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 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 themselves. 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 Sevigny 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 mid-morning 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 for the presidents, who sit at the table with the president always been male. The women at the table have been the first women in the corporation's upper management.

The April 1982 PEAC developments study done for the CBC, the April 1982 PEAC developments study done for the CBC, the April 1982 PEAC developments study done for the CBC, the April 1982 PEAC developments study done for the CBC...
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 1979, 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 diminish in reasonably 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 Loro, 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 strata of responsibility and management." Between 1974 and 1982, the percentage of female announcers went from eight to 13.5% 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 inclined from a mere 1% to 5%. Therese Sevigny, the newly appointed vice-president, wonders: 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 planning business 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 cracker-jack. 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 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 where 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 trailblazers 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, it is still largely staffed and run by women. In the United States, where pay-TV, with its production 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, 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 pay-TV could not draw from the top echelon of the broadcast industry because the top echelon was extremely well paid. So they took the next echelon down. Pay-TV has always been a stepping stone for a great many women."

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're growing. The women's movement gets more powerful when it gets too pointed, as anti-men. I am 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.