

**Gertrude Joch Robinson**

## **The Future of Women in the Canadian Media**

In spite of the proliferation of serious studies concerning women and work, one striking trend has until now remained relatively unnoticed. Women's increased participation in the general labor force has not resulted in a parallel increase in their participation in the higher professions. According to Canadian statistics, the representation of women in the labor force has tripled since the turn of the century to its present 39%, yet in the professions it has remained virtually constant at about 19%. This gross figure is, however, misleading. It obscures the fact that 83% of all women in this category are found in the semiprofessions. They are nurses or lower paid secondary school teachers, they are working at below professional level in natural science, engineering, mathematics, medicine and law.<sup>1</sup> Though it is difficult to determine exactly how many Canadian women are in this category, U.S. figures indicate that, since 1900, the relative female representation in the prestige occupations has declined from 12% to 10%.<sup>2</sup> Using journalism as an example, this paper will explore why women's professional representation has remained virtually unchanged. It will also discuss the implications of this trend for the future of women seeking careers in the Canadian media.

### **structural barriers to media entry**

The relative lack of change in participation of women in the highest occupational levels is a result of a variety of social and structural barriers that are only beginning to be understood. Social barriers refer to the way in which society views women's work outside the home. Structural barriers indicate the way in which particular pro-

fessions restrict entry to minorities and channel their subsequent progress. Each of these mechanisms will be discussed separately.

It is well known that in North America women's social role is primarily that of wife and mother, in charge of family needs and child-rearing. Men's social role, in contrast, is to function first and foremost as providers, and to succeed in the world. These one-dimensional role definitions in turn color the definitions of work. Heavy production occupations and aggressive or analytical professions like law, science, engineering and dentistry are categorized as "male," while the helping and supportive occupations like librarianship, teaching, nursing and social work are sex-typed as "female." Both females and males trespassing into the work territory of the opposite sex become social deviates.

How do these societal conceptions apply to journalism and in what ways do they contribute to this profession's predominantly male composition? Until recently, few studies investigated these interrelationships in more than an anecdotal manner. The New York Media Women's Association refers to the trench-coated vision of the hard drinking reporter in its *Rooms With No View* and notes that the image of woman as homemaker carries over into professional situations where it is irrelevant. This is eloquently illustrated in an NBC producer's evaluation of his female production assistant primarily in terms of "laundry and morale."<sup>3</sup>

Anecdotal material is, however, not enough to determine how these stereotypes inhibit women's entrance into journalism or their subsequent progress on the job. Two recent studies by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and by Vernon Stone begin to probe more systematically supervisors' unique views of mediawomen's work aspirations as well as the impact of these views on work assignments.<sup>4</sup> According to the CBC report, prevailing notions can be summarized in four generalizations:

1. Women are not career-oriented and do not really want to get ahead enough to be willing to move to another city.
2. Women do not have the requisite education or experience for important production and managerial jobs.
3. Women have greater manual dexterity and do not mind repetitive detail as much as men. They are, therefore, better suited for secretarial work.
4. Women are overly emotional and generally troublesome and, therefore, less well suited for higher or decision-making positions.

Stone adds to these the belief that women must be protected from

the physical danger or gory sights connected with reporting certain types of events.<sup>5</sup>

Actual data collected on female CBC and daily journalists indicate that most of these views have little to do with reality. Canadian media women are predominantly single, while male journalists are overwhelmingly married (71%) — 66% in the CBC and 58% of print journalists were single, divorced or widowed. In addition, the professional women in the CBC were generally younger than the men, with 60% *under* 36 in contrast to 60% of the men who were over this age. When queried, these women evidenced the same job aspirations and willingness to move to another city as the men. General educational background too, turned out to be virtually indistinguishable. Canadian women in 1971 constituted 44% of all students enrolled in Arts and Social Sciences at Canadian Universities<sup>6</sup> and CBC personnel exhibited equivalent scholarship in production and management positions.<sup>7</sup> The only difference found is that women generally lack sufficient technical and electronic training to compete for top engineering positions in broadcasting.

The supposed superior manual skill of women has also never been proven and certainly does not constitute a reason for relegating a majority of all females to such jobs. The high CBC turnover rate and general dissatisfaction with the dead-end nature and rug-ranked valuation of secretarial skills is ample evidence for the fact that neither women nor men enjoy these jobs. Women's greater emotionality furthermore is a result of prescribed social norms rather than an innate difference between the sexes and quite unrelated to executive ability. Equally irrelevant is the Victorian belief that women must be protected from reporting crime, war and death because these may offend their sensibilities. Outstanding female war and foreign correspondents like Margaret Burke-White have, over the years, been living proof that insightfulness and courage are human, not sex-linked qualities.

Though many of the work stereotypes about women are in fact false, they do restrict access to male professions in two ways: through encouraging a much more stringent self-selection process and through making it more difficult for women or minorities to get hired in the first place. No precise figures on women who decide not to compete for media jobs are presently available but it is known that those who enter the labor market for the first time tend to seek out occupations where access is easier. There is, however, information on directness of entry into media jobs. Bowman's U.S. study shows that only 58% of the women, versus 73% of the men entered the media directly.

Of the substantial proportion of women who began their careers outside the media, the majority began in business and industry.<sup>8</sup> My own data on Canadian print journalists corroborate these findings. The CBC report, moreover, suggests that entry difficulties for women may include screening techniques which assume stereotypes about women's work and a much smaller total number of job classifications to which women can apply.

As a result, women are a minority of 20% in U.S. media jobs and their positions follow general labor force distributions.<sup>9</sup> They tend to be most prevalent in the least prestigious media sectors. In print, newsmagazines have 30% woman power, weeklies 27%, dailies 23%, wire services 13% and radio-TV 10%. Radio alone had a miniscule 5%.<sup>10</sup> Though general Canadian statistics on female media participation are once again lacking, a 25% figure is suggested by other sources. The 1971 census lists 9,665 fulltime writers and editors of whom 24% are women.<sup>11</sup> This is, however, not a very accurate figure for estimating media personnel, because the category includes writers of literature and poetry and excludes technical and camera workers. More detailed studies show that Canadian dailies have 25% woman power<sup>12</sup> and the CBC lists 14% women in broadcast production and management.<sup>13</sup> Both of these figures are somewhat higher than the U.S. counterparts and may indicate a slightly more optimistic professional situation for female journalists north of the 49th parallel.

### **the effects of minority status on career prospects**

Turning now to structural barriers, Turner found years ago that minority status has three potential negative effects for a person's career prospects: a minority member may be denied equal opportunity to enter certain occupational specialties; there may be unequal chances for promotional consideration; and there may be fewer rewards for the performance of the same tasks.<sup>14</sup> All of these barriers have been documented for women journalists working in the North American media.

Restriction of entry to certain media specialties was noted by Lubin, who found that though the print sectors are more open because of their size and the large majority (75%) of journalists they employ, they tend to circumscribe the location of women to small circulation dailies, published in cities of less than 50,000. Nearly 45% of all U.S. female journalists work there.<sup>15</sup> In Canadian dailies

no such segregation is evident. Both men and women are virtually equally distributed between large, medium and small cities and circulation papers.<sup>16</sup> One may conclude that Canadian female print journalists have better initial professional prospects than their southern sisters.

Much more detrimental to promotional equality, however, is the fact that women are disproportionately funnelled into a narrow number of low prestige professional fields. Detrimental specialization in newspapering is evidenced by the fact that women gain access to only half or, at most, two-thirds of all possible content areas (or "beats") and that the female representation is predominantly in such "soft news" categories as life-styles, fashion, personality and culture. Seventy per cent of all U.S. women work in "life-styles"<sup>17</sup> whereas this topic is covered by women exclusively in half (57) of Canada's 106 dailies.<sup>18</sup> Since "hard news" coverage of politics, business and economics, together with seniority and trustworthiness, are essential qualifications for professional promotion, early segregation to certain beats spells doom to many women's later career prospects. The same conclusion emerged from the CBC study which found that out of 1,425 position titles, 76% were sex-typed and had *no* female incumbent.<sup>19</sup>

A second barrier, promotional inequality, is also prevalent in the media. As in business generally, media women are disproportionately located at the lowest reportorial and management rungs. The study of Canadian dailies found women are equally represented only in rank-and-file reportorial positions. They have one half representation as content chiefs (editors of life-style sections) but constitute less than one per cent in the three top managerial categories. Only a handful of women are day and night editors, or assistant, managing and chief editors.<sup>20</sup> In the CBC, the situation is not quite as bleak. Here women hold 7.5% of management jobs, 9% of announcer positions and 13% TV producer jobs. Yet again equal representation is found only among the less prestigious category of radio producers.<sup>21</sup>

A final well-documented effect of minority status on career prospects is that women usually receive fewer monetary rewards for the performance of the same tasks as men. Since this discriminatory mechanism is by now so well known, we shall merely note it here in passing. Bowman's industry-wide U.S. media sample found in 1971 that nearly 70% of the female journalists reported incomes of less than \$10,000 a year, while nearly the same proportion of men (65.9%) made more than that figure. With all discriminatory mechanisms at

work, he concluded, it costs a woman between \$2-3,000 a year to be a minority journalist. Considering that there are roughly 14,000 females in the U.S. media, this means a yearly industry saving of \$28-48 million in salaries.<sup>22</sup>

Equally detailed figures are unfortunately not available for Canada, but it would be over-optimistic to believe that no salary differences between equally qualified male and female media personnel exist. The daily newspaper survey noted a mean yearly 1974 salary for all journalists of \$12,827, with the mean for women at \$10,958. It is well known that averages mask salary differences resulting from such legitimate factors as years of experience and circulation or market size. These two factors, according to other studies, together account for 32% of the salary variance.

In testing for the factor of sex, however, Bowman found an additional 8% of variance explained.<sup>23</sup> This would not occur if no discriminatory mechanisms were involved. Though it is difficult to trace or assign specific monetary values to these mechanisms, a recent study notes that some papers pay women editors lower salaries than general reporters, but that such discrepancies are diminishing under Guild guidelines.<sup>24</sup> More disturbing is the discriminatory potential of supervisors' greater salary discretion over middle management pay above \$10,000. It is here that the undervaluation of women's work may make a substantial difference.<sup>25</sup> Cumulatively, with all barriers and discriminatory mechanisms at work, Canadian female media workers may each be losing an estimated \$1-2,000 yearly.

## **what about the future?**

Fundamental social rethinking will have to occur on the matter of giving women equality of work opportunity. Basic to such rethinking is the realization that sex is an enduring ascribed characteristic, which has an effect upon the evaluation of persons and positions and is the basis for persistent sexual division of labor and sex-based inequalities.<sup>26</sup> To better understand the effects of sex on work, the structural conditions affecting willingness to work will have to be explored in greater detail. Bowman noted that some women do not attempt entry to media jobs because entry is known to be tough. What per cent select themselves out by their own volition and how these women differ from those who move into media jobs from non-media springboards, is not yet known. We also lack a clear picture of the differences in men's and women's work histories as they relate to marital status. Bernard notes that women's histories are more complex

than men's, because they frequently have to add work to their primary home-maker role.<sup>27</sup> On this point the CBC and daily print journalist data indicate that in journalism women have overwhelmingly chosen to remain single in order to minimize the disproportionate work stresses arising from the combined work and home-maker roles.

In addition, no one knows much about the effects of women being left out of the informal advancement and promotion system or how proposals for breaking down institutional barriers in various professions have fared. Only time studies will show whether women in certain professions become permanent tokens, are phased out or become assimilated.<sup>28</sup> *Rooms With No View* suggests women may remain tokens in broadcasting and the CBC report notes that hiring, promotion and training practices, especially for technical and engineering specialties, are crucial media job barriers which only require removal.

There are also the consequences of salary differentials and segregation to lower prestige occupational specialties, with which future researchers will have to come to grips. Do differences in salary lead to differential satisfaction and performance? To what extent and under what circumstances are women willing to work at "glamorous" jobs for less pay? On this question, studies on the differential definitions of work between the sexes and consequently the kind of rewards considered important, are part of the answer. Bowman notes that female media personnel who consider their work role as secondary will be more likely to stress professional rewards like autonomy, opportunity to help others, and minimum supervision, while those who view their work as primary stress tangible ones, like pay and fringe benefits.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, we come to the open question of how to make jobs more consistent with people's needs in the 21st century. This issue is usually raised in the context of the increasing bureaucratization of people's lives in most technological societies. From women's points of view, technological change has been advantageous in that it has opened up opportunities for choice between the homemaker and other roles. The sharing of childrearing, earlier marriage, drops in fertility, longer life expectancy and more spare time have in the past ten years propelled a staggering number of mothers into the Canadian labor force.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in spite of the new options, women's inequality outside the home persists in both capitalist and socialist societies. Huber notes: "Technological change resulted in men's monopolizing the exchange of valued goods and services, while women monopolized increasingly trivialized domestic work and second class jobs, owing to

their childrearing responsibility.”<sup>31</sup>

These inequalities appear to stem from deeply ingrained notions about women's inferiority, which seem to pervade all types of societies. These negative evaluations continue to be fed and sustained by patriarchally defined roles of man and wife in the home and by a lack of understanding that industry, politics and culture require women's talents *on a par* with those of men. The first, as we have seen, places disproportionate work obligations on women, and the latter keeps them out of professions to which they can bring different but equally important talents.<sup>32</sup> The introduction of flexible working hours, child-care benefits, maternity and parternity leaves, and public support for child-care facilities are the first steps in equalizing family responsibilities between the sexes. Better job access through public posting, on the job training, reclassification of job titles and clearer design of advancement paths for dead-end and secretarial positions, plus executive sabbatical and early-retirement options are means for bringing women into industrial, political and cultural professions from which they were hitherto absent. Though the creation of a more positive image of women's capacities will require legislative support and may take a century to achieve, it is surely based on human goals with which everyone can identify.<sup>33</sup>

## footnotes

1. Canadian Department of Labour (Women's Bureau), *Women in the Labour Force*, Ottawa: Information Canada, 1975 based on Table 24, p. 49.
2. Athena Theodore, *The Professional Woman*, Cambridge: Schenkman, 1971, p. 3.
3. Ethel Stainchamps, ed., *Rooms With No View*, New York: Harper and Row, 1974, p. 14.
4. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Women in the CBC*, Montreal, 1975. pp. 17, 30, 45.
5. Vernon Stone, "Results of a 1973 Survey of Women in Broadcast News," *RTND Communicator*, Vol. XXVII, No. 6 (June 1973), pp. 5-12.
6. Canadian Department of Labour, *Women in the Labour Force*, p. 30.
7. CBC, *Women in the CBC*, pp. 50-52.
8. William W. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists: Women as a Minority Group in the News Media," unpublished dissertation, Chicago: University of Illinois, 1974, p. 97.
9. The 20% minority status of women in journalism is approximated in other Western European countries like Scandinavia, Germany, Great Britain and Israel.  
See: Marion Marzolf, "Daring to Go Ahead: The Modern Woman Journalist in Western Europe," unpublished paper, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972; Elizabeth Berg, "Women in German Broadcasting," *EBU Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1975), pp. 19-20; Jeremy Tunstall, *Journalists at*



- Work*, London: Constable, 1971, p. 13; Stockholms Journaliter, report by journalist association, Malmo, Sweden, 1971.
10. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists," p. 100, Table 3.3.
  11. Canadian Department of Labour, *Women in the Labour Force*, p. 261.
  12. Gertrude Joch Robinson, "Women Journalists in Canadian Dailies: A Social and Professional Minority Profile," unpublished manuscript, McGill University, 1975, p. 5.
  13. CBC, *Women in the CBC*, p. 22.
  14. Ralph H. Turner, "The Foci of Discrimination in the Employment of Non-Whites," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (Nov. 1952), p. 247.
  15. Joann Lubin, "Discrimination Against Women in the Newsroom," unpublished M.A. thesis, Sanford University, 1971.
  16. Robinson, "Women Journalists," p. 6.
  17. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists," p. 105.
  18. Robinson, "Women Journalists," p. 9.
  19. CBC Report, *Women in the CBC*, p. 34.
  20. Robinson, "Women Journalists," p. 13.
  21. CBC Report, *Women in the CBC*, p. 30.
  22. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists," p. 157.
  23. *Ibid.*
  24. Staff, "Women's Differentials," *Editor and Publisher*, Sept. 1976.
  25. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists," p. 71, women formed a caucus in the Newspaper Guild which organized the first national conference on women in the news media in the 1960's.
  26. Joan Acker, "Women and Social Stratification: A Case of Intellectual Sexism," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (1973).
  27. Jessie Bernard, *Women and the Public Interest, An Essay on Policy and Protest*, New York: Aldine Atherton, 1971, Ch. 8.
  28. Cynthia F. Epstein, "Encountering the Male Establishment: Sex-Status Limits on Women's Careers in the Professions," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (May 1970), pp. 965-982.
  29. Bowman, "Distaff Journalists," p. 82.
  30. Canadian Department of Labour, *Women in the Labour Force*, p. 278.
  31. Joan Huber, "Toward a Socio-Technological Theory of the Women's Movement," unpublished manuscript, Urbana: University of Illinois, 1975, p. 1.
  32. Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe*, Boston: Beacon, 1974, Ch. 3.
  33. Judy Creighton, "Women Face Long Haul in Legal Equality Fight," *Montreal Star*, October 21, 1976.