considerations of feminist media reform and to identify strategies for progressive political change within corporate workplaces.

To relate WAC’s story, I draw on interviews with group members and CBS leadership, as well as archival documents—including communications within women’s groups, memos, policy notes, newsletters, and intraoffice correspondence about workplace practices—the majority of which are located at CBS’s News Reference Library in New York City.³ These resources track multiple expressions of feminist media reform beyond the domain of liberal feminism, locate feminist activism at the epicenter of the network television system, and identify otherwise anonymous women production workers who did not appear in front of the camera or occupy higher-visibility “creative” work. WAC’s activities at CBS bring to light not just an unorthodox aspect of feminist media reform but also the internal operations of a major media corporation. Accordingly, this chapter contributes to commercial

broadcasting history, which, as Michele Hilmes, Shawn VanCour, and Michael Socolow demonstrate, is notoriously difficult to reconstruct.⁴ More particularly, it centers on a broadcasting company whose industrial inner workings remain relatively inaccessible. Unlike the robust NBC archives, which have provided research resources for vital scholarship in television and broadcasting histories, the CBS archives, to the degree that they exist, are housed at the corporation without finding guides or transparent public access.⁵

The archival materials generated around WAC's existence reflect the group's influence on formalized company policies (e.g., health care, hiring and promotion, and pay scales) and everyday, experiential aspects of the workplace (e.g., spatial configurations, behaviors, language, and interpersonal dynamics) in which myriad gender inequities were rooted. This archive thus enables elements of a "critical media industry studies" approach that, per Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz, and Serra Tinic, "examines the micropolitics of institutional operation and production practices" rather than regulation and economics.⁶ Consequently, these materials make visible elements of CBS's corporate culture via its relationship to women and its selective acceptance of feminist politics by way of its workplace. They also illuminate how and with what effects women-led and women-oriented media reform influenced a powerful broadcasting entity at the time of the women's movement.

FORMING THE WOMEN'S GROUPS

In the fall of 1971, women at NBC began organizing as the Equal Opportunity Committee. They were followed by ABC women, who started the Women's Action Committee in the summer of 1972, and CBS women, who founded the Women's Advisory Council in 1973. Each group began with informal meetings and from there developed into more formal organizations. At NBC, according to one group member, women started "marvelous clandestine meetings" in which women would "meet in closets—literally in closets" and "scurry around secretly at lunch" in the hopes that no one would see them convene. The NBC group grew from three production assistants in November 1971 to a group of eight until they "were ready to go public" and meet with the personnel department in January 1972. But they would not meet with top management until nine months had passed. While women at NBC had little success in dealing cooperatively with the network, they broke ground that helped the other women's groups. They inspired women at ABC and CBS to form their own groups and mobilized women within and beyond the networks. When the NBC women filed a lawsuit against the network, their legal efforts were supported by "personal contributions from women at the other two networks," "all kinds of women[']s groups," and other women who worked in various media companies. The NBC group also helped ABC and CBS groups access their respective management much more quickly. Alice Herb, one of the original members of ABC's

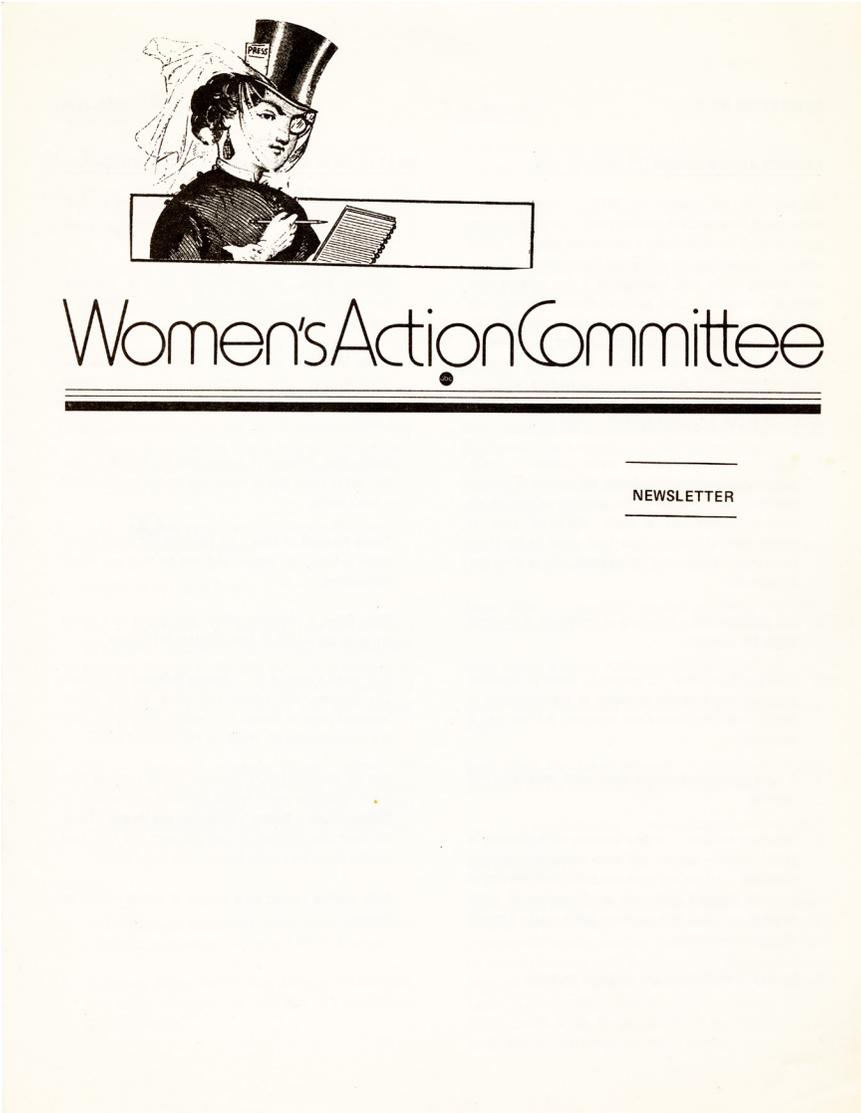


FIGURE 2. The newsletter of ABC's Women's Action Committee circulated information about the group and its actions and reported on problematic departments and behavior. (Eleanor Sanger Papers, Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, Smith College, SSC-MS-00286)

Women's Action Committee, recalls that the group started in the summer of 1972 during the Republican National Convention and by either "the end of August or the beginning of September," began meeting with management.⁷ The CBS women met with company president Arthur Taylor soon after they formalized their complaints about company policies.

The alacrity with which both ABC and CBS responded to their respective women's groups suggests that the networks were increasingly aware of the disruptive potential posed by organized workers and the validity of their complaints. WAC, in particular, benefited from management's growing awareness of feminist activism that included actions taken by the NBC and ABC women's groups. News of a lawsuit from ABC women and plans by the National Organization for Women (NOW) to file suits against all three networks prompted CBS to take a proactive stance. As a result, according to NBC's Equal Opportunities Commission cofounder Katherine Kish, CBS was "the most receptive of the three networks" to input from its women's group. WAC also benefited from strong in-house support from workers in departments across the company's holdings. Priscilla Toumey, one of the original members of the CBS women's group, estimated that—in comparison to the formative meeting for ABC's Women's Action Committee, attended by an estimated thirty-five to forty women—"upwards of three, four hundred women" participated in WAC's election for committee members, and four to five hundred women attended meetings in the early days.⁸

The formation of women's groups at the US networks coincided with the rise of women's workplace groups that expressed feminist-oriented media reform during the 1970s. Research by Jeannine Baker and Jane Connors on the Australian Broadcasting Commission, by Marama Whyte on the *New York Times*, and by Anne O'Brien on Irish newspapers illuminates a global movement of women worker-activists across a range of media industries, occupations, and national contexts.⁹ While these groups deployed different strategies and privileged different priorities, to varying degrees of success, they all shared advantages as industry insiders: professional expertise of group members; relationships with workplace leadership; and knowledge of their respective media industry's culture, protocols, and priorities.

Like their contemporaries, the women's groups at NBC, ABC, and CBS benefited from their status as industry insiders. The nature of their workplace, however, distinguished them from other media worker groups. First, unlike public sector broadcasters in other countries, US networks managed their obligations to the public in ways that protected their commercial interests. This limited the impact of activism from outsiders and in matters of programming. Second, corporate broadcasting headquarters were neither focused on a single media product nor dedicated exclusively to media production. This shaped their workforce, which was both sizable and dispersed. Workers were employed across multiple divisions and, in addition to media production, purchased and managed media content and conducted and supported the business operations of the company. These conditions shaped the composition and actions of the women's groups at broadcasting headquarters: they needed to represent the interests of women workers who were not unified by occupation and to contend with their employers' resistance to particular modes of media reform.

Initial Presentation by The CBS Women's Group To CBS President Arthur R. Taylor Thursday, July 19, 1973

CBS WOMEN IN ATTENDANCE: Rene Burrough, Sylvia Chase, Judy Hole, Jane Tillman Irving, Anita Kopff, Ellen Levine, Barbara Lomholt Lingel, Marie Mahecha, Chin Mahieu, Nancy Perov, Lily Poskus, Susan Quigg, Janet Roach, Inge Schmidt, Lynn Sherr, Joan Stewart, Cheryl Taylor, Mary Gay Taylor, Priscilla Toumey, Louise Waller

AGENDA

1. Mutual Introduction of Women's Group and Management
2. Introduction of Presentation
3. Labor Grade Problems
4. Secretarial Problems
5. Promotions, Opportunities, Training Programs and Salary Differentials
6. Benefits
7. Women Counselors
8. Image of Women at CBS
9. Affirmative Action Plan and Conclusion
10. Question and Answer Period

INTRODUCTION OF PRESENTATION

We represent CBS women in New York. We were chosen in fully publicized general meetings where every CBS division in New York was represented.

We appreciate this opportunity to meet with you. We know you are aware that women face discrimination at CBS. Since we are closest to the problem, we would like to work with you. We expect that this and subsequent meetings will lead us to solutions that will benefit CBS as a whole. Your policy notes indicate to us that you're willing to confront the situation and intend to change it.

We will talk about some of the most pressing problems women encounter as CBS employees and will make some initial recommendations.

LABOR GRADE PROBLEMS

Fifty-one percent of the CBS work force is female.

The women of CBS are concentrated in labor-grade positions where the pay is low and the possibilities for change or advancement extremely limited.

Think of a switchboard operator. Does a man's voice come to mind? Think of a secretary. Can you picture a young man with a good education hitching his wagon to that star? And picture yourself living on their pay.

The vast majority of CBS women are employed in non-exempt jobs as secretaries, telephone operators, billers, clerks,

CBS Response to Women's Group Presentation August 17, 1973

At the meeting held on Thursday, July 19, 1973, we had agreed to respond promptly and fully to the many points raised in the presentation submitted at that meeting. While there are some issues on which we are not completely in agreement with your views, there is no question that the area of agreement is more significant and extensive than the area of disagreement. We want to continue to discuss our disagreements; meanwhile, the fact that there is such broad agreement is a very important consideration for the future.

As has been pointed out in the President's Policy Note on Women, there is no dispute that over the years women have not progressed in the same manner and to the same extent as men and that, in consequence of this, serious inequities exist. This is, of course, a national problem, existing extensively throughout business and industry as well as government—a problem really only focused on in the last couple of years. We think that most fair-minded people would concede that CBS's record to date has been significantly better than that of others. Nonetheless, there is still much to do.

We believe that the drive for the equality of opportunity for women in business and industry has reached the point where there can be no turning back, where it has an inevitability and momentum of its own. All of business, CBS included, obviously has a lot of catching up to do. However, not a great deal of purpose will be served by either excusing or condemning the past; the key standard for all of us is our present and future commitment and whether programs are developed and carried out effectively to give meaning to that commitment.

One important disclaimer: No one should expect instant perfection. Many of the problems and inequities raised in your presentation, even with the best will in the world and with maximum effort, will take time to correct; that is inherent in effecting change in any large organization. It is true whether we are dealing with issues relating to women, men or minorities, or even non-personnel issues that do not so intimately involve the human equation.

Suffice to say that CBS has always cherished its role as a leader in an environment of change; in the same way, we expect to provide constructive leadership in finding solutions to the flood of problems being identified by the women's movement. You should bear in mind, however, that those who lead the way on uncharted paths are precisely those who are most likely to stumble from time to time. We hope, therefore, that if we occasionally seem to be groping for our way, you will not mistake our intentions. We also hope that you will not reject ideas simply because they come from management. The management of CBS—even if it is composed predominantly of

FIGURE 3. A transcript of the first meeting between the Women's Advisory Council and CBS president Arthur Taylor and CBS's response to the Council's concerns were published in a multi-page report made available to employees. (CBS News Reference Library)

In recalling the origins of WAC, researcher Judith Hole highlights the abilities of workers to utilize corporate resources and their professional expertise to their advantage. A policy note issued to executives on February 13, 1973, proved to be the catalyst for women organizing at CBS. The document claimed that the company did not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, or national origin. Skeptical of this account, Hole and her colleagues called upon their training and researched CBS's claims. "We went to the CBS internal phone book, which in the back of it had every department and the director of that department, the manager of that department," Hole recollected, "and there was not one female anywhere."¹⁰ Priscilla Toumey, CBS Radio Network publicist, also remembers that evidence of a male-dominated organization provided WAC with leverage to meet with CBS president Arthur Taylor. In Toumey's account, a small group of women "disagreed" with some of the points Taylor made in the February 13, 1973, policy note.¹¹ On the basis of discrepancies between Taylor's statement and findings from their own research, they requested a meeting with Taylor to "discuss the areas of disagreement."¹² The women's request for a meeting was "granted quickly," and Taylor issued a formalized response to the concerns presented in that meeting within three weeks' time.¹³ At that point, the women suggested that they have an "ongoing method of communicating with top management regularly on a more organized basis," to which Taylor agreed.¹⁴ WAC's access to Taylor marks its success among the network women's groups. But although WAC effectively pushed CBS to acknowledge the "flood of problems being identified by the women's movement," the corporation was not always amenable to feminist politics and reform pressures, particularly when they originated from women outside the company.¹⁵

CBS AND FEMINISM

"We do not dislike women." So said CBS board chair William S. Paley in 1970 at the company's annual board meeting. The meeting proved unexpectedly eventful when the feminist group Women's Liberation Front (WLF) disrupted the proceedings. In comparison to NOW's legislative path to righting sexism, WLF's radical feminist approach involved consciousness-raising for women and activism directed toward "changing societal structure, informational efforts, and shock tactics."¹⁶ The WLF demanded that the company improve employment opportunities for women, allocate half of all jobs and half of the seats on its board for women, provide airtime for feminist ideas, and remove sexist programming and advertising from the air. These actions compelled Paley to weigh in on the network's attitude, or its lack of "dislike," toward women. Paley's ambivalent statement reveals the fundamental gender problems of the television industry. That network leadership would respond to feminist protest in such underwhelming fashion indicates the magnitude of the struggle feminists faced in changing the television industry and the unpreparedness of industry

leaders to respond thoughtfully to feminist demands, particularly when these came from industry outsiders. CBS was so affronted by the WLF that at its next annual stockholders meeting in 1971, the network took “extra security measures” and hired eight plainclothes L.A. police for the event.¹⁷

Industry publications supported the CBS board's resistance to the activists' demands, amplified Paley's tepid response, and were disinclined to treat these women with respect or to take their activism seriously. Lest this seem like a matter of typical journalistic attitudes of the time, the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage offers an instructive difference. Overall, the *Wall Street Journal* struck a more objective, dispassionate tone than the leading media industry publications. The *Wall Street Journal's* article title, “Ten Women Disrupt CBS Meeting, Assert Daytime Network Shows Turn Them Off,” draws upon the rhetoric—being “turned off”—that the feminists themselves used to protest CBS's sexist language in advertising.¹⁸ In comparison, *Variety's* title, “‘Liberation’ Women Explode, Finally Get Bounced,” places scare quotes around “liberation” and characterizes the protesters as out-of-control, emotional women.¹⁹

Beyond title choice, the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage avoids sexist language and describes WLF's actions in political terms. The article leads off with WLF's action. It goes on to relate that once the WLF women left the meeting, they encountered a protest against the Vietnam War, which they greeted with a “clenched fist” and shouts of “Right on!”²⁰ Details of political legitimacy and solidarity do not appear in *Variety's* or *Broadcasting's* coverage of WLF's actions. In *Broadcasting*, the activists were not even mentioned in the article title, “CBS Strides into the 70s,” and their actions constitute relatively little of the article. When industry publications did mention the feminists, they invalidated the political character of their group. *Broadcasting* described WLF women by their “unwelcomed strident tones” and seemed more concerned with the activists' violations of Robert's Rules and gender norms than with the merits of the criticisms they lodged against the network.²¹ *Variety* did little better. It described the activists as a “covey of quarrelsome, cursing women” who “broke up” the board meeting with their “complaints.”²² When the “largely male board” yelled at these “loud lasses,” WLF women responded with “certain profanities.” With an incredulous tone, *Variety* noted that, upon exiting, the protesters “even refused to talk to male reporters—speaking only to newshens [*sic*].”²³

Both *Variety* and *Broadcasting* characterized the protest as an unwelcome disruption to the real business of television. Despite *Variety's* teasing news about “explosive” women getting “bounced” from the meeting in its sensationalized headline, WLF's protest essentially was used to frame the business report of the meeting, which constituted the majority of the article. *Variety's* article opened with a two-paragraph description of the activist disruption and then moved to the scheduled business of the meeting. Four out of the article's twelve paragraphs dealt with the women's protest; the remainder reported on the network's concerns about the ban on cigarette advertisements and Federal Communication Commission

(FCC) restrictions on the network's station ownership.²⁴ Like *Variety*, *Broadcasting* presented CBS business as the centerpiece of its coverage and assured readers that, against the "backdrop" of "the unscheduled cacophony," "CBS leadership . . . managed to get its message across."²⁵ In both articles, Paley was cast as a sympathetic figure trying to keep order, someone who, in *Variety*'s report, was "finally forced to stop the session until the women could be bounced from the building."²⁶

Though feminist activism from outside the industry provoked anxious and defensive reactions from the network and industry publications, feminist activism expressed by CBS workers garnered a markedly different response. Soon after the infamous April 1970 board meeting and Paley's apathetic statement about not disliking women, CBS formulated a more cogent stance on its relationship with women and with the women's movement. In August 1970, just four months after the WLF interrupted the CBS board meeting, *Variety* noted in front-page coverage that "CBS ha[d] come a long way, baby," when it "extended formal recognition to the Women's Liberation Movement" on the eve of the Women's Strike for Equality.²⁷ In anticipation of the strike, CBS executive vice president John Schneider provided employees with a background on the women's movement and argued both publicly and within the company for the need to take feminism seriously. Schneider warned that "embattled women" would "not be prepared to wait" for rights, anticipated a forceful and long-lasting feminist movement, and argued that feminist demands "deserve[d] calm, respectful and understanding consideration."²⁸ As Schneider's reaction to the strike indicates, CBS was more inclined to acknowledge the relationship of its own workers to the women's movement than it was to respond to feminist activism from outsiders. The confirmed and potential involvement of the CBS workforce in feminist actions proved a significant catalyst in changing the corporation's attitudes.

As the discussion of the August 26, 1970, Women's Strike for Equality in the introductory chapter of this book indicates, the networks recognized that their workers would participate in the action in New York City. Workers at the networks were at worst not punished and at best given leave to participate in the Strike, and CBS led the way in its response to its workers. Unlike NBC and ABC, which came up with an ad hoc policy on employee absences on the day of the strike, CBS formulated a coherent, company-wide policy that offered women the option to take unpaid time away or to use a paid vacation day in order to attend the action. *Broadcasting* regarded CBS's policy on the Strike as exemplifying the company's overall outlook; CBS now understood that the women's liberation movement was, in Schneider's words, "'serious business."²⁹

The dissimilar ways that CBS treated its own workers and outsider activists could easily be attributed to the groups' distinctive approaches to feminist reform: WLF's direct action and demands for change as opposed to WAC's researched responses to policy notes and requests for meetings, for example. Yet the distinction between CBS women and overtly politicized feminist groups appears more complex when one considers the political leanings of CBS women who joined

feminist protest on the streets or the commonalities between the points of reform WLF demanded and the ones that WAC expressed to CBS. It is productive, then, to see that CBS women were not wholly divorced from feminist organizations and that WAC's goals were similar to those of feminist groups, even radical ones. How WAC achieved gains for women at CBS was not so much a question of political investments or engagement with media reform. Rather, WAC's almost exclusive focus on workplace reform, its knowledge of CBS culture and relationships with company executives, and its expertise in engaging company policies account for the group's successes.

OUTSIDER VERSUS INSIDER MEDIA REFORM

In the US, media reform has been defined by media advocacy traditions and by campaigns mounted by political activist groups. In the early 1970s, NOW, the "largest organization of feminist grassroots activists," coordinated challenges to FCC broadcasting license renewals, which was one of the most significant media reform efforts associated with the women's movement.³⁰ NOW's petitions-to-deny, as documented by Patricia Bradley, Kathryn Montgomery, Anne W. Branscomb, Maria Savage, and Allison Perlman, positioned women as an underserved public to whom media industries were beholden.³¹ WAC does not easily align with prevailing traditions of feminist media reform. It was a group neither composed exclusively of like-minded feminists nor engaged with public-oriented impact. Nonetheless, its efforts affected the labor conditions of women media workers and altered a media industry workplace, thereby contributing to the feminist media reform movement of the time.

WAC's purpose at the corporation and their obligations to all women workers meant that WAC was not, strictly speaking, a feminist organization. This was the case with many women's workplace groups of the time. In her exploration of the Women's Caucus at the *New York Times*, Marama Whyte addresses a limitation in prevailing understandings of feminist movements. Rather than looking only to "women who self-identified as feminists or participated in activism coordinated by feminist organizations," scholars must also consider how to assess and recognize "women who undertook feminist actions while actively not identifying as feminists."³² There is clear evidence that, while WAC was not a feminist organization, its membership included active feminists and women familiar with the strategies and ethos of the women's movement. For instance, group members Judith Hole and Ellen Levine took an approved leave from CBS to research and write *Rebirth of Feminism* (1971), a "comprehensive survey of the modern women's movement based on extensive interviews and painstaking research into the mound of recent feminist literature."³³ And, while some WAC women clearly identified with the women's movement, there were others who likely did not. This does not, as Whyte helpfully argues, preclude a group from undertaking actions with feminist consequences. It does, however, require a nuanced sense of how feminism operates in

nonfeminist groups and/or groups with nonfeminist members. It also complicates how feminism appears and registers in group actions.

Perhaps counterintuitively, CBS shaped WAC's capabilities to take on the work of the women's movement and provided the group with certain advantages in its relationship to feminist politics. Unlike the univocal reform efforts of NOW to challenge license renewals, WAC was able to—indeed, compelled to—engage in eclectic strategies and forms of feminist thought to meet the needs of a variety of women workers at CBS. It defined its operations and agenda according to multiple practices and values of the women's movement: consciousness-raising, antiracism and anti-ageism, recognition of private sphere concerns in employment, and identification of gendered power imbalances in cultural and economic forms. Although WAC was not a feminist group, its ethos and impact underscore Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin's idea that organizations bear feminist value not just through the orthodoxy of "ideal" political affiliation and identity but also through "the places in which and the means through which the work of the women's movement is done."³⁴

Workplace reform, as Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo point out, frequently utilizes liberal feminism, as it "meshes well with the political ideals of free market labour and the meritocratic workplace, and uses those ideals to critique existing gender inequities like those in wages and positions of authority."³⁵ Given the profit-driven and hierarchically arranged organization of the networks' corporate operations, WAC called upon tenets of liberal feminism to identify "structural impediments to women's progress" and ways that women could fairly compete with male coworkers.³⁶ While its use of liberal feminist approaches may seem unsurprising, WAC complicated a univocal approach to improving workplace conditions. It drew upon an assortment of feminist practices and priorities, including consciousness-raising, antiracist measures, recognition of private sphere issues in employment, and exploration of affective and interpersonal aspects of labor and power. The eclectic feminism deployed by WAC demonstrates the adaptability of the women's movement, the ways that feminist politics influenced the business of television, and the transformative possibilities of feminist activism within the staunch conservatism of corporate culture.

Commercial television was disinclined to respond to activist pressures when they threatened what CBS reporter Marlene Sanders called the "sacrosanct" nature of "program content."³⁷ The inviolable nature of programming meant that, at best, activists who tried to influence on-screen content would be "placated if possible but not at the cost of changing programming."³⁸ When advocacy groups protested objectionable content, as Kathryn Montgomery demonstrates, the networks developed strategies for "managing" advocacy groups, primarily through its standards and practices department.³⁹ Arthur Taylor made CBS's position on the matter clear in August 1973 in a special issue of *Columbine*, the CBS company newsletter, that reported on the corporation's relationship to a newly formed WAC. "The question of programming," he wrote, "is an area in which CBS has historically resisted pres-

sure from all groups outside its programming organization: government, religious groups and countless other entities that wish to influence programming decisions.”⁴⁰ Even as Taylor supported women’s advancement in the workplace and proved receptive to the majority of WAC’s demands, his stance on programming portends the ways that the networks would treat calls from their own women’s groups to reform televisual representation.

When pressure to reform on-air content came from within the industry, via the network women’s groups, the networks responded even more directly and defensively than they had with outsider activists. While it is clear that the Equal Opportunity Committee at NBC faced resistance from management because it was the first of the women’s groups to form, it also encountered refusals from NBC because of the nature of its complaints against the corporation. Along with improved opportunities for women in the workplace, NBC women also pushed for improved representations of women. This agenda “added to their difficulties” in negotiating with management, so much so that negotiations grew “hostile” and “legal intervention became necessary.”⁴¹ In 1973, after a year of stalled negotiations, twenty-two women at NBC filed a class action suit against the network. Charged with “across-the-board sex discrimination” by the Women’s Committee for Equal Employment, NBC lost the lawsuit. As a result, it was forced to pay out a cash settlement to employees and to institute a series of policies to ensure an equitable workplace for women.⁴² But, even with this victory for NBC workers, issues of programming remained unaddressed.

Although it expressed less hostility than NBC did, CBS took an unapologetically protectionist stance when dealing internally with critiques of programming. CBS women were warned against “seeking a voice in CBS program content,” which was deemed by John Schneider, president of the Broadcast Group, to be a “highly controversial issue, touching as it does on First Amendment (Freedom of the Press) considerations.”⁴³ When WAC members did request that CBS address the issue of representation, which appears only once in transcripts of their presentations to management, they were careful to link the issue to that of workplace investments, an area that proved less controversial to company leadership. In anticipating gains in women’s promotions, WAC argued that a woman in power at CBS would require improved programming for her “self-respect”: “Any executive will be proud to say that her company was in the vanguard, was first to determine that something should be done to portray the new woman as she really is.”⁴⁴ Tellingly, CBS did not respond directly to this presentation point. Instead, Taylor made a statement that he was “in agreement that the public image of women was another area in which CBS would provide leadership” and welcomed “comments and suggestions” from CBS women.⁴⁵ But Taylor ultimately insisted that the company retain its authority, with himself and the president of the Broadcast Group as the representation of that authority, over programming.

John Schneider, the same executive who, in response to the Women’s Strike for Equality, circulated information to CBS employees about the women’s movement

and called for respect for the movement, also cautioned CBS women against seeking influence over programming. In a 1974 *Columbine* article, "Broadcasting: The Issue of Influence," Schneider opined that if CBS women oversaw changes to programming, "practical and philosophical problems" would arise, including issues of what content would best represent women's interests and elitist assumptions that CBS women were positioned to tell women audiences what they "should" rather than want to see.⁴⁶

On representational issues, CBS struggled to represent the women's movement. It did fare better when dealing with its workforce and the culture of its workplace. To be clear, CBS's internal responses to feminism were not without disappointment and compromise. Yet its responses included legitimate attempts to reform sexism in the corporation, primarily through education of its workforce and cooperative policymaking between management and women workers. The variability with which CBS addressed feminist issues confirms what Kylie Andrews identifies as the "paradoxical" nature of media organizations. In her study of women workers at the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Andrews views the broadcaster not as a monolith but as an entity constituted by human interactions, drives, and engagements. By looking to broadcasting history through workers and the conditions of labor, as Andrews does, it becomes "possible to recognize the competing factions and personalities, motivations and missions of its participants, to contextualise the individuals who affect the policy and processes of broadcasting and to historicise how broadcasters imagine the social function of their work."⁴⁷

ARTHUR TAYLOR, ACTIVIST EXECUTIVE

While CBS president Arthur Taylor fell in line with network television traditions in terms of outsider activism and programming reform, in other ways he proved a significant force for progress. Hired in 1972, Taylor was hailed as an "Activist Executive" and positioned among "an increasing number of corporate heads" in the early 1970s who took "aggressive roles in improving the status of women in business."⁴⁸ WAC credited various members of management, including CBS vice president Sheldon Wool, with a willingness to meet with the group to hear their concerns. But no one was acknowledged more readily or frequently as an ally to the group than Taylor, who was invested in equitable employment opportunities, which he saw both as ethically correct and good for the performance and standing of the company. Taylor's support was so vital to future WAC members that they called themselves "the Taylor Committee" when they first organized.

While so-called activist executives were viewed as a new breed of leaders, they were not the first to operate according to what counted as principled politics in business. In the 1950s and 1960s, as Lynn Spigel points out, "corporate liberalism was a general mentality of the era," and television executives, along with other business leaders, "put faith in the idea that corporate growth would create not just

a stronger economy but also a better world.”⁴⁹ Taylor retained aspects of corporate liberalism in his business philosophy, but he adapted to the political unrest of the time and its role in the labor conditions of the workplace. This aligned him with a style of corporate leadership that emerged in the 1970s. In 1971, *Harvard Business Review* polled 3,453 of their subscribers to find that one-sixth to one-half of them were “willing to encourage activist elements in a company.”⁵⁰ The study also indicated that executives were particularly receptive to an “employee insurgent group” if the issues it raised were “less controversial, less related to public pressure, and more related to everyday standards of decency, honesty, and ethical behavior.”⁵¹

Soon after he took the job as president, Taylor countered CBS’s sexism by correcting gender disparities in job promotions, which he characterized a “terrible situation.” “You had women who had worked there for many years,” explained Taylor. “A good many of them had advanced degrees as secretaries because everyone wanted to get into the television industry. And they had passed these men in through their offices to other offices who have now become executives and they’re still sitting there as secretaries and assistants.” When William S. Paley, then-board chair and former president of CBS, took a vacation early in Taylor’s tenure, Taylor moved swiftly and without Paley’s permission to rectify the problem. Taylor promoted every woman who had worked at CBS for five years or more. By Taylor’s estimation, this included around fifty women. “So everyone got promoted,” recalled Taylor, “And then we had all kinds of new policies which would allow women to advance as quickly as men.”⁵²

While promotions demonstrate a commitment to women’s advancement on business ledgers, in annual reports to investors, and as compliance with federal laws on equal employment, titles alone did not guarantee corresponding gains in power, prestige, and workplace conditions. In an oral history for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Ethel Winant recounted her promotion to vice president of casting and talent at CBS in 1973, the first for a woman at any US television network. Winant explained that, with her groundbreaking promotion, there was no discussion of a salary increase or any negotiation of benefits that would come with the title. Once promoted, she encountered a lack of accommodation, quite literally, for her presence as the sole woman in the executive ranks. When she started using the executive dining room, Winant realized that she would have to take an elevator to a lower floor each time she needed to use the bathroom, since there was only one facility, which the men used. One day, after deciding, “I’m not going to do this anymore,” Winant used the men’s room, which did not have a lock on the door, and left her shoes outside to signal her presence and prevent men from walking in on her.⁵³

While Winant’s promotion was groundbreaking in the early 1970s, women’s advancement to vice presidential positions accelerated soon after. Unfortunately, these appointments signaled a corresponding devaluation of the job. Anne Nelson, whose sixty-eight-year career at CBS saw her advance from a temp to the

vice president of business affairs, was first passed over for a promotion to vice president in 1950. She regarded the slight as expected, not only because of the prevalent gender discrimination of the era, but also because of the relative worth of the position at that time. Nelson was well aware of the sexism at CBS, having experienced it in full force when television and radio split in 1952. When, after three years of combined divisions, television and radio became separate, "naturally the old boys' club got the good jobs" in television while Nelson was rehoused in the less-prestigious radio division.⁵⁴ There Nelson trained several men for the job she wanted, the director of business affairs in radio. When she repeatedly asked for a promotion, she was told that a "girl" could not be a head of a department until she finally landed the job in 1954. To Nelson, CBS's repeated refusal to promote her was indicative of the importance of the job. "At the time," she remembers, "the vice president in charge of the West Coast was *the* vice president. It wasn't a matter of being passed over as vice president, it was a matter of getting a job to run the department." Over time, the job title took on less significance when, according to Nelson, vice presidents "proliferated only because it was a way to make it look like they were doing something for the women."⁵⁵

Within the context of devalued vice presidencies, Taylor's decision to promote women en masse raises questions about its impact and Taylor's motivations. Certainly, Taylor understood the business sense that promoting women made. By addressing gender issues, CBS garnered positive public relations and gained a competitive edge in the broadcasting industry. With headlines like "CBS Aims High on Equality Side" and news of women's promotions to management, industry publications relayed CBS's new political awareness and granted the company newsworthy status.⁵⁶ Taylor amplified positive PR for CBS in talks at corporate gatherings and interviews in trade and business publications. He repeatedly affirmed CBS's commitment to women workers and asserted that the company would "assume national leadership in providing equal opportunities for women."⁵⁷ With Taylor's framing, CBS signaled a laudatory commitment to the women's movement through the reformation of its workplace. And in this laudatory commitment to women, CBS could position itself as a vanguard of the industry.

But Taylor's interest in women's progress at CBS was not just opportunistic. His mass promotion of women preceded any widespread trend, and, notably, his presidency saw the promotion of Ethel Winant to vice president. When Winant became vice president, the position still wielded considerable power and prestige. In a 1996 interview, Winant expressed an assessment similar to Nelson's when she reflected on the differences between a vice presidency at the time of her assumption of the title in 1973 and that of the contemporaneous moment. According to Winant, at the time of her promotion, there were only seven vice presidents at CBS. "You became an officer in the company," recalled Winant. "It wasn't a title. You had to be elected by the board of directors. . . . There were not fifty-three VPs and twenty-five presidents as there are now in every network." Winant identified

her promotion, which came at the time of Taylor's presidency and his promotion of numerous other women, as one that preceded the relatively meaningless promotions criticized by Nelson. Rather than providing mere window dressing, Taylor's actions can therefore be understood as good-faith ones. Winant confirms that Taylor, who "looked upon [her] fondly," along with the influence of the women's movement, was a key force behind her career-changing promotion.⁵⁸

While the issue of women's career advancement was Taylor's high-profile cause, it was part of his broader commitment to social responsibility. Taylor felt that CBS needed to "operate in a socially constructive manner" and "encourage its employees to be guided by the same principle."⁵⁹ Informed by this philosophy, he instituted a Social Service Leave Program in November 1975, under which employees were granted three months' paid leave to work for a "worthy social service organization," including "private and voluntary education, health, welfare, cultural and civil rights organizations."⁶⁰ Taylor also instituted measures that addressed racial inequalities: elections for an advisory committee that met regularly with "key management executives," improved training programs geared to the needs of Black personnel, and active recruitment of employees at historically Black colleges and universities.⁶¹ Taylor established seminars meant to help Black employees with career advancement and to provide CBS department heads with "a continuing updating of our knowledge concerning conditions which face Black employees in terms of career development and to find additional ways as to how the situation can be improved."⁶²

Under Taylor's tenure as president, CBS adopted a rhetoric of responsiveness to inequalities in employment, which also served WAC. Memos and policy notes internal to the company document a number of improvements Taylor implemented to address gender discrimination. Anecdotal evidence also illustrates the support Taylor provided women at CBS, particularly as he was coming to terms with gender discrimination on a personal level. Judith Hole recalls that Taylor began to understand feminist perspectives, or what Hole describes as "other nickels dropping," by witnessing the sexism his own four daughters faced. Without these personal revelations, according to Hole, "it would have been a tougher road" for WAC.⁶³

ASSESSING WORKPLACE GAINS

As Taylor and CBS utilized the workplace to signal their commitment to the women's movement, WAC pushed the corporation beyond mere self-promotion and superficial solutions to women's issues. The group stipulated that company policies have measurable and meaningful impact. In some instances, WAC's interests aligned with CBS, particularly in assessing progress for women workers through quantitative data on salaries and promotions. These statistics were easily calculated and circulated as evidence of women's progress and required few structural changes to the corporation. It is unsurprising, then, that WAC successfully pitched

these measurements of improvement to CBS. After the first meeting between Taylor and WAC in 1973, CBS agreed to a review of salaries and resulting corrections that guaranteed "equal pay for equal work," as well as transparency in hiring and advertisement of job openings.

In addition to the relatively straightforward issue of women's access to equal employment, WAC's plans for meaningful accountability engaged CBS leadership in nuanced discussions about institutionalized gender issues. In their initial presentation to the company, WAC leaders highlighted the reasons why women occupied lower-paying, less prestigious, and less powerful jobs in the company. Women possessed the requisite interest, training, and talent, WAC argued, but they were "conditioned to accept" being passed over for promotion.⁶⁴ WAC cast light upon ageism as well as sexism facing older women, who were often passed over for promotion and pay increases, and asked for redress. Given these circumstances, WAC maintained that it was not enough for CBS to provide only equal access to job opportunities. The company also needed to actively recruit women for higher-paying positions and to rebuild the culture of a workplace that had normalized women's inferiority. To substantively change this culture, WAC proposed that all employees understand their own roles in perpetuating workplace inequities. To this end, the group recommended "consciousness-raising sessions," clearly based on the concept within the women's movement, that brought workers to an understanding of "all the ramifications of sexism and how to eliminate it from the day-to-day working environment."⁶⁵ In response, CBS referenced a pilot program of "awareness sessions" aimed to correct "deeply ingrained male attitudes" that posed "an obstacle to the progress of women" and agreed to expansion of the program "as rapidly as practical."⁶⁶ WAC also requested that CBS not just alter its own practices but also use its widespread influence to challenge multiple blockage points in women's career aspirations. One way it suggested CBS do this was to pressure unions that barred women's involvement to allow women to join them and consequently qualify for the many unionized technical jobs in television, radio, and recording. CBS cited a low turnover rate in union jobs as an impediment to the plan but indicated that it would support the initiative and would express to the technical unions its "desire to see women candidates" for union jobs.⁶⁷

To further gauge the impact of workplace reform and to hold management accountable for reform efforts, the position of "woman counselor" was created at CBS in early 1973. Women counselors performed a number of tasks: they expressed workers' needs to management, "provid[ed] better access for women to management for redress of individual grievances," and kept employees informed "on a day-to-day basis" of management's "actions" that would "improve the situation of women."⁶⁸ While counselors provided a conduit for CBS management to address women workers, they also brought to management perspectives from women on how policies affected them so that CBS would be "better cognizant of those women's thoughts and needs."⁶⁹

In its initial presentation to Arthur Taylor in July 1973, WAC asked CBS to revise language in their communications that described women's complaints to women counselors as "gripes."⁷⁰ Instead, CBS should utilize conventional language used in organized labor that identified worker complaints as "grievances."⁷¹ To do otherwise, WAC argued, was offensive and suggested that CBS failed to "consider the status of women at CBS a serious labor problem."⁷² WAC also pushed CBS to expand the number of women counselors and, in order that counselors would no longer spend personal as well as company time in their role, to convert the role of counselor to a full-time position. This newly enhanced position should also include management training as one of its benefits. In its August 1973 response to this WAC presentation, CBS agreed—albeit rather begrudgingly—that the "gripes" wording would no longer be used. It also acknowledged the value of women counselors and the demanding nature of the position: "The contributions made by the Women Counselors have been inadequately recognized. Perhaps most importantly, they have influenced management in its thinking; it is hard to visualize how we could have made such progress between February and August without them."⁷³ In January 1974, CBS started to adequately compensate the labor of counselors and converted the positions to full-time, permanent ones. The new job categorization provided counselors a place on the "first rung of management employment," increased salary, and the possibility of "performance bonus plans."⁷⁴ Women were appointed to the newly enhanced counselor positions from a wide assortment of departments and jobs. Among them were a former secretary and current community relations coordinator, an audience services manager, and assorted project managers.⁷⁵ The egalitarian advancement of lower-level employees to counselor positions safeguarded against already-established women using the opportunity to advance their own careers rather than agitate for "upgraded female employment."⁷⁶

In addition to the gains it procured for counselors, in its first year WAC had accomplished several of its other goals. By fall 1974, job postings were made available in common spaces at CBS before they were publicized beyond the company, and the personnel department was "required to conduct a conscientious search for women and minorities to fill these jobs."⁷⁷ Women were appointed to a variety of management positions. CBS offered tuition remission for continuing education, hosted educational workshops, and provided management training for women. Yet even with these successes, WAC remained vigilant in applying pressure on management for expanding and diversifying workplace rights for women. To mark the one-year anniversary of their first presentation to Arthur Taylor, WAC leaders made another presentation to Taylor, a number of corporate staff, and group presidents on July 11, 1974. In this presentation, they documented lapsed commitments and endorsed an evolving need for new policies. They noted that there was still an "insignificant number of women vice-presidents" and that there were "still far too many women whose jobs do not use even a portion of their skills."

WAC also called for new actions ranging from open job posting to increased training programs to seminars on gender-specific career challenges for women. WAC once again stressed company accountability by asking that all management attend training sessions for compliance with new company policies and that management's raises and bonuses be tied to "concrete implementation" of these policies.⁷⁸

Overall, CBS responded favorably to the initiatives the CBS women presented to them in 1974. The corporation agreed to improvements to women counselor positions; expanded health care and childcare benefits; increased appointments of women to management positions; and increased funding for tuition remission, educational workshops, and management training for women. However, it is also worth noting that the ambitious requests of the 1974 committee presentation were met with some refusals. CBS cautioned against the "mandatory" nature of awareness sessions for all CBS management, indicating that compulsory participation would "result in resistance rather than awareness." CBS's response to quantifiable hiring practices was mixed; it agreed to additional research but did not want to set "numerical targets" that would "take on the aura of quotas" and "would result in a change in the atmosphere we have of working together."⁷⁹ These setbacks indicate the constraints WAC faced. Yet even in its negative responses, CBS focused on issues of efficacy rather than outright rejection of, or hostility to, the committee's proposed changes.

WORKER COLLECTIVITY AND THE VALUE OF MARGINALIZED LABOR/ERS

Much like any bureaucratic entity, a media corporation like CBS was purposely designed, as Kathy Ferguson argues, to be "sufficiently large so as to prohibit face-to-face relationships among most of their members." This serves the needs of the organization rather than the worker since it ensures the isolation of workers and the rationalization of tasks that are central to the organization's "continuity and stability."⁸⁰ Before their first meeting with Taylor in 1973, WAC had to grapple with the organizational logistics of the corporation in order to ascertain and represent the concerns of all CBS women. By organizing across siloed departments and hierarchical job titles, WAC challenged axiomatic corporate divisions of labor that thwarted worker solidarity and valued labor unequally.

When CBS women first started to organize, differential treatment among them was a key issue. During the pants-in action of January 1970, the *New York Times* reporter Marilyn Bender related an observation from "one of the many secretaries who c[a]me to work in blue jeans and timidly change[d] to dresses" that the "privileged" women in the news division were allowed to wear pants, which violated existing dress codes for women Bender noted that women who worked at Columbia Records—"creative types"—were permitted to wear jeans to work, another violation of company policy.⁸¹ Uneven enforcement of workplace rules regarding "professional" attire signaled larger and more significant divisions among women at CBS, which hindered

workplace equity for all women and reinforced hierarchical relationships between clerical and creative workers. If WAC were to succeed, it had to confront the divisions among women at CBS, so the group was guided by principles of collectivity.

Starting with their clandestine meetings in closets and bathrooms, group women refused bureaucratic protocols and engaged one another through face-to-face contact. They took measures, similar to those implemented in the women's movement, to limit the negative impact of organizational structures of their corporate workplace and within their own ranks.⁸² When WAC became operational, CBS employed upwards of twenty thousand people and comprised nineteen divisions, including broadcasting and records, and, to a lesser extent, publishing and other assorted media. To contend with corporate sprawl and worker dispersion among divisions, WAC established subdivisions at the broadcast center; corporate headquarters; and the subsidiary publishing company of Holt, Rinehart, and Winston in order to represent occupationally specific concerns within the larger collective.⁸³ Membership was available to all women, regardless of job title; group leadership was elected from all ranks of workers; leadership roles rotated; membership was antihierarchical; and governance was shared among the widest range of workers possible. Elected WAC representatives, meant to "cover the spectrum" of women working at CBS, came from a variety of positions that included personnel department employees, food service workers, secretaries, and television producers.⁸⁴

By encouraging all CBS women to join the group, WAC worked to bridge divisions between relatively privileged "creative types" and those who carried out largely invisible and undervalued labor. Workplace issues involving clerical workers, secretaries, and support staff were as much a part of the group's concerns as those of promotion to executive ranks and high-level jobs in television and radio. This recognition reconceptualized who counted as production workers and which labors constituted media production work. In addition, by enfolded bureaucratic aspects of corporate work into the production culture of the network, WAC signaled that all women's work at CBS was burdened with inequitable, gendered expectations that cut across occupations.

In acknowledging all workers as contributors to media-making, WAC recognized labor that fell outside of the business and creative positions conventionally identified as central to the making of television. Its comprehensive understanding of where media work happens aligns with production studies scholarship that, according to Miranda Banks, expresses "anti-auteurist" tendencies and illuminates "production at the margins."⁸⁵ Participants in WAC and the other network women's groups occupied not just above- and below-the-line positions but also ones that operated beyond either category. Erin Hill's work on women employees in the Hollywood studio system illustrates the invisibility of these workers and their contributions. The classification of workers in systems of media production as either above or below the line, as Hollywood filmmaking does, "overlooks many others, because, for example, secretaries were usually considered parts of studio overhead

operations rather than members of any particular production.”⁸⁶ Likewise, women who worked as secretaries, support staff, researchers, accountants, and marketing staff at network headquarters served the operations of the corporation rather than the creation of a single television program.

In addition to their contributions to the creative aspects of the television industry, women in support staff roles were essential to the industry's corporate workings. Ethel Winant understood and relied upon these contributions as essential both to the culture of the network and to her career. Because of her relationship with informal networks of information sustained by secretaries, Winant gleaned vital information at CBS. When her promotion to vice president was kept a secret from her, only to be revealed in a surprise announcement in 1973, Winant considered the plan's success completely atypical of her experience at CBS. “They kept it a secret from me,” she recalled. “Now that's really hard to do because nobody'd ever kept anything a secret from me at CBS. Because I went to the ladies' room with all the secretaries, and they knew everything. And so they always told you everything. And so I always knew what was going on. And if I didn't know, my secretary could find out.” Winant continued to rely on this culture in her executive position. As the sole woman in such a position, Winant had a “great relationship with a million secretaries” that provided her with information that her male colleagues did not have access to. Therefore, Winant's unique status as a woman vice president, according to Winant, “was actually sort of an advantage.”⁸⁷

Just as they did in countless other offices, the secretarial and clerical staff at CBS worked under circumstances that rendered their labor feminized, disrespected, and unrecognized by waged compensation. In addition to the technical or logistical support they provided, these workers produced what Arlie Russell Hochschild famously describes as “emotion work,” or the type of labor that “*affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others.*”⁸⁸ In exploring the labor function of women in Hollywood during the studio era, Hill argues that “all women's work” within the studios served the “larger purpose of absorbing routine tasks and unwanted emotion around men's creative process,” and therefore qualified as emotion work.⁸⁹ Within a presumably noncreative support function, studio women's work consisted of “*both* the explicit labor they were assigned on the basis of gender—typing, sewing, inking, and painting—and the implicit ‘shadow’ labor—the interpersonal competencies, gender performativity, and emotion work their jobs required.”⁹⁰

WAC identified gendered burdens of labor for women at CBS in the 1970s similar to the ones Hill calls out in the Hollywood studio system. This demonstrates the applicability of Hill's assessment to many, if not all, women across media industries and historical periods. WAC underscored the problems of women's labor on both the explicit and shadow fronts and made it clear that women's work at CBS was exploited, undervalued, and undercompensated. It demanded an end to the unpaid and affective labors women were asked to perform and insisted on a workplace culture that would no longer demean work conducted by women. Since these concerns

were particularly applicable to secretaries, WAC focused much of its occupationally specific reform on those workers. It devised training and advancement schemes for secretaries that challenged beliefs that the “explicit labor” of these positions fully satisfied women’s occupational goals and utilized their professional competencies. When CBS offered training for the executive career path and reimbursement for college courses to all employees, WAC argued that these opportunities should be earmarked for secretaries. As for the “shadow labor” of secretarial jobs, this was no longer to be expected. WAC stipulated that job descriptions for secretaries be clearly defined and adhered to by supervisors and that male supervisors be retrained about their sexist behaviors toward support staff.

Secretarial work was a particular priority for WAC’s reform efforts, so much so that WAC dedicated an entire subsection to “Secretarial Problems” in the presentation its leaders made to Taylor in 1973. WAC’s recommendations for improving work conditions for secretaries included formal policies and training as well as experiential aspects of power differentials in the workplace. The group advised CBS to revise the company manual for secretaries to “make it acceptable to intelligent, professional” women and to restore the once-clear function of a secretarial position as a “training ground for management.”⁹¹ Noting in its 1974 presentation that there were “some places in CBS where a woman must notify her supervisor when she goes to the ladies’ room,” WAC rebuked CBS for infantilizing its female workforce and overstepping professional boundaries with them.⁹² WAC argued that when “secretaries are treated more like ‘office wives’ than employees,” the relationship was not cooperative but based on exploitation and an abuse of power.⁹³

Given patriarchal assumptions that women were responsible for men’s comfort and ease in the workplace, WAC had good reason to be concerned. While particularly egregious in the treatment of secretaries, these dynamics permeated every rank of women workers who had contact with men in positions of authority. Even after being promoted to vice president at CBS, Ethel Winant, the only woman in any given room where executive decisions were made, was charged with feminized tasks typically associated with secretarial work. Winant recalls that William S. Paley would go through his mail and then “always turn to” her and instruct her to convey the mail to his secretary. Rather than agree, Winant “would take a deep breath and think, no, I’m not going to do that,” and would instead instruct Paley to ask the CBS butler in the room to carry out such work.⁹⁴

Attitudes such as Paley’s were ingrained in the culture of CBS, which WAC needed to confront if women were ever to be seen as colleagues and coworkers rather than work-wives. Men’s learned helplessness forced women, regardless of position, to take on the work of dealing with paperwork, mail, and phone calls and arranging and packing for business travel. Winant’s refusals of work for which she was not compensated testify to the types of labor that women at CBS—even executive women—were assumed by men to perform. “It was just automatic,” Winant recalled. “If there was a woman in the room, you were the

one who took the mail, and you were the one who made the phone call. And the truth was, nobody in that room knew how to make a long-distance call. They didn't know how to get an outside line."⁹⁵ When traveling with other senior vice presidents, all men, Winant realized that she was the only one among them who knew how to buy an airline ticket since this had always been the responsibility of their secretaries or wives.

CONTENDING WITH RACE

Given the relatively high rate of employment of women of color in support staff jobs, by prioritizing the needs of secretaries and other employees who labored at the peripheries of media production, WAC implicitly addressed intersectional issues of race and gender at CBS. As a group that focused explicitly and solely on women's issues, WAC acknowledged its difficulties in addressing issues of race and successfully recruiting women of color for the group. CBS contributed to these problems, as it identified "minority" concerns as separate from those of women's issues in its policies; employment programs; and other efforts for recruitment, hiring, training, and advancement. In defining concerns of racial equity as distinctive from those of gender equity, CBS reinforced cultural scripts that led to what WAC member Priscilla Toumey described as the "hesitancy" of Black women in joining WAC. According to Toumey, these women were afraid that, in supporting workplace improvements for women, they were depriving people of color similar opportunities. With perceptions of CBS support as finite and competitive—particularly in issues of racial versus gender equity—women of color were concerned that CBS's efforts to improve racial inequalities "may be compromised in this rush to do things for women."⁹⁶

It is difficult to determine the racial composition of WAC's membership. Information about individual members, when available at all, is generally restricted to a short list of names for women who attended a meeting, issued a memo, earned a promotion, or sat for a radio interview. If women occupied higher-visibility, higher-prestige jobs, they were pictured in industry publications, which provides some evidence of their racial identity. Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of these women were white. Sheila Clark proves a notable exception. She was listed among the twenty-nine women from the WAC Steering Committee who met with CBS management on July 11, 1974.⁹⁷ By 1978, Clark was working as the director of minority programs at CBS; her position meant that she served as the public face of the company's diversity initiatives. In 1981, *Billboard* published a photo of a luncheon where students who aspired to careers in music met with CBS executives.⁹⁸ Clark was identified in the photo caption as one of those executives. This photograph provides visual confirmation of Clark's identity as a Black woman and indicates at least a small degree of racial diversity within WAC's leadership.

Most of the women involved in the CBS group whose racial identities are ascertainable occupied executive ranks or higher-level creative work at the time of their group membership or later ascended to these positions. This leaves out of the picture WAC members who worked in secretarial, clerical, and support staff positions and likely included large numbers of women who were not white. The impact and involvement of women of color in WAC and the other network women's groups are, for these reasons, unquantifiable. Nevertheless, women of color were part of the groups and contributed to their functioning and agenda-setting, even if the long-standing racism of the television industry meant that they made up a less visible part of the workforce than their white counterparts.

The difficulties of quantifying the role women of color played in WAC, even in the most basic of measurements, illustrate a larger research problem in assessing women's contributions to and presence in media workplaces. In their research on women's employment in the British film industry, Natalie Wreyford and Shelley Cobb needed qualitative data to demonstrate the scale and consistency of gender inequality's operation in the system. Although this data was indispensable to their project, employment figures available to them were "imperfect and unstable." According to the traditions of ostensibly objective research, this evidential deficiency compromised the validity of the project. But rather than let it sideline scholarship of value for women production workers and feminist scholars alike, Cobb and Wreyford reassessed the impact of flawed data and proceeded with their project. By doing so, their research facilitates new understandings of the issue of women's employment in British filmmaking specifically and more broadly illustrated the illusory nature of comprehensive datasets by underscoring the "ellipsis" that underlies the "presentation of academic writing in a neat and ordered way."⁹⁹

In the absence of statistical data on the employment of women of color at CBS and their participation in WAC, contextual labor trends offer one way to identify their presence. Following the civil rights movement, Black women and men moved from farmwork and private service work to white-collar jobs. The US Department of Labor reported that, out of all of the Black women employed in wage-earning labor, 22.7 percent worked in clerical jobs in 1972; by 1980, that figure had risen to 29.3 percent.¹⁰⁰ Employment in the television industry followed a similar pattern, with a significant number of women of color working in clerical positions. In their 1977 publication *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*, the US Commission on Civil Rights reported that "minority" women constituted 28.7 percent of clerical workers at the television stations involved in their study and that 58.9 percent of "minority" women employed at the stations were office and clerical staff.¹⁰¹ Given these figures, it is statistically probable that women of color were employed in considerable numbers as clerical, support, and secretarial staff at the networks. Dorothy Sue Cobble's labor history indicates as much. Cobble's research finds that "African-American women did not enter clerical work in any appreciable numbers before

World War Two, but by the 1970s almost as large a percent of African-American women were in clerical jobs as held jobs in the overall labor market.¹⁰² Since there is clear evidence that WAC prioritized outreach to secretarial and clerical staff and developed policies aimed to improve the existence of these workers, it is reasonable to surmise that women of color were participants in WAC and beneficiaries of the group's actions.

From the start, WAC took steps meant to address racial disparities in employment. In 1974, its first year of existence, the group pushed CBS to implement required "conscientious" searches for women and "minorities" for all job vacancies. On WAC's suggestion, the network also instituted training programs for women and people of color in the same year. These training programs were intended for employees who wanted to work in more prestigious positions but had not profited from "the advantages of training and experience needed to successfully move into these highly qualified areas."¹⁰³ Training comprised three components: "attachment," a position that paired employees with a supervisor to learn more about a department; "internship," in which the employee "learns by doing rather than by observing;" and "on-the-job," which placed employees in a job, "permanent in nature," that provided advancement in a current area or entrance to a different area of the company in which the employee wished to specialize.¹⁰⁴ By the spring of 1976, the program was still intact. At that time, *Columbine* reported over one hundred enactments of the training program in the company's New York City-area holdings, thirty to forty more to come in the upcoming months, and forty-three promotions that resulted from the program.¹⁰⁵

In its report on their "women/minority training programs," published in a 1976 issue of *Columbine*, CBS did not differentiate between the numbers of women and men who participated in the training programs, nor did it specify the racial identities of the women involved.¹⁰⁶ The company newsletter, however, suggested that women of color were central in the program's outreach and a measurement of its success. An illustration that accompanies the *Columbine* article features a Black woman sitting at a small desk in front of a typewriter, flanked by an overflowing trash can and file cabinet. With her hand resting on her chin, she looks at her imagined future, which floats near her head in a thought bubble. In this future, she is sitting at an organized, spacious desk with a phone and appointment book at her elbow. Behind her, a reel-to-reel tape player, a record player, and a speaker fill a credenza and shelves. The article opens with direct address to a "secretary in radio sales"—presumably the figure featured in the article's illustration—who aspires to an executive position, an assistant to an editor in publishing who longs to become an editor themselves, and an assistant in the personnel office who wants to work in the newsroom.

If the ideal outcome of woman/minority training programs was a Black woman's promotion from secretary to executive, as the article suggests, it required long-term investments. CBS demonstrated its commitment to the program by extending it for at least three years beyond its inception. It also continued to



FIGURE 4. Illustration for a June 1976 article in *Columbine*, the CBS company newsletter, detailing information on the company's Women/Minority Training Programs provided to employees. (CBS News Reference Library)

earmark the program as one designed to explicitly correct inequalities of race and gender. Joan Showalter, director of the training program and WAC member, noted that there had been “a few complaints of discrimination from white males” about the programs but that the company would continue its focused efforts on career training until there were “more women and minorities distributed throughout all areas of the Company.”¹⁰⁷ Yet even with their intentions to correct disparities in workplace opportunities for women and people of color, CBS continued to specify redress for racial inequities as separate from gender disadvantages, which, in turn, fostered a lack of coalition building among workers. Although WAC’s goals of inclusivity were hampered by this situation, the group operated under the assumption that it represented all women. From this position, WAC addressed intersectional issues of gender identity that included race, economic status, and age, with a primary aim, according to Priscilla Toumey, “to equalize the system to bring it where it should be so that everyone has an equal chance.”¹⁰⁸

HOLDING THE CORPORATION RESPONSIBLE: HEALTH CARE AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Impediments to coalition building are among many examples of corporate culture’s negative impact on WAC’s reform agenda. Yet for all of the restrictions that CBS’s corporate logistics, ethos, and design imposed on WAC, the group challenged fundamental philosophies that underpinned the corporation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the reproductive health care and childcare provisions WAC secured for workers. This success repudiated fundamental aspects of what Joan Acker identifies as the “non-responsibility” of modern corporations. According to this capitalistic model, corporations seek to restrict their obligations to

workers' well-being, whether in terms of environmental protections, childcare and health care, or protections of a limited workweek and child labor laws. Policies developed within such organizations therefore reinforce "everyday inattention to the non-work lives of participants" and "render peripheral and usually invisible the essential social activities of birthing, caring, and even surviving."¹⁰⁹ Non-responsibility holds serious consequences for women workers. They not only are charged disproportionately with the unacknowledged labor in the "nonwork" lives but also are jeopardized by the very conceptualization of a worker under corporate nonresponsibility. As Acker argues, "Non-responsibility consigns caring needs to areas outside the organization's interests, and, thus, helps to maintain the image of the ideal, even adequate, employee as someone without those obligations."¹¹⁰

WAC's proposal for comprehensive maternity benefits promised, in its words, to "put CBS in the vanguard of social responsibility."¹¹¹ By framing its plan for health care this way, WAC offered the corporation a means to distinguish itself from competitors through its socially responsible policies, a goal clearly expressed by Taylor and other CBS executives. Thus WAC recentered gendered concerns that had been eroded in corporate philosophies of nonresponsibility.

Given the broader sociopolitical context of 1974—the year in which WAC secured reproductive protections for employees—WAC's success in this area is particularly impressive. Various "right-of-conscience" bills and acts were proposed immediately following the January 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. Of these, the one with the most impact was the "Church Amendment" to the 1944 Public Health Service Act. Adopted in 1973, this refusal law protected any health care professional involved in federally funded research from performing abortions or other reproductive health procedures that "would be contrary to his [*sic*] religious beliefs or moral convictions."¹¹² By August 1973, a total of twelve states had passed legislation aimed to "skirt or subvert" *Roe v. Wade*.¹¹³ From May through October 1974, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments held a series of hearings to consider "possible Supreme Court negligence" in its decision to legalize abortion.¹¹⁴

It was within this reactionary political climate that the CBS Women's Joint Steering Committee, a subdivision of WAC, designed a plan to redefine abortion as a medical need. In July 1974, CBS accepted significant elements of the Committee's proposals. In doing so, CBS expanded coverage for women's medical needs that ranged from improved maternity leave to free, on-site breast cancer exams and mammograms.¹¹⁵ The Committee's proposal also pushed CBS to normalize abortion as part of medical treatment and health care when it successfully argued that maternity policies should include not only "pregnancy-related disabilities" and illness but also abortion and miscarriage as grounds for sick leave for "the purpose of recuperation."¹¹⁶ CBS agreed that all illnesses and medical procedures related to pregnancy, including abortion, would be treated "as any other illness" and would be afforded sick days.¹¹⁷

While unable to shift CBS policy to increase coverage for pregnancy-related hospitalization, something CBS deemed too expensive, the Women's Joint Steering Committee succeeded in redefining the most conservative and paternalistic aspects of reproductive rights and parenting roles in company policy. CBS agreed to strike the "dependent coverage" women had previously been required to take out while pregnant in order to "protect themselves financially against the possibility of abortion or miscarriage."¹¹⁸ The Committee argued that this was an unacceptable policy based on an inaccurate definition of a fetus as a dependent, a reflection of antichoice ideologies. CBS agreed to this redefinition of personhood and dependency and struck down the related policy. This decision was particularly momentous, considering that the fifth session of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, held just two months earlier, on May 1974, had debated whether a fetus was a human being with the same attendant rights and deliberated "at what time in the reproductive cycle life actually commences."¹¹⁹

Under the influence of the Women's Joint Steering Committee, CBS also reimagined caregiving for children. The company's revised policy assumed that fathers as well as, or instead of, mothers would be involved in the labor of child-rearing. Extended leave had previously been available only to women and for a four-month period. In 1974, this became available to both men and women for the care of children "natural or adoptive" and was extended to six months.¹²⁰ This policy was a clear victory for the CBS women, and one won through persistence. When they first proposed this policy revision in 1973, they were denied and were told that CBS did not grant "non-medical leave, maternal or paternal, for the purpose of child-rearing."¹²¹ A year later, CBS not only agreed to a more generous timeframe for parental leave and more expansive definitions of parenting roles requested of them by the Committee but actually improved upon the Committee's original plan by no longer requiring that this leave be taken "directly following childbirth."¹²²

ASSESSING WAC

By 1975, WAC's efforts had measurable effects, which an article published in *Columbine*, "What Progress Women at CBS?," conveyed to employees. This article provides an unusual assessment of work conditions for women in television. Reports on the status of women in television generated at the time typically tended to the industry's obligation to the public interest (to protect FCC licensing) and adherence to legislated employment practices (to ward off lawsuits). As a result, most evidence was numerically driven and focused on employment, hiring, and promotion of women at television stations. In 1974, the *Milwaukee Journal* expressed frustration at the limited means of evaluating women's progress in the television industry. While conducting research for their article "On or Off Camera, Women Move Up in TV Jobs," it found that "the only comprehensive survey deals

with local stations, not networks,” and was restricted to the “number of women holding important jobs.”¹²³ These figures not only lacked breadth but also were subject to manipulation. In the same year that the *Milwaukee Journal* expressed its concerns about the scarcity of available data, the United Church of Christ (UCC), who were centrally involved in FCC licensing challenges and media advocacy work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, questioned the validity of employment statistics stations submitted to the FCC. While numbers indicated improved employment for women, the UCC charged that stations likely manipulated job categories to reclassify positions without corresponding increases in prestige or salary.¹²⁴ The *Columbine* article on CBS women, by comparison, provided an unusual and information-rich rubric by which to gauge women’s status in the industry. It focused on employees at CBS headquarters rather than stations, offered a mix of quantitative and qualitative assessments of women’s progress, and addressed company insiders rather than the public and/or the FCC. As a publication internal to CBS, *Columbine* was not designed for public relations or designed to ward off broadcasting licensing challenges; therefore it assumed a less protective position and, presumably, provided a more reliable perspective.

To offer a “fresh set of eyes to the assessment of our programs to date,” CBS “turned to an outside writer,” Judith Hennessee, who was charged with evaluating the progress women had made at CBS.¹²⁵ By hiring Hennessee, who was a member of NOW and was deeply involved in its media reform campaigns and whose journalism appeared in feminist publications such as *Ms.*, CBS announced its investment in feminist assessment and outsider evaluation. After interviewing employees, compiling statistics, and narrativizing her findings, Hennessee found that “several hundred of CBS’s working women seem to have already benefited directly” from changes in management practices.¹²⁶ Promotions and raises clearly demonstrate these benefits. In 1971, women constituted 13.2 percent of promotions within salaried positions; by the third quarter of 1974, this figure had increased to 36.2 percent.¹²⁷

In Hennessee’s evaluation, women’s progress at CBS was not confined to economic indicators. Hennessee also gauged experiential evidence and found, overall, that interpersonal and cultural aspects of women’s work lives had improved. The “substantial changes in basic intangibles of attitudes,” something that WAC deemed necessary for true workplace reform, manifested in interpersonal, affective ways.¹²⁸ Kathryn Pelgrift, Arthur Taylor’s assistant who had been promoted to a vice presidential position, noted that it was “no longer fashionable to put women down around here.”¹²⁹ Even a bureaucratic detail, such as the revision of the title of a training manual from “CBS Secretarial Manual” to “CBS Office Practices,” helped transform the tone of vocational instruction from one of condescension to professionalism. Whereas the earlier iteration of the manual indicated that secretarial duties included making coffee and “playing the gracious hostess,” the revised version “[stuck] strictly to business.”¹³⁰ As a result of such changes, women who worked various “lower-level” jobs noted a decline in various on-the-job “indignities.”¹³¹

Despite the many workplace improvements Hennessee identified, not all employees had been helped by CBS's new policies, nor were they convinced that they would be. Although some women felt the effects of the revisions to policies, "many more thousands of CBS women (and men) [were] watchfully waiting to see if the company's 18-month-old push to change policies and attitudes toward women [would], in any direct way, affect them."¹³² Hennessee interpreted this skepticism not as an indictment of WAC's reform efforts but as a persistent effect of the corporation's organization and the subcultures it fostered. Depending on the CBS division in which she worked, equality employment measures affected an employee differently. News and radio divisions, which reported on "women's issues in the outside world," adapted quickly, while CBS Records suffered from a legacy of "'macho' and 'groupie' mentality" and was therefore slow to change.¹³³ The hierarchical organization of CBS also had an effect, and trickle-down adoption of policy was not ensured. One woman interviewed by Hennessee attested to the problem, saying, "If it doesn't filter down to my boss, then it doesn't matter how good Arthur Taylor's intentions are."¹³⁴

In her 1975 report, Hennessee was careful to acknowledge the uneven implementation of policies within CBS along with the positive impact of WAC's efforts, but she did not predict the looming challenges to women's workplace reform and to WAC's efficacy. As the 1970s continued, WAC became less active and less powerful, not least because of the larger sociopolitical environment of the US in the 1980s. Arthur Taylor's departure as CBS president in 1976 was also a loss given his concern about the advancement of women in the workplace. And, as with so many activists, some group women experienced burnout, while others missed the energizing effects of grassroots activism. Once WAC and the women's groups gained official status within their companies and formal recognition by their employers, "a lot of the thrill of the original underground feeling [had] gone."¹³⁵ Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, the success of all network women's groups contributed to their decline. Women throughout the corporation came to depend upon group women to the point that they grew complacent and "believed that the activist women would take care of things."¹³⁶ More generally, given the significant improvements for women in the broadcasting industry under their watch, group members felt that the "movement had paid off" and that women's "problems were over."¹³⁷

THE LEGACY OF THE WOMEN'S GROUPS

By 1983, television journalist Marlene Sanders witnessed "backsliding" on gender equity issues at ABC, her previous employer, and "dissatisfaction" at CBS, her current employer, but "no organized effort of any significance" to address these problems.¹³⁸ As a response to deteriorating conditions, women formed new women's groups. Sanders recalled that the "most shocking revelation" about a women's group that was forming anew at ABC at this time was that the new

group was unaware of the women's groups that had come before just ten years earlier.¹³⁹ Unfortunately, a lack of institutional memory among generations of women media workers is not unique to this time period, the broadcasting industry, or US media workplaces.¹⁴⁰ Fortunately, feminist scholarship on histories of labor movements and media activism can help bridge generational disconnections. Such work, as modeled by Frances Galt's recent project on women's unionization efforts in British film and television industries, "seeks to build a body of evidence which could support current stakeholders to effect change."¹⁴¹

Given WAC's brief life span, its reform focus and actions internal to the corporate workplace, and the difficulties of accessing evidence of the group's activities, it is unsurprising that media workers and scholars alike are unaware of WAC's existence and impact on CBS. The group's legacy, however, like that of so many other women's media workplace collectives, is worth recalling for its place in feminist media histories and for its applicability to contemporary labor conditions facing women. WAC's strategies for changing a media workplace, its ability to harness its members' collective skills and energies, and its adaptable ways of articulating feminist ideas bore significant outcomes. WAC improved the bureaucratic functioning of the corporation and operated as a conduit by which women could voice their grievances to executives. It educated men who held positions of power to not abuse that power and to attain heightened awareness of gender issues. It redefined traditionally feminized and undervalued work so that the terms of that work were formally defined, recognized, and respected. It instituted services and programs that trained women in professionalizing and educational measures, which helped them achieve greater status and economic compensation. And, finally, it demystified the processes behind instituted corporate policies so that women workers could effectively intervene in and shape those policies. For all of WAC's many accomplishments, the most remarkable aspect of its story, perhaps, is that, at a time when activist groups faced outright refusals from network television, a women's group operated inside the industry's corporate stronghold to affect feminist change.