

**LESSONS OF THE MARKETPLACE:
EMBRACING PRAGMATISM IN THE PURSUIT OF
GENDER EQUITY IN THE MEDIA**

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1980

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Abstract

For decades, feminists and communication scholars have documented systemic inequities in the portrayal and representation of women in media. In Canada, MediaWatch, a national, non-profit feminist organization, has played a key research, lobbying and educational role for the past fifteen years. Despite a great deal of evidence accompanied by passionate arguments about equitable cultural representation being a fundamental social right, this work has had relatively little impact on altering media practices.

However, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that such entrenchment on the part of advertisers and programmers may serve to undermine their ability to attract the increasingly desired female consumer. Instead, it appears that marketers and producers who either ignore female audiences altogether, or address women in a sexist manner, are jeopardizing their own commercial interests by inspiring boycotting behaviour.

Although consumer activism has always been a component of MediaWatch's work, the organization's perceived irrelevancy and marginalization by industry forces has been an obstacle to its effectiveness. In recent years, however, the group has capitalized on evidence that its mandate is endorsed by the majority of Canadian women and begun to place more emphasis on audience response. In 1994 it conducted a survey of female television viewers, which provided additional support for the thesis that women's buying and viewing decisions are negatively influenced by media sexism.

The recently licensed Women's Television Network sets up circumstances in which to further test the theory that women, when given a choice, will respond more favourably to positive and progressive representations of themselves, than to those which are demeaning and derogatory. Moreover, WTN provides an opportunity to investigate the validity of the argument (made by those who conducted research on its behalf), that such a channel -- by providing a popular alternative in a competitive environment -- would contribute to improving the overall image of women in television.

WTN's first year has been fraught with difficulties, some of which reflect the continuing challenges for women in the media, and although it's still too early to safely predict the network's longterm impact, preliminary data suggest that its influence may well be positive, if slowly realized.

Acknowledgements

Some of the work appearing in this thesis I initially undertook in a different capacity and wrote about in another context. In addition, although all of the written material here is my own, in several sections of the thesis the research component was done cooperatively and credit for that aspect of the work is shared.

In the first chapter I have adapted parts of an essay I contributed to a university-level text, *Communications in Canadian Society*, edited by Dr. Ben Singer. Entitled "The Portrayal of Women in the Media: The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful," this chapter consisted of a comprehensive review of recent content analysis research into the portrayal of women in mainstream media. Written in December 1993 (although the volume was not published until more than a year later), it constitutes my first formal discussion of many of the issues dealt with in this thesis, including the increasing importance of female consumers' economic clout.

In the second chapter I discuss in considerable detail an audience study that I initiated, oversaw and then wrote the report for in my capacity as President of MediaWatch in 1994. This research would not have been possible without the expertise of my supervisors, Drs. Catherine Murray and Stephen Kline, whose advice during the development of the methodology and survey questionnaire helped to ensure the validity of the data collected. The survey was conducted by MediaWatch volunteers in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Saskatoon, Calgary and Vancouver (although results from Halifax, Toronto and Vancouver were the only ones used in the final report, due to the small size of the samples taken from the other markets). In addition to the time and energy of these women, I am indebted to the sponsorship of universities, law firms and insurance companies in the cities listed, members of which made their offices and phone banks available for the surveying. The MediaWatch office staff in Toronto – notably Linda Hawke, Meg Hogarth and Josie Marchese – provided crucial coordination services and ongoing moral support. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the indefatigable Jackie Botterill, then working at SFU's Mountain Media Lab and now a fellow graduate student, for her research

analysis skills. She, under the tutelage of Catherine Murray, was responsible for comparing the survey data to the Canadian census figures in order to weight our results as necessary.

In the third chapter I draw heavily on a research project called "It Matters Who Makes It", undertaken on behalf of Lifestyle Television (now WTN) which involved the aforementioned Jackie Botterill, Catherine Murray and Steve Kline, as well as Theresa Kiefer. The breakdown of responsibilities for that study – which was essentially a review of academic and trade literature relating to women audiences -- was as follows: Catherine directed the overall scope of the review building on a series of hypotheses developed by Steve, which we were to investigate. Jackie, Theresa and I gathered the materials; Theresa and I read and wrote synopses of all the relevant work, which we then, under Catherine's guidance, wrote up into more integrated analyses of each hypothesis, with me drafting six of the 10 sections, and Theresa the other four. The final document was edited with the input of both Steve and Catherine, the latter of whom worked with Jackie to add some additional analysis of relevant ratings data. In drawing on this work, I have excerpted from the original only sections of text that I wrote myself; any other material has been substantially altered in its integration, and reflects my own sense-making in the context of this thesis.

Over and above the acknowledgements due to those whose research assistance contributed to this document, I would like to credit in particular the patience and support of Steve Kline, who supervised me through three completely different thesis concepts (one of which reached a length of three and a half chapters prior to being abandoned!) and whose intellectual rigor and personal flexibility have been invaluable.

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Chapter 1

A Feminist Approach to the Media's Treatment of Women

Introduction: Some Personal Context

My feminist awakening occurred in 1990. It came in the form of a guest lecture given to a second-year communications course by Suzanne Strutt, the then-executive director of MediaWatch. Describing itself as "a national volunteer feminist organization working to eliminate sexism in the media," MediaWatch "seeks to transform the media from one in which women are either invisible or stereotyped, to one in which women are realistically portrayed and equitably represented in all our physical, economic, racial and cultural diversity." At the time I was a self-employed communications consultant, earning my living by -- among other things -- convincing journalists to interview and/or write articles about my corporate clients, whom I had media-trained for the occasion.

It now strikes me as odd that, despite my professional stake in the power of media to influence audiences, prior to the Epiphany I experienced during Suzanne's lecture, I had never really thought about the connection between the portrayal of women in mainstream media, and sexist attitudes that pervaded society generally. Although at the time I was not comfortable applying the feminist label to myself, I was not unaware of or unaffected by the subordinate status many people still attribute -- often inadvertently -- to the female half of the population.

As a teenager I -- along with the rest of the young women in my class -- had been assigned a particularly infantile art project by a teacher convinced that only her male students were capable of producing wood carvings. When I rebelled (in my admittedly polite and contained way, by finishing both assignments) she wouldn't even look at -- let alone mark -- my carving. I was dumbfounded. Similarly, waiting on tables at a variety of restaurants proved to be a very effective means of funding my university education, but I was outraged to learn that -- as a

female -- some sectors of the industry were closed to me by virtue of my gender. In the late 1970s and early '80s, the ritziest eating establishments -- while they may have hired women at lunch time -- only had male servers during the more lucrative evening hours.

I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Arts and a first class average in 1980. As I began my search for career-potential employment, my father recommended I take a typing course, get hired as a secretary and work my way up. (This was not advice he would *ever* have given my brother under similar circumstances, but reflected his construction-industry-informed perspective on how women got ahead in the business world.) Once I entered the corporate world in 1985, the stakes got higher but the attitudes did not. A year after I joined an international public relations firm at an entry level position with salary to match, the agency hired a man at the same title for \$8,000 a year more than I was paid. When he was fired for incompetency twelve months later, I was rewarded with a promotion, but only a small salary increase. Subsequently, after winning a professional award for my work managing the multi-dimensional public relations needs of a resource company, which also happened to be the firm's largest account, I was denied the opportunity to participate in a sales presentation to a potential new client, also in the resource sector. This, my boss assured me, was not because *he* had any doubts about my ability to do the job, but because he was certain that the prospective client *would*.

By 1990, I was ripe for feminist indoctrination, and my professional work dealing with image creation and promotion and the influence of news media predisposed me to appreciate the importance of the issues addressed by MediaWatch. I experienced a profound sense of personal resonance during Suzanne Strutt's hour-long presentation to my advertising class, and when she was done, I immediately signed up as a volunteer. Within a year I had become the B.C. Representative to the National Committee, and twelve months after that I was elected national President -- a fact which demonstrates primarily that there are no glass ceilings in non-profit women's groups relying on volunteer labour!

Since its establishment in 1981 (initially as an arm of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and then two years later as an independent entity), MediaWatch's

activities have encompassed communications research, educational outreach, resource development, government and industry lobbying, and the facilitation of consumer complaints. To some extent, the emphasis has shifted throughout the years, in response to government initiatives, industry practices and/or the specific interests and skills of the women at the hub of things.

When I joined the organization in 1990, its primary activities were centred on the development of educational resource materials and attempting to influence regulatory decisions being made by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), and affecting broadcasters and advertisers. In the five years immediately preceding my involvement, MediaWatch had made a significant impact at the regulatory level, pressuring the CRTC to make compliance with the sex-role stereotyping guidelines a condition of license (1986), and to introduce an equality clause into the Broadcasting Act (1988). Despite these victories, ongoing research determined that the portrayal of women on air, and the representation of women in the industry were not improving in any substantial way.¹ Furthermore, two separate reviews of the CRTC broadcast licence renewal hearings demonstrated that the government-appointed commissioners rarely questioned broadcasters about their adherence to the sex-role guidelines, or asked them to demonstrate what measures they were taking to increase the number of female workers they employed.²

From 1991 through the beginning of 1994, we continued to conduct content analysis studies in both print media and television, documenting the inequities in Canadian newspapers, magazines and on television news and dramatic programming.³ We viewed the empirical

¹George Spears and Kasia Seydegart, *The Portrayal of Gender in Canadian Broadcasting: 1984-1988*, (Ottawa: CRTC, 1990) and TWIFT, *Changing Focus: The Future for Women in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991)

²Linda J. Trimble, "Coming To A Station Near You: The Process and Impact of The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission's Involvement in Sex-Role Stereotyping", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, 1990 and MediaWatch, *Review of Policy on Sex-Role Stereotyping*, brief in response to Public Notice CRTC 1990-114, June 1991, pp. 14. The report quantifies the number of licensees asked about the issue, and the kinds of initiatives they referenced in response.

evidence of women's under-representation and stereotypic portrayal as fundamental to achieving our goal of persuading government and industry to make the desired changes. At the same time, gathering such evidence helped to reinforce our own sense of mission and legitimacy. Although the volume of consumer complaints, requests for information, interviews and speakers received by MediaWatch has continued to grow in recent years, our membership base has not. Despite the increasing awareness of the negative impact of media violence and sexism on society amongst the general population, MediaWatch, like most other women's groups, has typically been characterized as a "special interest" or "fringe" organization by the rising tide of fiscal and social conservatism in both politics and the media. Hard science has always seemed to be one of the safest ways to counteract or overcome the range of responses – from subtle resistance to outright hostility – we get from those most threatened by our requests.

Nevertheless, we grew frustrated with our inability to translate the irrefutably-documented inequities into change that transcended the policy documents to appear on newspaper pages and television screens. This frustration eventually led us to seek other avenues of persuasion. My work as a graduate student at SFU was instrumental to this shift. In 1993 Communication department professor Dr. Catherine Murray was approached by Lifestyle Television, one of more than 40 organizations bidding for a specialty cable license the following year. Asked to conduct research into the relationship between female audiences and television, Dr. Murray invited me and several others to review the relevant academic and trade literature. In light of my work with and leadership role at MediaWatch, the exercise was particularly illuminating. Suddenly, I was exposed to a different kind of data and analysis which, in both quantitative and qualitative ways, suggested that it may, in fact, be in advertisers' and broadcasters' best interests to improve their portrayal practices. While I had been making this argument tentatively in my presentations for several years, it had always

³ *A Good Day to be Female?* (1992) and *Focus on Violence* (1993), surveys of women in Canadian newspapers; *Front and Centre - Minority Representation in Canadian Television*, 1994; *Cover to Cover - Magazine Analysis*, 1994, all written and published by MediaWatch in Toronto.

been based more on naive optimism rather than on documented evidence. (Indeed, the popularity of products like Guess Jeans, and programs like *Married ...With Children* often served to undermine such hopes.)

Although since its inception, MediaWatch had encouraged consumers offended by specific portrayal trends to fill in a MediaWatch-supplied complaint form and send it to the organization for forwarding on to the offender, by the time I became involved in the organization, this strategy had been abandoned. Apparently the industry executives on the receiving end of the forms were increasingly choosing to dismiss the complaints, believing that they originated with MediaWatch members only, and therefore did not represent the views of a wider population. Lacking the staff and financial resources to mount more aggressive boycott campaigns, our direct action work instead occurred only in the context of the bulletin that went out to our members. This vehicle was revamped in 1994, reducing its size and emphasis on research and increasing its frequency and focus on particular ads and the ways in which individuals could express their concerns.

However, our small membership base not only limited the potential impact of such target actions, but also made it difficult for us to legitimately claim that member views reflected those of the Canadian population in general. Suddenly, with the encouragement of the evidence found in the research done for Lifestyle Television, an audience survey seemed to hold great promise, giving us an opportunity to gather evidence that would not only demonstrate the breadth of concern among Canadian women about the issues we were raising, but also convince media producers of the business advantages of improving their portrayal practices. The methodological and logistical challenges of conducting such research using volunteer labour were significant, but the results were more than worth the effort. In addition to confirming that the majority of Canadian women are often or sometimes offended by portrayal practices, the study found evidence to suggest that a significant number of buying decisions are adversely influenced by such practices. Relaying this message to the industry -- as opposed to focusing on the equity arguments -- became a clear priority.

In June 1994 while this audience survey was being conducted, Lifestyle Television – now renamed Women's Television Network (WTN – herein after referred to as such) – was awarded a specialty cable license and ordered to be on air by January 1, 1995. Promising to create programming by and for women, and to – in the process – both avoid stereotypical portrayals and aggressively counter the numerical gender imbalance existing elsewhere in the TV universe – WTN's first year of broadcasting appeared to present a golden opportunity to demonstrate the power of the female audience in the context of the marketplace itself.

In part, this thesis charts my own evolution in making use of feminist critiques of and interventions in the mainstream media's portrayal and representation of women. In my role as president of MediaWatch – the Canadian women's group having played the most significant advocacy role in the issue over 15 years – this personal evolution has both influenced, and been influenced by, the changes in strategy that have occurred within the organization itself. In particular, the thesis documents the shift from our reliance on equity arguments and the power of the regulator to impose policy on the industry, to the recognition of the potentially more effective use of audience-based arguments with bottom-line implications.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a broad overview of the historical concerns expressed by feminists about the way in which the mainstream media have represented women, both in terms of image portrayal and the participation of women in media production industries. Following this is a summary of the most recent content analysis research that has documented the inequities in news, entertainment and advertising media. Next I discuss the way in which feminists in general, and MediaWatch in particular, have interpreted and articulated this empirical research and its social implications in their attempts to establish a consensus around the need for change in the way media industries portray women.

The second chapter starts by examining the impact of feminist activism on the development and implementation of related broadcasting and advertising policy, differentiating between on-paper successes and in-practice realities, and citing particular advertising portrayals which generated public protest as illustration. These examples open up questions about the potential

power of consumers in the fight against media sexism, and lead into a discussion of MediaWatch's first foray into the arena of audience research. A significant departure from the group's previous work, the national phone survey gathered data on women's responses to and attitudes about television, including information about their viewing habits, concerns about violence and perceptions of and reactions to trends and influences in the portrayal of women. The chapter closes with an analysis of the significance of the study, regarding both the issue of media sexism generally, and the value of the findings to MediaWatch specifically.

Building on this knowledge about the female audience, in chapter three I discuss traditional attitudes about women television viewers and review the trade and academic literature dealing with the relationship between female consumers and mainstream mass media. This involves an examination of the way in which women differ from men in terms of their communication needs and media consumption patterns and responses, as well as an analysis of the print and broadcast media forms directly targeted to women. In particular, I look at emerging trends in television programming, which seem to suggest a relationship between the increasing importance of the female audience, changes in portrayal practices, and the presence of more women in key production positions. This leads to an examination of the question: "Does it matter who makes it?", which posits that women create media differently than men, and are better equipped to program to female audiences. A fundamental plank of the Women's Television Network in arguing its case for a cable license before the CRTC, this contention – and the notion of a women's channel itself – raise a number of issues also addressed here, including: ghettoization concerns; capacity of a women's television network to improve portrayal elsewhere; and the economic viability of such a service.

In chapter four, the analysis moves from theoretical potential to practical realization in an examination of WTN's first year in operation. Based on the channel's license application submission to the CRTC, I first review the proposed programming line-up, and advertising, employment and production policies. This is followed by a discussion of the implementation challenges faced by the network in terms of the surrounding cable environment; the news and

entertainment media coverage of their programming, audience ratings and financial status; and the management changes that occurred at the network in its first six months of being on-air. I also bring to bear my experiences as an independent producer contracted by the channel to produce a 13-part series on the portrayal and representation of women in mainstream media. Finally, I explore the extent to which the WTN experiment can be seen as a test case in addressing women audiences differently, providing more progressive portrayals in the context of alternative fare. What does its limited success say about the value of audience-oriented strategies in pursuit of a more gender-equitable media environment?

Problematic Portrayal and Under-representation of Women in Mainstream Media

An oft-repeated joke suggests that if extra-terrestrials were to land on the planet Earth and draw conclusions about female human beings based on how women are depicted in contemporary mass media, the outer space creatures might conclude the following: Women – who constitute just over 30% of the population – are uniformly beautiful, obsessively thin, surgically reconstructed and scantily-dressed objects of male sexual desire, who derive pleasure primarily from clean dishes and being dominated by men. Furthermore, they conveniently die off before reaching middle age, no doubt in order to avoid the mortification of gray hair, wrinkles and cellulite.

Although clearly an exaggeration, the image brought to mind by the joke is nevertheless one that evokes the laughter of recognition. In fact, for more than three decades feminists, social commentators and media researchers alike have been expressing concern about the pervasive under-representation and stereotypical portrayal of women in mass media. From television news programming and situation comedies to print advertisements, music videos and mainstream movies, women's inequitable participation and distorted image, and their concomitant social implications, have been the subject of extensive investigation.

Mass media and popular culture have become constitutive elements of our social environment. Television alone has dominated our leisure time since the 1960s. The average North American child spends as much or more time in front of the television set than attending school.⁴ This, in conjunction with additional time spent interacting with video games, comic books and teen magazines, arguably comprises an alternative – not to mention more engaging – curriculum, and one that is hardly informed by the same values as our formal education system. Many argue that the crafted images and constructed messages of mass media are among the most effective means of reinforcing notions considered by the dominant forces in society to be normal, acceptable and ideal. Inevitably, this hegemonic process is believed to naturalize and legitimize systemic forms of oppression affecting those who are already less powerful, including women, ethnic minorities, the elderly, gays and lesbians and people with disabilities.⁵

As early as 1954, Dallas Smythe drew attention to the fundamental inequities of the media's "alternative curriculum" with respect to women, and its negative socializing potential.⁶ Betty Friedan's pioneering feminist work, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, was based in part on a content analysis of women's magazines and precipitated a widespread critical review of the image of women in mass media.⁷ Entire bibliographies of in-depth research into the problematic portrayal of women have been compiled, dating from the

⁴ Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Children in Canada* (Ottawa, 1989)

⁵ Gramsci's concept of hegemony informs and is central to a large body of work; see for instance Todd Gitlin, "Television's Screens: hegemony in transition" in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, ed. M. Apple, (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 203; and, especially relevant to this paper, Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1993), p. 3., and Karen M. Stoddard, *Saints and Shrews: Women and Aging in American Popular Film* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 5

⁶ Dallas W. Smythe, "Reality as Presented by Television" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 18, 1954, pp. 143 - 156. In an analysis of one week of dramatic programming on several New York stations, Smythe noted that only a third of the characters were women; that they were on average five years younger than the men; and that women who remained in the home were more likely to be considered "good".

⁷ Gaye Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media" in *Signs*, 4.3, 1979, p. 530.

1970s to the present.⁸ Hundreds of studies document in repetitive detail the limiting roles and characteristics accorded to women in media forms ranging from television dramas and children's cartoons to the photographs and comic strips in daily newspapers. In Canada, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women convened in 1967 received more than thirty separate briefs from women's groups addressing the issue.⁹

In 1979, still under pressure from such groups, the CRTC initiated a review of the treatment of women in Canadian broadcasting. Its findings -- that women were not only significantly under-represented, both on air and behind the scenes, but also stereotypically portrayed -- led to the 1981 establishment of MediaWatch as an arm of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. With a mandate to work for change in the media's treatment of women, the organization lobbies government and industry; assists citizens with complaints regarding media portrayal; produces media literacy curriculum materials; provides educational workshops for a wide range of audiences; and conducts and publishes research.

Image and portrayal practices

In the context of its monitoring work, MediaWatch identifies some of the most pervasive and troubling trends, particularly in advertising, as follows:

Objectification - Equating women with objects is dehumanizing and encourages the notion that women can be bought, owned and disposed of.

Irrelevant sexualization - Using women's bodies in a sexual way in order to attract attention perpetuates the attitude that women's primary function is to serve men sexually.

Infantilization - Presenting women as silly, childish and coy, or passive and vulnerable, waiting to be rescued (especially in contrast to men, who are generally portrayed as strong, serious and

⁸ *Role Portrayal and Stereotyping on TV: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies Relating to Women, Minorities, Aging, Sexual Behaviour, Health and Handicaps*, compiled and edited by Nancy Signorielli, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 3 - 89. and *Women and the Media: Resources for Analysis and Action*, compiled by Michelle Valiquette, (Toronto: MediaWatch, 1993)

⁹ MediaWatch, *Tracing the Roots of MediaWatch*, 1993, p. 5.

assertive) undermines women's need for independence and reinforces the perception of women as victims.

Domestication - Defining women always or primarily in relationship to their husbands, children or parents, and showing them predominantly in a home environment, denies the complexity of women's lives and their contributions to society.

Victimization - Portraying women as the natural victims of male brutality, either overtly or by implication, is particularly troubling given the incidence of violent acts experienced by women both within and outside of their homes.¹⁰

Such trends as articulated by women's groups are supported by a wealth of content analysis research (to be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter). Nancy Signorielli, author of numerous studies into the portrayal of women in media from the 1970s onward, noted in a 1989 article that over a period of more than 15 years, the image of women was consistent in its traditionality, and generally upheld the status quo. She describes the latter as one in which women are, on average: younger, more attractive and more nurturing than men; more likely to be victimized, married or involved in romantic activity; and, when married, less likely to work outside the home, or if they do, more likely to be employed in traditionally female occupations such as nurses or secretaries. Citing U.S. demographic statistics, Signorielli points out the inaccuracies of the television picture in relation to reality, concluding that "the image conveyed by prime time television is that women, especially if married, should stay home and leave the world of work to men."¹¹

This distorted picture has been particularly troublesome in terms of its impact on children's perceptions of appropriate sex roles. In the landmark "Notel" study which measured attitudes

¹⁰ These categories represent a condensed version of trends described in MediaWatch's *Objection Letter Guide*, 1992, p. 4.

¹¹ Nancy Signorielli, "Television and Conceptions About Sex Roles: Maintaining Conventiality and the Status Quo" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 21, Nos. 5/6, 1989. pp. 341 - 360. See also studies cited in Signorielli *Role Portrayal and Stereotyping on TV: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies Relating to Women, Minorities, Aging, Sexual Behaviour, Health and Handicaps*

and behaviour in a small Canadian community before and after the introduction of television in the early 1970s, Tannis MacBeth Williams and her colleagues found that TV viewing increased children's tendency to identify certain stereotypes as typically male or female. In noting that television's influence was sufficiently strong to be identifiable over and above the impact of other real-life variables, Williams noted that the medium "may be an especially effective teacher of gender roles, since it provides more models than most children encounter in real life, and they tend to be presented similarly..."¹²

Participation of Women in the Media Work Force

One of the long-standing arguments put forth by feminists regarding the problematic nature of mainstream media portrayal practices has posited that the dearth of women in positions of power and influence within media production industries is in part to blame for the inaccurate and destructive female media image. Although relatively little research has been done to document employment inequities (compared to the volume of studies done on portrayal trends), the available studies are persuasive regarding the significant under-representation of women in broadcasting, filmmaking and newspaper publishing. (Given the focus of this thesis, and for the sake of brevity, I have cited here statistics relating primarily to women's employment in mainstream television and film only, although similar data are available for the other sectors as well.)

In 1990, Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg conducted a comprehensive statistical profile of women in the Canadian film and television industries. Commissioned by Toronto Women in Film and Television (TWIFT), the study found that although women constitute 44% of the Canadian work force overall, they represent only 35% of those employed in film and television.

¹² Tannis MacBeth Williams, "The Impact of Television: A Longitudinal Canadian Study" in *Communication in Canadian Society*, edited by Ben Singer, Nelson Canada, 1995, pp. 184 and Meredith M. Kimball, "Television and Sex Role Attitudes," in Williams, *The Impact of Television: A Natural Experiment in Three Communities*, (New York: Academic Press, 1986) pp. 265 - 301.

Furthermore, women are ghettoized in "pink-collar" areas, holding between 70% and 93% of the jobs in the following categories: production secretary/bookkeeper, script supervisor/continuity, art department trainee, wardrobe, makeup artist, and hairstylist. Meanwhile, in the upper management ranks, women made up only 14% of the total in public sector radio and television companies, and only 1% in the private sector. Fully half the women in broadcasting do clerical work, whereas only 17% are full-time employed as technicians, and female cinematographers make up just 7% of the total. In the arenas where most of the large scale creative decisions get made, women constitute just 29% of producers and 16% of directors.¹³

Women's participation in the industry in the United States -- which produces most of the entertainment viewed by Canadians both on television and at the movie theatre -- appears to be worse. A study released in 1991 by the Director's Guild of America noted that of the more than 7,000 films made by its members in the forty-year period between 1939 and 1979, a mere 14 had female directors, and only seven women were represented in total.¹⁴ More recently, another U.S. study examining 80 prime-time dramas broadcast in 1990 found that women accounted for only 15% of producers, 25% of the writers, and 9% of the directors.¹⁵

Women's on-air representation has historically been somewhat more equitable than behind-the-scenes employment, and seems to be improving at a more rapid rate. However, the discrepancy is still significant, especially in certain categories. For instance, while a CRTC-commissioned study of Canadian broadcasting in 1988 found that women made up 41% of television hosts in non-news and sports information programs, female sports reporters and commentators constituted only 2% of the total. Similarly, although female actors represented

¹³ TWIFT, *Changing Focus: The Future for Women in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*, University of Toronto Press, 1991, pp. viii - 16

¹⁴ as cited in TWIFT, *Changing Focus: The Future for Women in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*, University of Toronto Press, 1991, p. ix

¹⁵ as cited in Margaret Gallagher, *An Unfinished Story: Gender Patterns in Media Employment*, Unesco Publishing, 1995

41% of those appearing in television commercials, they were hired for only 14% of all commercial voice-over work, in both television and radio.¹⁶

These figures often come as a surprise to people both involved in the industry, or simply viewing its products. In her analysis of the Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg data, Pat Armstrong noted that "the visibility of [a few] high-profile women camouflages the fact that women are scarce at the top and plentiful at the bottom of the film and television industry." In addition, because we are so accustomed to the systemic under-representation of women in news and entertainment media, the employment progress that has occurred in recent years seems deceptively significant. This was evident in anecdotal remarks made by industry workers interviewed by Armstrong, some of whom expressed disbelief at the documented statistics.¹⁷

The drive to improve women's participation in the communication industries is not motivated solely by the desire for employment equity, but – as Margaret Gallagher points out – is based on "the overarching assumption... that the presence of more women – particularly in creative and decision-making positions – should introduce new perspectives and interpretations... and lead to greater diversification of images and messages."¹⁸ Although the notion that involving more women in the development and execution of programs and advertisements would necessarily translate into improvements in both the numbers of women appearing, and the kinds of roles presented, seems a defensible one, it has so far been difficult to demonstrate.

In fact, in Gallagher's own comprehensive review of women's employment status in media industries around the world she admits that the growing numbers of female media workers have often failed to translate into the desired progress in portrayal trends. She cites several

¹⁶ George Spears and Kasia Seydegart, *Gender and Violence in the Mass Media*, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health Canada, 1993, p. 11

¹⁷ Pat Armstrong, "Understanding the Numbers" in TWIFT, *Changing Focus: The Future for Women in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*, University of Toronto Press, 1991, pp. 5-6

¹⁸ Margaret Gallagher, *An Unfinished Story: Gender Patterns in Media Employment*, Unesco Publishing, 1995, p. 3

reasons for this, not the least of which involve the regulatory, financial and professional controls that limit the influence of individuals. Furthermore, until women achieve a certain critical mass in any given employment arena, it is often difficult to effectively challenge the status quo. Professional female journalists, for instance, in their desire to avoid being relegated to the so-called "soft" or "less important" issues typically carried on the women's or lifestyle pages, have ended up emulating the practices and approaches of their male colleagues.¹⁹ (Similar dynamics reportedly operate in the advertising industry as well, where both agency creative personnel and client contacts remain dominantly male.)²⁰

It is hardly surprising that, in combination, stereotypical extremes and the relatively slow pace of change in both portrayal practices and employment patterns effectively mobilized women to organize in an effort to facilitate the desired improvements. Nor is it surprising, given the available evidence, that women's groups such as MediaWatch relied heavily on content analysis research in making the case to government and industry that change was needed, and in conducting grass roots educational work to motivate others to become involved in the fight. The extensive documentation of media-perpetrated and -perpetuated inequities against women served to galvanize those already concerned about social inequities and media influence, and provided a highly visible focus of attention for the women's movement in general.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2 - 10

²⁰ Interview with Alvin Wasserman, Vancouver advertising agency executive, 30 August 1995

Women and the News: "And that's the kind of day it's been..."²¹

George Gerbner describes the thematic structure of news as dealing with "the exercise of power: who has it, who uses it, who seeks it, and most of all, who threatens it."²² This analysis provides a disturbing, if partial, explanation for the invisibility and imposed irrelevancy of women in both print and broadcast news programming. Often referred to as a "window" on the world in general, and on one's own society specifically, news, because it is a selective process of construction, is also widely accepted as serving "a narrative function... circulating meanings that in general confirm and conserve existing social and economic relationships."²³ As Stuart Hall notes,

The choice of *this* moment of an event as against that, of *this* person rather than that, of *this* angle rather than any other, indeed, the selection of this photographed incident to represent a whole complex chain of events and meanings, is a highly ideological procedure.²⁴

Although one might expect women to appear less often as news-makers, given the fact that they occupy fewer positions of power and authority in society, this is inevitably compounded by a situation in which the definition of news, and the criteria governing the selection process Hall describes, are all predominantly determined by men.

²¹ At the end of the nightly CTV national newscast, anchor Lloyd Robertson intones, "And that's the kind of day it's been, here at CTV News." The subtle reinforcement of the notion that the highly selected and constructed series of news stories is simply a mirror of reality, when in fact it invariably fails to adequately reflect the perspective or give voice to the experience of at least half of the population, strikes the author as presumptuous, at best.

²² George Gerbner, *Women and Minorities on Television: A Study in Casting and Fate*, commissioned by the Screen Actors Guild and The American Federation of Radio and Television Artists, 1993, pp. 12 - 13

²³ Lana F. Rakow and Kimberlie Kranich, "Woman as Sign in Television News" in *Journal of Communications*, 41 (1), Winter 1991, p. 9, citing various sources and in the conclusions of Dhyanan Ziegler and Alisa White in "Women and Minorities on Network Television News: An Examination of Correspondents and Newsmakers" in *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Vol. 34, Number 2, Spring 1990, p. 215.

²⁴ As cited by Barbara F. Luebke in "Out of Focus: Images of Women and Men in Newspaper Photographs" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 20, Nos 3/4, 1989 p. 124

Women in Newsprint: Dying to Make Headlines²⁵

Davis' 1982 analysis of 5,500 stories in eight newspapers revealed the following trends in the portrayal of women in newspapers: women were rarely the main characters in news stories and when they were, the headlines were smaller and the stories shorter; women were rarely present in sports or business stories, but appeared more often in "soft" features; and they were rarely quoted. More often than men, women were referred to by their first names, described in personal ways (rather than by occupation or experience) and defined by their spousal relationships.²⁶ These trends – although gradually changing – are reflected in more current studies, as well.

MediaWatch's national newspaper survey of 15 or more English language Canadian dailies has gathered annual statistics since 1990 confirming that on average, female reporters and columnists comprise 29.5% of those shaping the print news, and only 18.75% of those whose activities are considered newsworthy or whose opinions are considered worth soliciting. Three French language papers, analyzed in 1993 only, reflected on average 20% female bylines and 15% references made to women. The survey cites evidence of all of the trends observed by Davis, as well as the presence – albeit declining – of sexist language. Common examples include the frequent use of false generics (such as "chairman" or "spokesman", even when referring to a woman, or "manpower", referring to a mixed work force); or descriptions of female musicians

²⁵ As Helen Benedict notes in *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), violent crimes have been "the meat and potatoes of daily American newspapers since the mid-1980s" (p.25) and because women are so underrepresented, the extent to which they do appear as victims seems proportionately larger. Furthermore, news by definition focuses on the unusual and since women are less frequently the victims of crime, their victimization may be more likely to position them in headlines than any other (self-determined) activity. In fact, in MediaWatch's most recent newspaper study, *Focus on Violence: A Survey of Women in Canadian Newspapers*, June 1993, the slight increase in women as newsmakers over previous years (22% versus 17 - 19%) appeared in part, to result from the arrest of Paul Teale (Bernardo) for the rapes and murders of several young women in Southern Ontario on the day of the survey.

²⁶ Luebke, "Out of Focus," p. 122.

and athletes which focus on their physical appearance and sexuality (in a manner rarely used to describe male performers) and de-emphasize their professional skill and achievements.²⁷

Not unrelated in its findings is a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the press treats female rape victims conducted by Helen Benedict. In *Virgin or Vamp* she documents the extent to which entrenched, but false assumptions about rape underlying and reflected in U.S. media coverage of sex crimes, result in the perpetuation of a madonna/whore dichotomy and pervasive "blame-the-victim" mentality.²⁸ Examining in exhaustive detail the newspaper reporting of four high-profile cases (some covered extensively by Canadian media, as well, such as that of the "Central Park Jogger") Benedict describes problematic journalistic practices which include: the use of sexist and sexually-charged language to describe victims; the tendency to focus on the woman's lifestyle and past, despite its frequently questionable relevance; and the failure to provide context for a particular crime, which would locate it within a larger social phenomenon. Benedict's micro analysis provides a useful and compelling counterpoint to the more readily available empirical studies, which often fail to address relevant social and institutional contexts, or further our understanding of the issues in a significant way.

Women in Television News: Reading the Teleprompter

In its examination of gender representation in Canadian broadcasting, the CRTC-commissioned study determined from the 1988 sampling of English language television news that women were more likely to appear as news readers (39%) than reporters (28%), and least often as those interviewed (22%). French language news representation was somewhat better, at 45%, 27% and 27%, respectively. In addition, female reporters were found to cover

²⁷ MediaWatch, *Focus on Violence and A Good Day To Be Female? A Three Year Overview of Sexism in Canadian Newspapers*, June 1992. Similar statistics are found in U.S. dailies, see: Debra Gersh, "Women Still Underrepresented", *Editor and Publisher*, May 15, 1993 and Rebecca Ross Alders, "Women: Minor Figures in News", *Presstime*, May 1993.

²⁸ Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp*

proportionately more "soft" and local stories than their male counterparts. These results echoed those of Soderlund, Surlin and Romanow in their examination of on-air staff in local newscasts from a selection of 21 stations across Canada in 1985.²⁹ More recently, MediaWatch, in its submission to the CRTC licence renewal hearings for CTV in 1993, cited evidence regarding Canada's largest private broadcaster's predominance of male hosts and experts.³⁰

The "host" category is subject to employment equity initiatives and appears to be improving at a faster rate than the interviewee ratio, in which the low numbers are explained in part by reporters' tendency to rely on traditional sources (typically male-dominated government and industry networks) and by the perceived relative scarcity of female experts.³¹

Data pertaining to U.S. television news reports, many of which are also seen by Canadian viewers, reveal similar trends. In Gerbner's survey of 31 U.S. newscasts during the spring of 1992, women comprised only 35.4% of news deliverers, 20% of authorities cited, and 17.4% of news makers. The U.S. study also noted that the only significant attention paid by the news to women's rights related to the contentious abortion issue (6% of news items in 31 newscasts over a period of eight days in 1992).³²

Many of these reports have suggested that better representation of women in the profession of journalism -- both print and broadcasting -- will necessarily ensure that news content itself begins to better reflect women's experiences and voices. This ignores the systemic under-representation of women in positions of power and authority in political and economic arenas and, as already noted, increased numbers have not always guaranteed such change. On the other hand, some feminist scholars argue that addressing the way in which current news

²⁹ CRTC *Portrayal of Gender in Canadian Broadcasting: 1984 - 1988* and Soderlund, Surlin and Romanow, 1985 as cited by George Spears and Kasia Seydegart, *Gender and Violence in the Mass Media*, (Ottawa: Family Violence Prevention Division, Health Canada, 1994) pp. 17 - 21.

³⁰ MediaWatch, *Submission for CTV Application for Renewal of Licence*, 1993, pp. 1 - 2.

³¹ Spears and Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, p.21.

³² Gerbner, *Women and Minorities on Television*, pp. 1 - 14.

practices marginalize women requires not simply more female journalists and more extensive coverage of issues directly involving women, but profound structural change. Rakow and Kranich, for instance, suggest that news is an essentially masculine narrative, in which women's relative absence as sources and subjects is made more problematic by the fact that when they do appear, they serve more as a ritualized notion of "women". Noting the much-discussed double standard of youth and beauty imposed upon female anchors, for instance, the authors suggest that "these women are no less the bearers of meaning, the objects of male fantasy than other representations of women."³³

Women in Entertainment Media: What's Wrong With This Picture?

The image of women in contemporary entertainment media has also been the subject of much investigation. The tradition of studies into the roles accorded to women in television series has expanded into analyses of how women fare in feature films, cartoons and comics, and more recently, music videos and video games. Dominant messages in the portrayal of women in entertainment programming have included the tendency to depict women as less intelligent and capable, overly emotional and dependent, and in roles which emphasize their domesticity or sexuality.³⁴ Most notable and consistent of the results of such research is the evidence demonstrating how vastly under-represented women are in virtually all forms of mainstream entertainment.³⁵

Such findings represent a different dynamic than those presented by the dearth of women in the news. Unlike current affairs, in the entertainment arena, there is no acceptable justification

³³ Rakow and Kranich, "Women as Sign," p. 12.

³⁴ A brief review of the literature pertaining to women in television can be found in Donald M. Davis, "Portrayals of Women in Prime-Time Network Television: Some Demographic Characteristics" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 23, Nos. 5/6, 1990, pp. 325 - 332.

³⁵ Gerbner, *Women and Minorities on Television*, pp. 1 - 14 and MediaWatch, *Front and Centre*, for evidence of the fact that women account for approximately one-third of all characters seen on entertainment programming in prime time, and less than one-quarter during children's television.

for why fewer women than men should appear on screen. Indeed, given the fundamental dependence of entertainment producers on audience interest, one would think that women's status as slightly more than half the potential viewership might wield sufficient clout to ensure more equitable portrayal. Obviously this has not been so. The world of mass-disseminated entertainment products does not constitute a democracy, given that the free-market system is run by a relatively narrow spectrum of the population who determine whose stories should be told, and how. Nevertheless, the equity-based arguments favoured by feminists have been easier to defend in the context of entertainment media than in the news realm.

Television's Woman (or "Why do they call it the 'Boob Tube', Mommy?")

The most comprehensive recent research into the status of women in television has been a report by George Gerbner, commissioned by the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists and released in 1993. The analysis of more than 19,000 speaking parts appearing in 1,371 programs included samples of ten seasons of network prime-time dramatic programming taken between 1982 and 1992, and less significant sampling from Saturday morning cartoons, daytime serial drama, cable programming for children and adults, and network news and game shows. In terms of sheer numbers, the study found that women do best in daytime serials and game shows, where they comprise 45.5% of the characters and 55.3% of the contestants, respectively. In all other programming formats, women make up one-third or fewer of the on-screen participants, hitting lows of 23.4% in children's programming, and 27.8% in the news. These figures remained remarkably stable over the eleven years of the study, with 1992 statistics accurately reflecting those of a decade earlier.

Some trends were particularly troubling. For instance, although in general, "good" characters outnumber "bad" ones in both sexes (2 to 1 for men, and 5 to 1 for women), among older characters, the proportion of female villains is more than eight times that of male villains. In addition, the picture in children's television was found to be the "harshest and most

exploitive. The inequities of prime time are magnified Saturday morning. A girl will see about 123 characters... but rarely, if ever, a role model of her gender as leader."³⁶

Canadian data are less readily available; but what information there is appears to correspond to the results of U.S. research. The CRTC research, which assessed day time as well as prime time dramatic programming, found 43% female characters in the former, and only 34% in the latter. Action dramas were typically found to have the smallest proportion – 30% or fewer female characters – and sit-coms and soaps had the highest, at approximately 45%. In terms of the roles accorded to women, the authors concluded that: "Like female characters in U.S. drama, those seen on Canadian stations tend toward marriage, children, and romance, while men tend toward paid work, vehicles and violence." Furthermore, little differences were seen between French and English programming, primarily because 80% of characters on Canadian television, in both languages, appear in U.S. productions, a fact which also accounts for the pervasive similarities in media gender imbalance between the two countries.³⁷

Even more recently, a television monitoring study conducted by MediaWatch in 1992, which coded 1,295 characters in 75 episodes of nine Canadian-made dramatic series, found that only 33.6% of all characters were female. Women of colour fared even worse, making up only 4.2% of all characters, compared to 12.4% of characters who were men of colour.³⁸ In an informal and much less comprehensive review of CTV programming, MediaWatch also noted that in the eight shows planned for the Canadian network's fall 1993 schedule, only three female lead characters were featured, compared to 12 male leads.³⁹

³⁶ Gerbner, *Ibid.*

³⁷ Spears and Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, pp. 24 -25

³⁸ *Front and Centre*, (Toronto: MediaWatch, forthcoming in 1994).

³⁹ Unpublished *Submission for CTV Application for Renewal of Licence*, provided to the CRTC Hearing Committee, September 1993, p. 3.

An examination of the demographic characteristics of women in prime time network television by Davis, which compared 1987 programming results to similar analyses dating from the 1950s, reflected Gerbner's findings in many ways, concluding that "little change has occurred in portrayals of women."⁴⁰ Instead, the study determined that beauty and youth appear to be among the most significant determinants of a woman's place in television, with females much more likely to be dressed in provocative clothing, and remaining on average approximately ten years younger than their male counterparts. (In fact, women generally disappear after the age of 35, returning only as "character" actors over 50.) In contrast to men, more women appeared in comedy than in either action adventure or drama, and a female character's marital and parental status were much more likely to be identified than her male counterpart's.

This is particularly ironic in light of another trend noted by media critic, Judith Posner, regarding the extent to which males have been used to replace females in mothering roles on television. While images of men nurturing children may be progressive in the sense that they challenge stereotypes of men as being typically aggressive and independent, Posner argues that the "obliteration of the mother" is problematic. The cumulative impact of programs such as *My Three Sons*, *A Family Affair*, *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* and *Full House* – all of which feature single fathers – not only contradicts the reality, but also implies that single parenting is only of interest when performed by men. Moreover, Posner notes that "in television's 40-year history we can find more shows featuring aliens, dogs and horses than shows starring Mom."⁴¹

Davis also cites a seemingly progressive phenomenon that occurred in the 1970s, when a number of programs featuring female leads seemed to dominate the small screen. Closer analysis, however, revealed that the apparently women-friendly shows included such "jiggle

⁴⁰ Davis, "Portrayals of Women..." p. 330.

⁴¹ Judith Posner, "Where's Mom?" in *Media & Values*, (Los Angeles: Centre for Media and Values, 1989) No. 49.

television" classics as *Police Woman* and *Charlie's Angels*, both of which show-cased fashion-model-beautiful and provocatively-dressed police officers who tended to be either saved by their male colleagues or ordered about by an invisible male authority figure. In that environment, Mary Tyler Moore – a single career woman who dated but was not defined by her relationships with men – was a beacon of independence and inspiration. Nevertheless, even Mary was the only one in her otherwise male-populated office who always called the boss "Mr. Grant" when everyone else addressed him as "Lou." Overall, the picture was not particularly indicative of an increase in autonomous and intelligent women.⁴²

In fact, a number of studies have focused specifically on the image of women and work. Vande Berg and Streckfuss reviewed three decades of studies on the portrayal of gender and occupation on prime-time television, and extended previous work by examining in their study the organizational actions performed by men and women in a sampling of network television news, sports and entertainment programming during 1986 and 1987.⁴³ Their findings, in addition to confirming the unrealistically low percentage of women seen as being employed outside the home, also demonstrated that although women on television were almost as likely as men to be professionals, they still tended to hold lower status positions (e.g. nurse versus doctor). This, in addition to the fact that women were underrepresented in most managerial jobs, or seen as inheriting their status from their spouses or relatives, cause Vande Berg and Streckfuss to note that "television continues to present working women as lacking the competitively achieved occupational hierarchical power and status of male workers." Rather, women tended to be shown performing proportionately more relationship-oriented actions, such as motivating, socializing and counselling, and fewer of the political and decision-making actions seemingly reserved for male characters.

⁴² Davis, "Portrayals of Women..." pp. 326 - 327.

⁴³ Leah R. Vande Berg and Diane Streckfuss, "Prime-Time Television's Portrayal of Women and the World of Work: A Demographic Profile" in *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Spring 1992, pp. 195 - 207.

In their analysis of these results, the study's authors challenge the conventional interpretation of such data and suggest that, from a humanist/feminist perspective (versus through the dominant lense of corporate capitalism), the activities being performed by women may well be seen as measures of success, not failure. Further, they propose that less attention should be paid to eradicating images of women who are "enacting a humane, interpersonally-focused, cooperative concerned information-sharing style of working and managing," and more emphasis instead, should be given to changing the depiction of television's working men, who are characterized by toughness, self-centeredness, and aggressive competitiveness.

A second study by Atkin, Moorman and Lin investigating working female leads in prime time network series during the 1980s, did so in the context of structural factors. Their hypothesis about the degree to which market conditions may have played an influential role in the development of and support for strong female-driven series such as *Murphy Brown*, *Designing Women*, *Murder She Wrote* and *Roseanne*, appears to have potentially significant implications for positive portrayal trends in the future.⁴⁴ These implications will be discussed at greater length further on.

As for female leads in the movies, critic Molly Haskell described Hollywood's opportunities for women in the 1960s this way: "There were no working women on the screen, no sassy smart-talking women, no mature women, and no goddesses either. There were, instead, amoral pinup girls, molls taking guff from their gangsters... and thirty-year-olds reduced to playing undergraduates... With the substitution of violence and sexuality for romance, there was less need for exciting and interesting women; any bouncing nymphet whose curves looked good in ketchup would do."⁴⁵ Empirical evidence as recent as 1989 appeared to suggest that, on at least some scores, the picture for women had not improved. A U.S. Screen Actors Guild study

⁴⁴ David J. Atkin, Jay Moorman and Carolyn Lin, "Ready for Prime Time: Network Series Devoted to Working Women in the 1980s" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 25, Nos. 11/12, 1991.

⁴⁵ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973)

found that only 14% of that year's total number of lead characters were female, and that an increasing number of women's roles were for rape victims or prostitutes.⁴⁶ Susan Faludi's analysis of Hollywood portrayal trends in the 1980s, although anecdotal, nevertheless documented some equally disturbing trends. In 1987, for instance, she noted that the "good" women -- "subservient and bland housewives, babies, or voiceless babes" -- were rewarded (as in *Fatal Attraction*, *Three Men and a Baby* and *Beverly Hills Cop*), while, the "bad" women -- who failed to give up their independence (appearing in the same movies as a "homicidal career woman", a "mannish and child-hating shrew", and a "hip-booted gunwoman") -- were punished.⁴⁷

Slasher Films: Good Girls Don't Die

This virgin/whore dichotomy also shows up in more systematic studies. Two recent analyses have dealt with popular "slasher" films, targeted mostly to teen viewers, and commonly perceived as focusing on the brutal killing of primarily young women. The results of Weaver's 1991 investigation into the extent to which male and female characters were victimized by violence in ten slasher titles contradicted earlier work by Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod which concluded that women were far more likely to be brutalized than men.⁴⁸ However, although the Weaver study found no significant difference between the number of male and female victims, and no rapes in the films sampled, sexist messages were conveyed by a tendency to reward "virginal" female characters with escape, while punishing their more promiscuous friends. In addition, when women were killed, their death scenes were significantly longer than those of their male counterparts.

⁴⁶ As cited in Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1990), p. 137

⁴⁷ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp.112 - 139

⁴⁸ James B. Weaver, III, "Are 'Slasher' Horror Films Sexually Violent? A Content Analysis" in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Summer 1991, pp. 385 - 392.

Cowan and O'Brien's analysis of a considerably larger sample of 56 videos confirmed Weaver's results regarding the equitable victimization of male and female characters, but suggested the common perception that more women die in slasher films may be attributable to the fact that women's "protected" status makes their deaths more memorable, and the best known titles have a preponderance of female victims. Cowan and O'Brien also found evidence to support Donnerstein et al's contention about a significant link between sex and violence. Not only did they, like Weaver, note a higher incidence of survival rate among "good" girls, but in addition, their sample revealed fifteen instances of rape.⁴⁹

Women in Music Videos: Sex Sells

Sex and violence have formed a potent mixture in another medium aimed primarily at young audiences: music videos. Since the introduction of MTV (Music Television) in 1981, and its Canadian counterpart, Much Music several years later, the derogatory, sexualized image of women in this advertising-cum-art form has also spawned numerous studies. Much of the early research, in addition to reflecting stereotypical occupational roles and a two-to-one ratio of male characters over female (consistent with television data generally), also determined that women were much more likely than men to be dressed provocatively (50% versus 10%). A majority of videos were found both to depict scenarios in which women were denigrated by men, and to include violent, sexual and criminal activities.⁵⁰

More recent research has tended to support such findings. Seidman's 1992 study, which assessed 1,942 characters in 182 videos broadcast in 1987, found evidence to confirm women's low status, revealing attire, and stereotypical behaviour and relationships with men. Relative to

⁴⁹ Gloria Cowan and Margaret O'Brien, "Gender and Survival vs. Death in Slasher Films: A Content Analysis" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 23, Nos. 3/4, 1990, pp. 187 - 196.

⁵⁰ Literature reviews of the earliest studies of music television are provided by Rita Sommers-Flanagan, John Sommers-Flanagan and Britta Davis, "What's Happening on Music Television? A Gender Role Content Analysis" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 28, Nos. 11/12, 1993; and Steven A. Seidman, "An Investigation of Sex-Role Stereotyping in Music Videos" in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Spring 1992, pp. 209 - 216.

male characters – who were adventuresome, aggressive, domineering and violent – females were more affectionate, dependent, fearful, and nurturing. Seidman found that women were also "more likely to pursue others and be pursued sexually," with the exception of women of colour, who were portrayed as being less active in sexual pursuit than men of colour. (This suggests that, in addition to being sexist, music videos – like television generally – not surprisingly embody and reflect racist assumptions, too.)⁵¹

A second study of 1987 videos assessed a smaller sample of 40 videos and focused specifically on stereotypic sex-role behaviour associated with "dating, flirtation, or other sexually oriented behaviours."⁵² Based in part on Jean Kilbourne's descriptions, Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan and Davis coded behaviours into categories such as "Dominance/Subservience", "Aggression with Sexuality", "Implicit (or explicit) sexuality (or aggression)," and "Objectification". Many of their findings confirmed those already discussed, but they also noted with surprise that male characters were equally likely to be objectified, and that although women were more likely to be depicted in sexually explicit behaviour, there was a high incidence of men in this category, as well.

Two Canadian studies identified an increase in videos containing sexist portrayals from 46% in 1988 to 55% in 1992.⁵³ Furthermore, because sexist videos were played more often than non-sexist videos, 60% of all videos aired in the 1992 sample contained such imagery. More than three-quarters of the women depicted were approximately 25 years or younger, and portrayed as being "dependent on men, dancing and posing seductively. Women over 25 years of age were typically ugly, badly dressed, and neglected." Although between the two samples,

⁵¹ Seidman, pp. 211 - 215

⁵² Sommers-Flanagan *et al.*, p. 746

⁵³ Francois Baby, Johanne Chene and Johanne Viens, "Sexisme dans les videoclips a la television," study commissioned by the Direction des Communications, Gouvernement du Quebec, 1988; and Francois Baby, Johanne Chene and Helene Dugas, "Less Femmes dans les videoclips a la television," study conducted for Le Conseil de Statut de la femme, Gouvernement du Quebec 1992, as cited by George Spears and Kasia Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, p.28.

explicit portrayals of violence decreased from 27% of videos in 1988 to 16% in 1992, implicit violence remained through symbolic representations which used special effects and image juxtaposition. According to the aggregated data from the CRTC's 1984 and 1988 studies, women constitute 3% of instrumental players, 19% of singers and 40% of dancers.

Although there is little empirical research into the depiction of women in the increasingly popular video game phenomenon at this time, Eugene Provenzo's review of a large sample of games determined that women are largely invisible or cast as victims.⁵⁴ Furthermore, recent newspaper stories discussing the best-selling games confirm this, and further suggest that some of the most graphic examples of media violence against women are to be found in this genre.⁵⁵

The Advertiser's Woman, (or "Who's Come a Long Way, Baby?")⁵⁶

Although, as shown, research studies cataloguing inequitable representation and portrayal trends cross all media forms, much of the most prominent discussion of the negative stereotyping of women in media has focused on advertising depictions. This is perhaps not surprising: advertising has sustained a long tradition of criticism, from consumer concerns about false claims to Marcuse's notion of "false needs".⁵⁷ Also relevant is the fact that the vast majority of media images are at least indirectly underwritten by – and therefore potentially subject to interference from – commercial advertisers.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ See Eugene F. Provenzo, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*, (Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ "Violent video game still available" in *The Province*, December 20, 1993, A 11.

⁵⁶ The Virginia Slims campaign slogan, arguably one of the longest running lines in advertising history, is also one of the most inflammatory. Jean Kilbourne criticizes the concept on two counts: for trivializing a woman's real need for independence by equating the escape from restrictive traditions with the freedom to ruin one's health by smoking; and for targeting young women already concerned about achieving an unrealistically slim body image, with a campaign that constructs a deliberate association between weight loss and a habit that kills. *Still Killing Us Softly*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge Documentary Films, 1987

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the dominant critiques of advertising, see William Leiss, Stephen Klíne and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising* (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1990), pp. 15 - 33.

Furthermore, the money invested in the creation of advertising campaigns – particularly those which dominate on television and in consumer magazines – often exceeds the money spent on the accompanying programming or editorial copy.⁵⁹ Indeed, many of the most memorable messages constituting the shared cultural vocabulary of late 20th century North America have been brought to us by a commercial sponsor. Campaign slogans such as Clairol's "Does she, or doesn't she? Only her hair dresser knows for sure...", or Virginia Slims' "You've come a long way, baby" are ingrained upon our collective psyche with the permanence of nursery rhymes and parental admonishments. Moreover, for many critics, the consumption ethos of advertising is directly implicated in the general media tendency to commodify women. As one research team put it, "For the male consumer, the implicit promise is that, if you buy product x, you will also get the sweet young thing associated with it. For the female, the dynamics are those of incorporation: buy product x and *be* the sweet young thing."⁶⁰ The social implications of these phenomena mitigate the extent to which one might be tempted to view women's greater proportional presence in advertising (as opposed to news or entertainment programming) as positive.

John Berger's seminal book *Ways of Seeing*, and the British television series on which it was based, effectively linked the historical subjugation of women evident in Renaissance art to contemporary advertising imagery in the early 1970s.⁶¹ Erving Goffman's 1979 study *Gender Advertisements*, which analyzed the physically subordinate positioning of women in a select

⁵⁸ Although editors and programmers typically deny that advertisers are permitted to influence content, Gloria Steinem provides an especially relevant description of advertiser influence on the non-advertising content of women's magazines in "Sex, Lies and Advertising" in *Ms.* July/August 1990, pp. 18 - 28. Ben Bagdikian also documents a number of cases in *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 4th edition, 1992), especially pp.152 - 173.

⁵⁹ Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, (London: Pinter, 1987) p. 103.

⁶⁰ Michelle A. Masse and Karen Rosenblum, "Male and Female Created They Them: The Depiction of Gender in the Advertising of Traditional Women's and Men's Magazines" in *Women Studies International Forum*, 1988, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 143.

⁶¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation/Penguin Books, 1973) especially pp. 36 - 64.

sample of print images has been an enormously influential study, inspiring more recent research which has sought to extend his approach to more current and randomized advertisement samples.⁶² More recently, the widely-viewed video *Still Killing Us Softly*, by Jean Kilbourne has introduced a great many teachers and students throughout Canada and the U.S. to Kilbourne's feminist critique of advertising.⁶³

Previous reviews of the extensive body of research into this area have cited evidence which demonstrates that throughout the 1960s and '70s, both in broadcasting and print media, the advertiser's woman was one who was more likely than her male counterpart to be seen in the home using household cleaning products, or if employed, working in a stereotypically female (and by implication, subservient) position. Many studies have found that a significant portion of television advertisements locating women outside the home, and aired in prime time as opposed to during the day, appeared to present women as sex objects whose primary focus was to attract and hold the attention of men. Moreover, researchers noted that women were largely excluded from playing the "voice-of-authority" which, in narrating TV commercials, reinforces the frequent on-camera positioning of men as experts. In fact, the image of women is especially distorted when compared to that of men, who have traditionally been depicted as independent, intelligent and ambitious. Furthermore, men are much more typically featured selling and using important and/or "big ticket" items such as pharmaceutical products, cars, trucks, gas and oil (whereas women are more likely to be depicted as authorities about personal care items).⁶⁴

⁶² Penny Belknap and Wilbert M. Leonard II, "A Conceptual Replication and Extension of Erving Goffman's Study of Gender Advertisements", in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 25, Nos. 3/4, 1991, pp. 103 - 118, and Masse and Rosenblum, "Male and Female Created They Them: The Depiction of Gender in the Advertising of Traditional Women's and Men's Magazines", pp. 127 - 144.

⁶³ The video has been broadcast frequently on public television and disseminated through educational video distribution networks throughout North America.

⁶⁴ For reviews of the earlier literature in this area, see Benjamin D. Singer, *Advertising and Society* (Toronto: Addison-Wesley, 1986) pp. 104 - 108; Alice E. Courtney and Thomas W. Whipple, *Sex Stereotyping in Advertising* (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1983); and Lynn T. Lovdal, "Sex Role Messages in Television Commercials: An Update" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 21, Nos. 11/12, 1989, pp. 715 - 724.

It is worthwhile to note here that advertisers have sometimes defended their portrayal practices by pointing out that creative teams working in isolation from each other all over the continent cannot be held responsible for the aggregate image of women that is documented by content analysis studies. Further, they've argued that stereotypes are a necessary form of cultural shorthand used to communicate a character or idea in a single photograph or a 30-second TV commercial.⁶⁵ These arguments might carry some weight if the under-representation of women were not as pervasive as it is, and if men were portrayed as narrowly as women.

Indeed, subsequent research findings all too often mirror previous results. Ferrante, Haynes and Kingsley, in a more recent replication of one of the earliest comprehensive analyses of network TV commercials, determined from an analysis of almost 1,400 ads appearing in 1986, that there was no significant change with regard to: the kinds of products typically associated with women in advertising; the percentage of female voice-overs; or the frequency with which women were used as on-camera authorities.⁶⁶ Furthermore, although women were shown less often at home, and in a greater number of roles than in the earlier study, overall differences between the portrayed occupations did not decrease. Ultimately, the researchers concluded that "These results reinforce the fact that women and men are not treated equally in television advertising... women are still predominantly portrayed in the home while men are more frequently shown in the business world."

Another recent study found significant differences between the way in which women were portrayed during programming targeted to predominantly female weekday audiences versus programming targeted to male or mixed audiences on the weekends or during prime time.⁶⁷

Coding a sample of more than 2,000 commercials aired in 1990, Stephen Craig determined that

⁶⁵ Singer, *Advertising and Society*, pp. 113 - 115.

⁶⁶ Carol L. Ferrante, Andrew M. Haynes and Sarah M. Kingsley, "Image of Women in Television Advertising", in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Volume 32, Number 2, Spring 1988, pp. 231 - 237.

⁶⁷ R. Stephen Craig, "The Effect of Day Part on Gender Portrayals in Television Commercials: A Content Analysis" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 26, Nos. 5/6, 1992, pp. 197 - 211.

advertisements aimed at women homemakers viewing television during the day tend to feature more traditional roles and emphasize domestic duties and maintaining one's appearance. In the evening, however, women were more likely to be seen in authoritative positions away from the home and on the weekend, advertisements tended to emphasize traditional stereotypes of masculinity (aggressiveness, independence, competitiveness) and to cater to "male fantasy", featuring women in subservient or sex object roles.

Several studies have also attempted to extend Goffman's seminal work in content analysis by assessing more randomized and current materials than he did in his original study. Research by Masse and Rosenblum, for instance, found women were more likely than men to be portrayed: alone, as "an idealized and narcissistic self" (35.4% versus 18%); dismembered (19.5% versus 8.4%); and in a subordinate stance (27% versus 3.8%); while men are more likely than women to be shown engaged in a purposeful activity – (21% versus 1.4%). ("Purposeful activity" here was tellingly defined by the authors as "sailing a boat, versus kicking up your heels alone in the kitchen.")⁶⁸

In an even more recent study by Belknap and Leonard, not all of the behaviour groupings (Relative Size, The Feminine Touch, Function Ranking, The Ritualization of Subordination, Licensed Withdrawal, and The Family) delineated by Goffman were noted. However, in those that did appear, stereotypical patterns were also evident. For instance, men were always taller; they were more likely to "grasp" objects, while women "caressed" them; women were much more likely than men to be pictured touching themselves; and the largest classification of "subordinate" men were deemed so due to their casual attire, while the equivalent category of females were subordinate by virtue of their smiling faces and canted posture. Interestingly enough, stereotypical gender displays appeared more frequently in advertisements found in the more "modern" – i.e., *MS.*, *GQ*, and *Rolling Stone* – of the six magazines sampled, causing the researchers to question whether or not "traditional" publications (in this case, *Good*

⁶⁸ Masse and Rosenblum, "Male and Female Created They Them," pp. 127 - 144.

Housekeeping, Sports Illustrated and *Time*) were ultimately more progressive than those considered modern.)⁶⁹

Lovdal (1989) conducted a review of television commercials, building on a classification system used by O'Donnel and O'Donnel in 1978, and comparing her findings to theirs.⁷⁰ Coding voice-overs, products, product representatives and setting, she found that, in a sample of 353 prime time commercials airing over a two-week period, all categories were unchanged from the previous study, except female product representatives. (The author attributes this one inconsistency to the relative increase in male product representatives in the fast food category.) Overall, men were portrayed in three times as many occupations as women, who were instead presented in "a plethora of stereotyped roles, including wife, mother, bride, waitress, actress, dancer, and in a dearth of professional roles such as photographer, athlete, dentist and businesswoman." Men continued to dominate 90% of voice-overs, and women were seen speaking only to those considered to be of inferior status (pets, children, and other women) about a narrow range of issues such as feminine hygiene, headaches and diets.

Bretl and Cantor's content analysis of a 1985 sample of television commercials, while confirming the findings cited above regarding both voice-over statistics, and the continuing association of female characters with domestic-based products, nevertheless also identified several areas of small, but statistically significant improvement. Compared to a study done on a 1971 sample of advertisements, Bretl and Cantor found that almost as many women as men appeared as the main characters in ads; and that the difference between the numbers of men and women depicted inside the home had decreased. Although women were still less likely to be employed, the gap between men and women in high status jobs was much lower than

⁶⁹ Belknap and Leonard, "A Conceptual Replication and Extension of Erving Goffman's Study of Gender Advertisements", pp. 103 - 118.

⁷⁰ Lovdal, "Sex Role Messages ..." pp. 715 - 724.

previously noted, and the proportion of men depicted as spouses or parents, with no other occupation, had increased.⁷¹

The most recent Canadian research comes from the comprehensive content analysis conducted by Erin Research on behalf of the Canadian Radio -Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in 1984 and again in 1988.⁷² The 1988 data determined that advertising on Canadian television included: fewer female characters than male (41% versus 59%), and in particular, fewer women over age 35; significantly fewer female voice-overs (14% versus 86%); and a strong tendency to associate women with home and family roles. In addition, women were more likely to appear in ads for household consumer goods such as detergent or plastic wrap (67%), but considerably less visible in paid political announcements (18%) or automobile commercials (20%). In a sample of 2,000 alcohol ads (at one time seen to be among the most sexist) appearing on Canadian TV, only 7% of female characters in beer commercials were found to have speaking roles (versus 29% of males); in cooler advertisements, none of the women spoke (versus 49% of the men).

Interestingly enough, in French-language television advertisements in Canada, male and female characters are more evenly split (53% and 47% respectively), female voice-overs account for 23% of the total, and there were less significant gender differences in assigned roles than in English-language ads.

The most recent analysis of Canadian print advertising comes in the form of MediaWatch's recommendations to the Canadian Advertising Foundation in 1993 in response to the latter organization's request for submissions pertaining to its Sex-Role Stereotyping Guidelines, designed to help advertisers voluntarily eliminate sexism. Although not in the form of an empirical study, the MediaWatch report provides an anecdotal assessment of the ways in

⁷¹ Daniel J. Brett and Joanne Cantor, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in U.S. Television Commercials: A Recent Content Analysis and Trends Over 15 Years" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 18, Nos. 9/10, 1988, pp. 595 - 609.

⁷² Spears and Seydegart, *Portrayal of Gender*, pp. 32 - 33.

which the existing guidelines have failed to have any measurable effect on the image of women, and includes print advertisements selected from 1992 - 1993 Canadian consumer magazines on the basis of their sexist content. In addition to comments addressing the underrepresentation of women in authoritative roles, the report focuses primarily on the objectification and irrelevant sexualization of women and girls, and the implied linking of sexual "fun" with "danger" or violence. Two television advertisements depicting women in particularly stereotypical domestic situations are also cited.⁷³

Social Implications of Gender Portrayal Trends

The implicit hypothesis inspiring virtually all of the studies into gender portrayal in mass media is that stereotyping and under-representation have a negative socializing influence. Considering the weight of evidence already cited regarding media inequities, especially in the context of a society still struggling with persistent and systemic sexism, it is not surprising that feminists have attempted to use the content analysis research in making a case for needed change. However, assessing portrayal trends in empirical terms, and then simply hypothesizing possible effects, drawing on theory or literature from psychology and other related fields has obvious limitations. These have not gone unnoticed by those resistant to change. In presenting the results of its monitoring studies to industry and government bodies, MediaWatch has on more than one occasion been challenged about the value of the research, given its inability to demonstrate social effects.⁷⁴

Relative to the content analysis research, however, there has been considerably less work done attempting to measure the socializing influences of media sex-role portrayals on behaviour. The bulk of what does exist has focused on the extent to which children learn sex

⁷³ MediaWatch, "Submission to the Canadian Advertising Foundation Re: Revision of Sex-Role Stereotyping Guidelines," 1993.

⁷⁴ Interview with Meg Hogarth, Executive Director of MediaWatch from September 1991 to August 1995.

role attitudes and behaviours from television. Early experimental studies summarized by Signorielli⁷⁵ suggest that boys and girls identify with same-sex TV characters (including those in cartoons) whom they perceive as exhibiting sex-typed attributes (e.g., boys respond to physical strength and activity level, and girls to physical attractiveness). Furthermore, heavy television viewing in children and teens has been found to be related to: stereotyping of occupational roles; increased agreement with statements such as "women are happiest at home raising children" and "men are born with more ambition than women"; the exhibition of greater sex typing behaviour for gender-related qualities and activities (e.g., independence and sports for boys; warmth and cooking for girls); and the increased likelihood that children will identify domestic chores as being associated with either men or women along traditional lines.⁷⁶

One of the most compelling pieces of research into media effects is the widely-cited natural experiment directed by Tannis MacBeth Williams. Capitalizing on the much-delayed introduction of television into a small British Columbia community ("Notel"), Williams and her colleagues were able to measure the impact of the medium as an isolated variable. They assembled before- and after-television data which, among other things, demonstrated that children's perceptions with regards to sex roles were less strongly sex-typed prior to the presence of TV, and only became comparable to the perceptions of children in other communities which were already receiving one or two stations ("Unitel" and "Multitel"), after the medium's introduction.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Signorielli, "Television and Conceptions..." pp. 341 - 343.

⁷⁶ Nancy Signorielli, "Children, Television, and Conceptions about Chores: Attitudes and Behaviours" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 27, Nos. 3/4, 1992, pp.157 - 170.

⁷⁷ See Tannis MacBeth Williams, "The Impact of Television: A Longitudinal Canadian Study" and Meredith M. Kimball, "Television and Sex Role Attitudes" in Williams, ed., *The Impact of Television: A Natural Experiment in Three Communities*, (New York: Academic Press, 1986) pp. 265 - 301.

This is especially disturbing given Williams' comments cited earlier about television's influence as a teacher of gender roles providing a significantly larger number of potential models than most children encounter in real life. Even in the 1990s, there remains a dearth of positive female role models on mainstream television. In MediaWatch's 1994 audience survey, for instance, almost half (46%) of the Canadian women polled were unable to name a single female character or personality on TV whom they considered to be a positive role model for young women.⁷⁸

The literature investigating effects of gender portrayal on adults is much more limited, but several small-sample studies suggest that positive correlations between: the viewing of entertainment programming and the acceptance of traditional sex roles; the viewing of daytime serials and the support of traditional family structures and values; and the viewing of stereotyped material and the amount of sex-role stereotyping in self-descriptions.⁷⁹ (It is important to note that causability cannot be inferred here; rather the relationships may simply reflect existing attitudes and program preferences of those studied. Research conducted by Geis, Brown, Walstedt and Porter on the effects of traditional and non-traditional gender roles in TV commercials found that the viewing of sex stereotypes in ads prompted women to de-emphasize achievement in favour of homemaking, as compared to men, and as compared to women who had viewed reversed sex role commercials.⁸⁰

Several recent studies have responded to the growing rates of anorexia and bulimia among young women, as viewed in the context of a media image of women that is defined by the bodies of fashion models who weigh 23% less than the average North American woman, and -- along with female actors and dancers -- are estimated to be thinner than 95% of the population.⁸¹

⁷⁸ MediaWatch, *Women and TV: A Survey of Women's Response to Television*, October 1994, p.27.

⁷⁹ As reviewed by Nancy Signorielli, "Television and Conceptions ..." p. 343.

⁸⁰ Lovdal, "Sex Role Messages..." p. 717.

⁸¹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, pp. 184 -185.

Earlier research has determined that: media generally emphasize women's appearance to a greater extent than men's and present a steadily thinning female ideal; women are more likely than men to overestimate their body size; and extra weight has become associated with poor health and lack of control.⁸²

Building on this material, Myers and Biocca conducted an experimental study with 76 affluent young women (of an age and class most often associated with eating disorders) who were exposed to some combination of body image-oriented and/or non-body image-oriented TV commercials and/or programming. The results of subsequent mood measurement and self-estimation of body size were surprising. Although the women overestimated their body sizes as expected, after viewing commercials which focused attention on body image and products or services designed to achieve a thin shape, the women tended to feel slightly euphoric and thinner than they normally would. The response to the programming was much weaker, and the authors hypothesized that the advertisements, which addressed the women directly, inviting them to imagine themselves in an ideal body, effectively convinced them that they could attain (albeit with help) a more desirable shape. The authors noted that additional work should be done in this vein to test their suspicion that the slightly improved mood registered by the women immediately after viewing the commercials would diminish (and perhaps translate into the more commonly documented "self-loathing") when confronted by "the cold reality of the mirror." Nevertheless, they concluded that the most significant aspect of the experiment was the implication that "watching even 30 minutes of television programming and advertising can alter a woman's perception of the shape of her body."⁸³

Although a discussion of mainstream pornography and the related effects research is outside the scope of this thesis, it is useful to refer to this body of literature, given the

⁸² Philip N. Myers, Jr. and Frank A. Biocca, "The Elastic Body Image: The Effect of Television Advertising and Programming on Body Image Distortions in Young Women" in *Journal of Communications*, 42(3), Summer 1992, pp. 108 - 133.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

increasing concern about violence against women in the media already mentioned, the infiltration of pornographic imagery into mainstream media forms,⁸⁴ and the growth of the pornography industry itself, which now generates more money world-wide than the "legitimate" film and music industries combined.⁸⁵ Although some assert that the research has not established a definitive link between use of pornography and criminal behaviour,⁸⁶ the experimental evidence suggesting that exposure to sexually violent films desensitizes both male and female viewers to victims of violence, and increases acceptance of rape myths,⁸⁷ is problematic enough in a society struggling with the consequences of high incidences of real sexual violence against women.⁸⁸

Research Challenges

With the exception of the "Notel" study previously cited, it has been enormously difficult to isolate the impact of one or more media forms from the myriad other influences on gender role socialization (such as family, school, or friends). As a result, even the studies reviewed above which have attempted to draw conclusions based on experimental evidence have been met with

⁸⁴ See Patricia Sawatsky, "After the Butler Decision: Sex, Violence and Entertainment in Canada" in *MediaWatch Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Fall 1992, p. 3; and Rosemarie Tong, *Women, Sex and the Law*, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984) as cited in Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, p. 51. The latter refers to a U.S. court decision which "upheld the right of male workers to display pornography in the work place, no matter how offensive to women workers, on the grounds that the landscape is steeped in that sort of imagery anyway."

⁸⁵ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ Augustine Brannigan, "Is Pornography Criminogenic? The Career of a Moral Problem" in *Communications in Canadian Society*, ed. by Ben Singer, 1995.

⁸⁷ Neil Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein, eds. *Pornography and Aggression*, 1984, Wendy Stock, "The effects of pornography on women", testimony for the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1985 as cited by Susan Cole, *Pornography and the Sex Crisis*, (Toronto: Amanita Enterprises, 1989) pp. 49 - 52.

⁸⁸ Moreover, a recent study of 26 prime time television dramas dealing with rape found the perpetuation of rape myths is also prevalent in mainstream television programming, as well, a fact which will inevitably make it more difficult to isolate the factors potentially contributing to the real life phenomenon; see Susan Brinson, "The Use and Opposition of Rape Myths in Prime Time Television Dramas" in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 27. Nos. 7/8, 1992.

some scepticism. The cultivation model used by Gerbner and Signorielli, because it seeks global impacts, is able to identify only small effects, due to the extent to which individual viewers respond differently. At the same time, lab experiments, which take personal and situational variables into consideration, are able to predict results only within the narrow field of the individual experiments themselves, making it difficult to generalize from their findings.

Tuchman, in her 1979 summary of the available research on media effects, argued that any conclusions made at that point about the impact of gender portrayal would have to mirror those made by the then-recent Surgeon General's report on violence, and go only so far as to suggest that: "For some children, under some circumstances, televised sex-role stereotypes may be harmful to optimal personal development."⁸⁹

Notwithstanding the multitude of research on gender roles undertaken in the intervening years, this perspective appears to remain. As Spears and Seydegart point out, despite common sense conclusions that might be drawn from the existing body of evidence regarding the likelihood of a preponderance effect, the systemic discrimination quantified by the research and the evidence supporting at least the potential for harm, have failed to translate into truly effective policy.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Gaye Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media" p. 539.

⁹⁰ Spears and Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, pp. 6 - 7.

Chapter 2

Transition from Social Equity/Content Analysis Approach to Appreciation of Audience/Marketing Dimension

The Impact of Feminist Activism on Industry and Regulatory Policy

In 1932, then Prime Minister R. B. Bennet declared the airwaves a "national resource" which should be protected from "private exploitation" and reserved for the use of the people. Implicit in this statement, and in the radio broadcasting act that followed it, was the notion that such a powerful means of communication should be used for the benefit of *all* Canadians. Yet throughout this country's sixty-year broadcasting history, empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated the extent to which the system has failed to reflect Canadian women in a fair and equitable manner. Feminists have been conducting and presenting such research to point out the discrepancy in pursuit of changing it for an equally long period of time.

From the Canadian Radio League in the 1930s, through the Massey Commission on broadcast policy in 1949, the Fowler Commission on television policy in 1955, and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967, women and women's groups have been actively lobbying the government, urging that they be portrayed "as free human beings with the same capacities as men."⁹¹ Indeed, the relative lack of substantive change has ensured that the argument that "women are a Charter group whose rights should be protected and enhanced"⁹² continues to be made in the 1990s.

Nevertheless, industry and government have responded, if not in substance, at least in principle. In 1979, after years of continued pressure, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) established a Task Force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media. For the next three years, public representatives worked with members of the broadcasting and advertising industries to develop guidelines that would eliminate gender

⁹¹ MediaWatch, *Tracing the Roots of MediaWatch*, p. 5.

⁹² MediaWatch, *Review of Policy on Sex-Role Stereotyping*, p. 1.

stereotyping. In addition to leading to the foundation of MediaWatch in 1981, the exercise resulted in the publication of a CRTC report in 1982, entitled *Images of Women*. In it, the Commission recommended that the stereotyping guidelines for broadcasters be voluntary for a two-year period of self-regulation, after which industry initiatives towards addressing the problems would be assessed.⁹³

As previously mentioned, in 1984, the CRTC commissioned an independent firm, Erin Research, to conduct a comprehensive content analysis documenting the portrayal of gender roles in Canadian broadcasting. Published in 1985, the first Erin report revealed that there were fewer women than men in virtually all aspects of Canadian broadcasting, both programming and advertising, and that the roles of women and men differed qualitatively in every area.⁹⁴ In light of this, and after additional presentations at public hearings during April of 1986, the CRTC acknowledged that although industry had shown greater sensitivity to the problem, this had not translated into sufficient improvement. As a result, compliance with the sex-role stereotyping guidelines – which the CRTC asked the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) to strengthen – was made mandatory, and a condition of licence for radio and television licensees. The Commission further indicated that broadcasters would be required to describe at licence renewal hearings the efforts they were making and policies they had developed to address the issue of sex-role stereotyping. (Unfortunately, despite the fact that presenters at the CRTC hearings, and the commissioners themselves, all acknowledged that getting women into key decision-making positions would be the most effective solution to media sexism,⁹⁵ no measures were taken on employment equity. The CRTC indicated that under the then-current broadcasting act, it had no authority over broadcasters' hiring practices.)⁹⁶

⁹³ The history of this process is described in both Spears and Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, pp. 65 - 71, and MediaWatch, *Review of Policy on Sex-Role Stereotyping*, pp. 4 - 6.

⁹⁴ Spears and Seydegart, *Portrayal of Gender*.

⁹⁵ While this contention has been debated (Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media", p. 534), there is also significant support for the notion that more women directors, writers and producers in media industries would effect a shift in portrayal trends. See for instance, Catherine Murray, Shari

In 1988, the CRTC had Erin Research conduct a second, follow-up study of gender portrayals in Canadian broadcasting, mirroring the methodology of the original 1984 research. Published in 1990, this report found that, based on its review of the gender portrayal data, the 1984 to 1988 period was "characterized much more by stability than by change." Although some improvement was noted, women still lagged behind men in both quantitative and qualitative measures.

In 1990, after several delays and amendments, the CRTC finally approved the CAB's new guidelines, which included specifics relating to: women's changing roles; the presentation of a diversity of lifestyles, ages, races and appearances; the avoidance of exploitation; the use of non-sexist language; and balance in expert representation, among other things.⁹⁷ While an important step, these guidelines nevertheless still lacked easily measurable goals and dates for achieving targets. Furthermore, since the CRTC would not be measuring the broadcasters' compliance with the guidelines, determination of their failure to adhere was dependent on a public complaint process. This required not only that groups and individuals know the

Graydon, Theresa Kiefer and Jacqueline Botterill, *It Matters Who Makes It: A Review of Research on Women, Audiences and The Media*, unpublished report prepared for Lifestyles Television Inc., 1993, especially pp. 28 - 32; and Eva Pomice, "A Few Good Women...and how they're changing the way advertising addresses us" in *Lears*, March 1993, pp. 103 - 107, 130.

⁹⁶ MediaWatch, *Review of Policy on Sex-Role Stereotyping*. It is perhaps worth noting here that although MediaWatch was not surprised that the CRTC chose to interpret its mandate in the narrowest way possible, precluding its interference on the employment front, the regulator had proven itself to be the most sympathetic point of access available to us in our efforts to influence broadcast industry portrayal practices. Both the Canadian Advertising Foundation and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, as industry-funded and run organizations, clearly placed their own business priorities ahead of any equity considerations raised by women's groups. The CRTC, on the other hand, as the government body responsible for at least upholding the appearance of fairness, had in the past at least issued statements and conducted research that acknowledged the importance of equity in the Canadian broadcasting environment. On a practical level, MediaWatch has always recognized that the CRTC's failure to uphold the portrayal guidelines in a rigorous way was in part a practical function of the lack of funding and staff that would be required for regular monitoring to take place. Moreover, MediaWatch's very existence as a government-funded organization, may have let them off the hook somewhat: our mandate was to monitor the portrayal, and they could be assured we would inform them of infractions to the extent that we identified them. Finally, the regulator was fully aware of the relative futility of attempting to enforce Canadian broadcasters' adherence to sex-role stereotyping guidelines in the context of an electronic media environment dominated by U.S. channels not subjected to the same rules.

⁹⁷ Canadian Association of Broadcasting, *Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming*, 1990.

guidelines and regulations, but also that they monitor radio and television stations, and submit formal complaints or intervene in licence renewal hearings. In addition, the CRTC's assessment of any such complaints would be in some part reliant on a subjective evaluation of the licensee's goodwill and intention to comply.

In fact, a comprehensive analysis of the 1988 licence renewal hearings conducted by Linda Trimble determined that the Commission failed to assess industry actions regarding gender stereotyping to any significant degree.⁹⁸ Few questions were asked of licensees about the issue (usually only one, of a general nature) and the condition of licence requirement was rarely mentioned. Further, Trimble noted that the Commission was satisfied by mere assurances by licensees that they were attempting to educate staff or monitor programming and advertising. A subsequent survey by MediaWatch of transcript hearings from 18 stations across Canada confirmed these findings.⁹⁹

These discouraging findings were at least temporarily offset in September of 1991, when parliament passed a new broadcast act which, in its articulation of the goals of the Canadian industry, implicitly expands the CRTC's role. The new document, which the regulator is under obligation to enforce, now states:

Canadian broadcasting should... through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests and reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights...¹⁰⁰

In contrast to the mandate expressed in the earlier version of the broadcast act, this wording recognized the failure of previous directives to improve the numbers of women

⁹⁸ Linda J. Trimble, "Coming To A Station Near You: The Process and Impact of The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission's Involvement in Sex-Role Stereotyping", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, 1990.

⁹⁹ MediaWatch, *Review of Policy on Sex-Role Stereotyping*, p. 14. The report quantifies the number of licensees asked about the issue, and the kinds of initiatives they referenced in response.

¹⁰⁰ The Broadcasting Act, 1991 as cited in Spears and Seydegart, *Gender and Violence*, p. 65.

employed in Canadian broadcasting, and gave the CRTC new authority, paving the way for the Commission's 1992 announcement that the employment equity practices of its licensees would subsequently be subject to review during licensing hearings. Chairman Keith Spicer noted that:

Despite the efforts by broadcasters in recent years, there is still much to be done to eliminate barriers to employment for... traditionally under-represented groups...

and further stated that:

The Commission recognizes that the Canadian broadcasting system has a unique and... influential role to play by providing realistic, equitable portrayal of men and women in the programming and advertising it brings into Canadian homes. This is why we intend to maintain a strong presence in the area of gender portrayal.¹⁰¹

Despite these words, however, the CRTC also indicated in its 1992 Policy on Gender Portrayal (CRTC 1192-58) that it would drop the condition of licence regarding adherence to the sex-role portrayal code – its only measure of enforcement – for broadcasters who had been members of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), an industry body, for six months. Far from reflecting Spicer's contention about "maintaining a strong presence in the area of gender portrayal," this effectively constitutes an abandonment of the issue to an industry which had already demonstrated its unwillingness to follow voluntarily-imposed guidelines under self-regulation. Although the CBSC positions itself as an organization designed to administer the code, and inform and educate broadcasters about emerging social trends, its role, too, is a passive one; action is only taken if members of the public knowledgeable about the system register formal complaints.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ CRTC news release, September 1, 1992.

¹⁰² CRTC, 1992 Policy on Gender Portrayal, Public Notice 1992 - 58, pp. 8 - 11.

The discrepancy between the situation requiring improvement and the measures in place to effect the necessary change is considerable. Although the evidence demonstrates that media discrimination against women is systemic, the complaint-driven, and therefore piecemeal, process by which change is theoretically being supported is not conducive to tangible, let alone pervasive improvement. (Indeed, compelling demonstration of this has come recently in the form of the parallel situation presented by the issue of media violence and, in particular, the case of the children's show, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. Although the program was in clear contravention of the CAB Violence Code from its first day of airing, it was not until two individual parents took the time to become informed about both the specifics of the code and the CBSC process, that the industry's own rules were applied. In response to the written complaints, the CBSC reviewed *Power Rangers*, agreed that it did, indeed, contravene the code, and ordered the program pulled from Canadian channels. However, at least one Canadian broadcaster continued to air the show unrevised for some time after the ruling, and it also remained available on U.S. channels.¹⁰³)

Fundamental to the ineffectuality of complaint-based policies, whether relating to violence or sexism, is the lack of consumer awareness about both the existing codes and the means available to members of the public to effect change. For instance, even after the *Power Rangers* case inspired extensive news media coverage about the complaint-generated ruling, the CBSC acknowledges that despite pervasive concerns amongst Canadians about violent television, very few Canadians are familiar enough with the process to participate.¹⁰⁴

Much like the CAB, the Canadian Advertising Foundation (CAF) has long argued for and managed to maintain a position of self-regulation regarding gender portrayal. And, like the

¹⁰³ The ruling was applied in November 1994, and has been widely covered by both electronic and print media. The recent CRTC hearings on media violence in children's programming in September and October of 1995 saw media coverage revisit the issue, particularly in light of the gap between the CRTC's ability to enforce rulings on Canadian broadcasters, which ultimately serve to benefit their American competition.

¹⁰⁴ Ron Cohen, President of the CBSC in comments made to the MediaWatch Annual General Meeting, September 24, 1995 in Toronto.

broadcasting body, CAF, too, operates on a complaint-based system. Its origins also harken back to the CRTC initiative in 1979 that resulted in a series of guidelines, which CAF agreed to take responsibility for extending and administering to the advertising industry in 1991. Twice since then – in 1987 and again in 1993, partly in response to pressure by MediaWatch – CAF has revised and updated the original document to deal more effectively with the kinds of portrayal issues encountered in paid media.

Nevertheless, even though the guidelines themselves are fairly detailed and progressive in terms of the portrayal practices they identify as problematic, they remain entirely voluntary. Even when – as the result of consumer complaints – an advertiser is found by CAF to be in contravention of the guidelines (which deal with issues such as: equality in roles of authority and decision-making; the avoidance of sexual exploitation – of both adults and children – and violence; and the incorporation of ethnically diverse models and inclusive language), the industry body merely informs the advertiser of the infraction by letter, and may suggest ways of altering the depiction. In rare cases CAF has suggested that an ad be discontinued, but the voluntary nature of the guidelines and the fact that not all advertisers and media outlets support the organization prevent CAF from enforcing any of its recommendations.

Furthermore, because CAF rulings typically happen well after the fact of an advertisement's placement and appearance (the committee that rules on such issues only meets quarterly), by the time a decision is made, the print ad or television commercial may well have run its course, rendering CAF's role completely irrelevant. In addition, as in the broadcasting industry, because the application of the guidelines is done on a case-by-case basis, the impetus for which is individually-filed complaints, improvement does not occur in an aggregate sense.

Historically, although MediaWatch has taken a high-profile role at the regulatory level intervening in public process hearings and submitting detailed briefs documenting the problems and recommending change, the industry has continued to resist advice from the group, which it

has traditionally perceived as being unrepresentative of the broader Canadian population.¹⁰⁵ Given this, it is likely that the guidelines and policy changes that have been influenced by MediaWatch's ongoing presence and pressure have, in fact, occurred primarily as a result of the social equity arguments put forth, as opposed to a genuine concern that consumers outside MediaWatch's small membership were being offended. Indeed, this would help to explain the lip-service nature of the policy changes, and the reluctance of industry to pro-actively enforce any of the guidelines.

On the broadcasting front, the lack of attention paid in the context of CRTC license renewal hearings to what initiatives individual broadcasters are taking with regards to gender equity was recently explained in particularly blunt and pragmatic terms. During an informal address to the MediaWatch annual general meeting in Toronto in September of 1995, a senior bureaucrat with the Commission acknowledged that the condition of license penalty relating to gender portrayal would likely never be applied to a broadcaster failing to adhere to the guidelines, due to a lack of political will on the CRTC's part.¹⁰⁶ He explained that the nature of the financial investment involved in a broadcasting license, and the potential economic (and

¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the other women's organizations convened to have an impact on the portrayal and representation of woman have tended to have been marginalized as well, based on their status as advocates on behalf of women in the industry. Most of the other Canadian organizations formed specifically to address women's inequity in media are professional groups seeking primarily to improve the opportunities for and presence of women in the communications industries. These include Toronto Women in Film and Television (TWIFT, formed in 1984), and its regional counterparts in Vancouver and Montreal. In 1991 TWIFT commissioned *A Statistical Profile of Women in Canadian Film and Television Industry* documenting the extent to which women are under-represented both generally (composing 35% of industry employees overall) and in management (14%). The three organizations develop training courses for women, present briefs to the government on equity issues, and support women's networking in the industry. Canadian Women in Radio and Television (CWRT), and the Canadian Association of Journalists women's caucus, both established in 1991, also work to promote women in their respective industries, as does the National ACTRA Women's Committee (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists). In 1991, a number of high profile Canadian women's organizations and concerned individuals cooperated in the formation of CASandRA (Coalition Against Sexism and Racism in Advertising). CASandRA's first initiative was to lobby for regulation in Ontario to eliminate sexism and racism in beer and liquor advertisements deemed at the time to be the worst offenders in their portrayal of women. This has resulted in considerable changes to much of the beer advertising developed by Canadian beer makers and advertisers.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Fleming, CRTC Director General of Television Programming, spoke to the MediaWatch board on 23 September 1995 in conjunction with our Annual General Meeting.

therefore political) fall-out of such a license cancellation would far outweigh the regulator/government's commitment to achieving equitable portrayal. Although not surprising, given the evidence already cited documenting the CRTC's reluctance to apply the condition of license code since its introduction in 1986, it was, nevertheless, discouraging to hear, and further underlined the extent to which economics ultimately exert more influence over the image of women in media than any other factor.

This is not to say that consumers have failed to speak and be heard altogether. Indeed, in recent years the voices of women expressing concern about some of the most blatant sexism in an advertising context have in some cases been not only loud and clear, but heeded. Given the obstacles described above, it's not surprising, however, that the industry response to high-profile advertising campaigns that evoke public outrage has, without exception, occurred outside the bureaucratic processes established by either the CAF or the CBSC. The following cases not only reflect an element of consumer dismay that has often been either ignored or dismissed by the relevant industry committees, but also demonstrate the weight individual advertisers or broadcasters are beginning to accord to the complaints of potential customers.

Relevant Case Studies

In the fall of 1993, a large billboard went up in downtown Toronto featuring a black and white photograph of a young couple in a shower stall. The vulnerable-looking woman, wearing what appeared to be a white body suit, was pinned up against the wall of the shower by a very muscular man, naked but for an inch or so of jeans riding low on his hips. Created by Request Jeans, the advertisement generated a raft of complaints to both MediaWatch (the office of which is located in Toronto) and the billboard company itself. One of the most compelling of these was from a young mother who, driving by the image on her way home from picking up her daughter at day care was asked by the four-year-old beside her, "Mommy, why is that man hurting that woman?" The billboard company removed the image, acknowledged its

responsibility in allowing the creative to be put up in the first place, and promised to "prevent a reoccurrence in so sensitive and important an area as this."¹⁰⁷

In November of the same year, a television campaign promoting Chanel perfume aired across Canada featuring an ambiguous exchange between a man and a woman. The scene had overtones of anger and jealousy, and a hint of violence. The woman, who appeared vaguely victimized in her love relationship with the man, said things like: "I love it when you hate me!" Although on one level the situation depicted was merely a conversation between two people, it left an overall impression that many women found sinister enough to complain about. MediaWatch became involved by calling the broadcaster in question and suggesting that in anticipation of the fast-approaching anniversary of the Montreal Massacre of 14 female engineering students by the anti-feminist Marc Lepine, this particular creative was extremely questionable. The television station responded by replacing the commercial with another Chanel promotion, this one featuring a woman dressed up as an exotic bird, in a cage, being threatened by a hungry-looking cat.

Ironically, the latter ad's print version, which had appeared in consumer magazines, had also generated a great many complaints. This suggests that consumer outrage is only prescriptive in application to individual ads, and fails to effectively communicate to advertisers, broadcasters or publishers the broader context for women's concerns about portrayal trends generally. Similar occurrences in print media support this conclusion. For instance, a controversial Calvin Klein ad featuring a very young-looking model lying naked face down on a couch, beneath the headline, "Obsession for Men" generated many consumer complaints to a number of Canadian magazines. In response to the expressed concerns about what appeared to many adults to be an invitation to the sexual abuse of a pre-pubescent teen, *Flare* and *Toronto Life* (among others) agreed not to run the offending image in future issues. Nevertheless, a year

¹⁰⁷Letter from Jim Herrier, Vice President/General Manager of Omni Outdoor and Company to Linda Hawke, MediaWatch, dated 21 September 1993.

later at least two of these publications had accepted another Calvin Klein advertisement featuring the same model in a similarly provocative pose, under the same headline.¹⁰⁸

In the late summer of 1995, another billboard appearing in downtown Toronto also evoked angry consumer reaction, despite the fact that although sexually exploitive, it contained no overtones of violence. Created and placed by Swatch, the watch manufacturer, this one featured an image of a woman from neck to midriff, holding her blouse open to expose a generous view of her gravity-defying breasts. The accompanying text drew an association between the watch's "shock resistant" qualities and the woman's body. The negative public response was covered by local media¹⁰⁹ and the ad was pulled, albeit reluctantly.

Within a few weeks of this incident, another outdoor campaign made news headlines when Calvin Klein, who has built a career on shock tactic advertising, responded to public pressure for the first time in more than a decade of pushing the boundaries of tolerance and good taste, and cancelled a multimedia advertising initiative. The campaign, which included outdoor as well as magazine and TV advertisements, featured teenagers of both sexes posed against a background and in a manner that was labelled child pornography by even some of Klein's fellow shock tactic advertisers.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, the fashion magnate was compelled by public outrage not only to pull the campaign, but also to print a full-page explanation (it fell somewhat short of an apology) in the *New York Times*. Although some have suggested that the entire incident was a cynical ploy deliberately designed to reap publicity, the enormous cost of creating, producing, placing – and then pulling – such an extensive multi-media campaign suggests otherwise. Furthermore, Klein's billboards and bus shelters (some of which were scheduled to appear in Canada the week following the unprecedented announcement) would

¹⁰⁸ *action Bulletin*, MediaWatch, April 1995 .

¹⁰⁹ *The Globe and Mail* , 3 August 1995, B1.

¹¹⁰ A representative of Benetton, infamous for its use of controversial images (which have included a black woman breast-feeding a white child, the blood-stained uniform of a dead Bosnian soldier, an arm tattooed with HIV) was quoted in *The Washington Post* as saying that Calvin Klein "made a very specific attempt to make these ads look like cheesy eight-millimetre porn films." 29 August 1995, B1.

have had a much greater impact on teen jean and underwear sales than the critical open-line radio shows and newspaper columns attended to by a largely over-thirty crowd.

Less than two weeks after the Klein controversy, public outrage also forced retailer Holt Renfrew to spend marketing dollars to make amends for one of its advertising decisions. The upscale clothing chain added its name to and paid for placement of a Boucheron perfume ad in a fashion magazine distributed with the *Globe & Mail* newspaper. The ad featured the rear view of a naked woman whose hands appear to be bound behind her back by a bracelet. In response to the ad, both MediaWatch and the retailer received a number of calls from consumers, many of whom indicated they were particularly disturbed by the association they couldn't help but make between the promotional image and the sexual crimes committed by then on-trial rapist and murderer, Paul Bernardo. In its full-page newspaper response, which appeared two days after the original magazine ad, Holt Renfrew promised not to print the offending image in the future, indicating that it "would like to apologize for any distress caused by the advertisement."¹¹¹

The speed and nature of the retailer's reaction was significant given that its offense was perpetrated in the context of a magazine, as opposed to an outdoor medium. Typically, because of the greater profile and sheer unavoidability of billboards and bus shelters, outdoor advertising companies have been not only more cautious in the first place, but also more responsive to consumer complaints than have print advertisers and publishers. While the heightened sensitivities of the public brought about by the grisly details of the Paul Bernardo murder trial no doubt played a role in this particular case, in recent years a number of magazine publishers have also responded in heretofore unprecedented ways to consumer concerns. In 1993, *Details*, a hip U.S. publication targeted to the 15-to-25 year-old crowd printed an apology in response to reader outrage about an ad for cowboy boots that featured a woman on her knees poised to lick the implied but invisible men's boots.

¹¹¹ *The Financial Post*, 9 September 1995, News 11.

Discouragingly, in contrast to the increasing responsiveness of both advertisers and media organizations responsible for disseminating images found by the public to be offensive, the Canadian Advertising Foundation has on occasion proven itself to be surprisingly resistant to applying its own guidelines. Although numerous magazine publishers -- from *Report on Business* to *Western Living* -- acknowledged the inappropriateness of the Obsession ad described above, indicating they would not print it in future because of the troubling juxtaposition of the sexualized youth against the headline encouraging obsession on the part of adult men, when the image was assessed by the CAF advisory panel on gender stereotyping, it was deemed acceptable. In its ruling, the panel indicated that the ad's use of sexuality was justified because it "appeared in an appropriate medium and... was for a cosmetic product." To many, this reasoning failed to uphold one of CAF's own recently updated Gender Portrayal Guidelines, stating that: "advertising must avoid the exploitation of nudity" and "adult women must not be portrayed as girls or with child-like sexual characteristics."¹¹²

The unwillingness of CAF to appreciate and respond to a broadly-shared public reading of a particular image, which appeared to directly contravene its own code seems to be further proof that at this stage in the evolution of awareness regarding portrayal trends and public sensitivities, advertisers with sales at stake are significantly more likely to be responsive than industry bodies made up of financially disinterested individuals who still don't get it. Having said that, Linda Nagel, the current president and CEO of the Canadian Advertising Foundation, appointed after the controversy just cited, devoted a recent editorial in CAF's *Pulse* newsletter to perceived trends in the portrayal of women in Canadian advertisements, noting that: "There is no question consumers are becoming increasingly media aware and sensitised to this issue."¹¹³ She goes on to advise her readers to review the association's Gender Portrayal Guidelines which she describes as having been "developed by and for the industry to help

¹¹² *action Bulletin*, MediaWatch, August 1995.

¹¹³ Nagel, Linda, *Pulse*, Canadian Advertising Foundation, Winter 1995-96, p. 2.

creators of advertising develop positive images of women and men and eliminate systemic discrimination based on gender." Regarding creative concepts which, while they "may be attractive to the target market [are] offensive to others," she warns of "potential untoward consequences" and closes with the following directive:

And since this is my editorial, let me take the opportunity to tell you my pet peeve. As far as I'm concerned, the use of a headless female is the ultimate in objectification. So if I'm in your target market, ON WITH HER HEAD!

This perspective marks a significant departure from the viewpoints of previous CAF presidents with whom MediaWatch has dealt,¹¹⁴ and may signal even progressive decisions from the organization in the future.

One final case study is relevant in the context of an examination of relative responsiveness to consumer concern about gender portrayal in advertising. In the summer of 1989, Johnny Walker Scotch ran a magazine and bus shelter campaign in Toronto featuring the rear view of a shapely woman in a bathing suit. Across her back was a phone number and a reference to her preference for Johnny Walker, and in small print at the bottom of the ad was the following invitation: "For interesting serving suggestions, please give me a call." Interested consumers responding to the invitation were met with a husky female voice telling them just what to do with their Johnny Walker Scotch. A member of MediaWatch's board living in Toronto at the time who was forced to stand adjacent to this ad on her way home from work at night went to City Hall to complain. She pointed out the discrepancy between the city's investment in programs attempting to make the streets safer for women, and the potentially counterproductive nature of this particular campaign's sexual objectification of a woman. She indicated she felt uncomfortable standing next to it, and wanted her concerns to be addressed.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Linda Hawke, current Executive Director of MediaWatch, January 1996.

As a result of her efforts, the City of Toronto, working with the Toronto Transit Commission, developed a series of guidelines governing the images of women permitted to be displayed on city and transit property. This, in turn, resulted in the implementation of a similar initiative in Vancouver prompted by the work of a MediaWatch employee who approached the appropriate authorities requesting they adopt the Toronto example. This case is an unusual one, in that it deals with municipal governments which, although somewhat dependent on advertiser revenues, understandably feel a greater obligation to avoid consumer/voter criticism than to cater to corporate marketing departments. Nevertheless, as an example, it reinforces the argument that self-interest is ultimately a more powerful motivator than the pursuit of righteousness. Being reminded of this point ultimately led to MediaWatch's desire to supplement its content analysis work with an exploration of the potential of audience research to contribute to achieving greater equity for women in media.

Audience Survey: Canadian Women's Response to Television

Perhaps the systemic nature of the inequities in the portrayal and representation of women in mainstream media made it difficult for those concerned with correcting the picture *not* to quantitatively document the unfairness, particularly when the hope must sometimes have been that some progress would have been made in the intervening years between studies. These factors, in addition to the relative facility with which a non-profit group like MediaWatch dependent on largely volunteer labour could undertake such work, probably partly account for the corresponding dearth of audience research, which is inherently much more difficult and expensive to do. A review of the trade literature, however, demonstrates that even industry sectors seeking to reach female consumers have typically ignored female audiences in their research.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This literature is reviewed in Chapter III.

In the context of what it suspected about widely-held views among women about gender portrayal trends, MediaWatch saw this gap in the research as an opportunity. Although the organization's feminist label and relatively small membership base has prevented it from being perceived by industry as reflecting the views of Canadian women at large, based on the feedback garnered through its numerous presentations to a wide variety of community, educational and professional groups, MediaWatch has long believed that the majority of Canadian women supported its goals. By early 1994, an audience survey that would confirm or deny this belief began to seem like an obvious -- and long overdue -- endeavour.

The survey was designed to explore women's attitudes about television programming, media violence and sexism. The hope was that, by confirming broad-based support for a critique of media sexism, the research could be used to bolster the case for change by capitalizing on the self-interest of those programmers and advertisers whose desire to reach women would preclude them from doing so in a way likely to alienate, rather than attract their target audience. The survey included questions about viewing habits and demographic characteristics so that the sample achieved and the data gathered could be validated against existing figures available through Statistics Canada and other reliable sources.

Because of the significant attention being paid at the time to the issue of violence in television (which typically ignored violence in other readily available and popular media forms, such as video games), the survey also included some questions on this theme. (It was also felt in part, that in the post-research publicity phase, news media typically disinterested in covering media sexism, might be more willing to feature stories on the violence findings.) In addition, MediaWatch used the opportunity: to gather data about the percentage of women who identify themselves as feminists or support the goals of equal rights for women; to gauge awareness levels about the organization itself; and -- in an era of ever-shrinking resources -- to determine whether or not women feel that there is a need for a group working to eliminate sexism in the media.

Methodology

The development of the survey, including the order and wording of the questions, the sampling methodology, data coding and weighting of the results was done with the advice of Dr. Steven Kline, Professor of Communication, and Dr. Catherine Murray, formerly Vice President of Decima Research, and now Director of Simon Fraser University's Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology. Both are currently directors of Mountain Media Lab at SFU.

The survey was conducted between June 1 and June 20, 1994, using a random sampling technique. This involved generating random number tables which were then used to locate starting points (page numbers, column numbers and distance in millimetres from the top of the columns) within urban centre telephone books.

The findings arrived at in this report are derived from the voices of 640 Canadian women living in three Canadian metropolitan areas: Vancouver (146); Toronto (379); and Halifax (100). The confidence limit for this sample is approximately +/- 5%, 19 times out of 20.

According to the Canadian census, Toronto makes up 53% of the metro viewing areas covered in this survey, Vancouver 43% and Halifax 4%. The sample surveyed accurately reflects the Toronto market, confidence limits for which are within +/- 3%, nine times out of 10. The Vancouver market is somewhat under-represented by survey respondents, and Halifax is correspondingly over-represented. However, subsequent analysis (t-tests on selected questions) found no statistically significant differences between regions.

Even with the most meticulous sampling procedures, it is not uncommon for slight variations to arise between the sample (women who responded to the survey) and population (all women). To ensure that the women who responded to the survey reflect the general population, we compared the sample to Statistics Canada census data. When comparing the ages of women in Vancouver, Toronto and Halifax, we found that the Vancouver sample under-represented young women and over-represented middle-aged women, thus the Vancouver portion of the sample was weighted. This commonly used procedure adjusts the sample to reflect more closely the

characteristics of the population. The Toronto and Halifax portion of the sample did not require weighting, as they did not bear any significant differences to the population.

Vancouver

Age	Census	Sample	Net Difference	Weighted Sample
15-24	15%	9%	6%	15%
25-34	23%	17%	6%	23%
35-44	21%	30%	9%	21%
45-54	14%	19%	- 5%	14%
55-64	11%	7%	4%	11%
65 +	15%	19%	- 4%	15%

Toronto

Age	Census	Sample	Net Difference
15-24	17%	15%	2%
25-34	24%	25%	-1%
35-44	20%	22%	- 2%
45-54	14%	13%	1%
55-64	11%	8%	3%
65 +	15%	16%	-1%

Halifax

Age	Census	Sample	Net Difference
15-24	19%	17%	2%
25-34	25%	29%	- 4%
35-44	21%	20%	1%
45-54	13%	14%	- 1%
55-64	9%	7%	2%
65 +	14%	12%	2%

In terms of education levels and incomes, the differences between the sample and the population were not severe enough to warrant adjustment. Although it should be noted that the women in the sample stated slightly higher levels of education and income than might be expected in the general population, the tendency of respondents to over-accentuate socially positive aspects is well-known to market and audience researchers, who refer to it as the "halo effect". The design of this research took the halo effect into account and incorporated two accepted methods of obtaining greater accuracy of response. Some questions which went beyond a crude "yes/no" dichotomy were included, and interviewers identified themselves as calling on behalf of the Media Lab at SFU, an organization having no stake in the outcome of the answers provided. No reference was made to MediaWatch until the final two questions on the survey, which related specifically to whether or not respondents had heard of the national women's group.

Viewing habits and preferences

The dearth of research on female audiences is surprising, considering the energy programmers invest in attempting to attract their attention. Recognizing the relevancy of scarce information on this matter, we began the survey by asking women about their viewing habits and the factors that affected them. The results were sometimes surprising. For instance, it has become standard comedy routine fare to joke about the extent to which men dominate the television remote control, and thus have greater influence in determining what programs get watched in mixed sex households. Despite this, 52% of our total sample of women indicated that they controlled the remote device. Nevertheless, when single women were removed from the data, the results confirmed that in households shared by women and men (whether married, common-law, or parent/adult child), the remote control is twice as likely to be used by men (62%) than by women (34%).

Ideally, broadcasters and the advertisers who purchase time on their programs, want to know that a large audience is going to tune in every day or week. The extent to which

viewership can be predicted as reliable is important to the financial health of the television station. However, although 40% of women in this survey indicated they "always" or "usually" plan what they are going to watch in advance of turning the TV on, the remaining 60% of respondents were almost evenly split between "sometimes" planning (31%) and "rarely" or "never" planning (29%), suggesting that for many female viewers, TV remains a spontaneous decision.

Reasons for planning or not planning were not explored, and could be due to a variety of factors, including unpredictable schedules and family responsibilities. However, this relatively high happenstance factor among female viewers could also be interpreted as a sign that content is less important than convenience. The vast majority of women (88%) indicated they were most likely to view television in the early or late evening, presumably when family and household duties were completed. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (76%) indicated that they are somewhat or very likely to be engaged in other activities while watching television.

In terms of what they watch, our results corroborate data gathered elsewhere showing that, like men, more Canadian women rely on television for their primary news source (36%) than any other medium. Newspapers were, however, a close second, cited by 33% of respondents, followed by radio at 19%. When it comes to women's first choice for escape and entertainment, however, television -- cited by 26% of respondents -- ranks second to books, at 32%. Magazines rated very low (4%) with women as a primary form of escape, perhaps because general interest publications tend to systematically ignore women,¹¹⁶ and although magazines targeted to women deal with issues of interest and relevance to them, even sometimes progressive editorial copy is often overwhelmingly contradicted by make-over and self-

¹¹⁶ *Cover to Cover Magazine Analysis - Volume Two of the MediaWatch Research Series, MediaWatch, 1994, pp. 6-7*

improvement features and advertisements which remain a source of profound ambivalence for many female readers.¹¹⁷

When asked which type of television programming they most enjoyed, 26% of women cited comedy, 19% news, 14% drama, and 13% movies. This breakdown is somewhat surprising in that it flies in the face of long-held stereotypes about women's favourite genres being soap operas (cited by 7%) game shows (2%) and talk shows (2%). In fact, more respondents identified sports programming (4%) as their favourite form of television than either game shows or talk shows. Interestingly enough, Canadian women's interest in TV sports has recently been the subject of research undertaken by Margaret MacNeill, who drew attention to Nielsen data from 1992 showing that women made up 36% of the audience for regular season NHL hockey games, 36% of CFL football TV fans, and between 40 and 44% of baseball viewers. MacNeill further suggests these figures could be increased if sports TV producers took into account a female perspective and avoided, for instance, the "picking your date" shots in which the camera scans the stadium or arena crowd looking for beautiful women.¹¹⁸ A complex picture emerges when these statistics are compared to women's comments about what types of television they avoid. For instance, although 4% of the women in the three cities identify themselves as sports fans, more than twice as many respondents (9%) list sports as the programming they most shun – a somewhat more predictable result, perhaps, considering both MacNeill's research and the relative lack of attention paid to women's competition or female athletes.

Similarly, comedy – which garnered the most "favourite" votes (26%) – also generated the second highest shun rating (18%), and soap operas were identified as being avoided by even more women (9%) than preferred them (7%). The seemingly contradictory findings about

¹¹⁷ As just one example cited in the MediaWatch magazine study, "While these magazines often present important issues from a feminist perspective, they also reinforce negative stereotypes about women. So although a reader may feel empowered by an article about the negative effects of dieting, she will have to wade through page after page of advertisements featuring unnaturally thin models to find it." *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Jim McElgunn, "TV Sports Events Attract More than Just Men" in *Marketing Magazine*, 14 June 1993, p. 11.

comedy are somewhat illuminated by both the reasons women gave for preferring the type of programming they cited, and the specific comedies they said they either watched or avoided. Convenience was identified by many respondents as being the strongest influence on their preferred choice, which makes sense in the context of a high ratio of unplanned viewing and engagement in other activities while watching television. (Women particularly noted the half-hour duration of comedies, their placement directly after the news, and the fact that they demand less attentiveness than dramas, for instance.) In addition, 27% of the women who identified comedy as the genre they avoided specifically cited *Married... With Children*, which appears to be seen by most women as being in a completely different category than *Murphy Brown*, for instance.

Perhaps the most important inference to be drawn from these contradictions, however, is that women are by no means a unified audience, whose preferences can be predicted solely on the basis of their sex. Rather, this survey supports the conclusion reached elsewhere that the variables of age, employment, family circumstances and class necessarily dictate a range of different viewing preferences.¹¹⁹

There was, however, one area of obvious congruence between the categories of preferred and avoided TV. In two open-ended questions, violent programming was identified by the most women (36%) as the form to avoid, consistent with the very small proportion of women (1%) who listed crime shows as their first choice. The little existing research into the way in which women respond to violent media suggests that for some women, viewing televised violence may approximate a feared event, or involve the re-creation of a painful personal experience.¹²⁰

Considering the content analysis research cited in Chapter 1, which noted the trend in movies for a disproportionate number of female characters to be stalked, chased, beaten, stripped

¹¹⁹ Pat Fili-Kruschel, former Vice President of the U.S. cable channel Lifetime, which describes itself as a "women's channel" noted in an interview that "Women are not homogeneous, so in some ways it's very complicated to build a channel around them." in an interview with the author, 13 August 1993.

¹²⁰ Philip Schlesinger, *Women Viewing Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

and/or raped prior to being killed, it is not surprising that women viewers prefer to avoid genres dealing with such subject matter.

Concerns About Violence

Not surprisingly, in a subsequent question in which women were asked to identify their primary concerns about television from a list of 7 items, a third (34%) of respondents cited violence. Other concerns included too many commercials (20%), the sexist portrayal of women (18%) and not enough quality programming for children (13%).

Perhaps reflecting the concern about violence was the high number of women who indicated that their children's television viewing frequently occurs in the presence of an adult. More than half of mothers (53%) indicated that either they or another adult co-views with their children "usually" (27%) or "always" (26%), with 36% only "sometimes" co-viewing. More mothers (81%) said that they were "usually" (28%) or "always" (51%) aware of what their children were watching, even if not co-viewing. This vigilance may well be attributable in part, to the fact that 82% of all the women surveyed believe that violence in the media contributes to violence in society.

Interestingly enough, despite the amount of media coverage devoted in recent years to Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) initiatives to combat television violence, almost 70% of women were either "not very" or "not at all" familiar with the proposed measures. Asked about the likely efficacy of introducing a rating system for violent programming, and banning heavy violence prior to 9 p.m., only 22% thought such measures would be "very effective". Most (61%) were undecided about likely impacts, choosing "somewhat effective", and 17% believed they would be "ineffective".

Curious about women's perceptions about television as the sole or primary source of media violence, we asked survey respondents how they felt about TV fare compared to the violent material available in video games and video rental movies. The majority indicated that they

were as, or more concerned about the latter forms, with video games rating slightly more troubling (70%) than video movie rentals (65%). Compared to mothers, women who did not have children were equally concerned about the violence in video games, suggesting that such awareness may be less a result of having been directly exposed to the games, than a function of news coverage focusing on especially controversial titles such as "Mortal Kombat" and "Night Trap".

A substantial minority of women indicated they were less concerned about video games (30%) and movies (35%) than about television, despite the extreme preoccupation with violence characteristic of many popular titles in both forms. These responses seem compatible with focus group research and anecdotal evidence suggesting that many parents are unaware of the content of video games (which few of them play) and the videos being rented and/or viewed by their children – either at home or at friends' houses. For instance, when Toronto-based researcher Sandra Campbell conducted workshops with 75 urban children between the ages of 10 and 12 in 1992, and asked them, among other things, to list their favourite video titles, only four out of 31 mentioned were designed for children. All of the rest were adult-oriented, and in many cases restricted movies. Moreover, the top 10 titles included *Terminator II*, *Robocop 2*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Poltergeist* and *Pet Cemetery*.¹²¹

Such films appear to have become a rite of passage for North American pre-teens. Indeed, according to a National Film Board paper, it is estimated that 80% of American children under the age of 13 have seen one or more of the titles just listed.¹²² Their parents, by and large, however, have not. In the frequent presentations I give to parent and teacher groups about media violence, the vast majority of adults I address have not only never seen any of the movies on the children's "favourite" list, but are horrified when presented with a clip from the first

¹²¹ Sandra Campbell, "A new report on TV violence", in *Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario Newsletter*, October/November 1992.

¹²² Jan Dancy, "The Continuum of Violence in Our Culture", unpublished lecture presented on behalf of the National Film Board, October 1993.

fifteen minutes of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, depicting a 17-year-old girl having her breasts slashed off, and her bloody body flung around the bedroom in which she has just had sex.

Portrayal of Women

Survey respondents' third most-cited concern about television (after violence and the volume of commercials) was its sexist portrayal of women, selected by 18%. Indeed, when asked in a later question to name a female character or personality whom they considered to be a positive role model for young women, almost half of the sample (46%), were unable to come up with a single example. Of those who could, 35% identified a dramatic or sit-com character or star (96% of whom were American); and 17% cited a news anchor or talk show host, with Oprah Winfrey leading the pack. Canadian personalities were mentioned only half as often. (This is no doubt explained by the fact that more than 60% of the programming viewed by Canadians is foreign – largely American – and news makes up a significant portion of the most popular Canadian-produced fare.) Female athletes and politicians registered less than half a percent each, perhaps partly due to their relative invisibility on television. In response to a follow-up question asking why the respondents considered the female role model cited to be a positive one, almost 40% identified her strength, 26% her intelligence, and close to 15% other personal qualities, such as honesty, sincerity and empathy. "Realistic" or "non glamorous" was mentioned by almost 13%.

Even later in the survey, when asked to react to the statement that "television offers few positive role models for young women", 78% either agreed or strongly agreed with this assessment. This perception is supported by several other Canadian studies. The girls who participated in the focus group research conducted by Sandra Campbell, also had difficulty identifying female heroes, and only under duress were able to come up with three examples: Wonder Woman, whom they admired for the sparkles on her dress; Marilyn Monroe, who's been dead for more than 30 years; and Julia "but-I-could-never-look-like-her" Roberts, an actor who

has starred in adult movies, and at the time of the study was perhaps best known for her portrayal of a prostitute who is rescued, Cinderella-style by a man, in *Pretty Woman*.¹²³

In contrast to the role models cited by little girls in Campbell's study, the adult women in the MediaWatch survey, when asked an open-ended question about what kind of women they'd like to see more of, expressed a desire for greater realism and/or less glamour (35%), more strength (13%), intelligence (12%) and greater diversity (10%). The fact that realism scored significantly higher on this question than on the previous description of why an identified role model was considered positive underlines the extent to which women perceive the majority of their television counterparts to be inaccurate reflections of their own reality. From the sublimely rich women on *Dallas* and *Melrose Place*, to the utterly ridiculous Peg Bundy on *Married... With Children*, female viewers often have difficulty finding anyone in television land whose lives remotely resemble their own. Considering the evidence of pervasive stereotyping provided by the content analyses research discussed in Chapter 1, this is not surprising. Furthermore, because female characters and personalities still make up only 35% of those seen during prime time, every sexualized bimbo, laundry-obsessed housewife, and rape victim makes more of an impression than if the numbers were more equitable.

Women's desire to see themselves more realistically portrayed has also been documented in previous work by Mary Ellen Brown, who noted the extent to which mainstream media have typically avoided presenting the dilemmas and conflicts experienced by housewives and mothers, despite how women themselves often view, experience and describe such roles to each other.¹²⁴ As communications scholar Susan Douglas observes in her book, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*: "Nowhere is the gap between image and reality wider than the one separating the smiling, serene, financially comfortable, and perfectly

¹²³ Campbell, "A new report on TV violence."

¹²⁴ Mary Ellen Brown, "Motley Moments: Soap Opera, Carnival, Gossip and the Power of the Utterance" in *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*, (London: Sage Publications, 1990) pp. 183 - 198.

coiffed media mom from her frazzled, exhausted, sputum-covered, real-life counterpart."¹²⁵ This explains in part the appeal of Roseanne, who – despite her controversial real-life persona – was identified as a positive role model by 7% of all of those who responded to this question. Murphy Brown, cited by 26%, also subverts the June Cleaver perfect mom stereotype, and gives greater expression to some of the dilemmas of motherhood.

Interestingly enough, a significant minority of women – almost 15% – gave no response to what kind of women they would like to see more of. Although this could be interpreted as demonstrating contentment with the characters and personalities already before them, it may also be reflective of the inability we sometimes have to imagine alternatives to the "way it's always been".

Despite the fact that only 10% of respondents volunteered "greater diversity" as their first reaction to being asked what they'd like to see more of, survey respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of the fact that visible minorities are under-represented in Canadian television. (This has been documented in a number of studies, among them a content analysis of Canadian news and dramatic programming conducted by MediaWatch in 1993 - 94.)¹²⁶ While 8% thought that television shows greater ethnic diversity than actually exists, and 21% believed TV depictions to be proportionate to the population, 70% correctly stated that television under-represents aboriginal women and women of colour.

Women's concerns about sexism and the lack of female role models are clearly fueled by the belief shared by 88% of respondents that women are either somewhat (47%) or strongly (40%) influenced by the way the media define femininity. Regarding body image, in particular, 85% agreed (36%) or strongly agreed (49%) with the statement that: "Media images that reinforce the idea that women must be thin to be beautiful can contribute to problems such as anorexia and

¹²⁵ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1994) p. 280.

¹²⁶ MediaWatch, *Front and Centre: Minority Representation in the Media*, Toronto, 1994.

bulimia." In addition, almost three-quarters of the sample indicated that they were either occasionally (41%) or often (32%) offended by advertisements portraying a woman as a sex object. (Based on consumer calls made to MediaWatch phone lines in Vancouver and Toronto, ads judged to fall into the sexually exploitive category have included images created to promote a wide variety of products, including beer, cars, jeans, soft drinks, perfume and fabric softener.)

However, phone calls and written complaints -- whether to a watch dog organization, industry association, or the advertiser itself -- appear to be highly inaccurate measures of consumer discontent. Only 21% of women said they had ever formally voiced their concerns about an advertisement by phone (13%) or by letter (8%), but three-quarters (76%) talked about their reaction with friends. Most importantly, more than half (53%) have refused to buy products from advertisers who offended them. Furthermore, even the minority of women who said they were rarely offended by sexist ads (27%) demonstrated almost as much willingness to boycott companies whose practices they found objectionable as those women who were more frequently offended.

MediaWatch's experiences liaising with concerned consumers suggest that lack of time and not knowing to whom to complain are key factors preventing more women (and men) from registering their feelings. However, the survey also determined that a significant number of respondents -- almost 85% -- indicate that they would take the time to complain if they thought that doing so would have an impact in helping to improve the image of women in the media. This may suggest a high level of cynicism amongst consumers about the disregard advertisers and broadcasters have for the opinions of their potential customers.

The "F" Word

When asked to pick a statement that "most accurately described [their] feelings about the women's movement", only 22% of our sample selected "I describe myself as a feminist", while a majority of respondents (78%) felt most comfortable with "I believe in equal rights for women".

This labelling dilemma among women who support the goals of feminism but don't want to be associated with the negative image they feel is attached to the word is common and has been documented elsewhere. For instance, a *Time/CNN* poll in 1989 found that 77% of women thought the women's movement had made life better, 94% said it had helped women become more independent, 82% said it was still improving the lives of women, but only 33% identified as feminists.¹²⁷ The reluctance of many women to identify themselves with the so-called "F" word, reflects and reinforces the obstacles faced by self-proclaimed feminists working to improve the rights and opportunities of women. Despite the fact that most Canadians -- women and men -- support the goals of feminism, such news neither makes significant headlines¹²⁸, nor is sufficient to overcome the general public perception of the activists involved in the movement as marginal. (The news media's role in perpetuating this marginality is particularly ironic, as graphically illustrated by this line from a 1989 *Time* magazine cover story: "Hairy legs haunt the feminist movement, as do images of being strident and lesbian.")¹²⁹

Impact of the Study

The results of the audience survey marked a significant watershed for MediaWatch on a number of fronts. Appreciating that, had a similar study been conducted fifteen years before at the time of the organization's establishment, the level of concern about media sexism and its social implications would likely not have been as strong, the strength of support was viewed in

¹²⁷ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, p. 276.

¹²⁸ "Feminists have majority support, Gallup poll finds", *The Vancouver Sun*, June 27, 1992, C16. The length and placement of this article are significant in this context: less than three column inches were devoted to the news item, which was buried at the back of the third section. Consider this in contrast to the coverage devoted by the same paper to the apparent demise of feminism six months previously. On January 29, 1992, *The Sun* had turned over the bulk of the opinion page to two articles by prominent U.S. conservatives whose views caused some readers to respond in outrage to this "one-two anti-feminist punch". The opinion pieces were promoted on the front page of the paper, with a headline that appeared above the masthead -- "Who Killed Feminism" -- which itself embodied the implicit and unchallenged assumption that the women's movement was dead.

¹²⁹ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, p. 275.

part as a result of MediaWatch's own efforts. From an internal perspective, the data demonstrating that an overwhelming majority of women are concerned about sexist media portrayals and the corresponding dearth of positive and realistic role models, provided confirmation of the organization's broad constituency, despite its small membership. In addition, although the responses of those surveyed can be read in and of themselves as an endorsement for MediaWatch's continued existence, when the views of women in the general population were compared to views held by committed members of the organization, that endorsement became even more evident.

The questionnaire administered by phone to the sample discussed above was also published in a bimonthly newsletter distributed by MediaWatch to its members. Out of a possible sample of 450, 173 completed surveys were returned. Demographically, they demonstrated that, compared to Canadian women in general, organization members are: younger (with 62% falling between the ages of 25 and 44, as opposed to 47% in the population as a whole); as likely as women in the general population to be married or living with a partner; more likely to be students (22% versus 12%); more likely to be working full-time outside the home (58% versus 41%); and significantly more educated (with 48% having completed undergraduate work and 25% having a graduate degree, versus 23% and 7% respectively amongst the general population).

Their disproportionate student and full-time paid working status no doubt contribute to the results demonstrating that MediaWatch members watch less television than Canadian women in general. They are also more likely than women as a whole to plan what they're going to watch ahead of time, to be engaged in other activities while viewing, and to watch more late night television.

When asked whether or not they agreed with the contention that violence in the media contributes to violence in society, 88% of MediaWatch members either agreed or strongly agreed, compared with 81% of the Canadian women surveyed. On this question, as well as on a number of others relating to the portrayal of women, a difference in conviction between the two

groups showed up in the breakdown between "agree" or "strongly agree": 60% of MediaWatch members "strongly agreed" with the violence/society connection, versus 36% of non-members, whereas the "agreed" category was selected by 28% of members, and 45% non-members.

MediaWatchers (86%) demonstrated greater awareness than Canadian females generally (70%) of the fact that aboriginal women and women of colour are under-represented in North American television. Not surprisingly, MediaWatch members were also considerably more aware of the measures proposed by the broadcast industries to combat TV violence (58% being "very" or "somewhat familiar", as opposed to 31% of women in general); and about as confident that the initiatives would be very or somewhat effective. 75% of MediaWatch members were as or more concerned about video game violence compared with television violence, versus 70% of Canadian females as a whole; a greater proportion of members were also as or more concerned about the violence available through video movie rentals (82%) than women in the general population, only 65% of whom expressed similar concerns.

Predictably, the vast majority of MediaWatch members (94%) believed that women are influenced by the way femininity is defined by the media, as did an only slightly smaller proportion – 88% – of Canadian women generally. Here, as in a number of subsequent questions, the difference was one of degree, with 70% of MediaWatchers feeling that women are "strongly influenced", and 24% feeling they are "somewhat influenced", whereas among non-members, the breakdown was 41% and 47% respectively.

This trend is echoed in the views expressed by members versus non-members about both the lack of positive female role models, and the desire to see strong, intelligent women. 88% of both groups indicated a preference for programs featuring capable female characters, with 76% of MediaWatchers and 44% of the national sample expressing the desire strongly. Similarly, both groups agreed that media images portraying women as excessively thin contributed to the prevalence of eating disorders (89% versus 85%) with 76% of MediaWatch members in the "strongly agree" category, compared to 49% of women generally.

As would be expected, the vast majority of MediaWatchers (93%) said that they were either often or occasionally offended by advertisements portraying women as sex objects, compared to just under three-quarters (73%) of the non-member Canadian women surveyed. MediaWatch members were also somewhat more inclined than the general female population to actively express their distaste, whether by complaining to an offending broadcaster by phone (54% versus 12%), or in writing (13% versus 8%); discussing their responses with friends (88% versus 76%); or by boycotting products promoted in an offensive way (75% versus 52%). Whereas 85% of the general female population indicated that they would communicate their concerns to those responsible more often if they thought doing so would have an impact, 99% of MediaWatchers expressed such a willingness – no doubt influenced in part by their experience of the organization's success at eliciting response and encouraging change.

Not surprising in this context is the fact that 74% of women in the general population, when asked whether or not there was a need for a media watch dog group focused on women's concerns and the portrayal, indicated support for such an organization. This, in conjunction with the significant parallels between the views of Canadian women generally, and MediaWatch members specifically, affirms the organization's existence and mandate.

This is particularly important at a time when government preoccupation with deficit reduction and conservative attacks on the influence of so-called "special interest groups" is at an all-time high. In arguing for continued financial support from the federal government, MediaWatch's ability to demonstrate a broad base of interest amongst half the voting public is obviously helpful. Indeed, having quantitative documentation of the pervasiveness of public concern about sexism helped provide the organization with the confidence necessary to invest in an initially costly direct-mail funding campaign. Moreover, it was exceptionally successful, generating a higher-than-usual response rate (2.6% vs the average of 1.5 to 2%) and grossing donations in excess of monies expended. This is apparently unusual in a first mailing to a purchased list, and bodes well for potential future support from the general public.

In terms of MediaWatch's ability to influence industry practice, the study's findings inspired much optimism. In the past, for instance, media producers have often attempted to counteract feminists' criticism of sexual stereotypes and unrealistic ideals of femininity by contending that they are creating mythical narratives designed to evoke desires, as opposed to reflect realities, and that in any case, people seek identification with ideals, and don't want to be shown reality-based portrayals.¹³⁰ Given women's expressed desire for less glamour and greater realism, the survey's results certainly appear to challenge these claims. Nor should this have been news. As early as 1983, U.S. advertising executive Rena Bartos was conducting focus group research into how homemakers and working women felt about traditional and progressive portrayals in advertising. Her study determined that both audiences "responded most positively to contemporary commercials and... imagery, and most negatively to traditional ones," and were particularly offended by exploitive ads portraying women as sex objects.¹³¹ More recently, marketing consultant Gerry Myers, who specializes in targeting women, published a collection of anecdotal accounts of advertising campaigns that provided further proof of this contention.¹³²

MediaWatch's 1994 survey provided both more current data and a broader sampling of such attitudes and their influence on purchasing behaviour. In amassing this quantitative documentation, it confirmed the potential economic implications of women's responses to sex-role stereotyping. Moreover, this indication of broad-based support for the organization's issues strengthens its advocacy position; the results can justifiably be used to challenge the historical assumptions made by broadcasting and advertising industry executives about its views being

¹³⁰ See for instance, Karen M. Stoddard, *Saints and Shrews: Women and Aging in American Popular Film* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983) p. 8; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹³¹ Rena Bartos, "Women and Advertising" in *International Journal of Advertising*, 1983, 2.

¹³² Gerry Myers, "Is your advertising designed to win or lose sales?" in *Targeting the New Professional Woman - How to Market and Sell to Today's 57 Million Working Women* (Chicago: Probus Publishing Co., 1994) pp.137-170.

unrepresentative of those held by the majority of women. In particular, the data relating to the low incidence of filed complaints (relative to the level of consumer dissatisfaction) and respondents' willingness to boycott products sold to them in a sexist manner, suggest that advertisers who ignore the few complaints they do receive -- whether from MediaWatch or the public itself -- do so at their own risk.

Over and above uncovering such information, however, was the task of effectively communicating it to industry decision-makers so that it would yield practical results. Clearly, the evidence regarding the extent to which buying behaviour may indeed be negatively influenced by advertisers' irrelevant sexualization and objectification of women, was only as compelling as the organization's ability to convince industry decision-makers of its scope of support and intensity of feeling. From the outset, MediaWatch recognized that as the body conducting the research and releasing the results, its credibility would play a significant role in how far the findings would travel. (This was one of the reasons that so much effort was invested in the development and analysis stages in soliciting professional advice that would support a certain validity claim.)

Complicated by the credibility factor was the attachment the organization initially had to generating money through sales of the research report. Operating on the enthusiastic but ill-informed advice of a fund-raising consultant, MediaWatch had planned from the beginning to package the audience survey report in a binder format along with two other studies (both content analysis) and attempt to sell the research as a series for \$400. The marketing for this endeavour -- supervised by the afore-mentioned consultant -- consisted of a targeted direct mail initiative that was as singularly unsuccessful in achieving its goal as the subsequent fund-raising one was successful in achieving its. In total, only about ten research series were sold.

As a result, the dissemination of the survey findings became dependent on news media coverage. In this regard, MediaWatch was more successful than usual at generating news articles about its study in the business press, with pieces appearing on the front page of the *Globe and Mail's* "Report on Business" section, in the trade publication, *Marketing Magazine*,

and in several other newspapers across the country. In addition, organization representatives have been quoted citing the study results in many subsequent media interviews, typically dealing with breaking news about a controversial advertising campaign that is eliciting consumer protest. The preponderance of these in the year since the report was released has, as a result, been a mixed blessing, but it remains doubtful that the information contained in the survey has achieved the desired reach within the industry. Moreover, it has become clear to me during the preparation and writing of this thesis that MediaWatch failed to fully capitalize on the possibilities offered by the data set. By conducting cross-tabulations of some of the demographic and genre preference questions asked in the survey, we could have generated additional information about female audiences of even greater interest to the Canadian marketing community than the material contained in our report. (This opportunity still exists for MediaWatch, although the shelf-life of the data, gathered in June of 1994, may be running out.)

Nevertheless, undertaking the audience research was an enormously valuable experience for MediaWatch. Although it greatly taxed our volunteer resources and cost us considerably more money than we have so far been able to recoup from sales, its impact on the organization will be felt for many years to come. Our disappointment at learning that research sales to industry were not going to generate revenues was replaced by our elation at discovering strong and broadly-held support amongst Canadian women for the work we do – support which we now believe we can transform into revenue from individual donors. In addition, our need to rely more heavily on the news media in publicizing the survey's findings suggests that it may be more important than ever for MediaWatch to pro-actively incite consumer protest about particular campaigns, as opposed to simply respond to or support unsolicited complaints. In the past, we have sometimes resisted going to the media about an offensive campaign, not wanting to play into the hands of advertisers desirous of even "negative" media attention that ultimately serves to extend their impact. However, a highly visible protest campaign can not only provide MediaWatch with a forum in which to reiterate the study's results, it can also –

when it is successful in changing advertiser behaviour, and/or eliciting an apology – help to counteract the sense of powerlessness expressed by the majority of respondents about their ability to influence portrayal practices by expressing their distaste. Such media attention constitutes an opportunity to remind industry of the power of boycotting behaviour as the research suggests it is currently being exercised, and to remind consumers of the value of communicating and acting on such intentions.

Chapter 3

Emerging and Potential Power of the Female Audience in Influencing Portrayal Trends

The Female Audience

In the summer of 1993 a group of people preparing to apply for one of the new specialty cable television licenses being authorized by the CRTC commissioned a review of the academic and trade literature on female audiences from Dr. Catherine Murray of the Media Lab at Simon Fraser University. As a member of the team assembled to review that literature on behalf of what was then called Lifestyle Television, and is now known as WTN (Women's Television Network), we were all surprised to discover how little research into the nature of women's television viewing motivation and habits had been done. Females (of both human and other species) have historically been left out of medical studies because it has been believed that their inclusion would make the data gathering and analysis significantly more difficult due to their biological differences from males.¹³³ Considering the extent to which women audiences are desired by television advertisers, however, one would expect there to be great volumes of research investigating a group whose members not only watch more television than their male counterparts,¹³⁴ but also make and/or influence more consumer spending decisions.

There is no doubt some existing data financed and collected by industry which remains privileged market research. But another possible explanation for the lack of available information is that television executives have traditionally believed that it was economically expedient to design programs for male viewers because although women and girls would watch what men and boys watched, the reverse was not true. Whether in prime time or children's television, conventional wisdom claimed that female audience members would not only defer to

¹³³ There is a growing body of literature on this phenomena, see for instance, Ellen Hall, "Double Exposure: The Combined Impact of the Home and Work Environments on Psychosomatic Strain in Swedish Men and Women," *International Journal of Health Services* 22, (2) 1992, pp. 239-260.

¹³⁴ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, November 1986.

male viewers, but that women or girl-centred programming could be guaranteed to alienate male viewers. This perception that male preferences dominate has been reinforced since the advent of the remote control, which even MediaWatch's own study found to be controlled more often by men than women. (Having said that, however, in an era of multi-set households, VCRs and single-parent families, it is increasingly difficult to conclude that men dictate what gets watched.) Astonishingly enough, even the U.S.-based cable channel, Lifetime, which targets female viewers, has never conducted research that attempted to distinguish between the preferences or habits of male and female viewers.¹³⁵

Because there was a dearth of material that addressed the precise relationship between women and television, we broadened our scope, exploring hypotheses dealing with women's relationship to other forms of media, as well as their communicational needs generally. In the latter regard, Deborah Tannen's analysis provided a provocative starting place. Building on a body of academic work from the behavioural sciences and linguistics, she argues that men and women have such markedly different styles that their attempts to verbally connect can appropriately be characterized as "cross cultural communication." (In doing so, she does not address whether or not her position is an essentialist one, judging the differences to be biologically determined as opposed to culturally constructed.) She sees motivational factors as being fundamental to the difference between men's and women's ways of communicating. Viewing conversation as means to give or receive information, she says men seek to achieve and maintain status through verbal interaction. Women, on the other hand – who are more likely to consider conversation as an opportunity for making contact with others – seek to establish and nurture connection. Whereas men experience social communication in the context of hierarchical order in which "life is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure," for women, conversations are "negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek

¹³⁵ Interview with Manager of Research, Lifetime Television, 9 August 1993.

and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus. Their context is life as "a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation."¹³⁶

Interestingly enough, this analysis appears to be borne out by newspaper industry conclusions regarding the potentially increasing need to address female readers differently than males. Recent studies demonstrate that although daily readership among men has increased .3% since 1986, readership among women has declined .9% over the same period. This represents the largest gender gap in newspaper readership ever recorded.¹³⁷ Although there is some speculation that "differing life circumstances" between men and women are partly responsible for this gap, a study by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau refutes the suggestion that the increased number of women in the labour force, who have more demands on their time than either men in the labour force or women who work only in the home, is responsible for the decline in female readership. In fact, the study found that women in the labour force full-time are more devoted readers than those who stay at home.¹³⁸

In fact, differing reactions to editorial content appears to be a significant factor.¹³⁹ A Knight-Ridder task force researching women readers in 1992 found that, relative to what's currently available in daily newspapers, "Women want more on education, social welfare, safety and health, personal finance, parenting and family, and ethical issues; more profiles on successful women; and shorter, more useful stories throughout the paper."¹⁴⁰ These findings echo the views of Tina Brown, currently editor of *The New Yorker* and credited with having turned *Vanity Fair* into one of the most successful magazines in the U.S. during her stewardship

¹³⁶ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men In Conversation*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990).

¹³⁷ Margaret G. Carter, "Dailies' Gender Gap Widens", *Presstime*, May 1993.

¹³⁸ Susan Hansen, "Reconcilable Differences", *NewsInc.*, September 1992.

¹³⁹ Carter, "Dailies Gender Gap."

¹⁴⁰ Hansen, "Reconcilable Differences."

there. Addressing the American Newspaper Publishers Association in the spring of 1991, Brown characterized male/female approaches to communication this way: "Men talk about what happened; women talk about what *really* happened." She described women as "good listeners, adept at helping papers get in touch with their communities", and as being "obsessed with subtext, the meaning, the motive, the story behind the story." In support of her claim that women are interested in the constructive uses of information, rather than being informed for the sake of being informed, she noted that women are turned off by news presented as unconnected, unassimilated bits of information. Concluding that "The female way of looking at life is one of the answers to the problems facing newspapers today," she noted that "It also answers the problem of how to deal with television, which, like men, tells only what happened."¹⁴¹

Another analysis that sheds light on differences between men's and women's communicational needs, this time in the television context, comes from Mary Ellen Brown in the concluding chapter of *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. She brings anthropological and cultural studies perspectives to bear on an examination of the extent to which the non-hierarchical juxtaposition of various stories in soap opera is characteristic of many women's cultural practices, ranging from traditional craft skills to storytelling techniques. Brown draws parallels between gossip and the soap opera, both of which privilege "unmotivated talk that raises questions, explores possibilities and continues for its own sake", and address domestic matters, the maintenance of relationships and the expression of sexuality. Citing women's unrecognized oral traditions (storytelling, matchmaking, health-related discussions, etc.), she compares them to the openness of the soap opera's narrative form, and the characters' frequent retelling of their own and others' histories.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Tina Brown, "Magazine Editor Urges Tough, Lively Papers", *Presstime*, June 1991.

¹⁴² Mary Ellen Brown, "Motley Moments" pp. 183 - 198.

The degree to which women's communicational needs differ from men's is manifest not only in terms of *what* women watch on television – the well-documented differences in genre preferences break down as follows: men view more sports, action-adventure and suspense programs, while women prefer drama, situation comedies, variety shows and soap operas¹⁴³ – but also *how* they watch. There is some evidence to suggest that television viewing is for women "fundamentally a social activity" to be done in the company of their family and friends.¹⁴⁴ (This would further support the contention made by programmers and referred to earlier regarding women's tendency to – at least sometimes – defer to the interests of their male partners or children.) Women's stronger attachment to the social aspect of television viewing is evident in their greater inclination to engage in conversations while watching TV,¹⁴⁵ and to verbalize responses when co-viewing with their children.¹⁴⁶ Men's generally expressed preference for viewing television attentively while in silence breaks down with regard to sports programming, the only arena in which women are less demonstrative and verbal than men.¹⁴⁷

At the same time, female viewers are most likely to "indulge" in attentive viewing when doing so by themselves, a phenomenon attributed to the fact that, in the company of family, they are too preoccupied by their domestic responsibilities and roles to fully relax and enjoy TV

¹⁴³ For a review of this literature, see Walter Gantz and Lawrence A. Wenner, "Men, Women, and Sports: Audience Experiences and Effects," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Volume 35, Number 2, Spring 1991.

¹⁴⁴ Compusearch/InfoGroup Inc., *Quantitative Research Study Produced for Lifestyle TV Inc.*, July 1993, p. 43. This document was commissioned by Lifestyle TV and included in its CRTC application, and is supported by comments made by the manager of research at U.S. cable channel, Lifetime Television, who said: "In the focus groups we conduct, women say they watch because they want to be together with their families." Interview conducted 9 August 1993 by the author.

¹⁴⁵ James Lull, ed., *World Families Watch Television*, (London: Sage Publications, 1988) as cited in "Home, Home on the Remote: Does Fascination with TV Technology Create Male-Dominated Family Entertainment?" *Media & Values*, no. 48, Fall 1989.

¹⁴⁶ Stoneman and Brodie (1981) cited in "Children's Television Viewing With Family Members", Frances C. Lawrence and Patricia Wozniak, in *Psychological Reports*, 1989, V. 65, pp. 395 - 400.

¹⁴⁷ Gantz and Wenner, "Men, Women and Sports."

viewing for its own sake. Basing his conclusions on a study of viewing habits in seven countries, James Lull argues that whereas for men, home is a site of leisure, for women – even those who employed outside the home – it remains a site of work.¹⁴⁸ The finding by a number of studies (MediaWatch's among them) that women are much more likely than men to perform domestic activities while viewing¹⁴⁹ further supports this contention.

This infringement of household responsibilities on women's television viewing may in part account for the fact that, although they watch more television than men, women report deriving less fulfillment from doing so.¹⁵⁰ Others have suggested that the extent to which program genres targeted to female viewers are often denigrated (soaps and game shows, for example) may also contribute to this lack of satisfaction.¹⁵¹ In addition, such denigration might provide additional explanation for women's deferential behaviour to men regarding the selection of shows during shared viewing times – primarily prime time.¹⁵² Furthermore, considering the evidence already discussed regarding programmers' traditional focus on pleasing male viewers, and the corresponding under-representation of female characters and pervasiveness of limiting stereotypes, it would be surprising if women didn't express such dissatisfaction with television.

In contrast, the magazine market serves as an interesting comparison to television, in terms of how the female audience has been more effectively addressed.¹⁵³ Where Canadian women's

¹⁴⁸ Lull, *World Families Watch Television*.

¹⁴⁹ Gantz and Wenner, "Men, Women, and Sports" and Lull, *World Families Watch Television*.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Kubey and Csikszentmihaly, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 1990).

¹⁵¹ Marybeth Crain (and James Lull), "Home, Home on the Remote: Does Fascination with TV Technology Create Male-Dominated Family Entertainment?" *Media & Values*, no. 48, Fall 1989.

¹⁵² The manager of research for Lifetime Television, a U.S. cable channel skewed to female viewers confirmed that women defer to their male partners and indicated that "...they can tell us what their husbands, their kids, and their neighbours watch more easily than what they like to watch. But they're always apologizing about their own opinions." Interview, 1993.

¹⁵³ Carter, "Dailies Gender Gap."

interest in television and newspapers has appeared to be on the decline in recent years,¹⁵⁴ according to an analysis of the penetration, reach and advertising revenue picture of the Canadian magazine market, women-targeted publications "are the strongest segment of the consumer magazine industry."¹⁵⁵ Dorothy MacKinnon's 1993 study determined that during the period of 1989 to 1992, although the industry as a whole experienced a decrease in both circulation and advertising pages, magazines designed to address and reflect women on subjects of interest to them – home, family, health, as well as fashion – remained popular with both readers and advertisers. In particular, the study noted that despite the seemingly dominant presence of U.S. publications such as *Vogue*, *Glamour* and *Elle*, Canadian women "overwhelmingly choose Canadian content over American when its available", giving *Canadian Living* and *Chatelaine* far greater circulation figures (592,570 and 911,478 respectively) than even the most successful U.S. counterparts, *Good Housekeeping* (157,405) and *Cosmopolitan* (190,618). Furthermore, the 1992 figures cited represent increases over the previous year for both Canadian publications, and declines for the latter American issues.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, in addition to providing women with information focused on Canadian communities, and speaking more directly to Canadian women's experiences, home-grown publications are also considerably less sexist than their American counterparts (in part due to the greater sensitivity in this country regarding appropriate portrayal practices.)¹⁵⁷

Although it is difficult to conclude what degree of influence the latter aspect has on women's selection of magazine, it is interesting to note that even the genre of romance fiction, a

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, plus Faludi, *Backlash*, p. 147.

¹⁵⁵ Dorothy MacKinnon, *Canada's Women's Magazine Market 1989 - 1993*, 1993, p. E3. This study was included in Lifestyle TV's CRTC application.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. E16 - E17.

¹⁵⁷ Although MediaWatch has not undertaken a systematic study comparing the contents of American and Canadian women's magazines, it is clear from even a cursory analysis, as well as from our complaint calls, that the former contain by far the greater number of offensive, sexualized portrayals, in both advertising and editorial content.

media form not generally considered to be particularly progressive, has nurtured and catered to the social evolution of its female audience by reflecting women's increasing independence and freedom of expression, and incorporating less dominating and more empathetic male characters.¹⁵⁸

Although television in general, and prime time in particular, have not been terribly attentive to the female audience, especially when compared with the other media forms just discussed, daytime television has always acknowledged, and indeed programmed to, women viewers. Unfortunately, in a social climate of continuing inequality, the fare that dominates daytime programming and is targeted to women has, as mentioned, typically been denigrated such that women's pleasure at viewing shows which not only feature more female characters,¹⁵⁹ but deal with subject matters of interest to them, tends to be mixed with feelings of shame or guilt. Nevertheless, in recent years several analyses of the female audience's relationship with soap operas and game shows have re-examined and articulated the value of such genres from women's own perspectives.¹⁶⁰

Pat Fili-Kruschel, President of daytime programming at ABC, explains the appeal of soap operas in terms of female viewers' demonstrated interest in character development, as opposed to plot.¹⁶¹ Her observation is echoed by a number of studies taking a uses and gratifications approach which have found support for the contention that women watch television primarily for communicational reasons; they derive pleasure from discussing what they view on TV with families, friends and colleagues.¹⁶² Relevant to this is the evidence Dorothy Hobson finds

¹⁵⁸ Jill F. Charboneau, "Imaginary Lovers", *American Demographics*, September 1989, p. 13.

¹⁵⁹ Gerbner, *Women and Minorities on Television*, p. 4 This comprehensive content analysis of U.S. television programming which examined more than 19,000 speaking roles in more than 1,300 programs found that: "Women comprise one-third or less of the characters in all samples except daytime serials where they are 45.5% and in game shows where they are 55.3 percent."

¹⁶⁰ In particular, see Mary Ellen Brown, *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*, a collection of essays, several of which are discussed specifically.

¹⁶¹ Fili-Kruschel, interview.

regarding women's use of television shows as part of a general discourse on their own lives and the lives of those close to them. In her observation of a group of women at a pharmaceutical sales office, Hobson notes that their post-viewing discussions of television dramas served to add interest to their work environment, and provided a means for the women to talk about their own experiences. She demonstrates how the fictional framework of the programs allowed them to address subjects that were too painful or personal to discuss otherwise. The programs acted as catalysts for wide-ranging and open conversations which served to "advance [the participants'] understanding of themselves and the world in which they lived."¹⁶³ Another article examining the emotional distance women viewers are afforded by television narratives (in particular, *Dallas*) concludes that women's engagement with soap operas is due in part to the role the fictional stories play in offering them a "safe place" to explore different identities without consequence.¹⁶⁴

Women's capacity to derive meaning from soap operas is also examined by Andrea Press in her comparison of working class and middle class American women's interpretations of the popular *Dynasty* series. She found that the former were more apt to perceive the show as realistic, and to like it for that reason. On the other hand, middle class women, although more sceptical about the fantastic nature of much of the show's narrative and action, nevertheless appeared to identify much more strongly with the program's characters and situations. Press hypothesizes that *Dynasty's* plot lines may have appealed to these women because they addressed "areas of moral or relational conflict within women's lives which they themselves may be attempting, not entirely successfully, to solve."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Karl Erik Rosengren, Lawrence A. Wenner and Philip Palmgreen, eds. *Media Gratifications Research*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985).

¹⁶³ Dorothy Hobson, "Women Audiences and the Workplace" in *Television and Women's Culture*, pp. 61 - 74.

¹⁶⁴ Jen Ang, "Melodramatic Identifications: TV Fantasy and Women's Fantasy" in *Television and Women's Culture*, pp. 75 - 88.

¹⁶⁵ Andrea L. Press, "Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women's Response to *Dynasty*", in *Television and Women's Culture*, Mary Ellen Brown, ed., pp. 158 - 180.

Aired almost exclusively during the day time, game shows are another television genre seen to be primarily the purview of female audiences. Like soaps, they, too, tend to feature more women than most other kinds of programming, and have been characterized as a subversive viewing experience for female audiences. In his exploration of the active and pleasurable role that quiz shows can play in the lives of female viewers, John Fiske starts with the premise that the condemnation of quiz shows is a function of the disciplinary nature of patriarchy. He cites *The Price is Right* consumer contest as one which rewards women's typically unappreciated knowledge of the prices and comparative values of commodities, describing an environment that encourages participants and audience members to give "public, noisy acclaim to skills that are ordinarily silenced." Fiske argues that the game show, rather than simply replicating and reinforcing the domestic shopper's role, "symbolically liberates women from their economic restraints" and shopping duties on behalf of the family, by removing the act of consumption from the sphere of subjugated, silenced domestic labour, and repositioning it in an arena of acclamation and fun. In a similar vein, *Family Feud* is mentioned as acknowledging and rewarding the largely female contestants for their knowledge of relationships and understanding of how people think and feel. Fiske ultimately concludes that quiz shows are popular with women because they embody the opportunity for women to "resist, evade or negotiate with [the dominant] voices," and turn the discourses of subordination (consumerism, romantic and family relations) into potential experiences of empowerment.¹⁶⁶

It is refreshing to read analyses of so-called "women's television" which challenge the dismissive characterization of such shows as shallow escapism giving proof to the contention that women's television preferences demonstrate their inferior intelligence. However, it is important to note that when Fiske speaks of daytime television "liberating" women, the operative adjective remains "symbolic." The "empowerment" to be gained from viewing a

¹⁶⁶ John Fiske, "Women and Quiz Shows: Consumerism, Patriarchy and Resisting Pleasures" in *Television and Women's Culture*, Mary Ellen Brown, ed., pp. 134 - 143.

consumer show like *Let's Make a Deal*, or a relationship-oriented program such as *The Newlywed Game*, is fleeting and fanciful at best. Moreover, considering that there is little else on during the daytime, it is erroneous to conclude that women's viewing of soap operas and game shows necessarily constitutes a preference, which implies an element of choice and selection that hardly exists. In fact, broadcasters have increasingly begun to move beyond this traditionally "female" material by producing and airing programming that better reflects the daytime audience's diverse and more progressive nature. Although shows such as *Baywatch*, the focus of which is a bevy of bouncing, bikini-clad lifeguards, and *Married ... With Children*, featuring two classic bimbo female characters (along with two equally stereotypical male figures) remain, the television arena has outstripped Hollywood films in responding to the changing times, and audience.¹⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, given the history recounted here, the portrayal improvements occurring in television appear to be at least partly a result of increasing competition for female viewers. As the television environment has grown more similar to the magazine market in terms of its fragmentation, broadcasters and programmers have been provided with the necessary incentive to better understand and target female audiences with material designed expressly for them, not just during the day, but in prime time as well. Two studies tracing the development of trends and economic influences in serial programs featuring female leads between 1966 and 1990 determined that a competitive environment increased both the format diversity of television's offerings, as well as the number of single-female leads and the range of professions they held.¹⁶⁸ Network rivalry during the 1970s, and the experimentation which it provoked, yielded more single women characters than previously, as did the increased competition

¹⁶⁷ Frazier Moore, "Trio of magazines heralding 'new' golden age of television," *The Vancouver Sun*, 1 November 1995; Alex Strachan, "Big roles for women are usually found on the small screen", *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1995.

¹⁶⁸ David Atkin, "The Evolution of Television Series Addressing Single Women, 1966 - 1990", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Volume 35, Number 4, Fall 1991; and Atkin et al, "Ready for prime time" pp. 677 -685.

brought about by the introduction of new U.S. cable channels in the late 1980s. Both works also cited CBS' success in counter-programming ABC's *Monday Night Football* with a distinctive women's schedule, a tradition which started with MTM's *Rhoda*, and continues into the present with shows such as *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*.

A cursory review of current television listings reveals a changing picture that includes a growing number of programs featuring strong, independent females in prime time, including not only those already mentioned, but also the comedies *Ellen*, *Cybil*, *Grace Under Fire*, and *Mad About You*, prime time hits such as *The X-Files* and *Picket Fences*, and three recent medical dramas *ER*, *Chicago Hope* and Canada's own *Side Effects*. Further anecdotal evidence comes in the form of statements made by Jamie McDermott, senior Vice President of prime-time series at NBC, who said in 1994,

In TV comedy, you'll see a strong woman in every half hour – you'll also see the opposite, the bimbo. One of our mandates for next year is female lead shows, women that are strong and independent. I think women want to see two things: positive images of families and women succeeding, being given the same opportunities as men.¹⁶⁹

Does it matter who makes it?

Despite the gender of the executive quoted above, and the references to the economic incentives of increased competition, there is some evidence to suggest that "in many cases it has taken a woman executive to convince network programmers to respond to... gender demographics."¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the recent ascendancy of several female producers in male-dominated Hollywood has inspired some research attention to the developments in progressive women's programming. From a number of reports, it appears that much of the impetus for the spate of successful programs currently featuring strong female characters and making a strong

¹⁶⁹ Laura Morice, ed., "The Women's Picture" in *US*, October 1994.

¹⁷⁰ Ann Gregor, "Designing Women" in *Maclean's*, March 29, 1993, pp. 40 - 41.

appeal to female audiences has come from talented and persevering women in the business. Prime time programs championed by female creators or producers – frequently in the face of significant initial disinterest from the networks – include *Roseanne*, *Murphy Brown*, *Designing Women*, plus *Hearts Afire*, *Dr. Quinn*, *Medicine Woman*, *Murder She Wrote* and the popular Canadian series *Street Legal*.¹⁷¹

Although there appears to have been little formal investigation comparing the creative work of male versus female writers, producers and directors, industry sources and several academic analyses of particular programs suggest some qualified support for the proposition that it does, in fact, "matter who makes it". The newspaper industry, which in recent years has begun to spend both time and money attempting to determine what changes they can make to appeal to women, has concluded that "the most critical step newspapers can take to win back women readers is promoting more women to upper management" where they have an opportunity to affect the content of the papers.¹⁷² Similarly, a government commissioned analysis of Canadian broadcasting undertaken in 1986 concluded that the frequency of stereotypical portrayals of women would diminish if more women were involved in the development and production of programs.¹⁷³

At very least, there is evidence to suggest that visual media productions created by women do tend to feature more female leads, and a Screen Actors Guild survey in 1990 attributed women's 46% of share of TV roles – versus only 30% of film roles – to the fact that there are more women employed in television than in film.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, a higher percentage of female producers and directors work in comedic, as opposed to dramatic television, a trend that

¹⁷¹ Janet Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms: *Roseanne* as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance", *Women's Studies*, Volume 21, pp. 87 - 101, 1992; Faludi, *Backlash*, pp. 144 - 152; Dennis Wharton, "TV's still a man's world, on camera & off, study sez" in *Variety*, November 19, 1990, V. 341, n. 6, p. 42; and Gregor, "Designing Women."

¹⁷² Hansen, "Reconcilable Differences."

¹⁷³ The Caplan Sauvageau Task Force on Broadcast Policy, 1986.

¹⁷⁴ Wharton, "TV still a man's world," p. 42.

is reflected in a correspondingly higher number of female characters in TV comedies versus dramas.¹⁷⁵ Another report which looked at 101 prime time entertainment series, 555 characters, and the men and women who created, directed and produced them for ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX concluded that television's dramatically distorted vision of women -- from both a character and plot point of view -- was largely due to the fact that "Hollywood... remains a bastion of male dominance."¹⁷⁶ In the world of film -- widely perceived to be much more hostile to progressive female roles than television -- a review of the top ten films for each of five years, between 1989 and 1993, determined that only 8% had female directors, and 18% were written or co-written by women.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, a study published in 1991 determined that male-directed films allotted more than five times as much screen time to men than to women, whereas in movies directed by women there was only a 12% difference between genders.¹⁷⁸

Whether or not women-created and/or directed material has a different esthetic is a somewhat more contentious matter. Although a manager at U.S.-based Lifetime Television stated that while she thought there was "a good chance" that men and women might create material that was in some ways fundamentally different, she believed it would be very difficult to gauge such a difference because a) "we are all so influenced by everything that's already out there"; and b) bottom-line considerations reinforce a tendency to go with established formula (therefore limiting the opportunities for differences to surface). Similar ambiguities were expressed by Pat Fili-Kruschel, President of Daytime Programming at ABC. She volunteered that there are female directors in Hollywood whose action adventures would

¹⁷⁵ Sally Steenland, *What's Wrong With This Picture? - The Status of Women on Screen and Behind the Camera in the Entertainment TV*, National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women and Women in Film, November 1990, pp. 8 and 55.

¹⁷⁶ Wharton, "TV still a man's world," p. 42.

¹⁷⁷ Glen Kenny, "Body of Evidence" in *US*, October 1994, p. 83.

¹⁷⁸ Michael R. Real, *Super Media: A Cultural Studies Approach*, 1991, as cited by Toronto Women in Film and Television, "The Broadcasting System is not just an Industry: It is Our Connection to Our Culture", response to CRTC Notice of Public Hearing 1992-13 Structural Hearing, February 1993.

not be discernable from the many other films in a genre directed primarily by men, but later observed that the female-orientation of Diane English – creator of *Murphy Brown* and *Love and War* – is very evident in her work.¹⁷⁹ Michael Real, in his more systematic analysis of the nine largest revenue-generating films directed by men, and the nine largest revenue-generating films directed by women, concluded that the latter:

...present women with a kind of multiplicity of activity. One's occupation may not be the primary motivating force, either personally or dramatically, of the characters in films by women... Value is placed on, and proportionately more screen time devoted to friendship with other women, finding an identity that may encompass more than one's career, being open and vulnerable to life, exploring the meaning and implications of love, verbalizing gender-related issues, resolving conflict without resorting to violence, and being morally responsible. To a lesser extent, many of the male characters in women's films also place value on some of these issues, especially friendship and vulnerability.¹⁸⁰

It is instructive to supplement this qualitative assessment of successful films with two cases from television – *Roseanne* and *Cagney and Lacey*. The popularity of the former series is well-documented, as is its relatively unique status as "women-centred entertainment", created and produced by the female star herself. *Roseanne* – the actor/producer/ character – is central, and as a result the program gives priority to her will, feelings and perspectives. The character is strong, assertive and serves to combat many gender stereotypes, including those relating to physical size and sexuality, the complexities of motherhood, and female friendship and solidarity.

Building on the assumption that television functions in part as a system of representation that helps to construct our world and therefore influences our experiences of reality, one textual analysis of the program concludes that "*Roseanne* ... makes good use of a strategy of

¹⁷⁹ Fili-Kruschel, interview.

¹⁸⁰ Real, *Super Media*.

resistance that subverts gender identities defining women as trivial, subordinate and marginalised..." and that "the stories and images portray and problematise... the harsh realities of women's domestic and pink collar working class existence... In this sense, the series is important in helping viewers connect their personal everyday lives to wider systemic forces in society, even if in a fragmentary and temporary way."¹⁸¹ At very least, *Roseanne* can be taken as an illustration of the claim that when women control their artistic expression and production, the result is programming that speaks to women differently than programming produced primarily by men.

Cagney and Lacey, the progressive female cop show of the late 1980s, is also relevant. From its introduction, the program – which featured two very strong, independent "real" police officers – was very popular with female viewers, especially those earning more than \$40,000 annually, and so prized by advertisers. Despite this, the show's female creators waged an ongoing battle with male studio executives over the integrity of both the true-to-life characters they had written, and the serious issues they were attempting to address. The show made television history by being the first female "buddy" series ever starring two women, and further distinguished itself by: keeping the characters' clothing, hairstyles and makeup deliberately unglamorous; depicting a close friendship between two women from working class backgrounds; and dealing with – at least in its initial scripts, controversial issues of great relevance to real women, such as equal pay, wife-beating, breast cancer, sexual harassment and date rape. These features alone represented a significant departure from earlier female cop stereotypes and shows, such as *Charlie's Angels* or *Police Woman*.

Unlike virtually every other police drama, *Cagney and Lacey* relegated the more traditional linear, cause and effect progression of the police work to subplot status, and foregrounded the personal lives of the two women in an open and fragmented narrative

¹⁸¹ Janet Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms: *Roseanne* as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance", in *Women's Studies*, Volume 21, pp. 87 - 101, 1992.

structure. Furthermore, dramatic events were often not shown on screen, permitting the two characters to speak of their experiences and feelings to each other, and allowing the audience to participate in the characters' problem-solving process. In addition, the show's female characters, by virtue of their control over the process of detection and narrative action, defined the point of view and avoided ever becoming the object of a male gaze. There is also compelling evidence for *Cagney and Lacey's* "difference" in the form of the record number of letters written by female viewers attempting to save the program from cancellation. In pleading for its continuance, fans particularly cited the inspiration they gained from strong fictional role models whose lives, concerns and appearance were so much closer to their own than the vast majority of female characters on TV. 182

As the *Cagney and Lacey* case so depressingly illustrates, despite the demonstrated audience appeal of women-originated programs featuring strong female characters (one article put seven of 1994's popular prime time shows in this category -- *Roseanne, Designing Women, Hearts Afire, Murphy Brown, Love and War, Dr. Quinn, Medicine Women* and *Murder She Wrote*¹⁸³) getting such programs produced and broadcast isn't always easy. In fact, the battles that a number of female producers have faced in their attempts to convince male television executives to support their projects arguably provides further proof of the extent to which women's production can constitute differing inclinations, perspectives and forms of expression.

Susan Faludi relates a particularly instructive case involving ABC's Vice President of Mini Series, Esther Shapiro, and her attempt to get an adaptation of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* onto television. Unmoved by the book's runaway best seller status, Shapiro's male

182 Danae Clark, "Cagney and Lacey: Feminist Strategies of Detection", in *Television and Women's Culture*, Mary Ellen Brown, ed., pp. 117 - 133; Julie D'Acci, "Defining Women: The Case of Cagney and Lacey", in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992) pp. 169 - 202; Beverley Alcock and Jocelyn Robson, "Cagney and Lacey revisited" in *Feminist Review*, Summer 1990, n. 35, pp. 42 - 53; and Lorraine Gamman, "Response: more Cagney and Lacey" in *Feminist Review*, Spring 1991, n. 37, pp. 117 - 121.

183 Gregor, "Designing Women," p. 41.

colleagues insisted that no advertisers would sponsor a story about a liberated housewife and the program would be lucky to capture an 11% share. Ultimately produced only to counter potential criticism expected in response to a "sexploitation" piece about Dallas cheerleaders, the show's broadcasting garnered "a 45% share, (the highest rated movie on TV that week), prompted a raft of positive mail, and won an Emmy."¹⁸⁴

Such resistance to progressive, female-oriented fare may reflect the phenomenon discussed earlier whereby the television industry has simply never conceived of there being such a phenomenon as a female audience. As another example, Nightingale cites the ineffectual attempts of Australian male TV executives to appeal to women through the scheduling of male-oriented action-adventure series or shows such as *Cheers*. She attributes such tactics to the lack of research into female audiences, the desire to reach women viewers cost-effectively and without alienating men, and the widespread assumption that women can be defined solely by their relations with and concerns about their families and the men who head them.¹⁸⁵

Even bottom-line considerations are often not enough to overcome the inherent prejudice against responding to and reflecting women's interests and realities. Despite the fact that a) TV advertisers put a premium on female viewers between the ages of 18 and 49 who are seen to make most of the purchasing decisions; and b) this same audience is abandoning network programming for more progressive cable fare,¹⁸⁶ "in many cases it has taken a woman executive to convince network programmers to respond to those gender demographics."¹⁸⁷ At the same time, adding insult to injury, successful producers such as Diane English and Linda Bloodworth Thomason (responsible for *Murphy Brown* and *Designing Women* respectively) are often

¹⁸⁴ Faludi, *Backlash*, p. 149.

¹⁸⁵ Virginia Nightingale, "Women as Audiences", in *Television and Women's Culture*, Mary Ellen Brown, ed., pp. 25 - 36.

¹⁸⁶ Faludi, Susan, *Backlash*, pp. 145-147.

¹⁸⁷ Gregor, "Designing Women," pp. 40 - 41.

believed to have gained access to the industry in part because they had male partners to ease their way into the Hollywood "boys club."¹⁸⁸

The entrenched resistance mentality of this boy's club has survived longer in the film industry than in television, for the following reason: TV executives of both sexes are increasingly having to acknowledge that despite the fact that movie success is achieved through repeat viewings by boys and young men, television success is realized through the ability to attract a female audience.¹⁸⁹ (However, even that conventional wisdom is being challenged, evidenced by a recent newspaper headline proclaiming that "Hollywood discovers it pays to make women ensemble movies."¹⁹⁰)

A women's channel

By the early 1990s the notion of a channel catering to female viewers was such an obvious one that two of the applicants for new Canadian specialty cable licenses were proposing the creation of a women's network. At the same time – although obvious to many women (and even some industry executives whose attention to market potential was sufficient to outweigh any gender biases) – for many, the idea was so inconceivable as to appear ridiculous. "What do you mean, a 'women's channel' – aren't there enough soaps on TV already?" was an all too-common question, whether spoken aloud or not.

Despite my own activist orientation working to improve the portrayal and representation of women in Canadian broadcasting, my initial reaction to the idea was not resounding enthusiasm. I am generally critical of the "WomenNews" sections of some daily newspapers (*The Montreal Gazette*, for one), which seem to let the editors of such papers off the hook with

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Fili-Kruschel, interview, and Alex Strachan, "Big roles for women are usually found on the small screen" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1995.

¹⁹⁰ *The Province*, 5 October 1995, B1.

a relatively simplistic response to the significant gender imbalance in daily reporting and coverage patterns. Although arguably permitting more news of relevance to female readers into the paper, and perhaps even soliciting more opinions and quotes from usually ignored sources, "WomenNews" sections can serve to ghettoize certain so-called "soft" stories and in so doing, reinforce already pervasive attitudes about issues such as child care and the feminization of poverty being only of interest to women, and less important than the government's management of economic matters or the latest maneuvering in the largely male world of party politics. In the process, the connections between the former issues and the latter structures somehow get ignored. Similarly, my concerns about the impact of a women's television channel centred on the fear that not only would programs of interest and importance to women be relegated to fringe status in the larger broadcasting environment, but their very existence -- however marginalized -- would then be used as an excuse by the rest of the industry (including network television) to abandon any efforts of their own towards the achievement of greater gender equity throughout the broadcasting system.

Having said that, to the extent that such isolation of "women's" perspectives has occurred in the television arena, it has appeared to have realized benefits of potentially greater value than the disadvantages just mentioned. For instance, in her analysis of two public affairs shows on U.S. cable channels which featured all-female expert panels, Robin Pogrebin noted that in addition to providing audiences with access to the fresh viewpoints afforded by women who approach many issues differently than men, the greater visibility of the female commentators prompted major network producers to invite the women to appear on their news programs. This ultimately allowed the experts to reach an even wider, more mainstream, audience.¹⁹¹ When reviewing the literature about female audiences on behalf of WTN, such anecdotal evidence helped to temper my initial concern about the retrogressive potential of a dedicated women's

¹⁹¹ Robin Pogrebin, "Women Get a Word in Edgewise", in *Working Women*, August 1992.

channel, particularly when considered in conjunction with the economic arguments addressed below.

It is interesting that the other, unsuccessful women's channel applicant, "T'Ellevision", was considerably more reluctant than Lifestyle/WTN to position itself as having any kind of political agenda. Although the head of T'Ellevision, Nancy Smith, had been a strong advocate for women throughout her professional career within the industry, the channel's presentation to the CRTC focused on mainstream entertainment programming, and emphasized market factors, avoiding any mention of the social equity issue, let alone identifying it as an agenda.¹⁹² (In the heat of the hearing lights, this strategy momentarily seemed smart to me, considering both the CRTC commissioner's focus on hard business concerns and the reservations about feminist overtones that had been expressed by Randy Moffat, WTN's majority shareholder, in our preparatory sessions.¹⁹³) However, T'Ellevision's more conservative approach not only didn't sway the CRTC, it cost the applicant potential support in the pre-hearing scramble to assemble cheerleaders from the community. For example, several months before the hearings, both women's channel applicants approached Media-Watch requesting support for their license bids, and initially -- concerned about my objectivity due to the research relationship I'd had with WTN -- I felt we should endorse the concept of a women's channel without specifically supporting one license-seeker over the other. (There was some pragmatism to this impulse, as well, desirous as I was that MediaWatch have the ability to interact with and influence both parties, depending on which, if either, were successful.) But when WTN invited me to appear as an expert witness on its behalf, I conducted a comparative review of the two

¹⁹² The author was present at both presentations, in addition to having attended informational meetings in Vancouver given by both channel applicants in the months prior to the hearing process.

¹⁹³ In my capacity as an expert witness appearing at the CRTC licence application hearings on behalf of WTN, I spent two weekends with the principals of the channel preparing for the hearing. During that time Randy Moffat and I had a lively discussion about the word "feminism" and how it is negatively perceived by most of those who don't identify themselves as being "feminist." Although he did not direct me not to use either term in any response I made to a commissioner's question, it was nevertheless clear to me that WTN executives would themselves be avoiding any use of the 'f' word.

channels' materials, and requested MediaWatch's then-executive director, Meg Hogarth, to do the same independently of me. In the end, our assessments were the same: WTN was far more direct and specific than T'Ellevision in articulating both a recognition of the inequities facing women, and a commitment to serving as an agent for change.

Indeed, in contrast to T'Ellevision's approach, social equity arguments constituted a dominant theme in WTN's submission to the CRTC. In addition to the proposed channel's detailed business plan and the research documenting its expected viability, its application package also included: an analysis of Carol Gilligan's work regarding the extent to which moral norms are currently based on male perspectives and need to be supplemented with female voices;¹⁹⁴ proceedings from a National Film Board-hosted round table on the need for communications industries to recognize and incorporate women's unique contributions;¹⁹⁵ Toronto Women in Film and Television's submission to the CRTC's 1993 structural hearing on the need for greater equality in media so as to counteract with "redemptive imagery" the pervasive portrayal of violence against women;¹⁹⁶ and the SFU Media Lab research already referred to, which reiterated some of the social equity arguments in the context of recent audience-related research.

Moreover, in WTN's introductory document, which contained descriptions of its mission, mandate and concept, the channel was very up-front about its intentions: on the opening page of the executive summary appeared the promise that the new channel would be "*for women, by women, about women*" (italics in the original). Under the heading "Mission and Mandate" the

¹⁹⁴ Abbyann Lynch and Joanna Rogers, "The Feminist Landscape," prepared for Lifestyle Television Inc., July 1993.

¹⁹⁵ National Film Board, *It Matters Who Makes It*, proceedings from the pre-conference of the 23rd International Institute of Communications Conference, "Women, Film and Television - Sharing Worldwide Strategies for Change"; a round table hosted by the NFB, Montreal, September 1992.

¹⁹⁶ Toronto Women in Film and Television, "The Broadcasting System is not just an industry: It is Our Connection to our Culture", response to CRTC Notice of Public Hearings 1992-13, February 5, 1993.

applicant acknowledged the challenge of defining what "a woman's perspective" was, and indicated that its solution would be:

to ensure that women populate the organization in critical decision-making roles, that women write, direct and produce the programs, that women fill the roles of host, interviewer, expert, and companion, and that women play lead roles as main protagonists in dramatic and documentary features.¹⁹⁷

Throughout the submission, this commitment to female employment both behind the scenes and on-air was accompanied by explicit references to the nature of the project being both "to amplify the voice of Canadian women" and to "ensure that sex-role stereotyping is seriously challenged" by "programs which portray competent, intelligent and real women in a variety of roles". The expressed mandate went even further by promising to provide a female-friendly work place which would recognize the unique challenges faced by working women with family responsibilities and adapt corporate structures and policies to women's lived realities, rather than the reverse.

Interestingly enough, this promise echoed a description of the environment at the U.S. cable channel, Lifetime Television, which is specifically geared to women audiences. According to a senior female manager, despite the station's male CEO and an all-male board of directors, the U.S. channel is still a much more "women-friendly" place to work (with better maternity leave and emergency child-care, for instance) than the major networks. Apparently, although Lifetime's original impetus was purely marketing-based, social consciousness of the need for a vehicle to support women in the industry has begun to evolve at the station.¹⁹⁸ This is perhaps not surprising in light of what little research has addressed the question of whether or not male and female-oriented work places differ. For instance, a BBC study comparing male and

¹⁹⁷ Lifetime Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Lifetime's Manager of Research, August 9, 1993.

female-driven production teams found that the latter were more democratic, supportive, development oriented, empowering and efficient when compared to male-headed teams, which focused on developing strategies for maintaining power.¹⁹⁹

References to this research were included in the literature review conducted by my colleagues and I at SFU's Mountain Media Lab and included in WTN's application. Indeed, it appears that the channel was effective in drawing on the authority implied by an academic study to support and legitimize its case about the unmet needs of female audiences, and its capacity to provide the missing perspectives. For me, the most compelling news to surface in our literature review regarding the potential equity improvements to be realized through granting a license to WTN, related to experiences in the U.S. marketplace. David Atkin's 1991 analysis of the development of trends and influences in programs devoted to single working women since 1966 was particularly instructive, uncovering as it did evidence that the portrayal improvements were in part inspired by audience preference. In particular, the study emphasized the extent to which a competitive broadcast environment increased both the format diversity of television's offerings, as well as the number of single-female leads. Network rivalry during the 1970s and the resulting experimentation yielded more single women characters than previously, as did the increased competition brought about by cable in the late 1980s. As one example, Atkin cites attempts by CBS to counter-program ABC's *Monday Night Football* with a distinctive women's schedule, a tradition which started with MTM's *Rhoda*, and continued into the nineties with shows such as *Designing Women*, *Kate and Allie* and *Murphy Brown*.²⁰⁰

This information, in conjunction with the previously cited research of Rena Bartos regarding women's preference for progressive (as opposed to traditional) imagery,²⁰¹ seemed to bode well for the potential capacity of WTN to not only realize portrayal improvement in the

¹⁹⁹ Cited by Angela Coyle, University of London in NFB, *It Matters Who Makes It*.

²⁰⁰ Atkin, "The Evolution of Television Series," and Atkin, *et al*, "Ready for prime time," pp. 677 -685.

²⁰¹ Bartos, "Women and Advertising."

context of its own programming, but to serve as a positive influence on the practices of the rest of the broadcasting environment as well.

The capacity of intelligent (as opposed to demeaning) portrayal practices to attract female audiences is perhaps especially evident in the advertising arena where the consequences are arguably more direct. In years gone by, when the media environment was not nearly as crowded and competitive as it is today, the image of women may well have remained limited and not terribly progressive because the image makers could afford to keep it that way, since the majority of women continued to buy products -- or tune in to programs -- despite being offended by the portrayal practices. Bartos suggests that this was because they didn't have much choice. Since a significant majority of programming and advertising discriminated against women, boycotting media or advertisers on the basis of inequity would require women to severely limit their cultural participation. Indeed, a National Advertising Review Board study into complaints against advertising concluded that people buy products *despite* their distaste for the commercials, not because of them. On a similar note, Jan Thomson, the Mazda marketing executive who was largely responsible for the positioning and launch of the wildly successful Miata, observed in 1992 that "Women are now buying [cars] by default because nobody is reaching out to them."²⁰²

Interestingly enough, recent automobile campaigns have demonstrated dramatic and effective departures from the glitter-babe-draped-over-the-hood approach of years gone by. Ford has produced a number of commercials clearly designed to reflect a more contemporary image of women.²⁰³ One spot features the voice-over of a woman sharing her experience as a school bus driver, and relating her concern for the safety of her professional charges to what she values in her personal car. Saturn's advertising has been particularly progressive, profiling real women from a variety of professions expressing satisfaction with their cars. A much-

²⁰² Larry Armstrong, "Woman Power at Mazda" in *Business Week*, 23 September 1992.

²⁰³ M.H. Moore, "Ford's Fall Ads Woo Women, Younger Buyers" in *Adweek*, 12 September 1994.

lauded television commercial that first surfaced in 1994 depicts a female customer being subjected to sexist behaviour in the showroom of a competitor (the salesman emphasizes the car's vanity mirror and decor). Her contrasting experience at Saturn is so inspiring, she not only buys the car, but joins the sales force.

Because the ability to attract and retain audiences -- particularly those seen to be made up of consumers -- corresponds to financial success, the above research was useful for WTN to cite in its submission to the CRTC which, beyond any consideration of social factors, is bound to ensure that each channel it approves has audience appeal, a solid business plan and some reasonable chance of achieving economic success. Over and above the literature review requested from SFU's Media Lab, WTN commissioned a number of other studies designed to assess the channel's commercial viability. For instance, Dorothy MacKinnon's updated analysis of the strength of the Canadian women's magazine market (discussed earlier in this chapter) was included in the submission as a demonstration of the demand for "information, entertainment and advice presented in a distinctively female and Canadian package."²⁰⁴ The study's assessment of future opportunities for dedicated women-oriented fare was very positive, citing as indicative of the untapped market the recent launching of three new such publications.

Consumer research was also undertaken. ComQuest Research Group, the custom division of BBM Bureau of Measurement, convened focus groups on WTN's behalf in four major Canadian cities to assess consumer response to and demand for several different programming concepts. A number of concerns about existing television options surfaced within the discussions, including dissatisfaction with the prevalence of violent material and the dearth of positive role models, and criticism of the level of sensationalism and lack of realism. Focus group participants expressed a desire for more information-based Canadian programming which would address issues of interest to women in a serious manner and air them during prime time.²⁰⁵ The findings

²⁰⁴ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, pp. 33-34.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 39-41

of this qualitative research were echoed by the results of a national poll conducted for WTN by CompuSearch/InfoGroup Inc. A phone survey of 1,400 women and 200 men in three major geographic regions found the majority of women from across the country wanting television to do a better job in the information and education arena, and requesting that such programming be aired during the more accessible evening hours, rather than just during the day. Similarly, more than two-thirds of poll respondents indicated a preference for smart and confident female characters and personalities, and just under that number agreed that women see and experience the world in a unique way. (This latter contention was underscored by the fact that the male survey respondents were less concerned about the negative portrayal of women or the scheduling dilemmas expressed by female viewers.) The CompuSearch poll also found significant subscriber interest in a proposed women's channel, with a majority expressing a willingness to financially support the service at a rate of forty cents per month. Support among lower educated women and women with children was even higher.²⁰⁶

In making the case for its economic viability before the CRTC, WTN supplemented the consumer studies described above with additional commissioned research undertaken by the Bay Consulting Group.²⁰⁷ Based in part on interviews with media buyers and an assessment of the performance of TSN, Newsworld, MuchMusic and YTV, Bay focused on three areas of relevance: analyzing the subscriber outlook, forecasting advertising revenues, and attempting to estimate audience share targets – all pretty speculative ventures. In concluding that: "The market for the proposed Lifestyle Channel (WTN) is highly attractive" and that "the channel will be viable if it is competently managed," Bay offered evidence that: buyers of national television advertising air-time liked the channel concept and deemed it of value to advertisers; existing English language cable services had become financially viable relatively

²⁰⁶ *Ibid* . pp. 41-43

²⁰⁷ Bay Consulting Group, "Analysis of the Market for the Proposed Lifestyle Television Channel", prepared for Lifestyle Television, 1993.

quickly (due in no small part to revenues flowing from cable subscribers); and Canadians' average weekly TV viewing remains fairly high and stable, with more than 50% of households owning multiple sets. Of course, to put this in perspective, such "proof" of WTN's expected success could as well have been used – and no doubt was – to support applications for everything from a country music channel to a science and nature service.

The terms of reference for the research requested from the SFU Media Lab dealt quite specifically with the question of whether or not "it matters who makes it" when it comes to television produced by women versus men. However, although the scope of our assignment did not require my colleagues and I to deliver an assessment of the commercial viability of the proposed channel, in reviewing the available literature, it was difficult not to conclude that a women's cable service did at least appear to be a promising venture. The already discussed Lifetime Television, which describes itself as a women's channel, had (at the time of WTN's application) a ten-year history of success to show for its female focus. The U.S. station's manager of research credited this in part to the consumer power of women and the extent to which that power is recognized and addressed by advertisers.²⁰⁸

Interestingly enough, the Lifetime example also demonstrated that deliberately programming to women did not automatically ensure alienation of the male audience; as it turns out, 40% of Lifetime's viewers are men. Analysis of the lucrative baby boomer market provided further support for the suggestion that a women's channel would have considerable potential for "cross-over" viewing. For instance, movie preferences of baby boomers – "story-driven" films such as *Dances With Wolves* and *Ghost*, as opposed to action adventures such as *Terminator* – appear to coincide with the films most popular among women.²⁰⁹ This suggests that a station attempting to appeal to female audiences has a good chance of appealing to

²⁰⁸ Interview with Lifetime's Manager of Research, August 9, 1993.

²⁰⁹ Gary Levin, "Boomers leave a challenge" in *Advertising Age*, July 8, 1991, v.62, n. 28, and Charles Fleming, "Filmmakers Shooting a Fond Glance at Women" in *Variety*, August 5, 1991, V. 344, n. 4, p. 3.

boomers – male and female – as well. Similarly, subjects and approaches to news identified as being attractive to boomers also appear to favour the kinds of topics women have traditionally been interested in, such as home, family, lifestyle and health.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the aging boomer population will eventually result in there being more grandparents than children,²¹¹ and older people spend more time watching television than any other segment of the population.²¹² Finally, older boomers are expected to be more desirable as audience members than previous generations of seniors: not having experienced the depression and the war, they are expected to be more inclined to spend their money.²¹³

In the final analysis, despite its historic reluctance to impose progressive change vis a vis the portrayal of women on Canadian broadcasters, the CRTC was convinced by enough of WTN's arguments to approve the channel's license. The research supporting WTN's economic feasibility, while important, was less significant in the context of a field of applicants, most of whom had also provided solid business plans and demonstrated audience appeal.²¹⁴ In the CRTC's view, what distinguished WTN from other channel proposals generally, and Television in particular, was the former's emphasis on providing real alternatives to existing television fare, including its significant support for Canadian production featuring serious information programming of relevance to women. This commitment, and its recognition by the CRTC, was seen as a significant one by proponents and adversaries of the women's channel concept alike, ensuring that the network's first year in operation would be watched with great interest from many quarters.

²¹⁰ Scott Donaton, "Media reassess as boomers age" in *Advertising Age*, July 15, 1993, v.62, n.29, p.13.

²¹¹ Christy Fisher, "Boomers bringing buying power" in *Advertising Age*, November 16, 1992, v. 63, p. S2.

²¹² Statistics Canada, *Television Viewing*, Cat. 87-208 Annual, 1991.

²¹³ Fisher, "Boomers bringing buying power."

²¹⁴ Interview with Martine Vallee, who works in the office of Peter Fleming, CRTC Director General of Television Programming, conducted by the author on 18 January 1996 by phone.

Chapter 4

WTN: A Test Case in Addressing the Female Audience Differently

In this chapter I examine the extent to which WTN delivered on its promises, assessing the impact of its first year on air in terms of what we can learn about female audiences. To do this, I draw on a variety of sources, including the network's original "blueprint" as laid out its CRTC application, some publicity materials and interviews conducted with senior WTN staff, as well as print media coverage from Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg newspapers. My own experience dealing with WTN as an independent producer furnishes some additional insights, which were supplemented by my viewing of the channel, sporadically over the past year, and more intensely in recent weeks. The approach proposed by WTN on paper is measured against both the perception of newspaper journalists responsible for mediating the network's launch to the viewing public, and its conduct as a company producing and broadcasting television programs "by, for and about women," taking into consideration the external and internal influences that helped to shape the decisions made and the directions taken during its first season. In particular, I look at WTN's relationship with its intended audience, attempting to draw some conclusions about how these decisions and directions ultimately confirm, contradict or expand our knowledge about female television viewers as discussed in previous chapters.

Proposed Approach - Philosophy

In its application to the CRTC, WTN went to some pains to define its proposed concept in the context of the broader environment, stating that not only would commercial and consumer needs be married, but that "societal considerations" would also play a role.²¹⁵ Although in keeping with the organizational sensitivity already referred to around the "F-word", no

²¹⁵ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 16.

reference to feminism is made in WTN's description of its direction, the impression created by the language used is of a very progressive approach. (Indeed, one reporter described the network's CRTC application as being "openly feminist in tone."²¹⁶) The document commits the channel to an "alignment of owner philosophy, program content and audience needs," which -- positioned in the context of the audience and academic research marshalled as support -- certainly implies a feminist agenda. Included in the concept section is an articulation of WTN's "values", which address the channel's: intention to "present the world through women's eyes;" recognition that women are not a homogeneous group; commitment to portraying a diversity of perspectives and opinions; and sensitivity to the importance of dealing with contentious issues in "an intelligent and meaningful way." Although expressly *not* anti-male, WTN promises in its submission to adopt a strongly pro-women stance with programming designed to "affirm their abilities, competencies and chosen roles." In addition to featuring female subjects and on-air personnel, the means of achieving this promise involves the assurance that women will dominate all aspects of the writing, directing and producing process. Finally, in probably its most overtly political statement, the channel specifies that "Women in politics will be questioned about their actions to advance the issues that affect women most: day care, elder care, judicial reform, abuse in all its forms, etc."²¹⁷ (The curious thing about this statement is the implication by omission that WTN's journalists will *not* be holding *male* politicians accountable for these same issues.)

Programs and Schedule

In reviewing the channel's proposed programming and scheduling design, it becomes clear that this stated direction does indeed inform the decisions made around what to air, and when.

²¹⁶ Hester Riches, "The play for pay -- or how to get a specialty TV channel and view happily ever after -- channels" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 January 1995.

²¹⁷ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, pp. 16-18.

Moreover, the influence of WTN's audience research is evident in both the content of the projected programs, as well as the way they've been scheduled. In recognition of the diversity of its audience vis a vis available viewing time, and in response to women's stated frustration about the lack of information programming dealing with concerns of interest to them during prime time, WTN's time table avoids the standard repeating "wheel" of four to six hours of programming. Instead, its schedule revolves around strategically positioned repeats designed to accommodate the diversity of women's working lives, so as to reach nursing mothers, shift workers, home-based business women and nine-to-fivers alike. Similarly, in terms of content, the channel's "signature service" offerings (shows produced by the network to "exemplify [its] mission and values") embody WTN's commitment to reflect women's unique perspectives, and provide information and advice relevant to their lives. A promotional fact sheet used in advance of the channel's launch in January 1995 went so far as to match up particular research findings (i.e., "women want television that offers two-way dialogue") with descriptions of programs designed to meet identified needs (*Call Us* - a call-in advice show featuring expert guests, and *Hot Topics* - documentaries on controversial topics, followed by hosted discussions and supplemented by a help-line).²¹⁸ Similarly, shows such as *POV: Women* (a news and public affairs program), *Bird's Eye View* (analysis of the Ottawa political scene), *The Creators* (profiles of and interviews with female artists, authors and performers) and *Girl Talk* (a contemporary magazine show hosted by teenage girls addressing the issues that affect them), also speak to the findings of WTN's audience research.²¹⁹

This is not to say that all of the programming proposed was relentlessly serious or agenda-driven. But even the network's more predictable fare -- such as its workout and health shows -- reflected a progressive and decidedly female orientation. The former promised to incorporate a disabled instructor, exercises that could be done in bed, and tips on turning household chores into

²¹⁸ WTN Fact Sheet, promotional material distributed Fall 1994.

²¹⁹ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book II, pp. J2-J18.

an exercise routine; the latter category included a program called *39 Weeks and Counting* (billed as the "Living Encyclopedia of Pregnancy and Childbirth") and a weekly segment named *Healing the Spirit*, to focus on alternative therapies and women as healers. Rounding out the information programming were car care, financial advice and fly-fishing (!) shows designed especially for women. Considering the appreciably higher costs involved in producing entertainment programming, it's not surprising that WTN's proposal did not commit to new production of any non-information fare. The channel did, however, indicate plans to acquire movies, dramas and situation comedies devoid of violence and featuring strong female protagonists.²²⁰ The non-violent requirement, in addition to reflecting women's concerns about excessively violent programming, is also a response to the research findings regarding their desire to view in the company of family members.

Portrayal and Employment Practices

The sensitivity to portrayal practices articulated in WTN's program descriptions was also echoed in its recognition of the need for a policy relating to advertising standards. Early on in the development process, President Linda Rankin indicated a commitment to use MediaWatch's guidelines on sex role stereotyping in determining what the network would and would not accept from advertisers in terms of the portrayal of women and girls.²²¹ In the executive summary of its CRTC application document, references were made to the importance of ensuring that "the kind of advertising and the way it depicts women" must be compatible with the overall mission of the channel, and reflective of "a woman's perspective."²²² (Presumably this latter assertion

²²⁰ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book II, pp. J23-J36.

²²¹ Public presentation to women in the Vancouver broadcasting industry, January 1994. MediaWatch does not, in fact, have its own guidelines, although the organization has regularly provided input to the Canadian Advertising Foundation on the ones it uses, and generally supports the application of the existing set.

²²² Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 10.

would prohibit voyeuristic beer and perfume ads that pan up women's bodies, sexualizing and commodifying their parts.)

The extent to which WTN's philosophy of "television for women, by women and about women" is reflected in its employment and production policies is best summarized by the following statement about its already mentioned "signature services," which are:

news and information programs which have been designed, created, researched, filmed and edited by women. These actions are vital to fulfill the mandate of providing a Canadian woman's perspective. It is only when women have the decision-making responsibility of selecting the issues and images to convey, that the real objectives will be met.²²³

Although financed primarily by three men, the network's senior management team has always been female, its staff of 48 is 95% female, and its foundation board is made up exclusively of women. The very existence of the Foundation is a significant and unprecedented initiative, and the mandate of its board is to provide regional perspectives on issues and programming, and to promote network-sponsored mentoring opportunities for women in broadcasting. On an economic basis, this support is further reinforced by the network's financial commitment to programming developed by women. Over and above the \$5.7 million slated for the first year of Signature Service material, WTN budgeted an additional \$2.4 million for other new Canadian programs "designed to speak to women in their own voice... [and] created by independent female producers."²²⁴

"Women's Television?" ... A Surprisingly Radical Concept

The very notion of a women's channel was a challenging one for many, and reaction – particularly from members of the news media – seemed reminiscent at times of the response

²²³ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 24.

²²⁴ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 26.

that greeted early suffragettes' suggestion that women be allowed to vote. I was doubly sensitive to this, as a feminist activist familiar with the knee-jerk reaction inspired by anything perceived to be unapologetically pro-women, and having myself been initially sceptical of the value of a channel that might ghettoize women's concerns. At the CRTC hearings held in March of 1994 to receive presentations from those applying for new licenses, it was apparent from Commissioner Gail Scott's questioning of WTN that above and beyond whatever considerations the regulatory body would give to economic viability or market demand, she was more preoccupied by the revolutionary – and apparently confusing – nature of the concept of a women's channel. Despite the significant amount of research submitted in conjunction with WTN's application, and the experts assembled for the hearing, the bulk of her questions were directed to the proposed channel's two principals, who were asked to define what the channel was, and how it would be different from what was available elsewhere. She appeared to be having difficulty conceiving of a network "for, by and about women." (Interestingly, Pat Fili-Kruschel, former Vice President of the U.S. women-oriented channel, Lifetime, made a relevant observation in drawing an analogy between her past employer and Nickelodeon, the children's cable station. Crediting Nickelodeon's success to the vision and "if-I-build-it-they-will-come" perseverance of that network's leader, she suggested that until a vehicle is created for a particular approach, the approach itself may be difficult to imagine, and audience members – or indeed, regulators – may have no sense of whether or not they will be interested.)²²⁵

Preliminary media coverage of WTN's launch reflected this ambivalence and confusion.²²⁶ Prior to the start of broadcasting in January 1995, a report in *The Toronto Star* suggested that

²²⁵ Interview with Pat Fili-Kruschel, August 13, 1993.

²²⁶ The print media analysis that follows is based on a review of all articles that appeared in *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Vancouver Province* from January 1995 to November 1995, and the most substantive articles printed in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, *The Winnipeg Sun*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Toronto Sun*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Financial Post*. Clippings from the latter five publications were supplied to me by WTN, as were copies of articles appearing in *Frank Magazine* and *British Columbia Report*.

WTN would be starting out with "a strange blend of material ranging from girly chat shows to gritty comedies and dramas that may offend as many women as they beguile."²²⁷ The day after the network's launch, the same paper's TV critic, Jim Bawden – after observing that "You'd think WTN is for the distaff side" – asked, "Surely men can sneak peaks, too?" Several days later, *Globe and Mail* television critic, Liam Lacey confessed, "I don't think I'm qualified to watch, never mind discuss, the Women's Television Network," despite the fact that he goes on to acknowledge that the channel's press material specifically states that it is endeavouring to air programming that women can watch alone, or in the company of family or friends.²²⁸

Meanwhile, over at *The Toronto Sun*, columnist Christie Blatchford, a former sports reporter with a reputation for being an unreliable ally in women's struggle for equality, while suggesting that the CRTC had already licensed a men's channel (otherwise known as The Sports Network), critiqued WTN in the context of a piece about the "splendid... noble... young male animal[s]" on a winning hockey team. Her gratuitous condemnation of the women's network was for its apparent endorsement of the "dreary attitude" that women are inherently gentler, superior, fairer and better than men, and for featuring "a lot of rhythmic drumming, much *sotto voce* voice overs and inane, not to mention rotund, hostesses..."²²⁹ The last reference, in particular, seemed to betray an especially indefensible hostility of a sort one might expect more from the likes of the brutally derisive *Frank Magazine* or the extremely conservative *British Columbia Report* than from a mainstream daily newspaper.

The latter two publications did not disappoint. Ottawa-based *Frank*, which specializes in below-the-belt satire, took predictable swipes at the channel in a mock advertisement, the most printable of which described the proposed program on political analysis as "Questionable

²²⁷ Greg Quill, "Scattered approach touches all bases" in *The Toronto Star*, 18 December 1994.

²²⁸ Liam Lacey, "Forget gender, Women's Network worth a look" in *The Globe and Mail*. 5 January 1995.

²²⁹ Christie Blatchford, "Genuine heroes" in *The Toronto Star* January 1995.

Period, a monthly current affairs round-table featuring the crabbest women in Ottawa reviewing all the bloody issues on the Parliamentary lunar calendar."²³⁰ From *B.C. Report*, came a review that was even more vicious, in that it was presented as objectively reported news, as opposed to satire. The none-too-delicate headline – "Gagging on Girl Talk - The Women's Television Network revels in lesbian-feminist fare" – sets the tone for Robin Brunet's article, which was relentless – not to mention picaresque – in its attempt to discredit the channel. The page-long profile effectively left the impression that WTN's programming is almost completely preoccupied with lesbian poetry, bodily functions best left unmentioned, and pro-abortion propaganda. Although the network's president Linda Rankin is quoted briefly, the person given the most opportunity to define the channel's value is Lydia Miljan, head of the arch-conservative Fraser Institute's media monitoring wing. She confesses to being "disgusted" by the "tasteless" programming, but the only example she cites is a talk show which featured middle-aged women discussing -- heaven forbid -- "their kids' sex lives." Brunet's reference to a lecture show featuring Camille Paglia is indicative of the piece's sneering inaccuracy as he states that the controversial culture critic "wasn't making enemies in the sisterhood" on this particular occasion, implying that WTN and its feminist subscribers undoubtedly embraced Paglia's endorsement of pedophilia.²³¹ Such analyses, although predictable in their biases, cannot be dismissed, given the audiences they reach and the extent to which they reinforce existing fears and prejudices about giving women too much voice. At the same time, the extreme nature of the views represented in such reviews underlines how safe and contained women-oriented television has traditionally been.

This is not to say that the channel did not receive any substantive and warranted criticism. *The Globe and Mail's* Michael Coren noted that WTN had "the appearance of a distended

²³⁰ *Frank Magazine*, January 1995.

²³¹ Robin Brunet, "Gagging on Girl Talk - The Women's Television Network revels in lesbian-feminist fare" in *British Columbia Report*, 30 January 1995.

version of community access television" and suffered an unfortunate sloppiness in the timing of its commercials – both failings that I either witnessed myself or heard critiqued by other network sympathizers. Giving voice to a perception apparently shared by many viewers, Coren lamented the "interminable talkshows and linking discussion groups" that characterized WTN's first season.²³² *The Vancouver Sun's* Lloyd Dykk expressed similar sentiments, characterizing the between-shows-host as "sanctimonious," and accusing a panel of facilitators of "insulting our intelligence." Nevertheless, even these critiques embodied a degree of mean-spiritedness that seemed disproportionate to the fledgling channel's offenses. Dykk's intellectual capacity was apparently affronted by having to witness the afore-mentioned facilitators "discussing things like 'support systems,' 'closure' and other terms..."²³³ As for Coren, he admits to being "angered" by the Women's Television Network, and vents this ill humour in the contention that WTN airs "entire programs featuring... grotesquely unamusing and irksome American feminist comics."

It is difficult to read these analyses and not wonder if the tone of the reviews is not at least partly attributable to the entrenched nature of the very environment to which the network is attempting to provide an alternative, and the gender of the critics in question. Moreover, at no time did either critic appear to question whether or not, as male viewers, their perception of the programming may be different from the female viewers for whom it was designed.

At the same time, such charged condemnation was countered by at least one male reviewer – who nevertheless felt compelled to acknowledge the unpopularity of his position even while endorsing the new channel and its offerings. Television critic for *The Vancouver Province*, Ray Chatelin described himself as under pressure from family and friends to stay "in the closet" rather than "admit the scarlet truth: I watch The Women's Network." This prelude to his

²³² Michael Coren, "WTN wastes a great opportunity" in *The Globe and Mail*, 13 February 1995.

²³³ Lloyd Dykk, "Channelling the new specialty services and divining an important life decision – no more TV" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 January 1995.

review of the channel – "It airs quality material, it grapples with contemporary issues but it is not a propaganda tool," offering "intelligent and entertaining material and a slightly different perspective of the universe" – underlines how strongly the conventional wisdom ran contrary to his own assessment.²³⁴ Chatelin's counterpart at *The Toronto Star*, Greg Quill, also managed to find something good to say about the channel, recommending several of WTN's shows which he praised as "fine examples of [its] programming mandate."²³⁵ At the same paper, media reporter Antonia Zerbisias defended all of the new cable networks from criticism that she characterized as unfair, suggesting that viewers "Give [them] a chance. They're worth your three bucks."²³⁶

A few voices made it into Canadian dailies expressing unreserved optimism about the potential of the women's channel to address previously neglected issues. Such analysis tended to come not from journalists or columnists, but from the mouths of activists. For instance, the only unapologetically positive comments printed in *The Vancouver Sun*, ironically enough, came from me. In an article previewing an upcoming public forum on women in film and television, and in the context of a discussion about the ongoing inequities affecting the portrayal and participation of women, I was quoted suggesting that WTN was a positive initiative that would – by virtue of its mandate and approach – nurture and support female producers and ultimately "have an impact on the larger universe."²³⁷ Similarly, a member of MediAction (a Montreal-based women's group that splintered off from MediaWatch several years ago) was quoted in *The Montreal Mirror* responding to the results of a poll suggesting that a women's network would rank 27th among viewers and constitute a ghetto:

²³⁴ Ray Chatelin, "More than a pretty face: Women's network offers quality stuff" in *The Vancouver Province*, 12 February 1995.

²³⁵ Greg Quill, "Discover new channel's well made presentation" in *The Toronto Star*, 20 January 1995.

²³⁶ Zerbisias, Antonia, "There's treasure in new channels: give 'em a chance" in *The Toronto Star*, 17 January 1995.

²³⁷ Lindsay Kinds, "It's still a man's world on film and TV" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1995.

Ghettos are born when large groups are forced into marginalization. WTN's very existence underlines the fact that quality productions by and about women are often left out of mainstream programming schedules. Therefore, a women's specialty network can preserve identity and facilitate expressions of the reality of women's lives that are censored elsewhere.²³⁸

Of the post-launch press coverage reviewed, only one article gave a WTN spokesperson the opportunity to frame the network in her own terms. Writing at the end of January, after most of the articles discussed above had been published (except for Chatelin's supportive piece) *Ottawa Citizen* arts correspondent Jamie Portman quoted network president Linda Rankin extensively, allowing her words to direct the bulk of the story's focus. Under the headline, "New women's network about marketing, not gender, CEO says," Portman even-handedly reports the criticisms of the channel's mandate and its financial viability, giving equal time and space to Rankin's refutations of the perceptions and rumours raised. Typical of the lengthy article are the following excerpts:

"For anyone who asks 'Why a women's channel,' we have one key response: In Canada, there's a market for it – that's why," Rankin says... [adding that] nobody has accused the YTV network of ghettoizing youths... "There's something very emotional attached to these discussions. It immediately becomes a gender issue rather than a market issue, which it should be. And as soon as it's a gender issue, all sorts of other agendas – political, social and emotional – are thrown into the mix."²³⁹

(Apart from the fact that Rankin appears to have suddenly abdicated WTN's pro-social arguments about the need for its existence, what's interesting about this coverage is the unusual amount of context provided, which runs counter to one of the very aspects of traditional newspaper reporting that women were found to take issue with, as discussed in chapter 3.)

²³⁸ Francesca Gesualdi, "As the world spins" in *The Montreal Mirror*, February 2 - 9, 1995.

²³⁹ Jamie Portman, "New women's network about marketing, not gender, CEO says" in *The Ottawa Citizen*, 29 January 1995.

At WTN, the volume and nature of the print media attention did not go unnoticed. Vice President of Marketing, Jacqueline Cook, claimed in an October speech to the Public Relations Society of Toronto that her channel had received "five times the press, mostly positive, of any of the other new services."²⁴⁰ While it is beyond the scope of my research to document this contention, the controversy-driven nature of news suggests that the women's channel likely did generate more coverage than the politically neutral science, country music and arts channels. As well, even the limited review conducted suggests that the negative reports about WTN may well have created a disproportionately strong impression, relative to the more balanced coverage that, in fact, existed.

Nevertheless, as TV reviewers turned their attention away from the seemingly controversial nature of the channel itself, to focus on the material being broadcast, WTN fare -- ranging from British sit-coms, to International Women's Day programs like *Women in Power* and *You've Come a Long Way Baby* -- began to show up in a variety of "TV Highlights" columns.²⁴¹ Moreover, an occasional columnist went out on a limb and actually provided answers to some of the questions raised about WTN's very raison d'etre. Writing in *The Toronto Star* under the headline "The women's TV channel faces undeserved hostility," media reporter Antonia Zerbisias cited some of the jeering remarks she'd heard from mostly male colleagues and readers about "The Tampon Network," and asked,

What is so threatening about a concept [devoted to] information programming created with the specific needs of women in mind?... Especially when you consider how much TV is aimed at snagging women viewers who buy the soap, soda, cereal and other stuff advertised throughout the broadcast day. But look at the crap aimed at women on conventional TV... mostly mindless stuff... Where are the forums for women to discuss issues of concern to them, to analyze political and other events from a feminine perspective? Hang what Wall Street money traders say about the

²⁴⁰ Jacqueline Cook, Speech to the Canadian Public Relations Society, Toronto, 24 October 1995.

²⁴¹ *The Vancouver Sun*, "Column One", 8 March 1995.

federal budget, tell us what it's doing to mitigate daycare costs or the number of deadbeat dads! WTN does that. Every day.²⁴²

Unanticipated Controversies

Above and beyond the difficulties the network encountered in attempting to assert and gain acceptance for its mandate and identity, other unanticipated controversies exacerbated WTN's growing reputation for contentiousness and contributed to making the channel's first month on air particularly challenging. The very first week it began broadcasting, a national TV listing service (supplying *The Globe & Mail's* TV magazine, among others) confused its programming with that of another specialty channel, erroneously informing prospective viewers that *Batman*, *The Green Hornet*, and *Wonder Woman* could be expected on WTN's schedule.²⁴³

As debilitating as that situation was, by far the larger problem was generated by the actions of carrier Rogers CableSystems, in its negative option marketing fiasco. By packaging the seven newly-licensed Canadian cable channels with established American counterparts (a move required by the CRTC), and requiring viewers to contact Rogers if they *didn't* want to pay for the new channels, the cable giant created a consumer revolt. During the first two weeks of January, the outrage felt by disgruntled cable subscribers received significantly more media attention – including virulent debate on open-line radio shows and almost nightly television coverage of public demonstrations – than the programming on the channels themselves. The discontent amongst consumers seemed substantive enough that the specialty channels – which had based their financial projections on reaching the vast majority of existing cable subscribers – felt their economic futures jeopardized by the fallout, which seemed destined to result in considerably fewer subscribers and viewers than anticipated.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Antonia Zerbisias, "The women's TV channel faces undeserved hostility" in *The Toronto Star*, 28 March 1995, E3.

²⁴³ "Birthing pains", *The Globe & Mail*, 6 January 1995.

In British Columbia, where Rogers has significant market penetration, the Minister of Consumer Services, Joan Smallwood responded to consumer pressure and promised to enact legislation that would make the cable carrier's negative option marketing illegal in B.C., as it was in other provinces. Rogers eventually backed down, revoking its original packaging plans and making it easier for consumers to refuse the additional channels and costs, with one industry observer actually suggesting that the intense publicity may have ultimately done more good than harm, simply by creating greater awareness about the new speciality services.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the stress of this unexpected revolt no doubt contributed to creating the climate that gave birth to WTN's next crisis.

In mid-January, network president, Linda Rankin, gave an interview by phone to a Calgary print journalist in which she expressed concerns about the financial future of WTN. The story -- carried by Canadian Press wire services and published in papers across the country -- opened with the following dark pronouncement: "Advertising sales are grim for one of Canada's new TV networks and its president says the channel may be killed by a consumer revolt." Rankin herself was quoted as saying: "It's a very precarious situation. We're getting no response from advertisers."²⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, this item sparked several days of intensive damage control on WTN's part, resulting in follow-up articles in some of the newspapers that printed the CP story. In the day or two following the first report, Vice President of Marketing, Jacqueline Cook, and Randy Moffat, owner of Moffat Communications, WTN's chief investor, were both given an opportunity to speak to Rankin's comments, which they claimed had been taken out of context. In efforts to counter the impression left by Rankin -- who had apparently been asked to speculate on a worst-case scenario -- Cook and Moffat delivered the message that the network

²⁴⁴ William Boei, "New channels expect 80% approval" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 4 February and Hester Riches, "The play for pay -- or how to get a specialty TV channel and view happily ever after -- channels" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 January 1995.

²⁴⁵ Ian Morrison, spokesperson for Friends of Canadian Broadcasting as quoted by Rachel Rafelman, "Can new channels survive?" in *The Globe and Mail*, 24 January 1995.

²⁴⁶ Canadian Press, "Lack of ads puts network in jeopardy", *Calgary Sun*, 14 January 1995, *The Vancouver Sun*, 16 January 1995.

was hitting its advertising targets and not endangered by the uproar over Rogers' policies.²⁴⁷ One report in *The Winnipeg Sun* provided additional context courtesy of a media buyer for large ad agency McKim Communications, who noted that "it took 10 years before A&E [the now successful Arts & Entertainment network] was doing well."²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as is often the case, with the exception of Winnipeg papers (where WTN and Moffat Communications are based) the damage control did not appear to achieve the same profile and attention of the earlier report, the impact of which lingered for some time and was still being countered by channel spokespeople in October.²⁴⁹

Moreover, several publications used the controversy as a stepping stone to critique WTN on other grounds. *Marketing Magazine* noted that the women's network received preferential treatment from cable carriers Rogers, Shaw and Maclean Hunter, who in fact buffered it from the consumer revolt by placing it on their basic or extended basic cable packages, ensuring that 90% of existing subscribers would receive the new channel.²⁵⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press* columnist Fred Cleverley wrote a lengthy piece challenging Rankin's intellectual grasp of "the facts of television life." In it he suggested that what she failed to understand was that "the Women's Network is too politically sensitive to be allowed to fail as long as there is tax money, in one form or another, available to keep it alive," regardless of whether or not anybody wants to watch it, which – he implied – they wouldn't.²⁵¹ It is interesting to note that Randy Moffat was apparently accorded more credibility on the business of television by the *Free Press*, which shortly after the above article appeared, quoted him directly on the subject of WTN's

²⁴⁷ Alexandra Paul, "WTN alive, well: Moffat - Death watch premature, partner says" in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 January 1995, and Denise Duguay, "Ratings key for new network" in *The Winnipeg Sun*, 17 January 1995.

²⁴⁸ Duguay, *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ Cook, speech to the CPRS.

²⁵⁰ Mark Etting, "Street Talk - Ad sales either grim or right on" in *Marketing Magazine*, 23 January 1995.

²⁵¹ Fred Cleverley, "No viewers? No problem" in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, January 1995.

management when he noted that the channel had achieved "about 95 per cent of its advertising sales budget for February."²⁵² The contradiction inherent in the two perspectives provided, however, was neither acknowledged nor explained.

Listening to the Audience

If WTN was at times able to discount the judgements of television reviewers as inaccurate or hostile, they were not able to ignore the tales being told by audience figures, the reporting of which did nothing to dispel the perception of WTN's alleged financial troubles. In *The Globe and Mail*, Nielsen ratings for the week of January 2nd to 8th revealed that out of the seven newly-launched channels, the women's network was unchallenged in its ownership of the bottom of the pack, with an average of 23,000 viewers during prime time (7 p.m. to 11 p.m.), compared to Discovery's top spot at 80,000 viewers, or even second-to-last Life Channel's 29,000 viewers.²⁵³ The new channels' performance in its second week on-air was reported in terms of the overall television viewing audience per minute, again showing WTN in last place, albeit tied with Life at a .3 share of all viewers, compared to Discovery's 1.4 per cent share.²⁵⁴ A month later, in an overview of the first five weeks of ratings published by *The Ottawa Citizen* and picked up elsewhere, WTN still had the lowest number of average per minute viewers (9,000 versus Discovery's 42,000 or Life's 13,000) but these were reported to be growing, and vice president Jacqueline Cook was quoted on the subject of audience feedback, maintaining that 90 per cent of the channel's viewer response was positive.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Martin Cash, "Moffat enjoys strong quarter" in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 January 1995.

²⁵³ Rafelman, "Can new channels survive."

²⁵⁴ "In Brief: Entertainment" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 31 January 1995.

²⁵⁵ Tony Atherton, "Ever in television, if at first you don't succeed, try try try try try try try again: After a barrage of bad publicity, the 7 new specialty channels are fighting back" in *The Ottawa Citizen*, reprinted by *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 March 1995.

In the face of the early criticism levelled at the network by the press, this was no doubt difficult for many to believe, and yet given the virulence of many of the reviews, one could argue that those viewing the WTN despite such negative assessments would only be doing so because they genuinely appreciated the alternative focus and approach. Indeed, WTN's appeal appeared to transcend news reports that continued to misrepresent the facts. Six months into the life of the new networks, *The Globe and Mail* reported that WTN's average number of viewers per minute stood at 6,000, and implied that it had only reached that level due to having been given preferential treatment by the cable carriers. *The Globe* also reported incorrectly on the contribution WTN's revenues had made to the channel's chief shareholder, Moffat Communications.²⁵⁶ This caused Cook to send a sharply worded letter to Editor-in-Chief, William Thorsell, taking the paper to task on a number of inaccuracies, including its reporting of ratings figures. Wrote Cook, "WTN's average minute audience has grown 20% since launch and now stands at twice the number of viewers stated in your articles. We are one of three English language networks to have grown our audience since launch... We have less preferential regulated carriage provisions than other services, such as TSN..."²⁵⁷ The letter was not published by *The Globe*, but Cook judged it to have been effective on at least one level: with the exception of a brief item about a change of staff, "Canada's National Newspaper" made no mention of WTN for many months afterwards.²⁵⁸

Meanwhile, as early as March, the channel had begun to respond to viewer feedback, and was revising both its content and approach. A *Toronto Star* article quoted programming vice-president, Barbara Barde on the subject of upcoming changes, indicating: "This is the first time we're able to stop, breathe and say this doesn't work, let's look at this, how do we revisit

²⁵⁶ "Moffat's earnings rise 21%" in *The Globe and Mail*, 5 July 1995, B12; Harvey Enchin, "Canadians tuning out specialty TV" in *The Globe and Mail*, 6 July 1995, A1; and John Haslett Cuff, "Challenger of CRTC no crank," 6 July 1995.

²⁵⁷ Cook, Jacqueline, vice president of WTN, letter to William Thorsell of *The Globe and Mail*, 10 July 1995, unpublished, provided by Cook.

²⁵⁸ Cook, Jacqueline, interview conducted by the author, November 1995.

this..." The changes themselves were telling. As one example, the producer of WTN's nightly public affairs show, *POV: Women*, volunteered that "Viewers see women sitting in chairs and talking and they think that what they're talking about isn't important -- just because they see women,"²⁵⁹ suggesting that the presentation of the show needed to be revamped to make it look more "authoritative." Even if such perceptions were not directly influenced by the sneering attitudes evident in some of the reviews already cited, they have no doubt been cultivated by decades of television in which female experts -- notwithstanding the happy housewife variety knowledgeable about bathroom cleansers and laundry detergent -- were notably absent.²⁶⁰ Indeed, this kind of response among female television viewers provides a dramatic, if depressing, illustration of the crying need for more female role models, if only to allow women themselves to appreciate that they do, in fact, exist.

According to at least one observer, WTN's willingness to incorporate such feedback, as frustrating as it must have been, set it apart from the other channels. At the end of May, Denise Duguay of *The Winnipeg Sun* wrote an exceptionally positive piece about the network's first five months on air, chronicling its initial challenges, and then concluding that, despite derision from the "good old boys," and dire predictions about its untimely demise: "WTN is not only still around, it's progressed from a crawl to an increasingly steady walk."²⁶¹ Citing qualities reminiscent of Deborah Tanning's analysis of the gender differences in communication styles, Duguay attributed the channel's "gently curving upward arc" to four things: "humility, balance, dependability and time." Crediting the network with listening skills uncommon amongst typically "arrogant" and "inflexible" broadcasters, she described some of the changes being implemented by WTN in response to the criticism it received regarding programming that

²⁵⁹ Zerbisias, "The women's TV channel faces undeserved hostility."

²⁶⁰ This anecdote also brings to mind the fact that long-time Conservative pollster, Allan Gregg is able to appear on television in a t-shirt and pony tail and be perceived as an expert, whereas women being interviewed as an authority on virtually any subject risk being read as a secretary if they don't wear a suit jacket or business dress.

²⁶¹ Denise Duguay, "Gals on Top - WTN's come a long way, baby" in *The Winnipeg Sun*, 31 May 1995.

was too serious and relied too heavily on talking heads. She also cited the decision to drop the between-show-hosts, who were intended to provide some kind of cohesion by bridging from one program to another, but turned out to be alienating even to some channel supporters.²⁶² Duguay concluded by maintaining that the channel "still delivers what it promised – TV for women, by women and about women," and then quoting a Videon cable supplier spokesperson who observed that both male and female viewers ultimately enjoyed WTN more than they expected: "It seems a lot of viewers... are paying more attention to the programming and not the name of the network, and they're liking it."²⁶³

This is not to say that the negative critiques of the channel's serious, talking-head programming didn't appear to have an impact. WTN's promotional material for the 1995-96 fall and winter season emphasized a schedule "packed with stars you'll love and stories you'll remember," eschewing the information shows that had featured so prominently in its January launch, and highlighting instead "compelling drama, hilarious comedy, romance and top talent..." Where new, independently-produced Canadian interview-based programs had been positioned front and centre its first time out, the fall publicity package started off by profiling entertainment products acquired from Britain, Australia and the U.S, leaving the home-grown and more issues-oriented shows to be discussed in later pages.²⁶⁴

In an October address to members of the Canadian Public Relations Society, WTN's vice president of marketing, Jacqueline Cook, confirmed that the programming vision had indeed been revised, and outlined the history and rationale for the changes made.²⁶⁵ Noting that established specialty channels such as MTV, CNN and A&E had all taken several years to

²⁶² *The Toronto Star's* Zerbisias, for instance, whose articles about WTN were mostly very positive, wrote "And what's with those women between programs? I swear one was knitting baby booties on air the other day," advising WTN to "lose the knitting needles" in "The expert views of new TV" 1 March 1995.

²⁶³ Duguay, "Gals on Top."

²⁶⁴ WTN 1995-96 Fall & Winter Programming Highlights, supplied by WTN.

²⁶⁵ Cook, speech to the CPRS.

define their focus, she said that WTN began re-evaluating "the type, tone and intent" of its programming as early as February. She indicated that the direction settled on at that point was to be less intellectual and elitist, and more lighthearted and escapist. This was signalled in part by a new advertising campaign placed in *Marketing Magazine*, which announced "We do so have a sense of humour," and evident in the increased promotion of the channel's British comedy series. For the fall season, the new direction translated into WTN's decision to keep its weekend movies, British comedies and biographies of famous women, and add *Bramwell*, a lavish period drama about medicine in Victorian England, and *First Fire*, an Australian drama about a female fire fighter. Although Cook recommitted the channel to other less mainstream shows, such as the experimental short film series, *Shameless Shorts* and *Girl Talk* -- "the only place on television where you can hear the uncensored/untampered voice of today's teenage girls" -- she also announced two interview-format programs: recycled celebrity interviews with Barbara Walters, and a new show hosted by former fashion model Lauren Hutton who draws her guests primarily from the ranks of Hollywood's rich and famous.

Moreover, Cook went to some lengths to convince the P.R. Society members that despite the contention made by a radio station talk show host that WTN was more like *MS. Magazine* than *Chatelaine*, the reverse characterization was more accurate. "We are Canadian, we are advertising supported. Our shows cover a broad range of programs - romance, fashion, finances, parenting, gardening, beauty, profiles of interesting people and some fiction... We are not politically or ideologically driven. Our objective is to create a commercially successful service by providing the most entertaining programming to our viewers." This last statement, coupled with the *Chatelaine* comparison, seem particularly at odds with the channel's promise to provide alternative fare, and Cook's identification of the four words that best define WTN -- "Savvy, sometimes Streetsmart, Fun and Classy" (capitals in the original) -- hardly evokes some of the network's loftier ideals as outlined in its application document and discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Although it's apparent that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and

Rhoda are the embodiment of these defining adjectives, it's less clear how 20 year-old American sitcoms provide the promised diversity or an alternative to already existing fare.²⁶⁶

While Cook's recipe for success was no doubt a palatable prescription from the perspective of her audience of marketing executives,²⁶⁷ the revised vision she articulates clearly calls into question the socially-conscious, equity-inspired goals laid out by WTN at its inception. Furthermore, Cook went on to imply that since women often watch television in the company of their families, it was important to provide programs that would take into consideration men's preferences. This phenomenon (which was also identified in the literature review that the SFU Media Lab conducted on behalf of WTN) perhaps provides additional explanation for WTN's increased emphasis on entertainment fare, since the network's ratings have demonstrated that male viewers are attracted to movies, comedies, dramas and biographies featuring female stars and personalities. While it is understandable that such an influence on program selection would have to be taken into consideration given the competitive nature of the television market, it is discouraging that any heed should have to be paid to the preferences of men, on this of all channels. In light of such decisions, and the ongoing challenges of appropriate positioning – with news media and the public – it is hardly surprising that accusations of "sell out" surfaced amongst some of the network's natural constituents.

How Far Feminist? Constituent Concerns

Many feminists, members of MediaWatch among them, saw the introduction of WTN as a significant moment in the evolution of our fight against inequality in mainstream media. The print media's obsession with the concept of a channel devoted to women only served to confirm the pressing need for such an institution and to validate the radicalizing role that WTN must

²⁶⁶ Lifestyle Television application for license to the CRTC, Book I, p. 17.

²⁶⁷ As a former member of the Canadian Public Relations Society (1985 - 1989) I have attended many such luncheons and am familiar with the orientation of the membership, particularly in the Toronto area. Although communication professionals from charitable organizations and the public sector belong to the CPRS, the majority of its members hail from large consulting companies or corporate public relations departments.

surely be supported in playing. And yet the capacity to generate negative publicity hardly proved the network's potential to radicalize the rest of the television environment. Indeed, in the eyes of some, WTN – from its management changes and supplier relations to its imported entertainment programming and re-articulated identity – was a far cry from the ultra-progressive broadcaster envisioned. The validity of such criticisms is clearly important in the context of this attempt to draw conclusions about the ability of the network to prove the female audience's potential role in transforming the broadcasting environment to a more socially responsible one.

In late December 1995 a year-end analysis of how the new specialty channels had fared over their first 12 months devoted significant attention to WTN's evolution. In a lengthy piece originating in *The Ottawa Citizen* and picked up elsewhere,²⁶⁸ critic Tony Atherton noted that "Almost every channel has revamped (some might say compromised) its program schedule to woo viewers." But he took particular aim at WTN, which he characterized as having abandoned much of the "issue-oriented programs for, by and about women (which) had charmed the CRTC..." Detailing some of the network's programming and staff changes, Atherton concluded that WTN was replacing its alternative fare with "shows about fashion, lifestyles and home renovations, precisely the kinds of 'stereotypical' women's programming that WTN's original president vowed would not be on the channel."

This assessment would have come as no surprise to at least one of the channel's early reviewers. In contrast to both its few glowing reviews and the condemnation doled out by especially conservative publications, WTN received unexpected criticism from a feminist source. In the May/June edition of *Pacific Current*, a left-leaning Vancouver-based alternative monthly which "sheds light on hidden forms of oppression"²⁶⁹ not covered by the mainstream

²⁶⁸ Tony Atherton, "New channels need special care to survive" in *The Vancouver Sun*, 28 December 1995, C1.

²⁶⁹ Zackery, Leina, letter to the editor, *Pacific Current*, June 1995, p. 5.

media, communication and women's studies instructor, Lynne Hissey berated WTN for "a promise broken and a potential betrayed."²⁷⁰ A former board member of MediaWatch, Hissey began by articulating her expectations for the channel, which she assumed "would be at least vaguely feminist in its orientation", even if "in a fairly safe, domesticated liberal" way. However, she found the network failed to live up to her hopes that it would "give voice to other feminist perspectives and act as a forum for those women largely excluded and marginalized," such as women of colour, older women, lesbians, and disabled and poor women. Instead, she judged the people featured on the channel to be "overwhelmingly white, able-bodied and apparently both heterosexual and middle-class;" found "very little feminist content;" was put off by "the number of times 'girl' appears in the its program titles;" and saw WTN's "over-emphasis on non-feminist views" as marginalizing "even nice, safe, liberal feminism." These accusations she backed up with selected program examples, citing the long, lacquered fingernails of the fishing show's host, lamenting the exclusive business focus of the program, *Working Woman*, and criticizing as polarized and superficial a panel discussion about pornography.

Although some of these very selected findings might well be used to question the progressiveness of the channel, others are specious attacks that suggest a hasty sampling and therefore insufficiently informed analysis. For example, *The Creators*, an hour-long daily program about female artists and performers, features more than its fare share of lesbians, and the nightly current affairs show, *POV: Women* was hosted by a gray-haired woman in her late fifties and two women of colour (phenomena that, interestingly enough, didn't escape *B.C. Report*). Indeed, as a reader of *Pacific Current* pointed out in a subsequent issue of the magazine, "Hissey focused on every negative aspect of the network, but said nothing about the regular programming of material never, ever seen on any other mainstream television network."²⁷¹ This

²⁷⁰ Lynne Hissey, "Lament for a station - The Women's Television Network out-mainstreams the mainstream" in *Pacific Current*, April/May 1995, pp. 26-28.

particular WTN defender, who specifically praised WTN shows *Shameless Shorts* and the *Dramatic Film Series*, further countered Hissey's "condescending" tone with the contention that: "I, too, would like to see a program about the other kinds of working women," and then asked "is lack of good labour programming stopping any of us from watching BCTV etc. for our daily fill of propaganda?"

Moreover, it is interesting to consider Hissey's analysis of WTN in the context of the accusations leveled at the channel by the already-mentioned *B.C. Report*, which judged the network to be relentlessly promoting the interests of man-hating lesbian feminists. Two such polarized viewpoints of the same programming arguably say more about the reviewers than the network, and in their extremity may effectively cancel one another, suggesting that, in fact, the channel may effectively be speaking to a broad cross-section of Canadian women who exist in between these two polarities. Ironically, in asserting that "It's easy enough to see why women of colour, lesbians and feminists of various stripes find little enough to interest them," Hissey seems to have bought into the message being disseminated by mainstream news media about WTN's failure to attract an audience. However, in pronouncing the channel's fare unfeminist, she could be accused of one of the very crimes she finds the channel guilty of: ignoring the diversity of opinion and perspective within the women's movement itself.

At a street level, other judgements about the network's feminist credentials circulated among women working in the television production community. In light of the media coverage critical of the channel concept, and in the context of the general discourse about the current "backlash" against those striving for women's equality, it is perhaps not surprising that some suspected that the high level staff changes at WTN reflected an attempt to eradicate those employees with the strongest pro-feminist agenda.²⁷² In addition, the network's commitment to independent female producers, while applauded by women in the industry, was somewhat

²⁷¹ Louise Leclair, "WTN could be worse" in *Pacific Current*, Sept/Oct 1995, p. 6.

²⁷² I heard this concern voiced in informal conversations with women in the Vancouver production industry who were working on my own series.

offset by the widespread perception that the fees it made available for such work were unusually low,²⁷³ and the speed with which it paid its bills particularly slow.

As one of those producers, my own experience is relevant here. Prior to my involvement with the channel, I had absolutely no background in television production whatsoever. Nevertheless, soon after WTN was granted a license in June of 1994, I was invited -- on the basis of my subject expertise -- to produce a 26-episode information series about the mainstream media's portrayal and representation of women. WTN teamed me up with a director, who had experience in film, but not television, and we formed a production company in order to do the series. Clearly this was not the kind of break that any other network was likely to provide to two novices, no matter how enthusiastic and intelligent. In the face of the mentoring opportunity being provided, the fact that the amount paid by WTN to my company by way of broadcast license fees for the half-hour series was significantly lower than the kind of money paid by CBC or CTV for similar kinds of programs became almost irrelevant. Moreover, it was also abundantly clear that neither CBC nor CTV would have been remotely likely to finance a program that intended to be critical of the way in which much of the mainstream media -- advertising included -- portrayed women.

I had a somewhat different perspective as well, on the concerns expressed by both my own production staff, and women working on another Vancouver-based program, about the way in which WTN's head office personnel dealt with independent producers. I noticed, for instance, that from the start of our business relationship, my partner -- who had not had the benefit of working with the network's management team as I had when preparing for and appearing at the CRTC hearings -- was decidedly more suspicious and less trusting of the channel's intentions. This set up an uncomfortable tension whereby she was inclined to attribute a late cheque or unclear wording in our contract to ulterior motives, whereas I generally perceived

²⁷³ This fact was reported by Judy Steed in *The Toronto Star*, "A channel for women", 11 December 1994, and relayed to me anecdotally by Eileen Hoeter, a Vancouver-based film-maker and the former president of Vancouver Women in Film who was contracted to produce 40 episodes of *The Creators*, a program about women in the arts, for \$12,000 per hour-long episode.

such problems to be a result of predictable disorganization and understaffing due to the challenges inherent to the start-up phase.

Ultimately, the test for me of WTN's commitment to the pro-women issues that I deemed important, and which it had identified in its application, came in the form of the channel's willingness to support my program's critique of mainstream media depictions, despite the potential threat of lawsuits. Like most other broadcasters, WTN requires its independent producers to obtain errors and omissions insurance coverage that will protect the channel and its producers in the event of legal action brought against the series for the use of an image, footage or music for which copyright clearance has not been obtained. From the start, we assumed that given the nature of *Doubletake*, we would not be able to obtain permission from all of those whose images we would be critiquing, and some intestinal fortitude on the channel's behalf would be required. Although the negotiation process involved in arriving at a mutually agreeable decision took many more months than I would have hoped (elongated considerably by the necessity of dealing with the insurance company's lawyer), in the end, WTN's senior executives agreed to stand behind the integrity of the program and take a risk airing uncleared material. Moreover, this decision was taken after the departure of both Barbara Barde and Linda Rankin (with whom I had established relationships) and so reflected a channel-wide philosophy and commitment, rather than simply the honouring of an understanding between individuals.

Moreover, the circumstances behind some of the high-level staff changes also fail to validate the suspicions of those who attributed them to an attempt by the owners to purge the channel of those employees with the strong feminist leanings. The perception began when, just a few weeks after the January 1995 launch, one of network's first hires, Carlyn Moulton, was let go from her 60-hour-a-week position overseeing the channel's independent producers. Moulton's departure came as a shock to the independent production community for which in many ways, she *was* WTN. When I spoke with Carlyn shortly after she left, she implied but didn't state that her political and sexual orientations contributed to her dismissal. However, the network's

position on her leaving (communicated to me by Barbara Barde) was that given the nature of Carlyn's job, the network really required her to operate out of WTN's head office, and she was unwilling to transfer to Winnipeg. (The common sense rationale of this argument was somewhat offset by the fact that the woman who has been doing Moulton's work since she left, Melanie McCaig, remains in Toronto. Nevertheless, McCaig took over on an interim basis, and -- based on my personal experience liaising with both women -- appeared better suited to the challenging task of keeping overworked, underpaid, rookie producers happy over long distance telephone lines. Clearly WTN agreed, eventually abandoning the search for a Winnipeg-based replacement, and appointing McCaig to Moulton's position permanently.)

Barde herself, with the channel from the beginning of its application process and a part-owner, left her own second-in-command position in July to move back to Toronto from WTN's Winnipeg headquarters, abdicating her role in providing overall programming direction for the network. This, too, was seen as an ominous sign by those familiar with Barde's long history of no-nonsense advocacy of behalf of women in the television industry. But her story had personal dimensions not readily apparent to the larger feminist/production community concerned about the personnel changes. In her words, "I had to get back to Toronto. I had no life, I gained 20 pounds, I worked around the clock. I guess I hadn't really realized how much my friends in Toronto mattered to me."²⁷⁴ The decision to leave was clearly Barde's choice; moreover, she now produces three of the network's "Signature Service" series out of Toronto, and continues to sit on WTN's board of directors, where her significant voice still contributes to shaping the network's direction.

However, to the extent that Moulton's and Barde's departures were publicized, they tended to fuel existing perceptions about WTN's penchant for bloodletting, concerns that were further entrenched when, a scant month after Barde left, WTN issued a terse press release indicating

²⁷⁴ Interview with WTN's former vice president of programming, Barbara Barde conducted by the author, 23 January 1996.

that Linda Rankin had resigned as president due to "fundamental differences in management philosophy between Ms. Rankin and the Company."²⁷⁵ Major shareholder Randy Moffat was named as the Acting President while a replacement was being sought. This latter leave-taking, in particular, raised questions about whether or not the channel's commitment to sticking to its, if not overtly feminist agenda, at least covertly progressive approach, was threatened. Were the "philosophical differences" referred to in the news release simply a euphemism for "not willing to compromise the mandate"? I was unable to speak with Rankin about the circumstances leading to her resignation (she is moving from Winnipeg to Toronto at the time of this writing), and it is difficult to determine exactly what transpired between the former and acting presidents. Barde has said that Rankin's departure was voluntary and more a function of Rankin's distaste for being "micro-managed" by Mr. Moffat (who was concerned about her lack of broadcasting experience), than it was a disagreement about the fundamental direction of the channel.²⁷⁶ However, she also indicated that her former colleague frustrated Moffat by placing importance on aspects of the business that were not profit centres, and is still negotiating her settlement with the network, both of which imply that there was more to the departure than a simple resignation.

At this time it is hard to say what direction WTN's continued evolution will take, particularly given the fact that the network's senior management has turned over in the past six months and the one constant, major shareholder, Randy Moffat, is reportedly more inclined to acquire greater volumes of American programming than he is to fund especially progressive ideas.²⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it does seem safe to say that at the very least, the female executives who are now heading up the Women's Television Network would be unlikely to ever utter the

²⁷⁵ News release supplied by WTN, dated 16 August 1995.

²⁷⁶ Barde, interview.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

following words, spoken recently by Moses Znaimer, owner of three Canadian television channels, and currently applying for a license for the educational network, CLT:

We're not saying that television can teach people as well as teachers. Not right now, at least. But in a few years, who knows? Maybe you'll have your screen here with your lessons, with a window for your notes, and maybe you'll have Access or CLT in another window. And, then, of course, you'll have your tutor. And, since we [he and his male business partner] will have something to do with it, she'll be the most breathtakingly beautiful PhD you've ever seen. And you're going to want to talk to her every day. ²⁷⁸

Znaimer, it appears, assumes the audience for his educational TV service will be sexually-preoccupied heterosexual men. (Over and above his apparent ignorance about effective pedagogical strategies, I suspect he may have difficulty luring corporate sponsors away from TSN.) His comments, printed unchallenged in "Canada's National Newspaper" underline the need for greater diversity within the country's media production industries.

Conclusions

The unconscious attitudes reflected in Znaimer's remarks provide an interesting gauge against which to assess WTN's performance. Surely judging the fledgling network's potential for transforming the current TV environment based on the expectations or concerns of the social group (feminists) who are hoping for the most radical shift possible, is unfair. More relevant is to measure the channel's management and programs against the broadcasters and programs with whom and which WTN will compete for survival.

Does WTN present a more progressive image of women?

Listening to Jacqueline Cook promote WTN to a roomful of public relations practitioners it might seem that existing mainstream television trends have been more successful at exerting pressure on WTN to change its programming direction than the reverse, but the network --

²⁷⁸ Chris Dafoe, "Accessing TV's new world" in *The Globe and Mail*, 20 January 1996, p. C2.

despite having acquired more entertainment material and choosing to broadcast *Mary Tyler Moore* reruns – nevertheless continues to provide a viewing experience that remains in some key ways substantively different from other channels. Elsewhere, for instance, female characters and commentators still make up less than 35% of all people seen on both Canadian and American prime time television.²⁷⁹ Yet even a cursory review of the programming offered on WTN finds the number of women appearing both on-screen and in the credits so dramatically higher as to render a detailed content analysis almost a waste of time. In an informal assessment of one evening's programs aired between the hours of 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm,²⁸⁰ every one of ten programs starred or was hosted by a woman; all told, the female to male ratio was approximately three to one, reflecting almost the exact opposite of what is seen on shows broadcast by established networks and cable companies.²⁸¹ Although the goal of getting more women on the screen is not, in and of itself, enough, it is an important start, given the potential impact of the increased number of role models available through the medium. (Indeed, in the episode of *Landed* which I viewed, a Black storyteller and author being interviewed about her experiences as a new immigrant to Canada specifically mentioned the pride she felt at being able to provide young Black children with someone to identify with, and imagine growing up to emulate.)

In terms of behind-the-scenes representation, all of the four credit sequences that I viewed featured female producers, as well as a predominance of women in other key production positions such as associate or segment producer, director (when applicable), writer and editor.

²⁷⁹ Gerbner, *Women and Minorities on Television*, Appendix, Table 2; and MediaWatch, *Front and Centre*, pp. 5-6.

²⁸⁰ The times given are Eastern Standard Time, since WTN is now disseminated on a single feed and schedules its prime time fare to the largest concentration of viewers, in Ontario.

²⁸¹ This survey was conducted on Tuesday, January 23, 1996. The programs viewed included: *Medicine File*; *Landed*, *Time of Your Life*, *Natural Angler*, *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Working Woman*, *Class Act*, *Resourceful Renovator*, *Painted House*, and *Take 3*. Although I did not view every program in its entirety or work with a rigorous methodology, the contrast between WTN and other channels was so stark that for several hours, men seemed virtually invisible, despite the three-to-one-ratio that I recorded.

Considering the paucity of women currently employed in such positions in the television production industry as a whole (relevant statistics discussed in chapter one), this commitment on WTN's part to the "television by women" aspect is significant, and its impact profoundly political. As Lana Rakow writes:

Currently, institutionalized systems of representation are used to sustain oppression by speaking for "The Other" in the interests of dominant groups. Means of communication should be used instead to make it possible for those who are other to "speak for themselves," a common feminist platform.²⁸²

Furthermore, the content of the programming viewed also reflected a significant departure from most prime time mainstream fare. With the exception of *Mary Tyler Moore* and an hour-long British comedy, *Class Act*, the remaining four-and-a-half hours of programming were information-based. There were no game shows or soap operas; the afore-mentioned *Landing*, about the value and contributions of immigrants to Canadian society is, in the context of the anti-immigration rhetoric of contemporary opposition politicians, extremely progressive; and the other shows dealt variously with subjects like developments in medical science, the perspectives and pursuits of active senior citizens, and an international trade mission for female entrepreneurs. Moreover, relative to the rest of the television universe, the ratio of female to male commentators and featured performers, and the diversity of occupations presented -- including women hosting how-to fishing and home renovation shows -- are arguably transformative acts, in and of themselves.

Having said that, concerns remain about the depth of the network's commitment to its originally-stated mandate. Although the current programming mix combines a good complement of information-based material, some of which addresses controversial subject matter unlikely to get picked up by more commercially-oriented channels, there is some

²⁸² Lana F. Rakow, "Don't Hate Me Because I'm Beautiful': Feminist Resistance to Advertising's Irresistible Meanings" in *Southern Communication Journal*, Winter 1992, p. 140.

indication that members of the network's new senior management team -- who have not yet put together a season on their own -- may not be as personally committed to the political nature of the project as their predecessors. (For Linda Rankin and Barbara Barde, Lifestyle/WTN was a labour of love fueled in no small part by their interest in the opportunity it presented to redress historic inequities in broadcasting. Neither of their successors appears to be motivated in this way to the same degree.)²⁸³

However, to the extent that changes in programming and scheduling have been made to date, the decisions appear to have been taken as a result of viewer feedback, which the channel goes out of its way to solicit, through both a regular newsletter and 1-800 number. Indeed, such responsiveness to its audience may prove to be one of the most distinctive things about WTN. Whether this orientation is attributable to the the reportedly superior listening skills of women, or the channel's mandate (for, by and about women) which clearly characterizes WTN as operating in a service relationship to its female viewers, it seems likely that this audience focus will remain a strong one. (Given the fact that the network was established in part as a reaction to the lack of attention paid to women viewers by male dominated television broadcasters, this seems only appropriate.)

Also relevant to a discussion of the channel's programming direction is WTN's recent indication that it will now only consider unsolicited program proposals that are submitted with the name and contact number of an already-on-side "Gold" sponsor, willing to invest \$100,000 in the series under consideration.²⁸⁴ Such a requirement will inevitably influence the

²⁸³ A WTN insider who did not wish to be identified indicated that, although she respects Susan Millican in her role as V.P. Programming, and enjoys working with her, Millican does not see herself as working on behalf of feminist issues. As for the new President, Elaine Ali, this source noted that "She has a strong set of values, which not everyone does. She's not an outspoken advocate for women, but there were many candidates who could have been worse." Anecdotaly, my own television series, *Doubletake*, although completed in July 1995, has not as yet been broadcast, or been given an air date. This is in part due to the network's revamped scheduling approach and the slight edge now given to entertainment, as opposed to informational programming. However, at this writing, it also appears that WTN, in proclaiming its "light-hearted, escapist" affinity with *Chatelaine*, may not be as keen as it once was to broadcast an "intellectual" series that is clearly more closely aligned with *Ms. Magazine*.

kinds of programs that will get made, since sponsors of that largesse are most likely to come from the corporate sector, a notoriously conservative source of funding whose decision-makers are primarily interested in avoiding controversy, and investing in vehicles that have already demonstrated their ability to contribute to profits. As just one example, my own series, *Doubletake* – a critical look at the portrayal of women in mainstream media, including advertising – would never have been produced under such an arrangement.²⁸⁵ WTN may still choose to fund such controversial projects in the future, but for the time being, they are not entertaining proposals for such obviously non-commercial material.

Nevertheless, although WTN may ultimately not live up to its original vision, or the expectations of some feminists actively engaged in the fight for a transformed television environment, the answer to the question, "Does WTN present a more progressive image of women?" is a definitive "yes."

Is there an audience for this more progressive, women-oriented fare?

Despite the network's dismal early showing in the audience ratings, by October the numbers were demonstrating that WTN's average minute audience had "more than doubled" since its launch.²⁸⁶ Its first week audience was so small that this, in and of itself, would not have been impressive, but, the channel's 26,000 viewer showing was second only to Discovery, which had established itself early on as the ratings leader of the new specialty channel pack.

²⁸⁴ Conversation with Melanie McCaig, Director of Independent Production, WTN, Toronto, November 1995.

²⁸⁵ The market for corporate sponsorship and underwriting of television shows is extremely competitive, and the ability to attract such a sponsor depends on factors like: the commercial nature of the program itself; the proven track record of the channel on which the program is to be aired; the experience of the producers involved. As an inexperienced producer with a non-commercial show proposal to be aired on the fledgling WTN, I was unable to attract any interest from the many corporate sources I approached. (In a recent conversation with Barbara Barde, who has been an independent television producer for more than 20 years, she confirmed that *DoubleTAKE* would never have been able to attract corporate sponsorship.) Furthermore, because WTN has already established itself as paying very low license fees, experienced professionals are inclined to submit programs to other broadcasters who will offer a more secure environment for their fare.

²⁸⁶ Cook, speech to CPRS.

In an attempt to publicize the trend, WTN released a press notice in early November, announcing "Nielsen reports for October 2 through 22, 1995 rank Winnipeg-based WTN the number one new specialty service with Women 18-34 and 25-54." Considering the additional challenges faced by WTN during the launch phase, this level of performance with the female demographic groups identified is a significant improvement, given what has already been discussed regarding the time frame that has typically been involved in new specialty channels (including TSN and A&E) establishing themselves. Although the network's competitors were also affected by Rogers' negative option marketing fiasco, and had an equally tight pre-broadcast preparation time frame (six months from the date of license granting to on-air status), the confusion about and hostility towards the concept of a women's channel was a challenge unique to WTN. In addition, in its desire to offer televised material that was clearly alternative to existing fare, the women's network attempted to provide a large complement of original programming during its first season – programming which suffered from a punishingly short development and production period, and in some cases appeared hopelessly amateurish and underfunded.²⁸⁷ In light of these issues, it is difficult to determine how much audience disaffection during the first six months of the channel's life resulted from factors other than the content of the programming itself.

Interestingly enough, the demonstrated preference among WTN viewers for more "light-hearted escapist" fare appears to fly in the face of the desire for more serious information programming that was expressed by women in WTN's market research. This discrepancy may be a result of the halo effect, with those participating in channel-sponsored surveys or focus groups having tended to exaggerate their preference for intellectually stimulating fare, and to under-represent the amount of entertainment TV they watch or desire. However, there is

²⁸⁷ From personal observation, the sets of the Winnipeg-based series *Call Us* and the between-show host segments in particular looked less professional than those featured on community cable channels, and the Vancouver artists series, *The Creators* experienced significant sound problems during at least its first month on air. Barbara Barde attributed these glitches and failings directly to the insanity of trying to produce as much original programming as the channel did in its first season.

another possible explanation. The MediaWatch audience survey (described in some detail in chapter 2) provides some interesting data relating to women's genre preferences. For instance, the research shows that women who identify as feminists or believe in equal rights for women watch less news programming and more comedy than do women who are less sympathetic to the goals of the women's movement, believing instead that it has gone too far.²⁸⁸ On the surface, this is surprising, given the dominant stereotypes of feminists as being humourless activists whom one might expect to shun entertainment programming in favour of public affairs. However, it's quite possible that such women rely more on print sources for news, and enjoy television precisely for its escapist potential. Furthermore, while there is no similarly delineated information about WTN's actual viewers which correlates their attitudes to women's equality with their viewing preferences, it seems likely that a large portion of the audience that has gravitated to a network devoted to women are, in fact, sympathetic to "the cause."

At the same time, the slight shift that WTN has appeared to make away from its emphasis on serious, issues-oriented programming and towards more entertainment-based products "packed with stars," would no doubt cause feminist critic Lynne Hissey to conclude that she'd been overly generous in her *Pacific Current* assessment of the channel's shortcomings. However, the MediaWatch audience survey data also shows that feminists watch less television overall than more traditionally-oriented women,²⁸⁹ and so the extremely critical charges levelled by Hissey are unlikely to reflect the perspectives of more regular TV viewers. Nor would WTN be able to survive financially by addressing only the 16% or so of women who voluntarily identified themselves in the MediaWatch poll as feminist – and surely part of the

²⁸⁸ These results, although not included in the report published by MediaWatch, are drawn from cross-tabulations of the audience survey data which were conducted by the SFU Media Lab's Dr. Steven Kline.

²⁸⁹ This claim is further supported by the data showing that better educated women watch less television, and feminists tend to be better educated than non-feminists.

point of the channel is to provide alternatives for women who *are* using the medium as an entertainment and information source.

Clearly, one of WTN's ongoing challenges will be to strike a balance in its programming between alternative/progressive and entertaining/escapist in a way that both provides an improved image of women on television, and meets the needs of its burgeoning audience. Just one year into the channel's broadcasting life, preliminary indications seem to suggest that the network's current programming mix of occasionally innovative information-based fare and dramatic and comedic series featuring strong, interesting women is a good start.

Is WTN's progressiveness having a positive impact on the rest of the television environment?

A year into WTN's broadcasting life, the widespread "obsessing" over the concept of a woman's channel by the news media that greeted its launch, and the obstacles that that resistance presented to the network in terms of its initial capacity to attract audiences, has subsided. Nevertheless, WTN will likely have to continue to fight the constraints imposed upon it purely by virtue of the fact that television has, for its entire history, been defined by men. On some level, whatever the network does that is a departure from TV "the way it's always been done" is likely to be characterized at first, or at least by some, as simply wrong. Given this, it seems unfair to even pose the question regarding the network's impact to date on the programming and portrayal practices elsewhere. Nevertheless, mere months into WTN's existence, *The Province's* Ray Chatelin made the following observation:

If you think that WTN and its U.S. counterpart, Lifetime, are not having an effect on mainstream television, you might take another look. Two recent PBS series, *Discovering Women* and *Animated Women* are arguably the direct impact that programming with a female focus has had on programming scheduling.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Ray Chatelin, "Women's network undergoes a facelift: New and recycled sitcoms, teen programming included" in *The Vancouver Province*, 11 April 1995.

This assessment fundamentally supports the conclusions reached by my colleagues and I at the Mountain Media Lab regarding the potential of a women's network to have a positive impact on gender portrayal trends throughout the broadcasting environment. Although relative to the major U.S. networks – ABC, CBS, NBC and especially the upstart FOX – the portrayal practices on PBS probably needed improvement the least, it is interesting to see such a focus on the public broadcaster's part attributed to the influence of women-oriented channels. Also of anecdotal interest are the CBC program, *In the Company of Women*, which went into production just after WTN received its license, and a spate of recent television specials appearing on various networks, which featured particularly strong female leads and garnered significant ratings on the small screen. These included two BBC mini-series, *The Prime Minister's Wife* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the latter a faithful adaptation of Jane Austen's classic. It's quite possible that, notwithstanding Chatelin's conclusion, none of these initiatives were directly influenced by WTN; however, they arguably reflect a growing awareness on the part of all broadcasters involved of the importance of addressing female television viewers in a more progressive manner.

Moreover, such a trend refutes the concerns about ghettoization that my colleagues and I felt when first confronted by the prospect of a women's channel. The notion that a network designed expressly for women would influence other broadcasters to cease airing programming that was either of interest to or responsible in its depiction of women was clearly an erroneous one.

What are the implications of these issues for MediaWatch?

This analysis of WTN, when considered in conjunction with the rest of the research reviewed here, provides some interesting perspectives on MediaWatch's contributions to "adjusting the image" of women in the media. As discussed, the organization has already begun in recent years to reassess the effectiveness of some of its research strategies, which have traditionally focused on content analysis studies statistically documenting women's under-

representation in print and broadcast media. The audience survey reviewed in chapter 2 marked a significant departure for the group, and generated in the process a healthy debate about how its findings might change MediaWatch's work in the future.

Although some feminist critiques of media legitimately focus on and condemn the fundamental structures of media industries and their commercial bases, suggesting that only radical change of a systemic nature will effectively address the current problems,²⁹¹ MediaWatch has always implicitly acknowledged its inability to take on such a challenge, and has been more pragmatically oriented in its goals. Moving away from arguments made about the need for improved portrayal practices and greater access for women on the basis of social justice, and towards a more business-oriented analysis of the costs of demeaning depictions, in some ways simply extends that direction. The case study of WTN does seem to lend support to the direction already initiated by MediaWatch's audience survey, and to recommend that audience-related research can provide information that not only demonstrates the broad base of support for the organization and its issues, but also serves as a cautionary message to industry decision-makers about the risks involved in hanging on to an increasingly antiquated "sex sells" approach. To this end, increased attention on MediaWatch's part to mobilizing and facilitating consumer protest will help to reinforce the empirical message embodied in the data by providing concrete reminders of the costs involved.

The data gathered from the 1994 audience survey have not, as mentioned earlier, been used as fully and effectively as they could have been. Conducting additional cross-tabulations of certain questions in order to derive more specialized information relating to certain audience demographics and their concerns and preferences, may -- if packaged and promoted in the right way -- be salable to marketers targeting women, generating revenue for MediaWatch at the same time as it helps to influence portrayal practices.

²⁹¹ See for instance, Lana Rakow, editor, *Women Making Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

This is not to say that I think the evidence discussed here supports a complete abandonment of content analysis research to document the representation status of women in dominant, mainstream media. It may remain useful to take sporadic snapshots that -- depending on their findings -- either illustrate the need for continued pressure and publicized boycotting, or demonstrate that changes are indeed occurring as a result of increased attention to the concerns and desires of female audiences.

Indeed, there may be possibilities for strategic alliances between MediaWatch and the Women's Television Network that would marry the audience dimension to a content analysis project. For instance, WTN could contract MediaWatch to conduct an independent analysis of the channel's portrayal and representation of women (on-air and in production capacities), and avoidance of violence, and MediaWatch in turn could release the study providing both comparative data from other channels for the same time period, and contextualizing evidence from the audience research into what it is women say they want to see more of on television. Based on my preliminary review of the channel's current programming, publication of the results of such a study could be positioned in such a way as to benefit both organizations, as well as the women they seek to serve.

Moreover, although mounting high profile critiques of offensive imagery and practices remains useful, from both an educational and a consumer activism perspective, MediaWatch has always recognized -- if not focused on -- the power of being able to "catch someone doing something right." Given that the evidence cited here has suggested women will gravitate towards the more progressive alternatives when given a choice, it pays to remind them of where those choices exist.

At the same time, I think it would be a mistake for MediaWatch to abandon its grass roots educational work. The frequent presentations given by organization staff and volunteers keep us in touch with a broad range of communities, which serve in an informal way as ad hoc focus groups dealing with current preoccupations about media practices in general. For instance, in recent years MediaWatch has benefited from increased awareness of and concerns about media

violence, and has been able to establish itself as an authoritative source of information about an issue that has generated far more attention than media sexism. It is in the organization's interest to remain involved in this issue for two reasons: the discourse on media violence helps to maintain a climate whereby people are generally more sensitive to – and likely to speak out about – all media practices; and by being actively involved in the discussions, MediaWatch representatives have been able to point out the limitations of the debate, in as much as it has tended to ignore gender issues, which in many cases are central.

Again, the case of WTN is a valuable one in this context: the channel appears to have heeded the wishes of women who expressly stated in both the MediaWatch survey and the network's own research, that they were not interested in violent television. In an environment that has seen major progress and initiatives across North America in the past few years vis a vis controlling the dissemination of violent television (including the development of a violence code by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters,²⁹² a landmark decision involving the cancellation of the most popular children's show on the air,²⁹³ and the recent introduction of the v-chip²⁹⁴) it is clearly useful for those concerned about media sexism to be able to equate women-sensitive television to non-violent television.

Finally, if the existence of the Women's Television Network can be seen as a testimony to the female audience's consumer clout, and if that market force ultimately ensures improved portrayal practices that have potentially significant social implications, it is nevertheless lamentable that such change can only be bought when those seeking the change have the money to pay for it. Although in the case of women, the commercial day of reckoning seems to have arrived, it is discouraging to think that other oppressed social groups who are also seriously

²⁹² "CRTC Initiatives Regarding Violence on Television," CRTC Fact Sheet distributed April 1995.

²⁹³ *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was judged in November 1994 by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council to contravene the CAB Violence Code and was ordered off Canadian television channels, *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ The v-chip technology, designed to allow parents to block out categories of violent programming from their own television sets was first field tested in December 1994, *Ibid.*

mis- and under-represented by mainstream media -- such as visible minorities, the elderly, and the disabled²⁹⁵ -- will require similar economic power in order to alter their own portrayal and access. These then, constitute the challenges for feminists -- MediaWatch members among them -- who have sought to influence the evolution of media industries in terms of equity issues: to work to ensure that the gains we are making as women are applied to other groups similarly disenfranchised by entrenched media priorities and practices; to acknowledge that the principles of social justice that motivated our efforts to democratize mainstream media are ultimately more important than the achievement of the goal (as it affects us as women) through commercial circumstances; and to use our increasing opportunities to create and influence media products for the equality of all.

²⁹⁵ Gays and lesbians, while still under-represented and stereotypically portrayed in mainstream media, are nevertheless increasingly being viewed by advertisers as a desirable market sector with a high level of disposable income. This is starting to be reflected in both specialty media targeted directly to this audience (such as the Vancouver-based publication, *Xtra West*) and a growing presence in mainstream media. For instance, lesbian tennis star Martina Navratilova was featured last fall on the front page of *The Globe and Mail's* Report on Business Section, holding up a Visa card designed specifically for gay and lesbian users, a percentage of whose purchases would go to benefit several gay health and education groups. (11 October 1995).

APPENDIX

Women & Television Audience Survey

(If a woman answers the phone) Hello, my name is _____ *(first name only)* and I'm calling on behalf of The Media Lab at Simon Fraser University. We're doing a national survey asking women their views about television. Is this a convenient time for you to spend 10 minutes responding to a few questions about the media?

(If a man or a child answers) May I speak with Ms. _____? *(refer to the name in phone book)... then, when the woman comes on the phone, refer to the script above...)*

___1. Do you: always (1)___ usually (2) ___ sometimes (3) ___ rarely (4) ___ or never (5) ___ plan what shows you're going to watch ahead of time?

___2. When you view television with others, who uses the remote control most often?

- 1) respondent
- 2) spouse or partner
- 3) child
- 4) adult child
- 5) parent
- 6) other

___3. Is this person female (1) _____ or male (2) _____?

___4. At which time of day are you most likely to view television?

- 1) early morning
- 2) late morning
- 3) early afternoon
- 4) late afternoon
- 5) early evening
- 6) late evening
- 7) after midnight

___5. On average, do you view television:

- 1) less than one hour a day
- 2) one to two hours a day
- 3) two to four hours a day
- 4) more than four hours a day

___ 6. In general, are you very likely (1) ___ somewhat likely (2) ___ or not at all likely (3) ___ to be doing other activities while watching television?

___ 7. Do you get most of your news from newspapers (1)___ , radio (2) ___, TV (3)___, or magazines (4) ___ ?

___ 8. When you want to escape and simply be entertained, are you most likely to turn to a book (1) ___ , radio (2) ___ , TV (3) ___, magazines (4) ___, music (5) ___, or rented movies (6) ___?

___ 9. What kind of TV programming do you enjoy watching the most?

(*ie. sit coms, drama, news, sports, soaps, movies, crime...*)

___ 10. Why do you prefer this/these types of shows? _____

___ 11. Are there any television programs or types of programs that you avoid? If so, what are they, and why? _____

___ 12. What are your primary concerns about television today? (*more than one ok*)

- 1) no programs that really interest me
- 2) not enough quality programming for children
- 3) difficult to know what's available with so many channels
- 4) too many commercials
- 5) too much violence
- 6) sexist portrayal of women
- 7) other (*specify*) _____

___ 13. Do you have children living at home? yes (1) _____ no (2) _____

(*If no, go directly to question 18; if yes continue.*)

___ 14. How many girls? (1) ___; what age(s) _____

- ___ 15. How many boys? (2) ___; what age(s) _____
- ___ 16. When your children are watching television, how often does an adult (either you or someone else in the household) view with them: always (5) ____, usually (4) ___ sometimes (3) ___ rarely (2) ___ never (1) ____.
- ___ 17. How often are you (or another adult in the household) fully aware of what programs your children are watching? Would you say: always (5) ____, usually (4) ___ sometimes (3) ___ rarely (2) ___ never (1) ____.
- ___ 18. How do you feel about the statement that violence in the media contributes to violence in society. Do you: strongly agree (5) ___ agree (4) ___ disagree (2) ___ or strongly disagree (1) ___ (*have no opinion*) (3) ___)
- ___ 19. Canadian broadcasters and the federal government recently introduced some measures designed to combat television violence. Are you: very familiar (5) ____, somewhat familiar (4) ____, not very familiar (2) ___ or not at all familiar (1) ___ with these measures?
- ___ 20. Do you believe that introducing a rating system for violent programming on TV, and banning heavy violence prior to 9 p.m., will be: very effective (3) ___ , some-what effective (2) ___ or ineffective (1) ___ at reducing media violence in Canada?
- ___ 21. Compared to the violence on TV, how do you feel about the violence in video games? Are you: more concerned (3) ____, equally concerned (2) ___ or less concerned (1) ___ about video game violence as opposed to TV violence?
- ___ 23. Compared to the violence on TV, how do you feel about the violence available in video movie rentals? Are you: more concerned (3) ____, equally concerned (2) ___ or less concerned (1) ___ about video movie violence as opposed to TV violence?
- ___ 24. Thinking about female characters or personalities on television today, can you name any that you consider to be positive role models for young women?

- ___ 25. Why do you think _____ is a positive role model? _____

- ___ 26. What kind of women would you like to see more of on television? _____

- (ie. realistic , women of colour, lesbians, aboriginal women, non-glamorous, etc.)*
- ___ 27. Do you believe that women are strongly influenced (3) ____, somewhat influenced (2) ____ or not at all influenced (1) ____ by the way femininity is portrayed in the media?
- ___ 28. How do you respond to the statement: "I like programs which feature strong, intelligent women? Do you: strongly agree (5) ____ agree (4) ____ disagree (2) ____ or strongly disagree (1) ____ (*have no opinion*) (3) ____)
- ___ 29. When it comes to reflecting the Canadian population's ethnic and racial diversity, do you think television over-represents (3) ____ accurately represents (2) ____ or under-represents (1) ____ aboriginal women and women of colour?
- ___ 30. How do you respond to this statement? "Media images that reinforce the idea that women must be thin to be beautiful can contribute to problems such as anorexia and bulimia." Do you: strongly agree (5) ____ agree (4) ____ disagree (2) ____ or strongly disagree (1) ____ (*have no opinion*) (3) ____)?
- ___ 31. "There are too few positive role models for young women on television." Do you: strongly agree (5) ____ agree (4) ____ disagree (2) ____ or strongly disagree (1) ____ (*have no opinion*) (3) ____)
- ___ 32. Have you ever been offended or upset by an advertisement's portrayal of women as sex objects? often (3) ____, occasionally (2) ____, rarely (1) ____.
- ___ 33. Have you ever phoned to complain (1) ____ written to complain (2) ____ discussed your response with friends (3) ____ refused to buy the product (4) ____ (*if none of the above, indicate "9" in the space beside the question number.*)

___ 34. Would you be more likely to complain to an advertiser or retailer, or boycott products or advertisers whose material you find offensive if you thought your action would have any impact? yes (1) ___ no (2) ___

___ 35. Which of the following responses accurately reflects your feelings about the women's movement (can pick more than one):

- 1) I describe myself as a feminist.
- 2) I believe in equal rights for women.
- 3) I'm not concerned with so-called women's issues.
- 4) I believe the women's movement has gone too far.

___ 36. Into which age bracket do you fall? (*How old are you?*)

- 1) 18 - 24 2) 25 - 34 3) 35 - 44 4) 45 - 54 5) 55 - 64 6) 65/over

___ 37. In terms of your marital status, are you: Married or living with a partner

(1) ___; or single (including widowed or divorced) (2) ___.

___ 38. In terms of employment, do you work:

full time outside the home (1) ___ . part time outside the home (2) ___

full time in a home-based business (3) ___

part time in a home-based business (4) ___

as a homemaker (5) ___. student (6) ___. unemployed (7) ___. retired (8) ___.

___ 39. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- 1) some high school
- 2) high school diploma
- 3) technical or trade diploma/certificate
- 4) some college or university
- 5) university degree
- 6) graduate degree

___ 40. What is your household income (*some respondents may not want to give this information; if so, don't push them. it's useful but not crucial*)

- 1) below \$20,000
- 2) \$21,000 to \$34,999
- 3) \$35,000 to \$49,999
- 4) \$50,000 to \$64,999
- 5) \$65,000 and over

___ 41. Have you ever heard of the organization called MediaWatch? yes (1) ___
no (2) ___ (if no, move on to question 44)

___ 42. (If yes) Do you have a very favourable (5)___ somewhat favourable (4) ___
neutral (3)___ somewhat unfavourable (2) ___ or very unfavourable (1) ___
impression of the organization?

43. How would you describe what they do? _____

___ 44. Do you think the media need a watchdog organization focused on women's
concerns and the way in which women are portrayed?
yes (1) _____ no (2) _____

Thank you very much for your time.

*(If the respondent at this time wants to know who the survey was for, tell her it is being
conducted by MediaWatch, and then read her the following.)*

MediaWatch is a national, feminist organization which works to improve the way
women and girls are portrayed in the media. We focus on public education and
consumer advocacy to bring about change.

*(If the respondent is interested, offer to send her a brochure providing additional
information, and then take down her name and address.)*

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