

CONTENT DISCONTENT

TOWARDS A FAIR PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA



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INSTRAW

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IN THE MEDIA

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Diana Burns
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PREFACE

It has often been said that information is power. If that is true, it is equally true to say that the mass media have an even wider power, since as well as providing us with information, they also entertain us. Modern media are the gate-keepers of messages of all kinds. They are able to reach our minds, hearts and senses --an awesome power. But with that power should come responsibility.

INSTRAW is the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. In the course of our work, it has become increasingly obvious that there is concern among many people worldwide over the way women and men are portrayed in the media. During the past decade, those taking part in international meetings concerned with increasing women's participation in society have pointed to the discrepancy between the media treatment of women and men and the reality.

No matter where in the world they come from, people have reported the same problem --that men and women are not only covered differently by the media, but that coverage is frequently both unrealistic and unfair. That is why we have called this handbook "Content Discontent". Many people are not content with much of the contents of the mass media.

We believe improvements can be made. We are not trying to push a "woman-first" agenda. Nor will we try to thrust any dogma down unwilling throats.

Instead, in this handbook we will present the arguments and the issues, and offer some practical suggestions on how fairer portrayal of both sexes might be achieved.

Who is this handbook for? For people working in the media who have some say over what is printed or broadcast. That includes journalists working in news, current affairs, sport, documentaries and features, regardless of the medium.

In radio and television, it includes the producers, directors, editors, script-writers and story-liners who create the programmes. In newspapers and magazines, we are aiming to reach the chief reporters, sub-editors, photo editors and designers who decide not only what is to be printed, but also how it will look, and what headlines or illustrations will accompany it. Editors, programmers and managers from all media must also be included, since they have the power to decide what the public will finally see or hear.

Finally, we want to talk to the Boards of Directors, the policy makers and the Heads of the media organizations. In some cases these will be Government Ministers and Departments, in others private companies. Even if they have no direct involvement in the day-to-day running of the media, their general directives and policies can ensure fairer portrayal and treatment of both sexes in the media --or not.

Our aim is not to limit or censor the mass media in any way. This handbook is about proving that there is currently an imbalance in the way women are covered by the media, and trying to improve both the quality and quantity of coverage. This does not mean that all stories, articles and programmes about women must be favourable and glowing, nor that women should be portrayed in ways that do not reflect reality. That would be patently absurd.

It does mean reflecting the full scope of women's and men's lives --something almost all media aim to do-- and getting some positive changes so that more of the world's readers, viewers and listeners will be more content with media content.

The preparation of this handbook was initiated in 1993 by the then Director of INSTRAW, Margaret Shields, and the Chief of Research and Training, Pari Soltan Mohammadi. The handbook is an output of the project "Development of Communication Materials on Women and Development" funded by the Government of Italy. It is a pleasure for me to see their efforts materialized in this edition prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Equality, Development and Peace.

Martha Dueñas-Loza
Acting Director, INSTRAW
September, 1995

INTRODUCTION

A UFO from Mars landed on Earth recently (in an unspecified location) and the Martians inside wanted to study the culture of Earthlings. They decided to do this by listening to the radio, watching television and reading newspapers and magazines from all over the planet. This is a summary of the report they sent home (in rough translation):

There are major differences between the male and female of the human species. He is active, decisive and obviously in control of his world. His work, his recreation and what he says are all important. He has his emotions totally under control, and often has to tell the female what to do.

We found it harder to get information about her. She seems to be a passive creature, interested mostly in the home and family, and in making herself beautiful to keep her man happy. There are a few females who seem to be as successful as men, but they are rare. The female is highly emotional, and seems to get great pleasure from cleaning and cooking. She does little outside the home, and is less intelligent than the male.

All right, Martians did not land. But if they had, they could have formed impressions not too dissimilar to these from the way women and men are portrayed in the media.

Few of us would argue that such statements tell the truth about women and men.

It may seem dated to you. These accusations about gender bias used to be made in the radical sixties and seventies, but surely we have moved on from there? The media these days do not treat women so badly....do they?

The truth is, these impressions could easily be gleaned from many media today- despite the progress made. In fact, research evidence on this subject from around the world shows that the amount and type of coverage of women in the mainstream media has increased remarkably little in the last twenty years.

In the past, advertising has been looked at particularly critically for the way it shows both women and men in limited, stereotyped roles. But what appears around the advertisements - the content- was not so carefully analysed.

That is what we look at in this handbook: not at commercials, but at the information and entertainment presented in the mainstream media. This material arguably has more influence than advertising does, precisely because of its different purpose and the different way it is received by its audience.

Why is this so important? Because of the undeniable power of the mass media, and their ability to reach into people's homes and lives. Children learn from what they see and hear, and adults too have attitudes and ideas shaped and reinforced. The media have an important role in setting the agenda of what is considered important and what (or who) is ignored. The power of the media is discussed in Chapter 1.

Though most media argue that they are merely reflecting social reality, there is evidence that in fact they lag behind reality, still holding to and putting across outdated ideas about women and men. This is changing, but not fast or deep enough. In Chapter 1 we go through some of the common statements made by media people, and answer them.

So do the media present a distorted picture? The international picture makes that clear, as Chapters 2 and 3 show.

Women feature less than men in the world's media, and in some areas are almost completely invisible. No country in the world where studies of media coverage by gender have been done --and that includes dozens of countries, both developed and developing-- routinely has more than 20% of news about women. In some countries, the percentage falls as low as 4%.

Stereotyping of roles is still rife. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the under-representation and mis-representation of women in the media has been both systematic and universal.

In Chapter 4, we discuss who pull in the strings in the media --who holds the power. In all countries, and in all branches of the media, the media power-brokers are overwhelmingly male. But international trends towards greater privatization and for the media to be owned by ever fewer people is also having a negative effect on the portrayal of women.

In Chapter 5, we argue that women are a huge potential audience who are being largely ignored by the media.

Arguments about fairness and balance may do little to change the media's coverage of women and men, but commercial considerations should. Women are not only half of the media public, but generally control the domestic purse strings, making up to 80% of all purchases. It stands to reason that if they feel ignored or excluded by programming or content, they will be less engaged and may take their attention and their purchasing power elsewhere.

Chapter 6 deals with women as experts and commentators. It is still rare for women to appear in these roles, and this chapter makes the case for more.

Despite the increasing numbers of women in the paid workforce, they are seriously under-represented as professionals by the media. Women have also not had the same opportunities as men in the media, often confined to "pink collar ghettos" and lower-level positions where they have less influence. There are still few women in high status positions in the media. Chapter 7 deals with women in the media workforce.

Because language is a reflection of culture, the words the media use to describe women and men are important. The language used can exclude or alienate people --particularly women. This is covered in Chapter 8.

This is designed to be an action manual, so we have included some practical suggestions of what you can do to improve the way your area of the media treat women and men. There's also a checklist of simple questions people in different branches of the media can ask

themselves, to make sure that their good intentions of treating gender issues better do not fade and die in the face of daily work pressures.

We talk here constantly about "the media" as if they were faceless organizations. But the media are, of course, made up of individuals like you. Representing gender better in the media allows for a win/win situation. The

media win because half, if not all, of their audience is more satisfied and at ease with the way it is portrayed. Women and men win because they see themselves and their concerns reflected back to them with greater clarity and honesty.

We hope this handbook will help you create such a win/win scenario in your work.

1

THE POWER OF THE MEDIA

POWER PLAY

To most people, the mass media are the single most powerful means in the world today of influencing attitudes, beliefs and lifestyles. Television, radio, films, magazines and newspapers are not only universal, but now form a vital part of most people's lives. But those of us who are immersed in the daily pressures of journalistic work can easily overlook that power.

It is hard to quantify the power of the media - partly because it grows daily. In 1987 there were an estimated one thousand million radios in the world; one for every four people on the earth at that time (Gallagher 1987). Since then, one can assume that the ratio has increased.

Despite the fact that there are still large numbers of people in some developing countries who have not been taught to read, newspapers and magazines still reach many millions of people world-wide. Films and videos can be seen even in remote villages these days. But it is television which has attracted more attention and criticism than any other medium. Its undeniable fascination and appeal, its ability to bring the world into our homes and to make us respond emotionally as well as rationally, leads to its awesome power.

INCREASING IMPACT WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY

The new communications technologies which are now mushrooming around the globe, are greatly increasing the mass media's impact.

Satellite broadcasting covers most of the world - even those smaller states which do not have their own television systems - yet effective systems do not yet exist to regulate and control satellite reception. Some countries are trying to impose such controls - Malaysia, Singapore and China, for example, have placed bans on individuals owning private satellite dishes. Most satellite systems can beam down at least 30 channels, vastly increasing the sheer amount of material available to those who can receive it.

Here, when we use the phrase "mass media" we include both the more traditional forms of the media and those arising from the new technology.

INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

Millions of people depend on the mass media for information and entertainment. More than that, there is increasing evidence that the media have the power to make people see things differently, and even to change ideas and values. If the mass media are powerful, of which there seems little doubt, then those who work in them are also bound to consider the effects of the power they wield.

THE PRINCIPLE OF FAIRNESS

Honesty and integrity are part of the international ethics of the news media, even though commercial considerations sometimes overpower them. Even in the fictional and entertainment media, most countries have a policy, whether official or unspoken, that material produced not be damaging to people. Fairness is one of the abiding principles in most media. Yet women do not usually get a fair deal in the world's media, either in the way they are portrayed, the amount of portrayal they get, or as members of the media workforce.

THE EVIDENCE

From the huge and on-going body of international research on the mass media which now exists, it is possible to say that women in general have been poorly served by the mass media.

While early research was mainly concerned with directly comparing the coverage of women and men in the media through the number and type of references made to each sex, more recent research has concentrated on the media's agenda-setting role (Gallagher 1992). That is, what is included and given prominence, and what is not. The power of the media extends not only to what is covered, but also to what is omitted.

Studies of the subject made a huge leap forward during the 1980s. Researchers no longer saw the human mind as a "blank slate onto which media images were directly imprinted", says Margaret Gallagher, but recognized that human beings already carry

with them the "baggage" of knowledge, preferences and pre-dispositions. Nevertheless Gallagher argues that the media is "deeply implicated" in defining reality (ibid.).

Except for issues related to fashion, family and health, women's news and views are rarely on the media agenda.

MEDIA - SETTING THE AGENDA

It is difficult to prove a direct causal link between what is conveyed in the media and people's behaviour. However, a large number of studies on how audiences receive messages have shown an undeniable link between media messages and behaviour.

Most researchers now believe that looking for cause and effect is a dead-end street. It is more important, they say, to look at the part the media plays in shaping what is taken-for-granted in society. However, experimental evidence does exist which shows that children --and by extension, adults-- are strongly affected by seeing stereotyped image (Pingree and Parker 1980).

In studies of the effects of television, it has been shown that the more television people watched, the more traditional were their values and aspirations (Morley 1992; Cumberbatch and Howitt 1989). These studies have found that children learn from television, and sometimes model their behaviour after examples seen on TV. Television has even been found to alter real life perceptions (Gallagher 1981).

GUIDE TO BEHAVIOUR

A study by Venezuelan researchers in 1991 confirmed that in Latin America, images and

language used in the media act as a guide to behaviour which adults imitate (CONAC/ CISFEM 1991). Television, in particular, they found to be almost as effective at teaching behaviour as what people learn from their own experience. A 1992 study by Thomas Tufte on the effects of soap operas in Brazil reached similar conclusions, as did a 1989 study in Mexico by Olga Bustos Romero of the effects of television soap operas on adolescents and women (Tufte 1992; Bustos Romero 1989). In the United States, a 1991 study by Andrea Press found that working-class women particularly identified with situations they saw in the media, and applied solutions they found there to their real-life problems (Press 1991).

Most of us would readily admit that we do not need concrete research to convince us of the media's power. Our own experience has shown us that such power is real.

The media not only encourage us to form certain views, but also to change them readily. Look, for example, at how Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has been portrayed over the last few years. When he became President of Iraq in 1979, many international media portrayed him as the new voice of moderation and reason in the Middle East. He was described by London's Guardian newspaper in 1979 as a "new Tito", and by the New York Times as having a "strong image which symbolises his new Iraq". There were few critical articles about this new "friend of the West", despite Hussein's role in the killing of 21 of his former colleagues shortly after he came to power.

But once the Gulf War began, Saddam Hussein was portrayed as an evil monster.

With the charge lead by the news organizations in the United States, most of the international media conveyed reports portraying Hussein as an immoral madman --the opposite of what they had said about him earlier. Whether or not there was an actual change in Hussein's behaviour, it is nonetheless true that the media not only shape people's ideas, but also encourage them to forget information that they previously believed was true.

THE MEDIA AS PIANO PLAYERS

As someone involved in the media, you will know that your profession has been blamed for many of modern society's ills. In developing countries, the media have been blamed for the breakdown of long-held community values and national identities. In Western countries, they have been accused of making the culture bland and uniform, and for promoting consumerism.

People who defend the media, including many of us who work in them, say that this is all a huge over reaction. The media do no more than reflect reality, the argument goes. Societies and cultures are going through major change and upheaval for which the media cannot be blamed. Electronic and print media hold a mirror up to society, and let it see its own image. To blame the media for the problems of modern society is like killing the messenger because you did not like the message...or shooting the piano player because you did not like the tune.

The media's job is to look objectively at what is going on in the world and report on it, they say. To place blame on the media for the problems of modern society is not only naive

and unrealistic, but also counter-productive. It is certainly not the stance of this handbook. Rather, we hope you will use the information and ideas presented here as a stimulus for looking at how women and men are treated in your own area of the media --and do something about it.

The Media's Role - Some Common Views

The media are just reflecting reality

News, documentaries, non-fiction and current affairs all exist to let the audience know what is going on in the world; to 'tell it as it is'. But whose reality do we get? This is not the place to get into a metaphysical discussion of what is reality. But even in factual material, there is always a point of view.

In the world's mainstream media, that point of view has inevitably been male. That is partly because it is still predominantly men who make the key decisions on what will be covered.

The unspoken values given to different issues decide what is considered news worthy, and what is not. Subjects which directly concern most women (education, childcare, and health, for example) receive scant serious coverage in the world's mainstream media.

While it is true that women have still not achieved full equality anywhere in the world, and in most countries lag way behind men in their treatment, the media are on shaky ground if they try to argue that the poor media representation of women simply reflects that inequality. In fact, there is strong evidence

that the media have largely ignored the changes that have taken place over the last few years, which have brought more women into the paid workforce than ever before, more women into decision-making roles in their jobs, and into a wide range of non-traditional work areas. Women in both developing and developed countries are frequently the head of the household, and play an active role in politics, the economy (particularly the informal economy), trade, commerce, industry...in other words, in most of the areas traditionally seen as male preserves.

Yet women's involvement in these areas is rarely reflected in news and current affairs coverage. It is this which has led many critics to call the mass media "essentially conservative". According to Indian researcher R. Akhileshwari, the media promote "the status quo of women; they have taken on the role of the fundamentalist" (Akhileshwari 1987).

In 1985, UNESCO checked on progress made in the portrayal of gender in the media since its earlier studies in the 1970s. It found little improvement (UNESCO 1989).

News and current affairs are about treating subjects objectively, not subjectively as some women would have us do

It was once said that objectivity really meant "my way of seeing things is the real way".

Most journalists are taught that one of the basic laws of good reporting is that the reporter's own opinions should not be evident in the story; that a news story or documentary should be objective. Fair enough. But that does not take

account of the deeper issues, such as who decided that the story should be covered in the first place, and the approach that would be taken to it.

There are values operating when decisions are made to cover stories, how much column space or air time to give them, and the style used. These values may be unconscious, but they exist nonetheless. The people making the decisions (the executive producers, directors, editors, chief reporters, bureau chiefs and so on) are usually men, and their understanding of what will be of interest to the public is rarely challenged. After all, they have spent years learning their craft and developing a good 'nose' for a story. They know instinctively which stories sell newspapers or bring in the ratings.

But old ideas about what makes news need to be expanded. News noses need to learn to smell new smells if they are not going to miss out on half of the perfumes in the garden.

By reporting what is being said, we help people to keep up with the play

Keep up with the play, or create it?

In her book *Backlash*, journalist Susan Faludi says that the media "decided" that modern women's quest for independence and quality was not natural, and was to blame for increases in female infertility, loneliness, unhappiness and mental illness (Faludi 1991). She accuses the United States media of calling in so-called "gurus" (such as pop psychologists and infertility experts) to back up their case, conveniently overlooking the fact that these

people were poised to make a juicy profit out of such "conditions".

Faludi uses the phrase "trend journalism" to describe news coverage which claims to be reporting on sweeping social change, but which actually gives its own opinions. Trend journalism, says Faludi, while "...pretending to take the public pulse, monitors only its own heartbeat --and its advertisers" (ibid.).

Whether or not you agree with her, couched in Faludi's strong language is the well-researched argument that the mass media have played more than a passive role in trying to get women to give up their ideas of professional and personal equality with men, and to get back home. It can be argued, as Faludi and others do, that the media have, historically, worked hand-in-hand with those groups and organizations in society which have had an interest in holding back women's progress towards equality.

This is by no means just a Western phenomenon. In Zambia, an article appeared in the *Sunday Times* in 1992 which criticized women's campaigning for forthcoming elections. They should, the paper said, be venturing into "more productive sectors of the economy". It continued "...as long as our women continue to shun hard work in preference for luxurious portfolios and trade, their much-wanted bagful of hypocrisy" (Longwe and Clarke 1992). However, citing this example, researchers Longwe and Clarke say that this follows a well-worn theme "...that women's development is nothing to do with women's equality, and that women's development is concerned with getting women to work harder --they are not pulling their weight!" (ibid).

The accepted definitions of "newsworthy" and "what works" may well reflect only what men have traditionally seen as important, ignoring the female perspective. It is time for a redefinition of what makes news.

We do not ignore women's issues. We cover them when they warrant it. But women have to see that if they want coverage, then they have to offer up hard news, not soft news

This is closely related to the discussion of subjective and objective news, above. The topics which are universally defined as "hard news" include national and international politics, war, commerce, finance, large-scale agriculture, industrial issues, disaster, conflict, sport and new technology. "Soft news" usually incorporates education, culture, the environment, domestic issues, lifestyle, children, animals, fashion, recreation and human interest.

Interestingly, health used to be seen as a "soft" subject until relatively recently. But the debates now taking place in many countries over how to reduce the increasing percentage of public funds that health care requires, has pushed health into the "hard" economic sphere, and expanded its traditional human interest orientation.

The subjects which the media see as "hard" all come within the sphere which has traditionally been male --what has been called the "large world" of public life, as opposed to women's traditionally "small world" of home, family and private life.

"Hard news" is the news that is found on the front page of the paper, or at the top of the news bulletin. "Soft news" has a lower profile and

is readily relegated to a lowly position or dropped altogether when more "hard news" comes to take priority.

Former United States President Richard Nixon once said "whether you are on page one or thirty depends on whether they fear you. It is as simple as that."

It seems that women, who mostly only make soft news if they feature at all, have not been sufficiently feared by the media!

The way the media convey stories is tried and true, and it works. We give the public what they want

If that is true, why has there been a far greater fall-off of women as newspaper readers and buyers internationally than there has been of men over the last few years? Why have the relatively few television programmes and films made in the last few years showing strong, independent women, or men showing their "softer side" and looking after children, been so popular world-wide? Why do so many radio stations report high female listenership to discussion and current affairs programmes which branch out into unorthodox issues like prostitution, or women in agriculture?

While the reasons for these changes are many and varied, it is clear that there is a vast audience which has not been adequately served by the media. It thirsts for wider information which incorporates women's and men's broad experience, and entertainment which satisfies people's need to see themselves reflected in more diverse roles.

The media surveys which determine audience tastes are usually limited to asking about programmes, formats or styles that already exist. It is hard for audiences to express a preference for something that they have never seen or heard. But there are enough examples now of positive audience responses to non-traditional media content to show that it is time for the media to move; that in most countries they are lagging behind public attitudes.

If stereotypes are put across in the media, it is in the commercials, not in the editorial or programme content

It is true that commercials have been particularly blatant in their use of stereotypes about women and men. That could be because they find it easiest to convey short, simple sales messages by using conventional forms.

Advertising has long been a popular target for attention for that reason. But less attention has been paid to the material between the advertisements, the editorial and programme content, which is after all the reason why the audience buys the paper or magazine, or turns on the radio or television.

Non-commercial content still promotes certain lifestyles and values, but much more subtly. It also has vastly more column inches and airtime in which to do it.

It is not up to the media to campaign for women's equality. We are not there to represent any interest group

It would be inappropriate, and a dangerous incursion into press freedom, to expect the

mass media to campaign on behalf of women. Other than those publications or programmes with a declared point of view, the media's job is not to favour any particular group or sector. But this is the point. In the current situation, one sex is being favoured out of all proportion to reality. As it stands, the vast bulk of news and entertainment coverage in the media is primarily for and about men. As half of the world's population, women's needs and views are as diverse as those of men. What is needed is for the current imbalance that exists in the media to be recognized and corrected.

Entertainment programmes or writing do not have to be socially responsible, their role is just to entertain. What is wrong with fantasy and fun?

Nothing. But it would be naive to suggest that programmes that appear to be realistic (such as soap operas, situation comedies and dramas), or which show real situations (such as sport) do not convey social messages while they entertain.

The results of a 1991 Venezuelan study, which found that television drama and "telenovelas" (soap operas) were watched by women and men partly as a guide to possible behaviour, were reinforced by 1993 studies carried out for INSTRAW in the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Argentina (CONAC/CISFEM 1991; Bonder and Zurutuza 1993; Alvear 1993; Cordero 1993).

While the media do not and should not have to convey only socially acceptable messages, they need to be aware of the powerful effects of the hidden messages --those which are conveyed, and received, unconsciously.

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2

WOMEN: MISREPRESENTED OR MISSING

If we look at the numbers of women appearing in the press, broadcasting and film all over the world, whether as newsmakers or as fictional characters, it is clear that as a sex, women are still severely underrepresented despite the advances made over the last thirty years (Communications Research Associates 1991; UNESCO 1989).

Just as importantly, women when they do make it into the media, are usually confined to limited roles and images. In other words, there are still problems with both the quantity and the quality of women's portrayal.

In 1989, the Australian Government set up a Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media. When this group reported in 1993, it had found that women were "still grossly underrepresented in the media", and still portrayed in only a narrow range of roles (Australian Office of the Status of Women 1993).

There were three main areas in which the report found women to be either underrepresented or misrepresented: as experts and presenters; as professional and businesswomen; and as decision-makers in the media. With few exceptions, these same three areas of poor portrayal of women hold true all over the world.

WOMEN AS PRESENTERS

In developed countries, it may seem as though women have achieved all they need to in terms of the numbers of visible women presenters.

In the United Kingdom, women regularly lead the news broadcasts and it is not unknown for the conventional newsreading "couple" to consist of two women. The same is true in several European countries. However this has been described as "powerless visibility". It misleads people into thinking women are more powerful in the media than they actually are.

Although there has been a percentage increase in the number of female newsreaders in many countries, males still appear far more often than women. They also perform most of the radio and television voice-overs or commentaries where authority needs to be conveyed.

Women are often used as 'hostesses', or when some glamour is wanted. But when its time to show that the subject is serious and important, it is still usually a man who gets the job of presenting it.

WOMEN AS PROFESSIONALS

World-wide statistics show that women are an important part of the workforce, but you would be hard-pressed to know it from the media. An overwhelming body of research now shows that compared to how many women are actually part of the workforce, all media underrepresent women's involvement in the workforce (UNESCO 1989).

Where they appear at all, working women are portrayed by most media in a limited range of "female" jobs: cook, secretary, model, nurse, teacher, and so on.

Such roles have come to be known as "pink collar ghettos" because the large proportion of women who work in them means they are paid less than traditionally male jobs.

There has been an increase internationally in the number of women who own and run their own small business --in some western countries women are now a third of all employers. However in entertainment programmes or fictional writing, it is still relatively rare for women to be portrayed as employers or in positions of authority, such as businesswoman, scientist or pilot.

However, some media have made positive efforts to break these stereotypes. The high-powered lawyers in the popular American television series "LA Law", or the female palaeontologist in Stephen Spielberg's acclaimed and popular film "Jurassic Park" are recent examples.

Positive portrayals of working women tend to occur in programmes, publications or films which are highly successful. It is not far-fetched to infer that they are so successful in large part because audiences (both female and male) find it so refreshing to see realistic, strong, intelligent women characters, and men who are allowed to have a heart as well as a mind.

WOMEN AS DECISION-MAKERS

In real life both women and men make important decisions. In fact it could be argued that because women traditionally organize the home and the family, they actually make more important decisions on a daily basis than most men do. Yet this is not generally shown in the media.

Entertainment programmes and articles still tend to portray women as weak and indecisive, and dependant on men (whether husbands, lovers, friends or fathers) to help them know what to do (Media Report to Women 1991).

The obvious exception to this is the genre of women as "superbitch", as seen in many television soap operas. Here, the woman may be resolute and decisive, but she is also hard, unfeeling and generally nasty. There are few positive portrayals of women in decision-making roles.

The factual media do not treat women decision-makers much better. Even when women have reached undeniable power (such as Prime Minister or head of a major organization) they tend to get referred to in ways that reinforce how unusual this is.

Thus, Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister of Great Britain, was uniformly referred to as "Maggie", even when the same sentence referred to her counterpart Ronald Reagan by his surname. She was also dubbed "the Iron Lady". What male leader would have been always called "the Iron Gentleman", or by his first name? No matter what their position, women are still seen as women first, and treated differently because of their sex.

Hilary Rodham Clinton, wife of the President of the United States, has attracted unprecedented attention since her husband's election. The public's, and media's, fascination with her power and ability has been mixed with considerable ambivalence and grudging admiration.

Hilary Rodham Clinton does not fit into the expected mould of the passive "First Lady", and the many light-hearted and satirical references to her repeated by the media reflect the general unease with a powerful woman who cannot be easily stereotyped.

WOMEN AS VICTIMS

Violence, and the fear of it, has become a part of many women's lives. Not only because they suffer from it directly (although many do) but also because they are constantly confronted by it in the media.

Many media have a fascination with violence --partly because it has been proven to sell newspapers, and boost ratings. But headlines like the one from the Melbourne Sun's story on June 26, 1992 ("Spinster hacked up in blood frenzy") appear in many of the world's papers almost daily. Such headlines help to create a climate of fear amongst women, without helping them to know what to do to avoid or prevent such violence.

Similarly, much of the media's reporting of violence uses the passive voice (as in "woman brutally raped in park") which tends to dehumanise the crime, and puts the focus on the woman rather than the person who committed it.

A recent British study found that presenting violence on screen causes real fear amongst women. Women studied found television violence "disturbing" and "offensive" rather than "exciting" or "entertaining" (Schlesinger 1992). This suggests that television programmers may need to rethink some of

their buying and placement decisions if they want to attract and keep female audiences.

Much reporting of violence against women also focuses on "stranger danger", when it is known that the vast majority of rapes and crimes of violence against women are carried out by a family member or someone known to the woman.

The way most crimes of violence against women are currently reported reinforces stereotypes about women, which are then amplified in dramas and soap operas. This is particularly so in Latin America, where the Women's Feature Service reports an undue emphasis by the media on violence, which tends to make women appear weak and helpless.

Violence is a difficult issue for the media. It is hard to cover it well, and not sensationalize it. But too often the present coverage makes women appear to be passive victims, or suggests that the woman must have done something to deserve it.

The media need to avoid using violence in ways that glorify it, or could titillate their audience. This does not mean avoiding coverage of violence against women --it is a serious issue which needs to be brought into the open and discussed.

But instead of just reporting on court cases or from the police reports, the media could carry stories which are constructive and help women and men to understand and avoid violence.

The recently-launched New York daily newspaper for women, *Her*, includes a column which aims to do just that. "Street Smarts" says that because crime styles evolve as fast as do seasonal fashions, it will try to keep readers "abreast of the latest crime trends and the best way to combat them" --a positive development (Sliwa, LM 1993).

SPORT - DO WOMEN PLAY IT?

Not according to most media. Women's sport attracts low coverage (an average of 4.2% of all sports coverage in most Western media, less in most developing countries) and often appears to be used as filler material, which is not given high status in where it is placed by the media and is easily dropped (New Zealand Southland Times 1992). Women sports reporters who receive the credit of a by-line in the press, or who are heard and seen on air in the electronic media, are rare.

In New Zealand, Newspaper Editor-turned-academic Judy McGregor carried out in 1991 a study of women's sport in that country's press. While almost equal numbers of males and females in the country play some form of

sport, McGregor found this reality was by no means faithfully reflected. The newspaper sports sections allocated only 10% of their space to women's sport. Sportswomen were similarly ignored by the papers' photographers, featuring in only around 7% of the photographs that appeared (McGregor and Melville 1991).

The types of sport covered also showed a clear bias. Relatively minor male sports received more attention than major women's sports in most papers. New Zealand, in common with most other countries, has very few women sports journalists working in print.

The neglect of women in the media coverage of sport -which is worldwide- is a form of stereotyping because it implies women are less important than men, their participation in sport is less significant and their challenges less dramatic.

In Spain, women's field hockey was practically unknown in the media --until Spain won the gold medal in the 1992 Olympic Games. It was a surprise to most of the public that the country had such a high standard in the sport. The media had certainly not told them so.

3

PORTRAYING WOMEN AND MEN IN THE MEDIA

WOMEN AND MEN ON TELEVISION

- **How much coverage**

In primetime television, across all Western countries, men outnumber women by at least 2 to 1. In 1992, 35 researchers from the United States monitored that country's three major television networks: ABC, CBS and NBC. The idea was to compare the media's portrayal of women with a 1974 study. The results were disturbing. Straight news stories about women declined in those 18 years from 10% of the news content to just 3%. Features about women went down from 16% to 15%. The proportion of female voices also decreased from 17% to 16% (Communications Research Associates 1992).

The researchers, quoted in "Media Report to Women" said that "...when women do appear in news stories, they are frequently victims of accidents or violence, relatives of males in power, or stereotypes that trivialize any activity that might be described as productive to society". (ibid.)

Even more surprising is the lack of progress that has been made in the last 40 years. According to American Demographics, in 1954 68% of primetime television characters were male. In 1987, this figure had changed to 65% (American Demographics 1992).

- **What sort of coverage**

If we talk about quality of portrayal, the picture is not much better. Researchers have found that the most common traits of men on television drama are strength, forcefulness, decisiveness, self-reliance and dominance. Women's most common traits were analysed as meekness, gullibility, weakness, lack of confidence and submissiveness.

Despite some scattered breakthroughs by women, men still dominate the small screen. In their 1990 book *What's Wrong With This Picture?*, America's National Commission on Working Women reported that "...TV's universe is at odds with reality. In the real world, women don't disappear at age 40, they don't wear bikinis when they answer the door, and they rarely need to be rescued" (Steenland 1990).

One of the major changes in many countries in the last thirty years has been increasing numbers of men sharing in domestic tasks and childcare. Yet American Demographics for 1992 show that the way television shows the division of labour between the sexes is badly skewed. Only 3% of men on primetime television are shown doing domestic work, compared with 20% of women (American Demographics 1992).

Italian researcher Milly Buonanno examined television between 1988-1990. She found that the protagonists were exclusively male, and though there was an increasing tendency towards male anti-heroes, the male focus had not changed (Buonanno 1991).

- **Positive developments and lost opportunities**

Lifetime, a cable television channel in the United States, has been set up specifically to cater to a female audience, 24 hours a day. More than half of its programming the channel originates itself, and seventy five percent of its staff are women. Its policy is to show nothing which exploits, reinforces stereotypes or encourages violence against women. Although channels are also being set up in other countries to cater for the female audience, not all of them do as well as Lifetime --which has become one of the most-watched cable channels in America. Mexican writer Mercedes Charles, for example, lamented the lost opportunity of a new women's channel called Gems in her country, which shows mostly romantic soap operas and firmly places the Mexican woman in her traditional place -- the home (Communications Research Trends 1992).

- **Telenovelas - the power of soaps**

The cultural phenomenon which has arguably had the most impact in Latin America in the last decade (and the continent's main cultural export to the world in recent times) is telenovelas (soap operas). Argentinian academic Nora Maziotti says they are now the major means by which romantic myths and ideas about the sexes are conveyed in Latin America, and are enormously powerful

(Communications Research Trends 1992). They form their own worlds of reality, she says, and are often confused with real life by their audience. Their biggest audience is women.

It is not just women who are poorly represented by television. A 1991 Belgian study found that television channels there lagged behind reality in the picture they presented of both sexes (Ibid).

WOMEN AND MEN ON RADIO

Radio is arguably the most accessible of the mass media, and in developing countries plays a more important role than any other medium. In India, for example, it reaches an estimated ninety percent of the population (Communications Research Trends 1992).

This is partly because radios are highly portable. Transistor radios are relatively cheap, and can easily be taken into the fields, the office or the street. Many factories have radios playing to provide a more pleasant background noise than just the sound of machinery and to reduce boredom. Radio does not require total attention in the way that television or newspapers do, so many people listen to the radio while they work. It does not require people to be able to read and is particularly important to the elderly, the illiterate and the house-bound.

In Nigeria, a 1992 study found that 96% of the women studied --65% of whom were illiterate-- had access to radio within their household or compound, and 59% within their own rooms. Over two-thirds of the women listened to radio daily (Iman 1992).

Radio has enormous potential to reach people...especially women who are usually

the bottom of the social and industrial heap. However, it has not often realized this potential.

The internationalization of broadcasting networks and technology is having the effect of making radio lose its biggest advantage: its unique ability to identify closely with its audience. Given that radio networks are even more internationally controlled now, this trend has undoubtedly increased. This means that radio in many countries is missing the opportunity of playing its winning card --the ability to really affect people's lives...and so increase its audience.

This challenge was taken up by a Peruvian radio station, broadcasting to Indian women in the Cuzco region. Writer Irmela Riedlberger found that the station was able to successfully communicate with its largely illiterate audience through turning the women listeners' own issues and problems into melodramatic stories, which allowed the women to view their experience from a different perspective (Riedlberger, 1991).

Radio generally tries hard to identify with its listeners, as the huge number of community radio stations that exist around the world proves. But radio could play an even more important role if it gave its listeners information they could use in their daily lives, as well as entertaining them in ways that reflect their experience.

It is clear that, as in other media, a male view of the world has dominated radio and lead to women being largely marginalized. Women are primarily heard on radio soap operas, songs, or women's programmes. They do not

feature heavily on the news or in sports coverage. Talkback radio, where people can phone in to put across their point of view on the subject being discussed, has become commonplace in the developed world. However it is still largely male voices that are heard giving their opinions.

WOMEN AND MEN IN NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers still play an important role in covering in-depth stories and issues. Despite losing audience to the electronic media, papers still carry prestige. They are seen by many people as the most serious and detailed source of information.

Print is the cheapest and most durable of the mass media, therefore it should be the most accessible. But even when they can read, women are missing. According to UNESCO, in 1990 there were from 50% to 70% more female illiterates than male in every continent (UNESCO 1990).

The photographs which accompany articles can be telling. The Women's Feature Service notes that when an interview is published with a woman well known for her professional success, the accompanying photo will often be taken of her sitting at home, or somewhere that provides no visual link with her career. "Women are shown in their private and personal world far more often than are men. This has the effect of visually removing the woman from the public sphere", says journalist Thais Aguilar (Personal communications).

In both words and in pictures, women are greatly underrepresented in the world's newspapers.

When the column inches have been totted up and the photographs counted, women have been found to be getting a raw deal everywhere. Women get more mention in newspapers as reporters than as interview subjects. Women rarely feature as the main subject of the story or article, and even less commonly as experts.

- **Indian Bride-burning**

In India, the newspapers have been apathetic about covering some of the crucial social issues which affect women, according to researcher Akhileshwari (Akhileshwari 1987). She reported that women rarely feature on the front page of a newspaper there unless it is a gruesome murder or a case of bride-burning (the husband's family burning the bride because they were either dissatisfied with the dowry or do not want to have to pay her keep for life).

However, another Indian researcher points out that women journalists in India have helped to put some important issues onto the news agenda; not only the more sensational ones like dowry deaths and bride burning, but also exploitation of women labourers in the unorganized sector, adoption, female drug addiction, the unequal status of girl children, rape and child abuse have all been covered by female reporters (Jha 1992). "Not that they never happened before", said Rama Jha, "but the news coverage brought the enormity of these problems to light" (ibid.)

WOMEN'S PAGES - PROS AND CONS

Debate is raging in some countries over women's pages in newspapers. They appear to

be making a comeback, as papers try desperately to attract back the women readers they have been losing in droves over the last twenty years. In the United States, female readership of newspapers went down 18% between 1973 and 1991. The jury is still out on whether this is a positive or negative development.

NEWSPAPER FOR WOMEN - A NEW DEVELOPMENT

On October 1, 1993, a new newspaper for women hit New York's newsstands. *Her*, a tabloid daily, describes itself as "the majority newspaper" (reflecting the fact that, in New York at least, women make up 53% of the population). Publisher Steven Hoffenberg says that he found it "impossible to convince most editors (male of course) to give major space and attention to women's news or subjects of interest to women. Those subjects, they argued, were "fluff" and not the stuff of serious journalism."

The paper has promised to deliver hard, breaking stories and fresh (female) perspectives on such mainstream issues as politics, finance, business, parenting, fashion and entertainment. Honourable intentions, to be sure --and ones which show that some newspaper publishers are at last waking up to the fact that there is a large untapped female readership out there. (See Chapter 5: Money Talks.)

WOMEN AND MEN IN MAGAZINES

It is hardly surprising that women feature prominently in women's magazines, both as the subjects and as the journalists and editors, given that these magazines are aimed specifically at a female market.

What is perhaps more surprising is that even when the editor and deputy editor of women's magazines are female, women are still virtually non-existent on the boards which have the ultimate control over these magazines.

A wide range of women's magazines exist in the world, covering a range of styles and tastes from traditional to feminist. In traditional mainstream women's magazines, more than half of the articles feature men: the attracting, winning, keeping and understanding of them. A high proportion of the photographs feature men (up to 40% in some women's magazines), and most of them will have been taken by men.

Women's magazines generally convey traditional messages about the sexes and encourage women to accept narrow definitions of femininity -even when they seem to be sexually liberated and "modern", like the international *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

According to a Latin American report of the Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres (CIM 1983), the values promoted in women's magazines have little to do with the realities of Latin American women's lives. It is true that stories about film and TV stars, fabulous holiday destinations and high fashion filmed in faraway locations has little to do with the daily lives of a majority of Latin American women. However, women's magazines often have more to do with escapism and fantasy than reality.

Nevertheless, there are signs that even traditional women's magazines have made efforts to change, and to take account of women's changing roles in society.

Many have provided positive role models by giving serious coverage to women in non-traditional careers, and discussed some of the problems modern women face as they try to balance home, career, family and self. Even the mainstream women's magazines in Latin America have broadened the range of articles they cover. *Vanidades*, and *Buen Hogar* are examples of Latin American magazines which now regularly cover economics, career advancement and the "large world" outside the home --though without forsaking their traditionally feminine orientation.

That is more than can be said for general interest and news magazines, which give women about the same amount of coverage as newspapers do: up to a maximum of 20% of what men receive.

PORTRAYAL OF THE "NEW MAN" IN THE MEDIA

In North America in recent years, several feature films, stories, radio and television programmes have featured men who seem to break many of the stereotypes of masculinity. Traditionally, men have been as confined to limited roles as women have. They have been expected to be strong, independent, non-domesticated (mops and fry pans are not things they should be familiar with) and non-emotional.

Dustin Hoffman as the solo-father and care-giver in the film "Kramer vs Kramer" was an example of a man who appeared to break that mould, as were the three bachelors trying to raise a baby girl in "Three Men and a Baby". In "Three Men and a Baby", the humour arises out of the men's difficulties with their new nurturing role and

the clash of this with the expectations we have of them as handsome carefree bachelors. In other words, if it were normal to see men in these roles, it would not be funny.

There are many examples of such "humour" in television situation comedies, dramas and soap operas. Women and men stepping outside their traditional roles is the basic material upon which many comedy shows and articles rely. Thus, weak and sensitive men who can be "bullied" into doing domestic chores are seen as laughable, as are strong, self-possessed women.

According to researcher Robert Hanke, most of the traditional ideas about masculinity are still present in portrayals of the "new man" in the media (Hanke 1992). To say that old fashioned ideas about masculinity and femininity are disappearing is, Hanke maintains, a "progressive fallacy". The media, he argues, may pay lip-service to broader roles for men, but the same narrow stereotypes still persist.

WOMEN'S ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Frustration with the poor coverage they were getting of their concerns in the main media led many women's groups to set up alternative media of their own in the last 30 years.

Many countries have some form of feminist publication, ranging from broadsheets to fully-fledged glossies. Some of these are flourishing, and some have joined the mainstream. In the United States, *Ms* magazine in 1990, after years of struggling with advertisers who tried to control its editorial content, decided to launch a "no advertising"

magazine, funded entirely by sales and subscriptions. The gamble has paid off. *Ms* magazine has survived, and continues to be one of America's largest circulation magazines. In Latin America, *Fempres* (based in Chile) and *Fem* (produced in Mexico) have also achieved relatively high readerships.

While women's alternative media have an important place, guaranteeing that women can control their own messages, they generally speak to a limited audience. Argentinian researchers Gloria Bonder and Cristina Zurutuza say that the time for taking on the role of victims and blaming men has passed (1993). These days, women in the media need to communicate with humour, joy and originality, they say. This is something that most women's alternative media have long realised. There is little earnest hand-wringing to be found in their work, but often an energy and freshness of approach that can serve as a useful source of material for journalists in the mainstream media. (See Action.)

HOW CHILDREN VIEW THE SEXES

Given the lack of representation and the poor coverage of women in the mass media in general, it is not surprising to find the same situation in children's programmes. What is disturbing, however, given the amount of time children in many cultures spend watching television is that children's programmes tend to be more 'sexist' than adult programmes.

A Canadian study backed this up. It found that 78% of human characters in children's dramas were male, and in cartoons where the characters had any identifiable sex, they were 82% male (King 1987).

4

WHO PULLS THE STRINGS?

One third of all developing countries have no national news agency, according to the 1993 publication, *Communication Strategies for Rural Women* (Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura, 1993). In fact, over 90% of the foreign news carried by the world's newspapers is provided by just four major news agencies: United Press International, Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France Press.

However, other agencies with a different approach are having increasing success at breaking into that territory. Inter-Press Service (IPS) is a fast-growing global agency which concentrates on development issues. Based in Rome, IPS has correspondents in some 100 countries. Issues it gives most attention include those which receive scant coverage by the four biggest agencies, such as refugees, human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Women's news services such as FEMPRESS in Latin America and the Women's Feature Service (WFS) world-wide also try to correct the balance and to give a voice to the seldom heard --among whom women are the majority.

Many developing countries are concerned that the news collected by the four largest agencies and printed locally is tailored to Western interests and lifestyle, and is far less appropriate for their own culture.

Around the world, official sources (such as governments and state agencies) supply most of the news content the public hears and sees. Other groups tend to get little coverage, and within those, women get least of all.

Because we are living in the age of international communications, when the media ignore women or disseminate outdated, stereotyped images of them, these can have repercussions all around the world in the way people see each other.

WESTERN MEDIA DOMINATE THE WORLD

Developing countries' dependence on foreign programming and news services impedes any efforts these countries make to create their own media information and entertainment, according to a 1985 UNESCO report, *Communication in the Service of Women*. The report says that heavy reliance on imported media materials and the concentration of media organizations and media professionals in the cities, widens the cultural gap between the educated and affluent urban elites and the rural population (UNESCO 1985).

If rural people generally are left out and poorly served by the media, it is rural women who suffer most.

In terms of what interests us here --the fair and accurate portrayal of both sexes by the media-- it does not necessarily matter whether the media are publicly or privately owned.

What does matter is that, regardless of where the power lies, there be regulations, policies and systems in place to ensure such fair portrayal.

It has frequently been said by those in favour of greater privatization of the media that what is produced by the state-owned media is of lower quality, and that commercial media are more responsive to the audience's demands. However, increasing privatization frequently means that the commercial factors dominate, and that policies designed to improve gender balance go by the wayside. There is little evidence to suggest that greater privatization has led to improved portrayal of women and men in the media.

WHERE WAS THE ORIGINAL SOURCE?

The mass media have always had a tendency to "feed" off each other, picking up on and finding fresh angles for stories which first appeared in another medium. But with so many media now being part of the same big company, this tendency has increased. It is now common for a newspaper, radio or television station from the same stable to repeat a story without going back to the original source.

It is not hard to see how, when the publishing medium had nothing to do with the original story, distortions and inaccuracies can creep in as it is repeated. It can also lead to fiction being passed off as fact, with damaging results.

In her book *Backlash*, journalist Susan Faludi documents several examples of this (Faludi 1991). Throughout the 1980s, for example,

numerous media stories appeared which stated that women were leaving the workforce in droves to devote themselves to motherhood. Each new story quoted the previous ones. But in fact the story was untrue; it was only in 1990 that women started leaving the workforce.

The increasing commercialization of the international media has made some women fearful that the hard-won gains of the 1960s and 1970s are being undercut in the hard-nosed '80s and '90s. Greater privatization of the media threatens the policies some countries had put in place to assist both women working in the media (job security, maternity and child care policies for example) and the overall portrayal of women.

Modern media organizations must be recognized as increasingly privately-owned and profit-motivated transnational businesses.

In the current global political economy, the few huge communications/media organizations have few legal or political restrictions, either nationally or internationally. This lack of accountability makes it all the more important that the people working within them are aware of gender issues, and continually assess the role they play in portraying the sexes.

CONTROL AND SEX

Does the sex of the people who pull the powerful media strings matter? The consensus among the international research is that it does.

In 1893, American journalist Susan B. Anthony said, "As long as newspapers and magazines are controlled by men ...women's ideas and deepest convictions will never get before the public" (Stanton et. al. 1889).

Almost a century later, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission reported in 1983 that in most societies, the male perspective is so prevalent and ingrained that it is accepted as the norm. The Commission stated that women who want their voices to be heard, their events to be given serious coverage, their productions to

be made, or the programmes they want to see or hear be purchased, are seen as asking for special treatment, favours or concessions. In fact, the Commission noted, they are asking for no more than their rights as equal partners in a democratic society and to claim that men's and women's media tastes are the same (and that women will therefore be quite happy with what male bosses in the media select for them) is to fly in the face of known fact. Women have measurably different attitudes, concerns and priorities (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission 1983).

5

MONEY TALKS - THE BOTTOM LINE

What has money to do with the way women and men are portrayed by the media? In the modern world, a great deal. A large part of the world's mass media are commercial; in other words, they depend on advertising revenue to survive and prosper. Advertisers place their sales messages around programmes, stories or articles which research tells them attract the kind of audience they want to reach.

Even the non-commercial media (such as state radio and television in many countries) must be mindful of audience size and composition. If they cannot prove that they are appealing to the public and fulfilling the role that the state sees for them, then they could find their budgets slashed and their future uncertain.

WOMEN'S PURCHASING POWER

Women make up half of the world's population. They also make up half of all consumers, but account for up to 80% of purchases (Faludi 1991). Research shows that in most cultures, women are responsible for making most of the daily purchase decisions (food, clothing and services for example) and play an increasing role in making the major ones as well (such as housing and cars.) In the United States, almost 50% of new car purchases are now made by women, and 60% of new investors in the stock market are female (Bartos 1989).

Because of their usual involvement in organizing the home and children's education, women may also have more direct influence over the family and community than do their male counterparts.

Yet despite their obvious influence and economic importance to advertisers, women are not well catered for by the mass media. As we have discussed in Chapter 3, women are usually either ignored or mistreated by television, press, radio and film.

CATERING FOR WOMEN AUDIENCES

The question must be asked: are the media allowing traditional attitudes to prevent them from reaching female audiences effectively? Are they passing up opportunities to attract women?

The Australians certainly think so. The Office of the Status of Women there has noted that many media organizations may be failing to reach a large number of women because they lack an understanding of the contemporary status, attitudes, motivation and aspirations of women (Australian Office of the Status of Women, 1993).

While special programming for women can do a lot to reach women audiences, it is not enough for producers and programmers to pay lip service to this. Unless a real commitment is made to making such programmes work, they are set up for failure.

Researcher Rosalind Coward found that many different attempts to develop women's programmes on British television have been "allowed to fail" because of lack of resources, poor time slots allocated to them, and a general lack of commitment from management (Coward 1987).

The pressure for most media to attract commercial support has led to a strong tendency for them to deal in words and images which are simple, known and recognizable. Images and phrases showing women as dependant and docile, and men as strong and fearless have become stereotypes, which no longer show more than a small part of reality. Perhaps they never did.

COMMERCIAL MEDIA OVERLOOK HALF OF MARKET

It seems that traditional conservatism is so entrenched in the media that it even overwhelms the obvious logic of marketing to at least 50% of the population --women.

When the media has made an attempt to attract female audiences, it has generally been by adding a fashion supplement or including more recipes, rather than by increasing coverage of the events, activities and viewpoints of women.

In her 1989 book *Marketing to Women: A Global Perspective*, Rena Bartos shows how marketers who cling to outmoded stereotypes of women "...have overlooked a great opportunity" (Bartos 1989). Bartos was talking about advertising, but in the commercial world in which most media operate, her comments stand for the media in general.

Australia's 1993 National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media found that "there is strong evidence to show women will be more attracted to programmes, articles and news which include and accurately reflect women and their world view... Modest improvements in gender balance indicate the opportunity for audience gain, with minimal male audience loss", it said (Australian Office of the Status of Women 1993).

There are numerous examples of this worldwide. In Ireland in 1991, the Irish Times decided to take action to attract back female readers. It appointed a well-known writer (Mary Cummings) as the women's affairs correspondent and gave other distinguished women journalists the right to roam freely outside the traditional female reserve. This added to the work of the female features editor, day editor and two duty editors.

The result has been a major growth in circulation for the paper, and it is still rising. As journalist Yvonne Roberts reported in the *New Statesman and Society* in 1992, "...the spur for this isn't guilt or altruism, it's commercial."

It is not coincidence that those British newspapers (such as the Independent) which use strong female writers have higher female readership. Women writers do not have to be confined to writing about traditional women's subjects to bring a different flavour and perspective to their writing from their male colleagues.

6

WOMEN AS EXPERTS AND COMMENTATORS

WHY DO WE NEED EXPERTS?

The nature of the news and current affairs media is such that there must continually be people who can be quoted in a story, to comment on or explain events. Finding a local person to quote can be a useful way of providing a fresh angle on a story. The severe 1993 floods in the United States, for example, might give a paper in another area the idea of finding out from local authorities or environmentalists how prepared its region would be for such a calamity. Or a new poll suggesting a radical swing away from the Government towards another political party may need fleshing out and interpreting. The media here will be likely to call on social scientists, political analysts, economists or pollsters to discuss it. A majority of stories feature people in authority in some capacity; people we will here call "experts".

Just as they tend to be overlooked as serious subjects of news and current affairs, women are also often ignored as commentators and experts. The media's natural tendency is to veer towards males to fill such roles, even to the extent of ignoring obviously qualified women.

HABIT AND IMAGE

What are the reasons for this? One is habit. As many journalists, chief reporters and programme directors will testify, when they are working under tight time deadlines and need

a comment or quote from someone to give substance to a story, they will go to someone they already know to be reliable.

Naturally, they will also go to people who are well-known to the audience and thus already have an image of authority. Since male experts and commentators are used more often, they are likely to be more experienced and well-known.

In this way it becomes a vicious circle, where women cannot get to be seen as experts because they are not already seen as experts.

GOOD TALENT

Some people in the media will argue that women experts are not used because, as individuals, they are "not good talent."

This means that they are seen to be too hesitant, too stiff or unwilling to come up with a strong, concise statement that can be used and quoted. For radio, people recorded also need to have a clear enough voice to be easily understood. For television and film, a physical appearance which is neither repugnant nor distracting is also an advantage.

It is however hard to believe the argument that women are "bad talent". Male experts are often less than articulate, and long-winded or pompous into the bargain. Few convey human warmth; neither are all of them particularly physically appealing.

It seems that as in other areas of the media, there is a double standard operating for women and men experts. Women are frequently good communicators, able to take into account the human side of any issue.

By ignoring their perspective, the media are making their coverage both less rich and more one-dimensional than it needs to be.

CREDIBILITY

A more insidious reason for so few women experts being seen or heard in the media is that, usually at an unconscious level, some people believe women are less credible. This cuts to the heart of the issue. To some, the idea of a female irrigation engineer talking about the dangers of poor flood control, or a woman political scientist urbanely criticising the government's latest budget, is anathema. At some level, many media have absorbed these ideas.

TIME PRESSURES

News, features and programme production work are pressured and hectic. It is all too easy for people working to tight deadlines to fall into routines and standard approaches to subjects. These need to be changed by a conscious effort (see chapter 10 below for suggestions on how this can be done).

FEMALE GHETTOS

Women have been confined to a narrow range of areas of expertise by the media, which does not reflect reality. Statistics show that women are now involved in a wide range of areas of work, but it has proved hard to have this recognized by the media.

Women are expected to be concerned about such "female" subjects as childcare, divorce, abortion and domestic violence. But these are all issues which equally affect men.

To treat these as essentially female issues is to perpetuate stereotypes. Men need to be part of these discussions.

Frequently, however, not only are women experts not often asked for their views in non-traditional areas, but they are even overlooked in the traditionally female ones. Despite the fact that women make up the majority of school teachers in many countries, when there is a story on the effects of some new educational policy on the classroom, it is often still a male teacher or principal who comments.

Even in the one part of life where women are supposed to reign supreme, the home, the rare serious coverage of domestic issues will frequently feature a male expert talking about women, rather than letting the women speak for themselves.

MEN GIVE ADVICE, WOMEN RECEIVE IT

Ayesha Imam's 1992 study in Nigeria looked at three weekly radio advice programmes and found that the vast majority of themes covered dealt with male control of females, as wives or daughters (Imam 1992). Imam found that men advise women but women do not advise men, while male advice is given three or four times as much weight as women's. The work women do was seen as of little value, and their attempts to earn some money of their own were criticized as greedy attempts to gain pin money.

The researcher concluded that since all three programmes explicitly advise people on how to behave, these radio programmes play a significantly conservative role persuading women to acquiesce to men, and telling men to continue strengthening their control over women (ibid.)

EXPERTS FILE

There is little doubt that women have the expertise and the ability to have a higher profile as commentators. Some countries have tried to help the media to recognise that by providing them with a file of women experts across a wide range of areas, from avionics to zoology (See Chapter 10 below for examples).

7

WOMEN WORKING IN THE MEDIA

It does not make sense to study the portrayal of women by the mass media without looking at the status of women who work within them. There appears to be a direct, two-way relationship between the sex of the people producing media content, and what is produced. That is why it is important to look at the position of women as media professionals. If the balanced portrayal of both sexes in the media is the goal, then it can't be done while there is an imbalance in the way people working in the media are treated.

MEDIA WOMEN - WHERE THEY WORK

Strikingly similar patterns of employment of women in the media have been found across different cultures and media systems. Everywhere, women are a tiny minority in senior management and technical jobs. They are concentrated in presentation or production in certain areas, such as educational and children's programmes, but underrepresented in news and current affairs.

One area where women's representation has improved greatly is amongst war correspondents. Although female war reporters are nothing new, the on-going war in the former Yugoslavia has drawn female reporters in unprecedented numbers. The British *Guardian Weekly* newspaper's correspondent, Maggie O'Kane, won in 1993 the coveted award of Journalist of the Year for her intensely personal coverage of the war. The number of women journalists reporting on it has led to what the *Guardian Weekly* called "...a perceptible shift in the news agenda of this conflict, a sense

that journalists are sending home a different war...for once we are reading as much about those who suffer from war as we are about those who make it" (Saunders 1993). This is a clear demonstration of the close relationship that exists between who is reporting the news, and what is reported.

Margaret Gallagher found in 1990 that within every professional category in the media, there were more women at the bottom of the hierarchy, and more men at the top. Men were also paid more than women across all jobs (Gallagher 1990). Across 79 radio and television networks, she found that only 6% of top management jobs were held by women, and that men were, on average, seven times more likely than women to reach the top (ibid.).

In Senegal, for example, women are only 10% of all journalists (van den Vijngaard 1992), while in Togo, women make up just 20% of all media employees --and more than half of these are secretaries (Houenasou Houangbe, KD 1992).

However, positive changes are taking place in some countries. In Spain, women make up 10% of management staff in the long-established public service broadcasting network RTVE, but take up an average of 20% of top management positions in the recently created regional broadcasting companies (Commission of the European Communities 1992).

However in other countries, positive changes in the employment of media women can still seem far away. In the Dominican Republic,

local women journalists at a seminar which took place in July 1993, were pessimistic about their chances of promotion and status in the media (CIPAF 1993).

Some men in the media also feel that they have too little access to the best jobs. We are not suggesting here that all women can make it to the top, any more than all men can. There are clearly other factors that prevent talented people from getting into powerful positions, such as race, age and class. But women can suffer from those barriers as well as those imposed by their sex.

WOMEN ON THE BOARD

Women fare better on external government boards, largely because there are often rules which specify that women and minority groups must be represented. Most media organizations present themselves as being equally open to male and female employees. But Gallagher called this an "egalitarian gloss" which hides a lot of indirect discrimination (Gallagher 1987). The barriers preventing women from reaching powerful positions in the media are generally hidden, but real. There is still a strict "gender hierarchy" in both production and policy-making.

Although there are a few women making it to the higher levels of media management, this has always been so. There is no real sign that the ratio of women making it to the top is improving.

A 1993 report carried out in the Dominican Republic confirmed that although media women are now at least as well qualified as

their male counterparts, this has not opened doors for them where it matters; in those positions where the real power lies in the media (Cordero 1993).

EQUAL PAY?

Most media organizations have the principle of equal pay for equal work but in practice women in the media earn 25% (on average) less than the men. And that gap widens through life. In Canada's CBC network, over a thirty year career women increased their salary fifteen-fold, men thirty-fold (Crean 1987).

According to a 1989 study by University of Missouri researcher Jean Gaddy Wilson, sex is a major determining factor in a media employee's salary (Wilson 1989).

Even a woman media boss earns significantly less than a man in the same job, with the same amount of experience.

MORE WOMEN = MORE/BETTER COVERAGE OF WOMEN?

Though the portrayal of women in the media does not necessarily improve when it has been produced by women, involving the points of view and perspectives of both sexes is the best way known to make sure that media content is balanced, fair and relevant to women and men.

There are certainly instances of women in the media having worked on what could be seen as anti-female material. This could be because they have "bought into" the media's values and ideas about what does or does not make a good story or programme.

It is also hard for women who want to be successful in the media to buck the ideas and attitudes which are linked to that success --even if these demean women. Ambitious and hard-working women are not likely to risk going out on a limb to defend women if this will brand them as radical, "feminist" or part of a pressure group. It is also hard to rock the boat from the inside.

On the other hand, there are signs that women working in the media are influencing the coverage of women. One example was provided by the Dominican Republic's biggest morning newspaper, the *Listin Diario*. In August 1993 it published a series of four major articles on the lives of Dominican women immigrants in Spain. Such a series would not have appeared had it not been pushed for and written by a well-known woman journalist, and had there not been a female Chief Reporter at the time.

DOES NEWS HAVE A SEX?

This idea of the objectivity of news does not hold up well. News reflects the values of the dominant culture and system it is in. Researcher George Gerbner found that women are accepted into the ranks of power (in this case, the newsroom) provided they act on behalf of the rules designed to protect the interest of majority groups (Gerbner et. al. 1984). This helps to explain why women journalists would so strongly defend the accepted definition of news.

It also provides a strong argument for having more women in the media; to alter the essentially male perspective which dominates at the moment. It seems that once the numbers of women in the media reach a "critical mass", they are able to start influencing the news agenda (Tuttle Marzolf 1993). This is now being seen in the USA and Finland, where more than 40% of journalists are women.

WHO TEACHES THE JOURNALISTS?

Despite the fact that these days so many women are crowding into the world's journalism schools, it is mostly men who teach them.

If reporting, writing, editing, producing and directing all contribute to women being either ignored or misrepresented by the media, this issue needs to be examined in media training. But it rarely is.

In her 1993 study, Dominican journalist Margarita Cordero found that although there has been an increase in the number of women in communications schools in the Dominican Republic, the overwhelming majority of lecturers in mass communication were men (Cordero 1993). This, she believes, has obvious implications for what is taught and how future media content is shaped. While the Dominican example is particularly extreme, there is a world-wide shortage of women in the formative roles of media lecturer and professor.

8

STICKS AND STONES

THE IMPORTANCE OF A FAIR LANGUAGE

The point of language is to communicate. Most of the time it serves this purpose well. But sometimes, language can also obscure meaning --or convey hidden meanings. That's fine when that is the speaker's or writer's intention. It is not so useful when it is unconscious. Then, there is a danger of the person being used by the language, rather than being in command of it.

In most languages, there is a bias towards the masculine form. In other words, men are taken to be the norm or standard, and women a subgroup. That's why so much attention was paid to "sexism" in language by the early women's movement. It was felt that language was frequently not fair....that it resulted from, and upheld, the inferior position of women. Just because it had traditionally been said that way, the argument went, did not mean that it should stay that way.

Some media made changes to the language they used as a result, and issued style books or guidelines to non-sexist language to ensure that gender references were treated more fairly. Some, however, still react strongly against any mention of sexist language.

SEXIST LANGUAGE - A DEAD ISSUE?

It can seem nit-picking, unnecessary and extreme to insist that women be mentioned equally with men in every context. Because the arguments over sexism in language were so closely associated with the rise of feminism,

many media feel that the issue is now passe, and that the problem no longer exists.

It is interesting that in many countries, editors, script-writers and journalists have been amongst the groups most resistant to changing to gender-free language. Some have stuck doggedly to the old forms, refusing to change.

Perhaps working so closely with written and spoken communication makes the media feel a greater ownership of the language. But it seems that, just as the media's portrayal of women often lags behind social reality, so too does the language they use to describe people.

LANGUAGE REFLECTS CULTURE

Language does not exist independently --it is part of the culture it describes. The bias towards male forms in most languages of the world is not accidental; it reflects the low position women have occupied in most cultures. Inequality in society is reflected and emphasized by inequality in the language.

But cultures change, and so must language. Women in most countries are no longer in the same social position as the women of two centuries ago. They are now an important part of the economy, politics and all aspects of life. Naturally, they want to be recognised as such. They want their achievements and experiences to be visible, not ignored.

In their book *Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing*, Miller and Swift say that "sex roles are changing, so it is not surprising that the language shows some strains" (Miller and Swift 1989).

THE CHALLENGE TO THE MEDIA

Fairly acknowledging women and men requires the media to assess whether the language they use includes both sexes. Because most of us use language unthinkingly, such an assessment needs special effort to break out of old patterns.

Each time a woman enters a field traditionally occupied by men, the media are put into a linguistic quandary. The challenge is to find a way out which recognises and affirms both women and men in a wide variety of roles.

Just as the media have a responsibility to ensure that their items, articles and programmes are factually correct and balanced, they also have a responsibility to use language which is clear to everyone. But there are plenty of recent examples which show that the language the media use can be confusing.

SOME EXAMPLES

Sentences like "any lawyer would have trouble defending his wife", or "the man in the street doesn't agree" can be claimed to reflect both sexes, since "lawyer" and "man in the street" can both be seen as generic terms. But in fact they exclude women. No female lawyer has a wife, and women do not see themselves as "men in the street." Why not refer to "ordinary people" or "the average person" instead?

"Man" was once understood as human being. But in the last century, common usage has changed that, and it has come to mean adult male. A girl does not grow up to be a man.

"Man" is what Miller and Swift call a "false generic" --a term applied to a group which does not cover all members of the group (ibid.). Many people argue that "man" can still mean all people, and dictionaries still give that definition. But studies done with students and children suggests that using man as a generic is confusing. Phrases like "man domesticated animals" call up images of males only, they found. "People" is much clearer here.

Journalists and writers sometimes try to show that they are using the word "man" as a generic by giving it a capital letter, as in "a tragedy for Man". Why not use the word "humanity" here instead?

In phrases like "a man who works hard gets hungry", "someone" or "anyone" work just as well. Better still, Miller and Swift suggest creative rephrasing, as in "a hard worker gets hungry."

When Thomas Jefferson said that "all men are equal" and "governments are instituted among men", it would not have occurred to him to use a more generic term, because women could not vote and had no part in government.

The historian Mary Beard has pointed out that many of the terms used by scientists (modern man, stone age man, mankind and so on) hide women's contributions to history (see Miller and Swift 1989). There is evidence that women were the earliest cultivators of plants, but this

is not clear from phrases like "when ancient man developed agriculture..."

Words like draughtsman, craftsman and fireman suggest that only men do these jobs, which is not the case. However, replacing "man" with "person" sounds clumsy. It is easier to find a new word, such as (in this case) draughter, craft artist and fire fighter. Similarly, foreman of the jury, now that women also fill this role, could become head juror.

"Spokesman" is a word journalists have to use often, and which can cause confusion. The Associated Press Stylebook (1986) approves "spokeswoman" but not "spokesperson", and suggests "representative" when the speaker's sex is not known.

"Chairman" can also be problematic. Miller and Swift say "chairwoman" is historically sound (it dates from 1699), but prefer the person in that position to be referred to as "the Chair" --which is similar to saying "the Crown" or "the Oval Office" (Miller and Swift 1989).

STEREOTYPING LANGUAGE

Words like farmer, pilot and slave are gender-neutral. They do not need to be qualified. Phrases like "the farmers and their wives" are still common, going against the fact that in continents like Africa and Asia, women produce 80% of the food supply. It is certainly not necessary to feminize the words with diminutives (like farmeress) or to qualify the sex, as in "a woman politician" or "a male nurse".

Sport has been particularly guilty of this. It is still quite common to have, for example, a Professional Golfers' Association, and a Ladies' Professional Golfers Association.

Sports journalists and commentators, in particular, also need to learn that a female is only a girl until her mid-teens, and that "lady" is not the same as "woman", any more than "gentleman" is interchangeable with "man".

Men are also stereotyped by language, as in terms like "gunman" or "doorman". In 1992-93, many of the English-speaking news media used the term "warlords" to describe the leaders of the different factions in Somalia --a male term which also has strong negative connotations of aggression.

The words used to describe each sex vary according to stereotyped ideas about the qualities of women and men. Thus women are described in "feminine" terms that imply nurturing, softness, weakness and timidity, while the descriptions of men suggest boldness, courage, strength of character --"masculine" traits. Thus, women bicker, men argue. Women get ruffled, men get annoyed. Women gossip, men discuss.

Comments on women's appearance are often inappropriate. Consider this example: "Her shy, gentle smile and stunning Asian beauty belie the fact that this lovely 18 year-old girl has just completed a PhD in nuclear physics."

If we substitute "his" for "her" and "boy" for "girl", the sentence sounds ridiculous. Consciously or not, the writer is making the

point that traditional female beauty and brains are not usually seen together.

As Deborah Tannen shows in her book *You Just Don't Understand*, if you read "suddenly, the candidate fainted", you assume the candidate is a woman. Men don't faint, they pass out (Tannen 1990).

She gives another example. During the 1984 American presidential campaign, vice-presidential contender Geraldine Ferraro was described in *Newsweek* magazine as "a nasty woman" who would "claw Ronald Reagan's eyes out." Men are not called nasty --the word seems ineffectual applied to a man. Neither do men claw; they punch. This also uses the common stereotype of women as cats, which reinforces an idea of "cattiness" in women's character.

"Spunky" and "feisty", even if they are meant as compliments, are two other words which are only ever used about women, and which trivialize them.

There is a strong tendency for the media to be more affectionate and familiar with women's names than men's. So, even in top level politics, it is not uncommon to read headlines which talk about "Maggie and Mitterand" rather than referring to both heads of Government in the same way.

The good news is that much of what was seen as radical change to the language in the early 1960s is now largely accepted. When *Time* Magazine named Philippines President Corazon Aquino "Woman of the Year" in 1986, for example, it was a major departure. It was the first time the honour had not been given to a man, and showed that the qualities that had traditionally made the Man of the Year newsworthy, could be found in a woman too.

Tannen points out that journalists are not deliberately sexist in their use of language, but that "gender distinctions are built into language. The words available to us to describe women and men are not the same words" (ibid). But, she says, the issue is important because through language our attitudes are buttressed and shaped.

9

A CHECKLIST FOR FAIRER PORTRAYAL

This set of questions is designed to help you to focus on how gender issues appear in your work. This is not about quotas, but about a fairer gender balance in the media.

• News and Current Affairs

1. Is this article, programme or bulletin of interest to both women and men? If so, does it fairly represent both sexes, in terms of both quantity and quality of coverage --or are women under- or misrepresented?
2. How many pictures or images of women do we routinely carry on the front pages, or at the top of the bulletin?
3. How many serious references to women do we make in this story/article/programme? How do these references compare with those made of men?
4. How many women do we quote here --is there a reasonable balance between the sexes?
5. Does this documentary or investigative feature include women as principal speakers or protagonists?
6. Do we actively seek out women experts --particularly in non-traditional fields such as the economy, politics, industry and commerce? Is every journalist encouraged to develop and keep up good women contacts? Do we keep a central list in the newsroom or on computer which is regularly updated?
7. In our news analysis programmes, do we make an effort to use female "talent" as well as male --and not just for their looks?
8. Do we give women the chance to appear on the highest rating programmes, and in the first pages of the newspaper? Do we ensure that women are not just there as victims, or as appendages to men?
9. Are we often guilty of quoting women only in the traditionally "female" areas like domestic or childhood issues, health and education?
10. In our coverage of women, do we sometimes refer to details like age, appearance or marital status, which have nothing to do with the story? Would we do the same with men?
11. Are we careful enough to make sure that the language we use confers equal status on both women and men, avoiding words and phrases which exclude or belittle?
12. Do we accept that women and men may have different angles on many news stories, and try to let both styles and points of view through? Do we make sure that women feature in the hard news as well as the soft news?
13. In editing, are we careful to make sure that stereotypes or damaging impressions do not creep in, through the decisions we make about which images or statements will be used and which left out? Do we check to see that when we cut the length of a story or item, we do not change the sense of what the person wanted to say?
14. Do we cover the whole diverse range of women's activities and involvement in life --or do we tend to cover female interests by putting them into separate pages of the newspaper, or separate programmes and time slots? Does this "ghetto-ization" of women work against good overall coverage of issues?

15. When we cover stories about violence against women (rape, murder, abduction, dowry deaths etc.) do we fall into the old pattern of glorifying and "hyping up" the issue to titillate our audience? Do we avoid the passive voice, so as not to dehumanise the issue? Are we as constructive as possible, so as not to frighten women unduly?

- **Sports**

1. What percentage of our column inches or transmission time is given over to coverage of women's sport?

2. When we do cover women's sport, do we treat it as seriously as we do men's sports?

3. Do we use and encourage women's sports journalists and commentators? What proportion of our sports staff are women? Do they appear or get by-lines as often as their male colleagues?

4. In our filming of women's sports, do we allow the camera or the commentator to emphasize the women's bodies in ways we would not allow men to be filmed or referred to?

5. Do we have a strongly "male" atmosphere in our sports section which may make it difficult for women to feel comfortable working there as equals?

6. Do we carry photographs and visual images of women's sports and female players as often as we do of male sportsmen?

7. Do we use markedly different language in the way we refer to sportsmen and sportswomen? Could this language be seen as demeaning or trivialising either sex?

8. Do we make sure that our film and tape editors do not distort what finally goes out, by choosing to include images or sounds which may appeal to them and to male audiences, but which exclude women or may be offensive to them?

Focusing in on the "pretty women" watching the football match, including lewd comments or gestures made by male spectators as they watch female cheerleaders before a baseball game, or lingering over bikini-clad women at the beach during coverage of a wind-surfing competition for example is not necessary, and is likely to turn female audiences off.

- **Entertainment**

1. Do we screen the programmes and articles that we buy from foreign sources, to make sure that they do not demean and stereotype either sex? Is there a group in the organization (with fair gender representation) which could help with such decisions?

2. Do we run syndicated cartoons which are outdated and offensive in the way they portray women and men? (*Dagwood, Bringing Up Father and the Gambols* are all examples of such outdated, stereotyped humour.) It has been said that such humour humiliates and defeats women where rational arguments fail.

3. In our locally produced programmes and articles, do we use out-dated stereotypes of the sexes? Are women always the "glamour" in the game shows, never the one asking the questions; or the back-up singers in the music programmes, but not the main act?

4. Are we careful enough that the chat, jokes and patter which form a vital part of many light entertainment programmes are not damaging to either sex, by avoiding stereotypes? Humour must be free to break taboos, but it need not be cruel or based on thinly-disguised prejudice. All too often, hackneyed, cliché-ridden humour is not even funny.

5. In the drama programmes that we make or show, do we show women and men in a wide range of social roles, or do we fall into the old

patterns of men as business leaders, technicians and professionals, women as housewives, teachers and nurses?

6. Do we demand and create strong, lead roles for women which do not reinforce stereotypes?

- **Sales and Promotions Audience Research**

1. Given the statistic that women have up to 80% of the purchasing power, are we making false assumptions about the social roles of women and men? Is this making us miss out on or lose female audiences?

2. Do our promotions stereotype women in ways that may turn them off and make us lose audience?

3. Have we been ignoring women's interests and needs rather than catering to them as a discriminating audience?

4. Do we carry enough programmes, articles or general content to maximize women's interest and make them loyal to our station or publication?

5. Do we really know what women in our audience respond to --are we working with outdated information about what women like?

- **Programming and Decision Making**

1. Do we buy in programmes, news and articles from other sources which will cater to females as well as males?

2. Have our programming/content decisions kept up with the changes in society, and women's changing roles? Do we have a process set up for checking that they do --such as a consultative group, with public input?

3. Do we have women in positions where they can affect the decision-making on what the public sees and hears?

4. How successful are our products at reflecting a wide range of lifestyles and views -or do we only reflect those of a limited range of people, mostly men?

5. Given that fresh examples of women breaking new ground occur almost daily, do we have a general rule that our programmes, articles and content use gender-neutral language and avoid stereotypes as far as possible? Do we check to see that this is enforced?

6. Does the material we programme, organize or use generally give women as much attention as it does men? Could our content be accused of gender bias?

7. In material that we commission, do we make it clear to the writers, directors and producers that a good gender balance between women and men is required --and that stereotypes must be avoided?

8. Do we commission and buy as much material by women as we do by men? Do we place the material by women as prominently?

9. Do we treat gender issues and the fair portrayal of both sexes as seriously as we treat racism? Both undermine basic human rights.

10. Do I listen equally to women and men I work with when they present ideas or opinions? Do I judge what they say fairly, regardless of sex?

11. Do I really accept that valid perspectives may exist which I may not be able to understand because of my own gender and background? Do I allow these to be expressed?

12. When we do allow for specific programmes or space for women, do we give this every opportunity to succeed? In Mexico, public radio (Radio Educación) provided a programme for rural women, called "For ourselves, a space for country women". Although it dealt with issues known to be of concern to rural women, it rated poorly because it was put into an off-peak slot when few women listened to the radio, and not promoted. If you do something targeted at women, do it well --don't allow the space, the time-slot or the resources allocated to kill the effort before it has a chance.

13. Do we allow our women journalists, news anchors and presenters to appear in our high status, high rating programmes or pages? Do we give them the same opportunities the males have to shine?

14. Do we demand things of our women staff (such as good looks or more experience to get the job) that we don't demand of men?

15. Are women in the organization given the same promotion opportunities as men? How many female senior journalists, presenters, editors, sub-editors etc. do we have compared to male?

• Policy Making

1. Do we have a clear policy on the portrayal of gender in our station or publication? Does it have teeth? Has it been adequately disseminated around all staff, including journalists, camera operators, photographers, director and editors? Do we have a review procedure to make sure that it has been put into practice?

2. Do we have policies that will allow for women as well as men to rise to the top of the organization, such as child care facilities and procedures for dealing with sexual harassment?

3. Do we encourage women into non-traditional roles in the organization such as management and technical areas, by providing training and/or other support?

4. Do we have women on the board and all other key decision-making areas? Are they there in equal numbers compared to the men?

5. Do we accept that the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in the media is as serious and damaging as publishing racist slurs, and therefore have a clear commitment to improving the situation?

10

ACTION

Here are some ideas on how to give women more coverage, and portray both sexes more honestly.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

Recognize and reward fair coverage of women

In several countries, the media or associated groups hold annual award ceremonies for journalists and media organizations which fairly and responsibly cover women and men's issues. Canada's Mediawatch group, for example, awards the Dodi Robb award yearly. Swedish Television (STV) has an annual Prix Egalia, which is given to the programme which best promotes equality between women and men, and the award ceremony is televised.

The Detroit branch of Women in Communications sponsors "Dogs and Diamonds" awards for bad ("dogs") or praise-worthy coverage of women. Women in Media Groups within German Broadcasting select the most offensive programme each year, and send the "winning" producer the Sauere Gurke (Sour Cucumber) award.

Both entering and covering such events helps correct the gender imbalance in the media. If no such awards exist in your country already, why not institute them? You would certainly win pats on the back from women in your audience or circulation area, and show that

while you take the issues of fair coverage seriously, you have a sense of humour too.

More coverage of issues which specifically concern women

It is often said in journalism that there is no such thing as a new story...just twists and turns on the age-old themes. While that may be true, as any journalist knows, the angle is the crucial thing in a story.

Women are not often the angle, or the reason, for the story. As a result, there are a great many subjects and issues which get relatively narrow coverage in the media. There is of course an important place for the usual business, economic and political stories, but these could be better complemented by more stories with different perspectives.

By approaching even traditional stories from a new angle, they could be made to appeal to a broader audience. Women and men are involved in almost all aspects of life, but this variety is rarely discussed in the media.

At the risk of excluding thousands of subjects, and missing good ideas you yourself come up with, here are a few suggestions for stories for those people who just do not know what more could be done. Most of these subjects receive scant coverage world-wide, but they keenly affect women:

- women as managers (in the home and small business especially);
- women as the major consumers of health care, and how changes to health care systems affect them;
- the politics of breast feeding and breast-milk substitutes;
- latest research on contraception, including side effects;
- pharmaceutical drugs, over-the-counter and prescription drugs, information, politics, side effects and how the workings of the drug industry affect consumers;
- advertising and how it influences consumers;
- pornography, a discussion of world-wide trends and their effects;
- sex tourism in the developing world and its impact on families and communities;
- new technologies and their impact on home, work and life in general;
- nutrition --debunking the myths;
- genetics vs environment, the latest thinking on the nature/nurture debate, and what that means for child-raising and education;
- women in agriculture, their real contribution and work;
- credit policies, and how changes in these affect women;

- violence, including discussion of why we are seeing more violence against women, the trends, where and how violence takes place and how people can protect themselves against it.
- refugee issues and the factors that lead people to migrate
- the politics of clean water, and how to get it.

This is just a small sample of the vast range of subjects many women would like to see covered. The point is to include a women's perspective, the broader interests of women and men, and to show the involvement of both sexes in the wide world.

Avoid stereotypes in the material you produce

Some ideas from Britain on how this can be done:

In pre-production and planning

- Choose and shape subject matter to interest and involve both sexes...there are few areas of activity where women are not involved.
- Check who your audience is. In broadcasting, you can ask the audience research department for the likely demographic breakdown and composition of the audience for your programme or item.
- Involve both women and men as advisers and consultants.
- Seek out women's perspectives. There is work in almost every discipline which offers a women's analysis.

- Plan to reflect the diverse roles of women and men at home and at work. Remember that women have businesses, and men have homes and families.

Re-examine accepted definitions of newsworthiness, and hard and soft news

Look hard at your medium or organization to see whether it treats the male version of events as the real version, and systematically excludes women and their perspective by defining it as "soft" or "un-newsworthy".

Challenging long-held beliefs about hard and soft news means a fundamental shake-up of what most journalists, news producers and editors have learned is an absolute value --what makes news. But unless this re-appraisal happens, the world will continue to get half the story only and women will continue to be left out of the news.

Mainstream women - direct the material which used to be aimed at women at both sexes

There is no reason why men should not be interested in children, the home and education --even fashion-- yet these issues are invariably seen as "feminine" if they are covered by the mass media. Women, too, are interested in far more than just the home and family, and need to know about finance, economics and politics. There is clear evidence that women and men both enjoy watching and listening to a broader range of subjects. Diversity is the name of the game.

Avoid stereotyping issues by gender --treat them all as of potential interest to both sexes.

While there is nothing wrong with programmes, articles or slots which cater specifically to women, they are not enough on their own. Bring valid "feminine" areas into the mainstream, rather than putting them only into the "lifestyle" section of the paper (often a euphemism for the women's pages) or the off-peak slots geared to women.

Cover dates and events important to women

The diary and the calendar are important tools for journalists. As well as featuring such annual events as the opening of the football season or Independence Day, make an effort to find out about and cover dates (both national and international) which are important to women. These might include the day on which women in your country first gained the right to vote or International Working Women's Day. Major one-off events involving women have tended to be largely ignored or trivialized by the media. The 1995 World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing, China and convened by the United Nations General Assembly, will provide an opportunity to correct that imbalance.

Establishing good regular contact with women's organizations in your area will help you to keep up with such dates and events. They may also have research and topic ideas which are worthy of coverage.

Review how violence against women is covered

Make sure that the way you cover violence against women, whatever form it takes, is done seriously and does not sensationalize the issue.

Do everything possible not to boost women's fear of going out and living normal lives.

Show and refer to women's contribution to the economy

Women are responsible for a large part of the economy in all countries. A close look at agriculture and food production in the developing world will show that women are often the growers, harvesters and sellers of important basic crops such as coffee, sugar cane, fruit, corn and wheat. But women's contribution to commerce, trade, agriculture and development is rarely shown or discussed. This is not only unbalanced, but untrue. Make more effort to show women as productive and fully involved in economic life.

If your medium has a narrow view of the economy which means you deal only with such traditional areas as big business and the stock market, then you need to re-examine your approach to the economy. The informal sector, women in small businesses and agriculture as well as people in unpaid work also have a major influence on the economy.

Feature Women as Experts

Under the pressure of deadlines and through sheer force of habit, it is all too easy for people working in news and current affairs to say 'there isn't a woman.' In fact, there almost always is a woman. You may just not have used her before.

Research the women experts who exist in your area and use them in news and current affairs, rather than always resorting to the same male standbys. Use the resources of any groups in

your region formed to lobby for better representation of women (such as Women Are Good News, in San Francisco, USA, and FEMPRESS in Latin America.) These groups network amongst women, and get women experts and commentators to send in their resumes to producers. Use them. They can be a good source of new talent, and save you work.

However, providing a directory alone is not enough - there also needs to be a commitment to using it. In New Zealand, the organization Media Women went to a lot of effort to compile a booklet listing women experts which was distributed to all major media.

It did not have the immediate effect they desired. In many newsrooms, the booklet sat on the chief reporter's shelf gathering dust.

This tends to suggest that little progress can be made until the journalists, directors and producers themselves make a commitment to fairer and more comprehensive coverage of women. They need to seek out their own women commentators, and keep the list updated so that it remains useful.

This is something taken on board by the Dutch group Vrouw in Beeld (Women in the Picture), whose members span 13 Dutch broadcasting organizations. They produced their first directory of women experts in 1987, and updated it in 1990.

Do informal monitoring

Panels of viewers, listeners and readers can be invited to monitor programmes or articles over a certain period, and asked to give feedback

on the images of women and men conveyed. (This has been done successfully by the Belgian broadcasting network BRT since 1990.)

Programme makers can also be encouraged to systematically monitor their own output as a way of keeping the issue of fair gender portrayal in their minds. (The British BBC started doing this in 1990.)

WOMEN WORKING IN THE MEDIA

Increase the visibility of women working in the media

Make sure that your women journalists, columnists, presenters and anchors are seen and heard as much as their male colleagues. (Women in all countries where studies have been done are much less visible than their male colleagues.) Give women prime-time and front page opportunities, as well as off-peak slots and space on the back pages. It is not enough to be able to prove that you have women working in your organization. They need to be given a higher profile so that the audience can see and hear both sexes.

More women's voices on air, on screen and in print will help women listeners to identify more closely.

Cover women's sport and train women sports reporters

There need to be more women sports journalists and broadcasters worldwide, as well as greater respect and recognition given to women's sports, which are at the moment virtually invisible in the media.

In the short term, female general reporters could be assigned to the sports area to learn sports journalism, and longer term, training opportunities need to be developed in sports for women journalists (such as in-training courses or attachments, see below).

Given that media sports offices have tended to be solidly male, check that the atmosphere in your sports office does not alienate women and make them feel so out of place that they avoid working there...or have to struggle to be "one of the boys" in an environment that is weighted against them.

In an attempt to attract more female sports journalists, Danish network DR is cooperating with the Danish School of Journalism to try to attract more females into specializing in sports.

Use more material provided by women journalists

There now exist in several parts of the world press organizations and services which can provide well-written, gender-sensitive articles on current events and issues. These include the India-based Women's Feature Service, an international organization which exists to provide mainstream feature material from a female perspective. It has women journalists in 60 countries, so is well-placed to help print media with finding professionally written articles by and about women.

The Latin American agency Fempress incorporates a monthly press service to all Spanish-language media in the region, and Agencia Internacional also provides a women's news service to Latin America.

Subscribe to the alternative media

Most newsrooms subscribe to various newspapers and magazines as reference material. Subscribing to women's alternative media would ensure that you are also getting fresh and non-stereotyped viewpoints on the issues --and some useful story ideas as well.

Get rid of job descriptions which specify gender

Make sure your organization does not categorize jobs as being male or female by designating them, for example, "makeup girl" or "cameraman". Encourage both sexes into non-traditional areas. (At the moment, males still fill most of the management, production and technical areas, and women most of the lower-level, support and clerical jobs.)

Similarly, there is usually no need for information about age or marital status in job applications. This information has often counted against women who are re-entering the media workforce after a break.

Check the job description. The wording should be neutral, and not say "he will be required to..." Does the job advertisement clearly invite women as well as men to apply? Is it placed where both sexes will see it?

Check your informal systems

It is well-known that many jobs in the media are never advertised, even internally. But research in Europe showed that men were 15 times more likely than women to be "directly" appointed to management positions, without having to apply. If this is happening in your organization, it is clearly not fair and needs to be changed.

Review recruitment and training for both sexes

Women are taken on in larger numbers these days, but usually languish at the bottom end of the pay and promotion scale. Examine how and why this is happening in your organization. Redraft any regulations or written material that are out of step with equal opportunities.

Make sure that there are women on all interview and recruitment panels, and develop guidelines to ensure that women applying for jobs usually done by men will be fairly assessed.

Offer training for staff in non-traditional areas. This need not be costly or difficult. For example, the Irish television network RTE offered a Programme Production Familiarization Course, where up to 200 staff (mostly from secretarial and clerical areas) volunteered to be trained out of office hours, on two evenings a week over an eight week period. The training, in audio and video production, was practical and "hands-on" and was judged a tremendous success by the staff who took it.

Some of the women who took the course subsequently got jobs in technical and production areas. Portugal's RTP network runs similar courses. Other countries have operated on-the-job training where junior staff (including women) can be "attached" to senior staff areas for two weeks to get a good feel for what they do. This can be a good way for both sexes to learn and get experience in non-traditional work areas. Out of 60 women who have attended the British BBC's Operational Awareness Courses since 1986, 14 are now working in technical posts.

Appoint or push for more women to media teaching positions

Although women are flooding into the media and in some countries already make up the majority of journalists, women are still a small minority of the teachers of media and journalism worldwide. It is critical that gender issues and balance be discussed and debated during such training so that the future writers, directors, editors, producers and media managers are aware of the issues. For this to happen, there must be women involved in the training.

If your organization is involved in running refresher courses or in-house training for staff, the importance of a fair and balanced portrayal of women and men should form part of the programme.

Find and get rid of barriers to women advancing in your organization

Most countries now have some sort of maternity leave for women, but do not take into account who is expected to stay home to look after sick children --almost always the woman. Yet taking such time off from work can harm women's chances of promotion.

Sweden has a creative solution to this; between them, both parents can take up to 12 days a year to care for sick children. Develop a policy on this for your organization that does not unfairly restrict women's careers.

Another common barrier for women is lack of childcare. If your organization does not already have a childcare centre, set about organizing one.

POWER AND POLICIES

Make sure that both sexes are on all decision-making bodies

Give women an equal voice to men where it matters most: where the decisions are made. In most countries, there are still very few women in key management or media decision making positions. The power structures vary slightly from organization to organization, but most media have boards of directors, programming committees, editorial committees and production boards. Women need to be strongly represented on all of these.

Tokenism won't do --there has to be real representation and involvement to get the perspective of both sexes.

Review the bottom line

Women are good business. Not only are they half of the population, but they make up to 80% of the decisions about what gets bought in the home. By ignoring their interests and needs, most media have not only failed to maximize, but even alienated women as an audience.

Women must be taken into account by a media organization that wants to succeed.

Get gender policies in place

Written policies show your commitment to the fair and honest portrayal of both sexes --and are likely to be politically desirable as well. Don't wait for legislation to force your hand, but keep ahead of the law-makers by drafting and implementing your own policies on fair gender portrayal.

Do regular analyses of content and release results publicly

All media need to regularly analyse the contents of all of their programmes, bulletins and publications to see how well (or badly) they are doing in both the quantity and quality of coverage of women and men. Releasing the results of this analysis to the public is good public relations, shows that you have nothing to hide and that you are serious about wanting to be fair to both sexes. Since 1985, for example, the Detroit Free Press (USA) has had an in-house task force which combs the paper's pages to weed out sexist and racist references. The worst examples are published in their staff publication titled On Guard.

Review children's programmes and pages for sex stereotyping

Excellent programmes and stories for children now exist in many parts of the world, and there is little excuse for using those that are unimaginative and stereotyped in the way they treat girls and boys...or which teach them to see people in limited roles.

Distribute guidelines and policies for non-sexist language

If your organization does not already have guidelines for clear, non-sexist language, then don't start from scratch. Good examples exist in many countries for you to use. The British Union of Journalists publishes one, as do several United States sources, including Chicago Women in Publishing.

Similar guidelines also exist in other languages, such as that produced by the Centro

de Investigación para la Acción Femenina (CIPAF) in the Dominican Republic. The Canadian Broadcasting Commission in 1991 published guidelines on sexist language in both English and French.

Distribute and use guidelines on the fairer portrayal of women

These could include the following:

- avoid using demeaning stereotypes, such as the "dumb blonde", the "feisty redhead" or the "crafty (male) lawyer"
- reflect women and their concerns when reporting on and discussing current events
- recognize and reflect women's participation in all aspects of society
- seek and use women's views on all public issues
- realistically portray the interests, lifestyle and contributions of both sexes to society
- mention only those personal qualities (such as age, appearance) which are relevant to the story
- give women working in the media the same opportunities as men to take part in decision-making and production at all levels
- show and refer to women and men in non-traditional areas --avoid "ghetto-izing"
- treat news relating to both sexes accurately and with dignity

The Television Board of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters has a Voluntary Code it follows on Sex-Role Portrayal in Television Programming (1990), available in both English and French, which could serve as a useful model.

Review policies that restrict women

In some countries, women are excluded from working in some branches of the media by old policies and rules, which were supposedly designed to "protect" them. In Japan, for example, women in the media are not allowed to work more than two hours' overtime a day. Such rules mean women cannot get the same experience as men, and are therefore not as free to take up promotions and options in some areas.

If your organization has any such regulations which apply to women and not to men, they are unfair and outdated and need to be removed.

Give material aimed at women a fair chance

Providing a space or time slot for a programme or articles by and for women does not do much good if the effort is sabotaged before it has a chance to succeed by being placed in a low-rating spot where it will be almost impossible to attract an audience. This has happened to several women's initiatives around the world.

NETWORKING

Establish dialogue with public, staff and women's representatives to ensure fairer coverage

In most countries, women's and other consumer watchdog groups exist, but they rarely have dialogue with the media on issues to do with the portrayal of gender. Setting up a regular forum for such dialogue would help the media to be in better contact with public views, and guard against accusations of bias and stereotyping.

In-house groups can work well too. Asking for feedback from the public on what you broadcast, screen or publish is not the same as depending solely on audience ratings. You may be surprised at the useful information you get.

Review your journalists "rounds" or "beats"

Most media operate some sort of system whereby journalists are responsible for certain areas of news and current affairs coverage, such as politics, the economy, health or the environment. This may be as well as or instead of general reporting, and such an area of responsibility is usually called a "round" or "beat".

Some media still have a "women's affairs" round, which tends to remove responsibility from each journalist to cover women's perspectives and concerns on all subjects.

It is no longer enough to treat women as a minority or interest group, or to expect their perspectives to be covered by just one reporter. All journalists need to be told to make more effort to cover the views and concerns of women --no matter what their area. It may be necessary to re-order the rounds to take account of this wider focus.

Create or build up public access

Some countries already operate some form of public access, whereby the public can be involved in making programmes or writing articles to be printed or broadcast by you. The idea is that you provide the technical

resources and they provide the ideas and creativity. This is an ideal way of allowing women more space and time in the media. Such access can range from a guest editorial or article, to a 30 minute television programme. Some countries, such as the United States and New Zealand, even have entire access television channels or radio stations, where different groups can make and disseminate their own programmes.

While that is not easy for all countries to achieve, giving women greater access to the media in some way is something your organization could consider.

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CONTENT DISCONTENT

THE HANDBOOK, WHICH TARGETS MEDIA PEOPLE, INCLUDING THOSE IN COMMUNICATION SCHOOLS AND DECISION MAKERS IN THE MEDIA, AIMS AT CONTRIBUTING TO A MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE MEDIA. IT PRESENTS ARGUMENTS AND ISSUES CONCERNING THE POWER OF THE MEDIA AND THE MISREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN IT. IT ALSO OFFERS PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON HOW A FAIRER PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN MIGHT BE ACHIEVED.

THE HANDBOOK PROVIDES CHECKLISTS DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE WORKING IN SUCH AREAS AS NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT AS WELL AS MEDIA PROGRAMMING AND DECISION-MAKING BE MORE AWARE OF THE GENDER BIAS IN THEIR USE OF LANGUAGE AND IMAGES. IT ALSO PROVIDES RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AND HOW TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEDIA, ESPECIALLY IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT.

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