

PRESS RELEASE

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The crude and bigoted remarks made by Don Imus earlier this year about the Rutgers University women's basketball team may have disgusted millions and forced two networks to drop his program, but the reality is that Imus' comments reflect what can be heard on virtually any night on any channel of primetime network television.

A newly-released survey of primetime network television (underway at the time of Imus' remarks) shows an overall rise in hate speech and bias language since 2000, and a dramatic increase in language incidents targeting women and girls.

Dubbed the Primetime Misogyny 2007 Media Survey because of the overwhelming targeting of females, the six-week project tracked four levels of bias language/hate speech and compared the findings to a similar survey conducted in 2000.

Overall, there were 1,874 language incidents in 2007, compared to 590 in 2000. In 2007, 1,111 incidents targeted females, compared to 416 in 2000. The next most-targeted group was males at 193 incidents (compared to 84 in 2000).

In the two worst categories, females were also targeted at higher rates than any other group. In Category 4 (epithets, slurs, etc.), females were the target of 157 of 226 incidents. Males were the next most-targeted group at 32 incidents.

In Category 3 (demeaning, insulting, etc.), females were the target of 175 of 256 language incidents, with social attributes coming in second at 24 incidents.

"No matter how you look at it," says survey author Mimi Yahn, "the findings show an extraordinary bias and contempt for women and girls on network television—in the disparity between how much targets females compared to all other groups, in the frequent use of the most derogatory terms to describe females, and in the sheer volume of language that degrades and dehumanizes women and girls."

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The Media Survey was sponsored by the Thomas Merton Center, Pittsburgh's leading peace and social justice organization, and funded by the Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania, whose mission is to achieve equity for women and girls in the region through public advocacy, coalition-building and grantmaking.

Yahn is hopeful that these findings will spur campaigns to change primetime television's verbal contempt for females, from modifying FCC regulations to pressuring advertisers who sponsor programs that routinely use gender epithets and slurs.

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