

WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

The Big Picture

In Canada

- The equitable participation of women in the media, including access to and control of new information and communications technologies (ICTs), and fair portrayal of the diverse lives of women are major issues.
- More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy.
- The portrayal of women in the media does not reflect the diverse lives and changing place of women in Canadian society; women's voices are heard less often, their roles are limited, stereotyping is common and issues and perspectives important to women are marginalized. Portrayal of violence and sexual objectification remains a concern.
- Women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are almost invisible as either reporters or sources in newscasts.

Around the World

- New opportunities for the participation of women in the media and for the dissemination of information about women have been created as a result of the "revolution" in the field of communications. Despite these new developments, progress in removing stereotypes and negative images of women in the media has been slow.
- ICTs and broadcasting media have become important tools for women to communicate gender equality messages and mobilize for advocacy and social change worldwide.

- Sexist and exclusionary messages, especially those related to violence or to trivialization of women's concerns, still prevail in all media worldwide and tend to reinforce discrimination and perpetuate women's lower status in society.
- Although there has been some modest progress, women's access to both expression and decision-making in all media, and especially new media, is less than men's, and poor women have least access of all.

Facts and Figures

In Canada

- A recent study conducted by the National Watch on Images of Women in Canada (MediaWatch) found that although women represent more than 50% of the population, their representation as newsmakers, reporters or news photographers hovers around 20%. (*Women Strike Out*, 1998)
- Although female students make up more than 50% of all journalism school graduates, recent studies demonstrate that women write only 30% of the by-lines in newspapers. Female editors are even more rare. (MediaWatch, 1999)
- Family responsibilities are the biggest determining factor in female participation in newsroom jobs: 65% of women journalists are married versus 81% of men. Two thirds of the women are childless compared to 1/3 of the men. Only 14% of women have two or more children compared to 50% of the men. (Drs. Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean in *How far have women come in journalism*, Media Magazine, Spring 1999)
- Research studies report negative effects on women exposed to media images of the "ideal" woman. (National Eating Disorder Information Centre, February 2000)



- On an average day in 1998, 49% of all women aged 15 and over used a computer, compared to 63% of young men. However, young women are about as likely as their male counterparts to use a computer. (Statistics Canada General Social Survey)
- 7.6 million Canadian adults use the World Wide Web every week; 42% are women (*Media Digest*, 1999-2000, Media Director's Council).

Around the World

- Women's use of the Internet, especially e-mail, has more than quintupled since 1995. (*Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, UN, 2000*)
- In countries where access to computers is available, increasing numbers of women have gained access to computer technology and the Internet. From 1995 to 1998, women's online engagements were estimated to have increased from 8.1 million to 30.1 million globally, and were expected to reach 43.3 million in 2000. (*Women and the Media fact sheet*, UN Department of Public Information, 2000)
- There has been immense growth in networks formed specifically to advance gender equality through the media by fostering greater participation by women and by monitoring content, including the International Women's Media Foundation and the Asian Women's Resource Exchange.
- Women continue to cluster in lower-paid, low-status jobs in the media, and in journalism, they continue to concentrate in the "soft" issues rather than "hard" issues like politics and economics.

Towards Equality

In Canada

- Progress on women's equality in the media is being made through a mix of legislation, regulation, advocacy inside and outside the industry, industry self-improvement, changes in public expectations, voluntary guidelines, education and training.

- The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has developed and endorses, *Gender Guidelines*, a document which ensures language used by on-air personnel treats men and women equally. (CBC, December 1998)
- The Government of Canada, in partnership with the media industry and community, has initiated a federal Media Violence Strategy. The long-term goals of the Strategy are: to reduce media violence; to use media as a positive force to foster long-term attitudinal and behavioural change towards societal violence, by reducing the public's tolerance of aggressive, racist and sexist behaviour; and to promote media education for all viewers.
- MediaWatch is a federally and privately funded national, women's organization dedicated to eliminating sexism in the media. Known for its unique work nationally as well as internationally, MediaWatch regularly monitors media; conducts research and surveys; promotes consumer advocacy; and presents concerns to media organizations, advertisers, regulatory bodies and government.
- The Media Awareness Network promotes and supports media education in Canadian schools, homes and communities through Internet. The Network encourages critical thinking about media information, media entertainment and new communication technologies using a gender-based analysis.
- Other organizations active in promoting women's equality in the media include ACTRA, Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), Women in Film and Television-Toronto (WIFT-T), Femmes du cinéma, de la télévision et de la vidéo à Montréal, and Canadian Women in Communications (CWC).

Around the World

- CIDA has funded a number of projects using the media to promote human rights, such as:
 - a radio series in Pakistan on marriage, contracts, divorce and family law, together with the establishment of women's listening centres in Karachi where community-based organizations facilitate and assist during the broadcasts.
 - the International Telecommunications Union's Task Force on Gender Issues, which promotes

mainstreaming of gender issues into telecom policy and programs and ensures that benefits apply equally to women and men.

- a survey of the social and gender impacts of the introduction of IT on women in Vietnam, especially on the labour market; findings were presented to decision-makers and are being integrated into policies.
- media monitoring, training of journalists and media policymakers, and educational workshops linking violence in the media and gender violence in society, by Women's Media Watch — Jamaica.