

Gharib Addresses Sexism and the Decline of the Media

Dr. Aldemaro Romero Jr. *College Talk*

“I think it’s the best job on the planet. You’re learning something new every day, you’re meeting fascinating people, and you’re telling stories of triumph and stories of tragedy. You get to interview people and ask them pretty much anything you want.” That’s how Susie Gharib explains why she chose journalism as a career.

After receiving a master’s degree from Columbia University, this award-winning journalist went on to become a long-time TV anchor at CNBC’s Nightly Business Report and at PBS, besides working for Fortune magazine. This year she became the Ratner Visiting Professor in the Department of Journalism and the Writing Professions of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences at Baruch College/CUNY.

When asked why she got into broadcasting, Gharib says it was purely accidental. “I wanted to be a magazine writer, and it was very fortunate that I got a job at Fortune magazine, which launched me as a financial news reporter. A number of entrepreneurial people in the television world decided that we had to start having financial shows and financial reporters. They came after me. I told them, ‘Look, I know nothing about television,’ and they said, ‘We’ll teach you, you know business, and we’re going to teach you.’”

That doesn’t mean Gharib has no criticisms of the way the media is conducted today. “One problem we have these days is that some broadcast, print, and electronic media are so slanted one way or the other. It’s a shame because the kind of journalism that I grew up with, the kind that you teach here at Baruch College, is to be objective, to remember that you as the reporter are not the story. You don’t want entertainment. You want to know what’s going on. The media landscape has gotten so split that, depending on the network you’re tuning into, you’ll get one side of the story but not the whole story,” says she.

Still, that begs the question of how financial journalism differs from other types of journalism. “You have to know your stuff. You can’t fake it. It’s fine when everything is going well. But I’ve



Susie Gharib reporting “From the Corner Office” at *Fortune*.

been in situations where we’ve seen the market crash or plunge traumatically, or even rally and hit new milestones, and people get the news and ask: ‘What happened?’”

Gharib also thinks that the general public is becoming savvier about finances. “People are responsible for their 401Ks, they know what an IRA is, and they know what a mutual fund is. Back in 1986, if I went on the street and asked people whether they knew what a 401k or a mutual fund was—what is a stock? what is a bond? —they wouldn’t know. But now they even know who the chairman of the Federal Reserve is. They’re much more educated.”

These days when we hear so much about gender roles, particularly in the media, one wonders how she views that issue based on her experience. “When I joined Fortune in 1974, it was male-dominated. There were a lot of research reporters who were women. We were the ones

who accompanied the male writers and took notes, typed them up, passed them on, and then they would write the story. Then things changed. There were lawsuits against Time Incorporated, against NBC. Gender equality started to evolve. But still, in the boardrooms, there were only men. All the CEOs were men. Today there are twenty-six women CEOs on the Fortune 500.”

About the specific issue of sexual harassment Gharib says, “I interviewed Gretchen Carlson, the journalist at Fox who brought the lawsuit against Roger Ailes that led to his ousting. The day I interviewed her was the day that Harvey Weinstein had been called out in The New York Times about everything he had done. So, I said to her, ‘What do you think of this newest development?’ And she said that when she came out and filed that lawsuit, she got emails and letters from people all over the world saying ‘Thank you for doing this.’ It gave them a little more courage.”

But how can we change this culture of male power over women? Gharib has an idea. “It starts from mothers and fathers and how they educate their boys and girls on this kind of issue. Let’s face it, every company I’ve worked at, they’ve always had the lawyers come in and educate us about what sexual harassment is—everything from an off-color joke to touching someone in the office. It’s a wide range. But those legal training classes come kind of late, and there’s still a lot of work to do.”

One also wonders how social media has influenced the landscape of journalism. “I hope,” says Gharib, “that we get smart young people who want to go into journalism. I think our American democracy depends on it. There are a lot of what we now call ‘citizen journalists.’ It’s just anybody who has a blog or writes something on social media, tweets, or puts it on Facebook. I hate to single out Facebook, but this happens everywhere. They have a superficial headline, and that’s what a lot of people are going to live with—that headline. Facebook is not a news organization.”

On the question of whether closing newspapers and cutting budgets for newscasts will affect the job market for journalists and decrease the quality of journalism, Gharib agrees that there is reason to worry. “Everybody is getting news from their cellphones and their computers, maybe some of them are subscribing to newspapers, but that’s not enough. I wish more people would buy more newspapers. We need them, and we need that coverage. It does disturb me that so many smaller towns or townships are cutting back so much. They’re not getting the advertising, and the advertising dollars are going to other platforms. Does it concern me? Very much so.”

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