

Nov 04, 2016 by [Alvin Snyder](#)

Public Diplomacy's Glass Ceilings ^[1]

Women in public diplomacy have long been confronted with a glass ceiling in Washington. It seems that their male counterparts in PD now see such a ceiling as well.

What caught my eye was a comment last weekend by former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. At her 50th class reunion at Wellesley College, Dr. Albright remarked to Boston Globe correspondent Ben Terris that women probably make better diplomats than men.

"In a lot of ways we do have advantages," she said. "Diplomacy is about being able to put yourself into someone else's shoes, to be able to empathize, figure out their perspective. At the risk of making a gross generalization, women are often much better at that."

Maybe that's why, with one exception, all Under-Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy have been women since the position was created in 1999.

President Bill Clinton chose Evelyn Lieberman to be the first State Department chief of public diplomacy. President George W. Bush appointed three women and one man to the job during his two terms in office (Charlotte Beers, Margaret Tutwiler, Karen Hughes and James Glassman), and President Obama selected Judith McHale. Apparently the male presidents who signed off on those presidential appointments could not make up their minds, as that State PD position has been left vacant more than one-third of the time since 1999.

It should also be noted that from 1997 to the present, three females have served as Secretary of State (Albright, Condoleezza Rice and now Hillary Clinton), with Colin Powell the lone male.

With that new glass ceiling for men at the State Department for the positions of Secretary of State and Under-Secretary for PD, the ceiling for women was shattered at the former U.S. Information Agency, when it was merged into the State Department and the office of the Undersecretary of State for PD was created. It was an all-male director's club at the USIA down through its history, headed by 13 male chiefs during the agency's 46-year existence, 1953-1999 (Streibert, Larson, Allen, Murrow, Rowan, Marks, Shakespeare, Keogh, Reinhardt, Charles Z. Wick, Bruce Gelb, Henry Catto, Duffy).

The Voice of America, which was not merged into the State Department, but survived with quasi-independence from public diplomacy and its glass ceiling in tact, has had 27 VOA directors since 1942, all males with two exceptions: Mary Bitterman, 1980-81 and Evelyn Lieberman, 1997-1999.

Although a woman's diplomatic skills may not be required for the very top director's position at the VOA — located on the protected side of the public diplomacy firewall — their time to shatter the glass ceiling may yet come.
