

## feature

## From the powder room to the board room

by Miriam Korn

It's time to free the press.

A recently founded group of women journalists from across Canada, Media Women for Equality (MWE), will be working to transform the scope and nature of news coverage by identifying and fighting gender inequities in the journalistic world. According to the minutes of its founding conference in Winnipeg last September, this non-profit educational and legal organization aims to educate the public, support women and equality issues in the context of the media, end discrimination in the workplace and encourage a more sophisticated, broader-based portrayal of women.

The group was set up in recognition of the need for more alliance among women to address issues which continue to create obstacles for women's success in journalism. "So much progress, so many gains for women in the past two decades — but so far to go before real equity is achieved," wrote one columnist in reference to the 1992 Canadian Association of Journalists' Women in the Media conference, the largest gathering of women journalists in Canada's history.

The obstacles faced by media women are complex and often inconspicuous.

"I am encouraged to be just as ambitious as any of my male classmates," said Bernice Landry, a Journalism student soon to complete her fourth and final year at King's College School of Journalism.

A report for the Southam Newspaper Group, the owner of 17 newspapers across Canada, said that women make up over half the enrollments in journalism schools, and about 51 percent of readership, but that this isn't reflected in newsroom hiring. Only 22 percent of journalists at Southam newspapers are women.

Margaret Daly, a professor of journalism and the first female faculty member at King's J-school, reports experiencing no significant problems with gender inequities during her diverse and very successful career in both print and broadcast journalism. Statistics and many Canadian women journalists' testimonials, however, show that Daly's positive experiences are not typical.

Women have less than 30% of the bylines in Canadian newspapers. The numbers of bylines dropped by 1.5% in six of the newspapers in 1992. The only one to increase was the Vancouver Province.

In the Southam report, women voiced concerns about sexist attitudes, the 'old boy's network' and the 'baby clock' (an underlying pressure to bear children just about the time women should be grooming for management jobs.)

"The press is supposed to be liberal," said Landry. "If it's bad there, what's the rest of the world like?"

Judging from wages of women in the media, women in journalism are

doing better than women in other professions, but they still have a long way to go before reaching equity with men. In 1987, the average woman in the media industry was paid about 75% as much as the average man. (Ahead of women elsewhere in society—66% of the average man's salary.)

stories filed by men. National and international stories represented 55% of the reports filed by women and 64% of the reports filed by men.

Because of the lack of women in influential positions, traditionally male-defined views persist in deter-

Marginalization of women is reflected in the discrepancy in how the genders are used as sources. For every 4 men mentioned in the newspaper one woman is cited. More than two-thirds of the papers used women for less than 20% references. In the *Globe and Mail*, 90% of the references are male.

feminist views."

Fortunately, enough women have voiced their concerns to draw attention to the issues at hand. "Fair and equitable portrayal of women and men on television and radio is a serious concern for CRTC," said Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission chairman David Colville. "The Commission must ensure that eliminating sex-role stereotyping remains an important part of the broadcasting agenda, and that our policies are up-to-date and effective."

The problems, however, lie deeper than changing hiring and editorial practices. "There are all sorts of new sociological issues to deal with, like families, lifestyles, job sharing and day care," said Bryan Cantley, CDNPA's manager of editorial services.

Major reforms are needed in the workplace. Long, irregular hours and long-standing hierarchical structures remain obstacles for women's success. The world of journalism needs to become less hierarchical and more receptive to fostering a schedule and environment compatible with maintaining a family life.

"At the Montreal Gazette there was only one woman on staff who was not single or divorced. This was not true of the men," said Nolen. "It's frightening. I really love this, but it seems like, as a woman, you're signing your life away. Women have to stand up and demand that allowances be made. We shouldn't have to accept that to be successful in this business women have to sacrifice having a family and grow old alone."

There are women out there who are demanding changes in their workplace — and getting results. At the *St. Petersburg Times*, in Florida, women organized to fight inequality in pay and opportunity. They brought facts to the editor and within a year, the situation turned around. The last five senior job openings were filled by women; sexual harassment has almost stopped since one harasser was fired and a gender counselor was hired to help deal with issues of sexism in the news and on the job.

"The revolt was sparked when a man was hired as a columnist during a golf game at the editor's club," said Cynthia Mort, an editor at the paper. It succeeded because 90 percent of the women reporters joined the committee. "There's power in numbers. Diversity is the wave of the future."

In this spirit, Media Women for Equality has been established to try to document the difficulties and problems for women across the country. The coalition will work to take action in cases where it could be helpful, and focus on providing information and support to women who have problems in their workplace or media organizations they sell to. With women working together to reclaim and redefine the news business, freedom of the press may soon take on a new meaning.



The clincher behind women's generally disadvantaged position in the media business points to a definite shortage of women in the upper echelons of power. 1990 statistics of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association show that only 6% of publishers, 6% of managing editors, and 9% of editors-in-chief are women.

1989: 39 percent of producers and 16 percent of directors are women

1988: 75 percent of the women in the industry earn \$30 000

Private sector: women held 1 percent of upper-management jobs

1989: Women in the CBC and TV Ontario hold 14 percent of top positions

Stephanie Nolen, a student in her final year at the King's School of Journalism, recognises the persistence of obstacles for women in the media industry despite the numerous interviews and a fair number of offers for employment she has received as a result of her job hunting efforts. "There are barriers that people do not acknowledge. A woman can be senior managing editor, but she won't be made editor-in-chief."

Many sense a 'glass ceiling' hindering women's success in the business. "We call head office a boy's club," said one senior female Quebec journalist. "There's a new game being played and we don't know the rules."

There was no statistically significant difference between the kind of stories introduced by male announcers and those introduced by female announcers, but 45% of the reports by women were on local matters, compared to 36% of the

mining what is worthy of coverage.

If there were more women in more influential positions, news coverage and priorities would probably be quite different. "In my experience, so called women's issues, which are really society's issues, tended to be put on page one when women were on the (news) desk," said Shirley Sharzer, long-time journalist and now Southam's special consultant.

Nolen recounted how the Montreal Gazette boasted of its Weekly Saturday "women's news" section. "They thought it was really exciting. I thought it was stupid. It's not 'women's news'. Everyone needs to know about these issues. Is the rest of the paper men's news?"

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"News values are man-made — both in the generic and gender sense," said Bob Hackett, who teaches news analysis and media studies at Simon Fraser University. "The perspective would be more bottom up, rather than a top down view of society. You would see less of women being used as sex objects and a greater stress on gender free language."

When women are mentioned they tend to be defined by their appearance and their relationships to men rather than their own actions and self worth. "Canadian newspaper editors must drop their white, male bias and provide fairer coverage of women," said Sheila Copps, MP. She noted the media's focus on her clothes and family life during the campaign, while concentrating on the business accomplishments of her male opponents.

The media's coverage of women is not unlike gender stereotypes inherent within the industry. A career in journalism still has a predominantly "macho image". Many feel it is time to reform the "macho" image associated with a career in journalism. "Both men and women are clamoring to prove they have the most balls," said France Bula, BC director for the Center for Investigative Journalism, an Ottawa-based organization.

Women in the media find themselves in a double bind. In order to compete in the business, they must be assertive, but this often means being dubbed as being too pushy. "Are you always this aggressive in the morning?" asked Brian Mulroney of one woman reporter.

At the London *Free Press*, said Kelley Teahen, a reporter with the paper, women in the newsroom have been classified under two headings. "Fembo's" — a combination of feminist and Rambo, and "OK" women, who men believe have good news judgement and do not speak up with