



● Margaret Lyons, CBC vice-president, English radio network



● Joan Schafer, First Choice vice-president, programming



● Thérèse Sévigny, CBC vice-president, audience relations



● Phyllis Switzer, First Choice senior vice-president, programming



● Marge Anthony, CTV vice-president, network relations

The network :

Women decision-makers in Canadian television

by Gail Henley

There's no doubt about it: the television pioneers of the 1980's have been female. Women discovering power – not just concerned with acquiring power, but

Gail Henley is a screenwriter living in Toronto, and author of the novel *Where The Cherries End Up*.

with struggling for the acceptance of women in power positions. And discovering how to feel comfortable and confident with their position among men decision-makers, how to achieve a balance of male/female viewpoints on the screen, and how urgent a need there is for more female decision-makers. In the present economic climate, women have had to take the offensive to be understood; above everything else, they have had to work at proving them-

selves.

And they have fought – even to the point of assuming mother status in male-dominated positions. In some cases, these women decision-makers, by hiring only females, have created new areas of more opportunity for women, writing new rules and redefining old roles. The result: in some areas of Canadian broadcasting more than 50% of people employed are female, and this in the hitherto male-dominated

television world.

In August, 1982, Pierre Juneau became president of the CBC. In his public address on accepting his position, Juneau remarked that although an Office of Equal Opportunity existed at the CBC, steps to raise women to higher levels in the corporate structure had been slow, and he stated emphatically that during his tenure he would correct the prevalent pattern whereby top women executives have been a rarity at the

corporation. In April 1983, he appointed two women vice-presidents - Margaret Lyons as vice-president in charge of English Radio Network and Therese Seigny as vice-president in charge of Audience Relations. These recent appointments were a major step forward for women in the corporate structure of the CBC, where each of the 14 vice-presidents who sit at the top-management table with the president have always been male.

There have been a handful of senior women at the CBC who in recent years secured executive positions. They include Betty Zimmerman, rubbing shoulders with the VPs as Director of Radio-Canada International (RCI); Trina McQueen, edging just a shade under the VP level as Network Program Director, Toronto; and Dodi Robb, in the middle-top range of the corporate structure of the CBC, as Regional Director for the Maritimes. All these women scaled the corporate ladder on their own, long before the ropes of affirmative action were in place to assist them on their climb. They were the first women in the corporation's upper management.

Dodi Robb is CBC's most illustrious

pioneer. She was the first female executive producer in television, when she headed *Marketplace* in 1972. She was the first female Director of Television (which is another level up) when she was asked to take charge of television in Winnipeg in 1976. She was the first woman Area Head, when she was brought back to be Head of Children's Programming in Toronto in 1978, and she is now the first woman Regional Director - Regional Director for Maritimes. There are 10 Regional Heads for the CBC spanning the length and breadth of this country, all of them men, except for Dodi Robb.

As the first woman to sit at that table, she jokingly refers to herself as "the only broad at the board table." But it is no joke really, and Robb is the first to underline the social significance of notching a trail for other women to follow. "I took these jobs, to be the pioneer, to be the first, because it was too important not to take them. There weren't any women to help me when I was coming along so that's why I feel so strongly in helping the younger women now. I never cared about power, except that it would help other women to get

better jobs, and would help produce better programs. I don't think there are enough female decision-makers at the CBC. More female decision-makers are necessary. With the amount of women in the population, it takes both viewpoints to do a really good broadcasting schedule. When you sit at a board room table where it is all men except you, and men are usually more interested in sports than you are - a lot of men think that news and current affairs are the only things and the arts are something their wives do, ballet, opera, (which are a primary interest of mine) and a lot of men aren't interested in science - so I think you need both viewpoints very much if you are going to service the population properly."

When there were no other women in managerial positions, no grass roots political women's movement, nor affirmative action program in place, what was the common denominator that helped these certain women achieve their formidable status and trail blaze in a man's world? Unlike many male counterparts, these women had no school ties nor old boy's network working on their behalf; they were not from establishment families, and they were not "well connected". But what they all had in common was an uncommon amount of ambition, a competitive streak, fierce independence, a devotion to their career and enough energy for hard work. But the Catch 22 was: if you're going to function in a man's world you should like men and hopefully they'll like you. Trina McQueen, an arch-pioneer with a mantle of firsts (including first female Executive Producer of *The National*), claims that "Before affirmative action, every woman who has been successful owes her success to men who took a chance on her. The men who took a chance were exceptional men who saw that talent was important whether it was men or women, who saw in the natural world of business that their career could be helped by having talented employees. And they were willing to overcome all their own prejudices - and every man has them - for that motivation. And to me, in some ways this kind of man is the unsung hero of women's advancement." Now of course, for younger women, the course is paved with precedents, and as further assistance comes along the way, there are women in senior positions pulling for them from the top, and with affirmative action programs entrenched, a grass-roots movement of women bolstering them from the bottom.

Women's groups first presented briefs about and against the CBC, both in writing and verbally, at the CRTc hearings in 1974. Then, in 1975, the publication of the CBC Task Force Report on the Status of Women clearly demonstrated that occupational segregation existed in the CBC. The Office of Equal Opportunity, now headed by Helen McVey, was established to implement affirmative action for women and monitor internal staffing. Shortly after the 1975 CBC Task Force report denounced the occupational segregation, all recruiting literature was re-written to describe jobs in a non-sexist way and discriminating questions on application forms were expunged. The equal opportunity policy of the CBC was sent to every university, community college, guidance counselor and high school across the country.

There are 1,425 job categories at the CBC, each of them now open to men and women. For instance, the title Script Assistant was abolished. Now in its



● Joan Chilcott, CTV sports producer



● Dodi Robb, CBC regional director

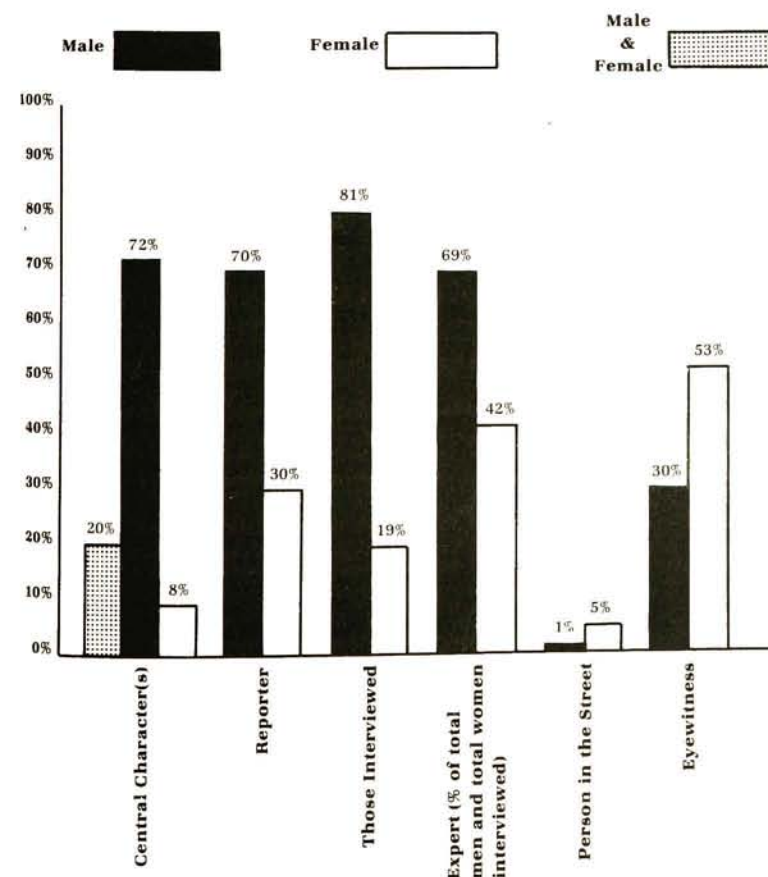


● Betty Zimmerman, director RCI

Figure 1

Type of participation of men and women in prime time public affairs programs (CBC) Characters on prime time programs per the April 1982 PEAC developments study done for CBC

"Most public affairs reporters, about 70%, are male.
Voice-overs are exclusively male."



Source: ACTRA Committee on Women's Issues, "Women in the Media and Pay TV", October, 1982.



● Trina McQueen, network program director, CBC



● Nancy Archibald, executive producer CBC



● Jackie Pilote, CTV head of budgeting

place are two separate categories: Production Assistant/Control Room and Production Assistant/Studio. Production Assistant/Control Room still demands typing and is filled predominantly by women and Production Assistant/Studio does not require typing and is filled predominantly by males. The policy stands in principle, however, and men and women now have equal opportunity to apply for the jobs.

In 1975, in the English network of the CBC, the percentage of women in management, was 11.5%. It was 22% in September, 1982. (There are about nine levels of management in a corporation below vice-president). Of the women who are in management in the CBC, 85% are in the lower three categories compared with roughly 55% of men who are concentrated in these same lower echelons. "Our aim is to have women represented in the same proportion that they're in the labour force. We're in the 19 to 25% area for all the key jobs," reports Helen McVey. "Now things seem to be getting slower and slower. Whatever your corporation is, as soon as you get around 15% or 20% of your management jobs filled with women, you're going to find that after that you can't do a damn thing, you're not going to get any more. Perhaps men thought it was the right thing to do, to be supportive, but now that we have some women in reasonably high senior positions, they're seeing we really meant business. Maybe it's more threatening to them with the difficult economic situation. It is clearly much more difficult to hire and promote and train women today than it was two years ago. The number of things that can be done within the affirmative action program is slimmer than in really good times."

However, the jump in statistics represents real gains, and an increase of ten percent has considerable social implications. In the main there are more female TV producers. To name some of the top positions held now by women: Nancy Archibald, executive producer, *The Nature of Things*; Louise Lore, executive producer, *Man Alive*; Nada Harcourt, area head of Children's Programming. These jobs were all held by men before.

"The news departments are already crowded with women, so much so that the men are starting to complain," comments Helen McVey. "All these researchers and journalists will be going somewhere, they're working their way up. One day they'll all be equipped for jobs at higher stratas of responsibility and management." Between 1974 and 1982, the percentage of female announcers went from eight to 19%, of journalists from 15 to 25% (although at CBC there is still no female parliamentary reporter).

"Until you get a lot more women into the technical ranks in the corporation, such as camera women, lighting women, audio women, not until then will you get a good base from which you can draw your executive level," says Dodi Robb. "I don't know one woman camera woman, and they have them in both Russia and Japan, and I know some film camera women and lighting and audio which is done by women in theatre, but there are none in television." In the seven-year period covered by the Equal Opportunity program the percentage of female technicians inched from a mere 1% to 5%. Therese Sevigny, the newly appointed vice-president, ponders: "Nothing will be given to women, particularly in the '80s when the world is in recession, so women must work to

make themselves competent internally and externally; women must work to be understood."

Dodi Robb believes that we will see a day when there will be a woman as President of the CBC. "It has never happened yet, but when you look at it, we never had a female vice-president, and now there are two. If you want to go the route that reaches to the top, and strive to be the President, there are two possible routes you can take: one, on the management side, starting in Planning, Human Resources, or Corporate Affairs; or two, take the route via creativity, by being a writer or producer. If you took the executive route, you would go to Harvard Business School, get your MBA and then you'd be right into it; these are the planning and management levels of a big corporation. It's much more unusual for someone to be picked from the creative ranks because creative people are not that interested in administration. But if they gave the job to a woman she would have to be a crackerjack. But that is something that has not happened in the past, and this is a revolutionary idea."

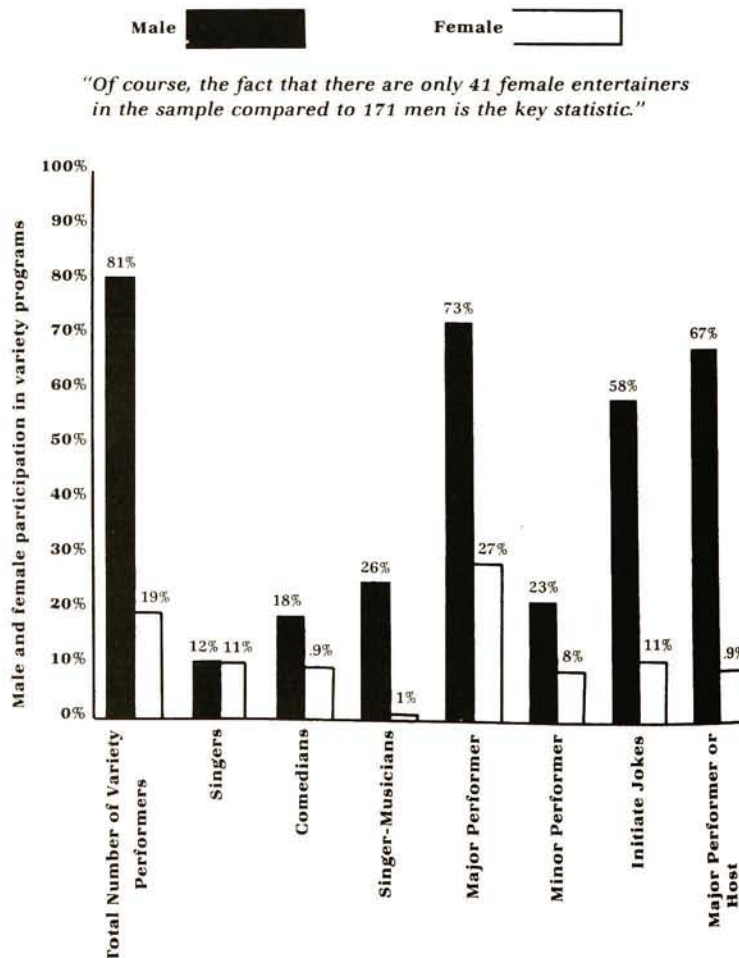
Dodi Robb recommends that young women go and learn the broadcasting

business. To do that they should take a good communications course. There are a number of excellent schools in this country: in Ontario alone there's Ryerson, Carlton, Western, and York. Through this they can often get a summer job at a station, especially in the smaller centers. Take any job, even in a secretarial position in a department that interests you, so you get to know the corporation. Dodi Robb has had three secretaries who became script assistants and then producers. "A production secretary is a perfect way to train, as you're working with creative production people all the time. Another wonderful career for a woman is film editor. Some of the very best have come that way, always have been women, a very particular skill, paid very well. But there are other areas women should seriously look into: audio, lighting, camera, and studio directors, if your goal is to get to be producer and then executive producer. Management is always looking for bright production people to go into management and to be creative managers." It is from these ranks that the women came who have forged a career for themselves in the tough broadcasting world, who have learned the profession inside out,

Figure 2

Characters on prime time programs per the CBC study

Variety programming



who have proven their competence, who have something to offer, and it is from these women that the next levels of corporate women in the broadcasting structure will come.

Yet, however much the CBC has been self-correcting in its hiring and promoting of women and incorporating women as decision-makers, as a television network it lags far behind the smaller, privately owned stations, who have been even more progressive and quick in injecting women into the system at all levels.

Elsa Franklin, an independent television producer since the early 1970's, states emphatically that she would not have survived within the confines of the CBC: "I've seen male producers who wouldn't go and get a cup of coffee. Who always had someone running for them. There's the producer here, and the female script assistant who does such a tremendous amount of work and never could get out of that position. Now today she may be able to if she fights like hell. Look at what you have in the control room: you've got a switcher who's a man; an audio technician - a man; you've got the director - a man; you usually have the producer - a man; and one woman - the script assistant." Secretaries, researchers, script assistants, all were women who were kept in subordinate positions at the CBC because they could type.

Helen Hutchinson, who co-hosts the news program W5, came to CTV (the privately owned national network in Canada) from the CBC. CTV President Murray Chercover has a female vice-

president: Marge Anthony, in charge of Network Relations. At CTV, women in powerful positions include Jackie Pilote, head of Budgeting; a number of female executive producers and producers; and one of CTV's Sports producers is a woman, Joan Chilcott.

City TV, a local Toronto station, has been a stepping stone for a great many women. Phyllis Switzer, one of the people who founded City TV (now senior vice-president of programming at First Choice), was the first woman to be both an equal partner and founder of a television station. She speaks highly of Moses Znaimer, President of City TV, as a man who respects the contribution that women can make. The first female news director in Canada was Carla Singer and she was City TV's first news director (she's now vice-president of CBS television in Los Angeles). At City TV, the first payroll clerk was a woman, the first controller was a woman, the shipping people were women, and the switchboard people were men. There was no segregation at all. Joan Schafer started out as floor director at City TV. On the way up she's been a director, a producer, and rose to executive producer of *The City Show*. Joan Schafer headed the only all-women's group and only hired females. She is now vice-president and part-owner of the First Choice Canadian pay-TV network.

There were six founding members of First Choice. Joan Schafer was one of them. She was in the front line at the CRTC hearings. When First Choice was awarded its license, she was the only

woman sitting on its 18-man board. She is vice-president in charge of programming and director and part-owner of First Choice. She has watched her company grow from six to 80 people in a matter of months. Pay-TV has always been a branch of the television industry largely staffed and run by women. In the United States, where pay-TV came into existence ten years before it developed in Canada, a trend was established where the predominance of women in pay-television was a fact. With the introduction of pay to Canada, the trend seems to have transplanted itself here, too. Joan Schafer sums it up this way: "Two things happened simultaneously: one, was that women were learning to take more responsibility; and two, to negotiate toughly about their positions. I've hired a lot of women in my time and it's been historical that women have not had the training to negotiate their positions and demand their titles and demand their pay and demand their working conditions. Where would we have learned that from? We just didn't know that. Men knew it. So during the broadcast years a lot of women were very close to the top but not on the top.

"When pay-television came along there was not a large pool of eligible people to attract and pay-TV could not draw from the top echelon of the broadcasting industry because the top echelon was extremely well paid. So they took the next echelon down - and the next echelon down was women. And that's how it started and by that point, women had learned how to negotiate. Women were willing to move because they were bumping their heads against the top echelon and they wanted their break and this was something new and they had, by that time, learned, that getting paid to get your break is to move into new areas, that the traditional structure (like the CBC) is male. But when you come into a new operation when roles are being defined, and when you're all sitting around the table saying who should do what, and you have a voice in that, then you can redefine the rules and that's what pay-TV did."

At First Choice Canadian, more than 50% of employees are women, and women are in most of the influential important positions. Besides Phyllis Switzer and Joan Schafer in two of the most senior positions at First Choice, there is Susan Peacock, head of Business Affairs. Many heads of departments are women, including six regional heads. There are several women accountants, and the head of Marketing is a woman. Says Joan Schafer: "The women's movement helped me in the sense that I had more confidence in myself because of my associations and because of the movement so I was able to go in and demand what I wanted and get it. A lot of men are beginning to understand what it's all about, demanding the same kind of liberation that we've had. I've spent a lot of my time talking to my women friends; I was doing networking for at least ten years, and my men friends were not. Now they need it, they know they need it. They haven't been talking, they haven't been growing. And we've been growing. The women's movement gets detrimental when it gets too pointed, as anti-men. I am not anti-men. I am anti-the history of women in the world, and I want to change that history."

Boldly, confidently, competently, the women decision-makers are changing traditional tides and, in doing so, are making history.



● Louise Loré, executive producer CBC



● Nada Harcourt, CBC area head, children's programming



● Helen Hutchinson, CTV's W5

Figure 3

Male and female participation in the Canadian film industry

Reference: 1981 Cinema Canada Catalogue
1982 Film Canada Catalogue
1982 Cinema Canada Catalogue

