

WOMEN  
= IN =  
JOURNALISM

## CHAPS OF BOTH SEXES?

Women decision-makers in newspapers:  
Do they make a difference?

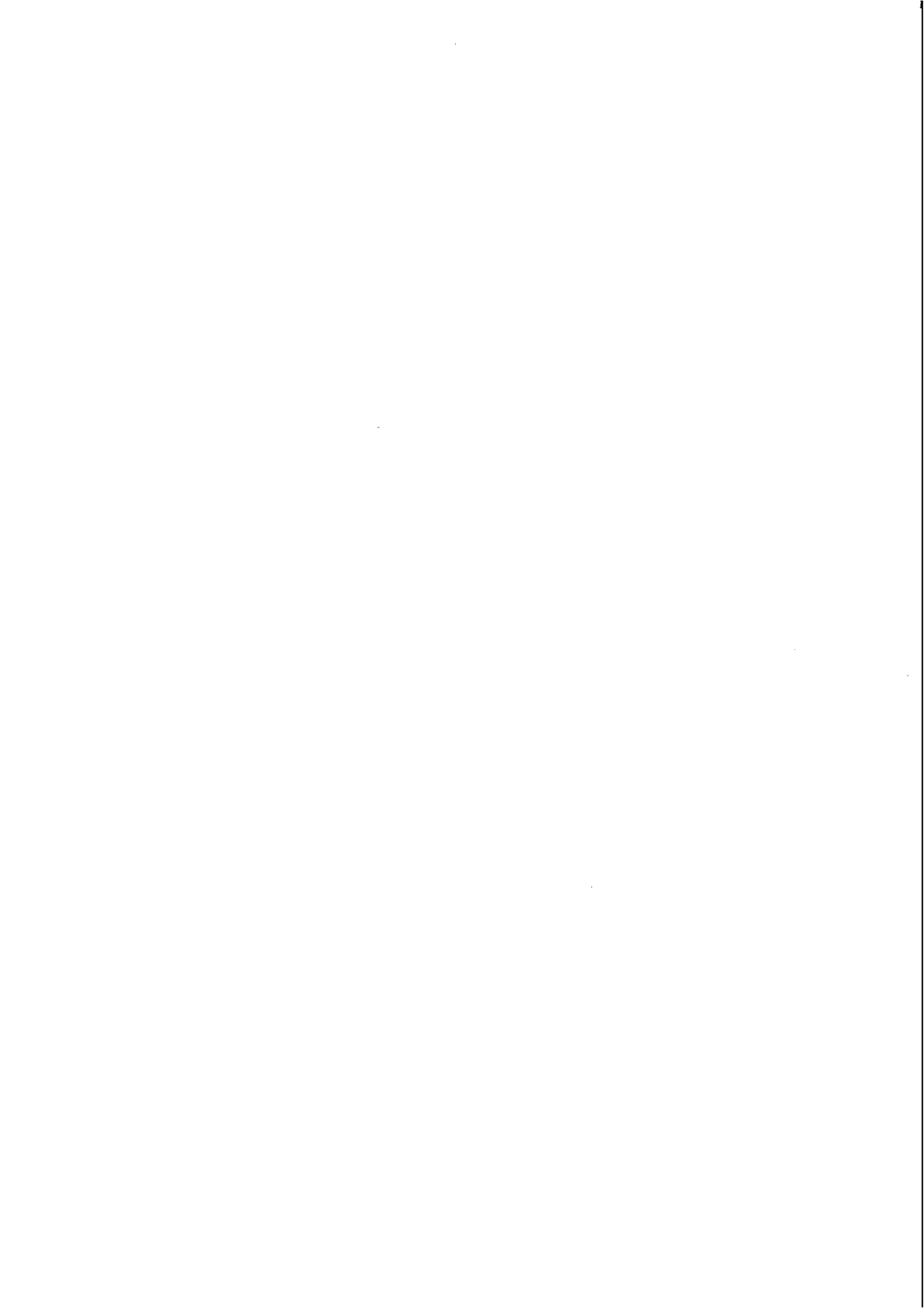


**Linda Christmas**  
Senior Lecturer in Journalism  
City University, London

*campaigning for better communication*



THE BT FORUM



# **CHAPS OF BOTH SEXES?**

Women decision-makers in newspapers:  
Do they make a difference?

**Linda Christmas**

Senior Lecturer in Journalism  
City University, London

---

**Acknowledgements:** To **The BT Forum** who funded this project; to Eve Pollard and Mary Ann Sieghart for reading this manuscript and making many helpful suggestions; to Nicole Veash, former post graduate student at City University, for her help with the section on weekly newspapers; to Andrew Grant-Adamson for editing and desk top publishing. And to Jacky Fleming, The Women in Publishing Training Committee and The Bentinck Group for permission to reprint the cartoon on the front cover.

*Chaps of Both Sexes?* is published by Women in Journalism in association with **The BT Forum**. First published: June 1997.

Women in Journalism, Prospect House, Cock Road, Rowde, Devises, Wiltshire SN10 2PP. Fax: 01380 724002.

Text: © 1997 Linda Christmas.

Cover cartoon: © 1995 Jacky Fleming.

---

# *Contents*

Preface .....	IV
From the author .....	V
Summary – Chaps of both sexes .....	1
Women’s voices, women’s visions .....	7
Society talking to itself .....	11
The answer so far .....	13
What do women readers want? .....	17
National newspapers .....	21
Regional Newspapers .....	37
Weekly newspapers .....	47
Conclusions .....	51
Recommendations .....	55
Appendix – News interests .....	57

---

# Preface

**T**he **BT Forum's** aim is to understand the role that interpersonal communication plays at different phases of our lives: at home, at school, in the community and at work. It does this through programmes of action research, and country-wide partnership projects and activities. **The BT Forum's** work focuses on three themes: communication and the changing roles of women and men; communication in changing families and across generations; and communication at work and at home.

*Chaps of Both Sexes* gives us some new understanding about communication and the changing role of women. It builds on the discussions in our recent *Eve and Adam* series organised jointly with the Royal Society of the Arts (RSA) when we looked at how women's voices, values and visions are contributing to the international agenda and changing the workplace culture.

As the new government settles in, this report also encourages us to speculate about the potential difference the large intake of women MPs could make to changing the culture of the House of Commons and the policy agenda.

As political, economic, technological and social changes continue to impact so dramatically on all our lives, how they are reported and discussed becomes more and more important. The role of the media is to mirror and communicate these changes. Women's voices, values, visions and experiences are crucial for a balanced view. This report helps us understand more about the communicating process and women and men's different (and similar) ways of going about it.

**Joanna Foster**  
Director  
**The BT Forum**  
June 1997

---

## *From the author*

**I**N THE AUTUMN of 1990 I began to make notes for a lecture entitled *What is News?* I started by examining my 30 years of experience working for a local newspaper, a specialist paper, *The Times Educational Supplement*, a lengthy spell with *The Guardian*, a short spell with BBC 2's *Newsnight* and the writing of two journalistic books, one on contemporary Australia and the other on Thatcher's Britain. At first it seemed obvious that most of my news values had been learned by osmosis while working in a male dominated media.

But, by the time the notes were complete, they broke into two sections – what I'd absorbed and taken for granted and what I felt. The differences were interesting. Why did I prefer stories I'd found for myself rather than attending yet another press conference? Why did I have to fight to convince *Newsnight* that the 1987 Housing Act was as interesting as the latest development in South Korea? Why did I gravitate to the narrative form – feature writing; why did I find it as satisfying to record the opinions of ordinary people as much as gathering the views of experts and walking the corridors of power? Why did I hate the way the European Union was covered? The idea for this project was born.

Linda Christmas  
June 1997





## *Chaps of both sexes*

Women decision-makers in newspapers:  
do they make a difference?

**T**HE 21ST CENTURY could belong to women. They need to start thinking now how they intend to use their growing influence. Male values and visions are firmly entrenched and unless women clearly define – and ardently pursue – their own agenda, change will be all too slow.

This is particularly true of newspapers, a “mature industry”, where male norms have prevailed for centuries. What newspapers choose to print is of primary importance in shaping the way we view ourselves, our communities, our country and the world. Two out of three people read a national newspaper regularly: 14 million are sold every weekday. That’s in addition to 4 million regional evening and morning newspapers. Television and radio often follow the news agenda set by the press.

The influence of gender on decision-making is controversial; some women believe their gender has no impact on their decision-making. They argue that “a journalist is a journalist.” Others accept that gender makes a difference to both the choice of content and the way in which the content is written and presented. This polarisation is to be expected: it reflects the current state of the wider gender debate.

Women began to be employed in national newspapers in more than token numbers in the Sixties. Since then their contribution has increased slowly. The first female editors were appointed ten years ago, in 1987, to edit tabloid Sunday newspapers, *The News of the World* and the *Sunday Mirror*. They were hired for their magazine and feature expertise: Sunday newspapers have always been more feature orientated and readers buy them as much for entertainment and information as news.

To date there have been eight female editors on Sunday national newspapers (*The News of the World*, *The People*, the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Sunday Express*). Now, in June 1997, there is only one woman editor of a national newspaper: Rosie Boycott at *The Independent on Sunday*.

There are five women editors of regional evening newspapers.

The circulation of many newspapers has been declining for decades as competition from other media increased and as lifestyles changed, leaving less time for reading papers. To fight

---

*Women began to be employed in national newspapers in more than token numbers in the Sixties*

---

---

*Research by Women in Journalism suggests 20 per cent of decision makers in national newspapers are women*

---

Pages 13-16

against this decline, papers needed to attract more readers in general, but women in particular. Advertisers said so and advertising - as opposed to cover price - is increasingly important in providing newspaper revenue. Women still do most of the buying of fast moving consumer goods and therefore women readers were needed to attract advertisers.

This need provided the opportunity for women to be promoted to major decision-making roles below editor level (deputy editor, feature editor, news editor, etc.).

Research by Women in Journalism suggests that women form some 20 per cent of the decision-makers in national newspapers.

What impact does this have on the content? This is the first research to determine the effect in Britain. American research suggests that women could have a profound difference on (a) what is reported, (b) how it is reported and (c) where it is displayed in the paper.

American research also suggests that male dominance of the news has led to promotion of male professional values and news gathering techniques which are likely to be felt long after numbers of male and female journalists have equalised.

Research by MORI, commissioned for this report, suggests that women readers are interested in different subjects from men: medical and health news; letters; food and recipes; clothes and fashion; horoscopes; royal news and social gossip.

It shows that men and women are equally interested in many subjects including domestic news, and personal and family money matters.

It also shows that women are less interested in certain areas: defence and disarmament; economic news; industrial relations; parliamentary news; science reports and international news.

A comparison with a survey done in 1983 shows that the gap in interests is closing in some areas including education, medical and health issues, clothes and fashion, food and recipes. The gap, however, is widening in other area - particularly in readership of parliamentary news.

Pages 17-19

---

*Women's interests are different and far from trivial*

---

## **CONCLUSIONS (from national newspapers)**

1. The first women to be promoted beyond the women's page ghetto had to appeal to men and were expected to carry on men's work, and to play an almost imitative role.

Only with the second wave of appointments is it possible for women to acknowledge that their interests can be different and are far from trivial. But only when women form a "critical mass" will it be possible for female values and visions to shape the 21st century.

Some women acknowledge that after years of working in a male environment, their own instincts have been submerged. Women should be encouraged to rely more on their own judgment.

2. Even with the current limitations of working in what is still a dominant male culture, women have already made a difference, particularly on the magazine and feature side of news-

papers. This is to be expected as most were appointed for their expertise in this area.

The feature content of all national daily and Sunday newspapers has increased in the last 15 years – much of it has been devoted to areas which attract advertising, like leisure activities and supplements listing what's on and where to go, plus health and fitness.

There has also been a huge increase in human interest stories, tales of triumph-over-tragedy, and advice on how to handle relationships

This has led to an extraordinary increase in confessional journalism in which the well known and the unknown share their most intimate thoughts. We appear to have swapped an obsession with public affairs for an obsession with private concerns. Some of this is undoubtedly beneficial; it helps readers to share an understanding of contemporary problems. It also means that newspapers can be said to more accurately reflect society which, in the past, their narrow agenda prevented them from doing. However, the drive for ever more intimate stories encourages the publication of the bizarre and the prurient.

---

*We appear to have swapped an obsession with public affairs for an obsession with private affairs*

---

Pages 26-28

3. Women have helped to change the content of news pages. Material of particular interest to women, which used to be ignored altogether or relegated to women's pages, is now spread throughout the paper and stories that might have been down-played in the past are given greater prominence. These concern women's health, children and child-care, family matters, education and health. These subjects are regarded as particularly important to women because they tend to think "as parents". Men, it seems, do not think as parents.

Pages 22-23

---

*Material once relegated to the women's page is now given greater prominence*

---

4. Even when women select the same news content as men they write it in a different manner. Women want news that is "relevant", news you can "identify with", news that is explained in terms of their lives. Issues therefore are "personalised", or "humanised" in order that the reader understands the relevance. This move recognises:

- that women prefer to communicate with the reader; they put reader's needs above those of policy-makers and other providers of news,
- that women tend to be more "people" orientated rather than issue orientated,
- that women place greater importance on seeing news "in context" rather than in isolation and
- that women like to explain the consequences of events.

This change has been aided by the need to differentiate newspaper news from that of radio and tv. Newspapers need to "add value" and do so by supplying context.

The "humanisation" of news means that news presentation is now closer to feature presentation. This change has encouraged women to move into newsrooms. In the past they stayed in the feature department, partly because they disliked

Pages 24-26

the way news was written. (They also found the hours and the atmosphere uncondusive.)

Pages 24-26

5. Women have wider interests and offer a wider news agenda. Women are critical of the male tendency to "hunt in packs" and "feed from same trough", which results in a newspaper caring more about what its competitors are covering, than about its own readers.

Pages 28-30

6. Women either fear or dislike polarised debate and the expression of strong views; they see more "shades of grey". This might account for the fact that there are few female writers of leaders (editorials) or polemical articles.

---

*Women have wider interests  
and offer a wider news  
agenda*

---

Pages 30-33

7. Women are concerned about the amount of political coverage and the style of coverage with its emphasis on conflict and controversy. The increase in the number of women elected to Parliament in May 1997 could change the mood of the House of Commons and this could in turn encourage a different approach to political reporting.

Page 34

8. Some female editors have managed to achieve a temporary rise in circulation and women readers, especially Eve Pollard, the only women to have edited two newspapers (*Sunday Mirror* and *Sunday Express*); while others including Tessa Hilton (*Sunday Mirror*), have temporarily increased female readership even when the overall circulation continued to fall.

Pages 37-49

## CONCLUSIONS (Regional newspapers)

There are three major differences from national newspapers:

Page 38

1. The denial of gender difference is more apparent with regional editors: this may be because their ladder to the top had been via the traditionally male-dominated subbing and production departments rather than the female-dominated feature side. Also the editors have been appointed to daily newspapers, where news leads the paper, rather than Sunday papers.

---

*There is an open acceptance  
that women have a different  
style of management*

---

Pages 39-40

2. There is an open acceptance that women have a different style of management. Consensus decision making, team building and motivating staff to work towards a common aim are favoured by women. It is generally accepted that the old-style authoritarian, hierarchical system, which was not concerned with keeping the workforce on-side but merely in-line, is no longer appropriate. Some women also show concern about over-long working hours and are keen to allow staff time for family commitments. This approach should be copied by national newspapers

Page 41

3. Editors and editorial staff now acknowledge the use of market research to establish what readers want. The needs of the reader are now paramount in the regional newspapers: national newspapers are more concerned with reader needs and wants than they were in the past, but not nearly to the extent of the regional press.

In other areas women's influence mirrors that of the national press:

- Stories of interest to women are given greater consideration and prominence, particularly health and education issues, thus ensuring that papers mirror the lives of women to a greater extent than in the past.
- News of relevance to the reader dominates. Local news only is covered. The more readers likely to be affected, the greater the prominence given to an item. "News you can use" has become a slogan.
- Human interest stories are once again given preference and stories emanating from institutions – courts, police (crime) and councils – are examined and written to demonstrate how they affect the reader. The bickering at council meetings is no longer covered. This approach should encourage national newspapers to look again at the way they cover Parliament and political news.

---

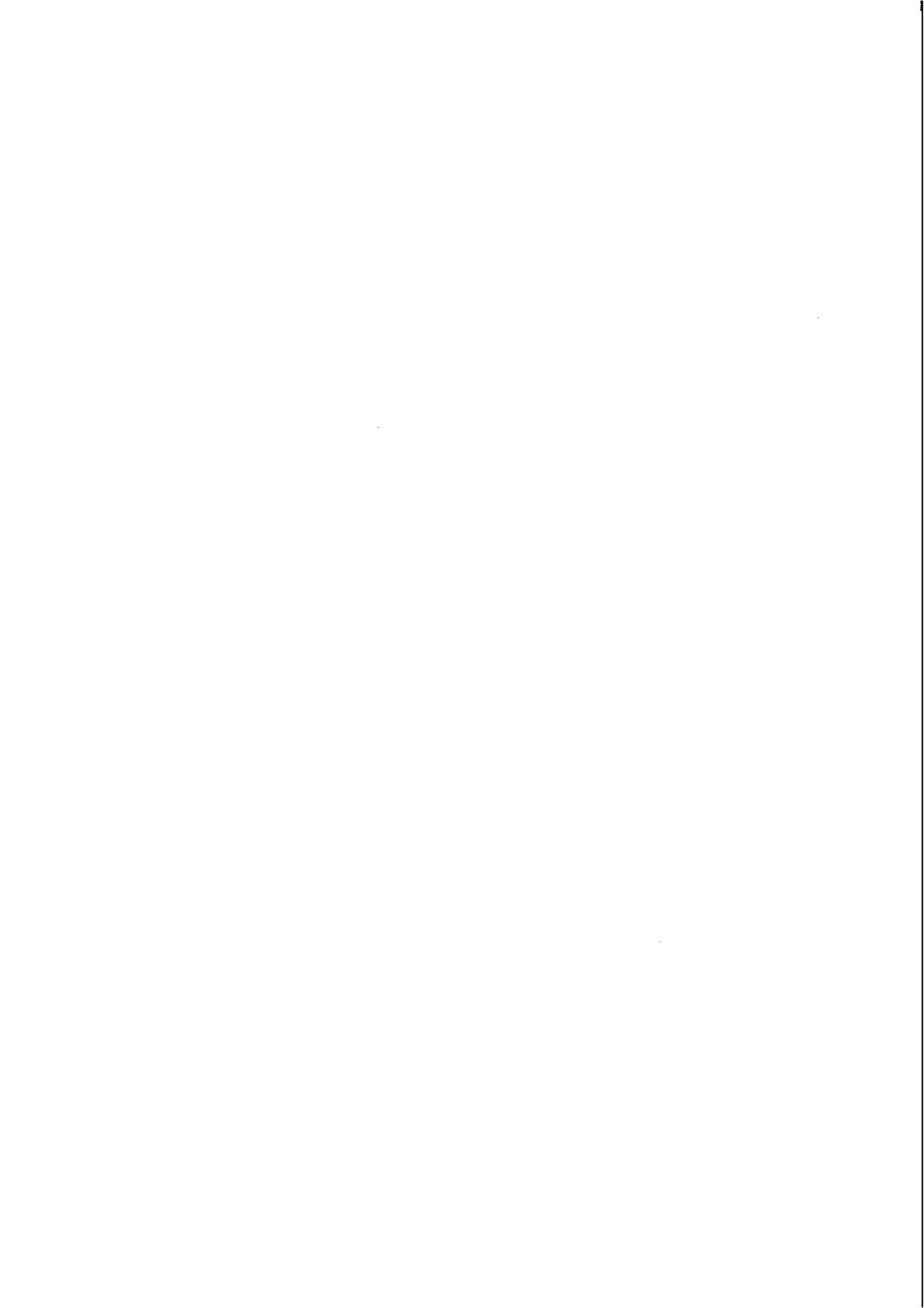
*'News you can use' has become a regional press slogan*

---

### Recommendations

- Women decision-makers should fight against the culture of long hours and help their staff pursue a better balance between work, family and social commitments.
- Women decision-makers should extend the gains made in accessible news reporting to the coverage of politics – both of Westminster and Brussels.
- Women decision-makers should re-write the office "contacts" book to include far more women experts.

Pages 55-56



# 1 – Women's voices, but not visions?

Women winning their way into previously closed professions have generally had to accept the rules of those already in power, who make concessions on the understanding that newcomers play the game more or less as it has always been played. ✓

*Theodore Zeldin, An Intimate History of Humanity*

THE 21ST CENTURY could belong to women. Women form a majority of people in this country and more of them are in employment than ever before, whether part-time and low paid or full-time and highly paid. And not just here: America and other parts of the Western world face the same expectation. Women's voices will be heard increasingly.

## What will they be saying?

To date most women, in order to get hired and promoted, have needed to tailor their views and their approach, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or subconsciously, to a predominantly male environment. The quotation at the head of this page and the title of this report say it all. A senior civil servant, Jonathan Charkham, responsible for drawing up a list of the great and the good to sit on public bodies, told Peter Hennessy, when writing for *The Times*, that he was looking for "chaps of both sexes". The date was 1978.

In future, this tailoring may not be necessary. Women's voices can become women's visions, not merely women's voices uttering male visions.

For this to happen women's presence in the workplace needs to reach a critical mass. That critical mass is, by consensus, thought to be around 30 per cent. Although some accept 25 per cent as the crucial figure. On May 1, 1997, 101 female Labour MPs were elected to the House of Commons, 19 have ministerial posts, five are Cabinet ministers (out of 22). And nine out of 36 special advisors to the government are also women. All these figures mean that women's numbers in the new government nudge the magic 25 per cent mark. In the House of Commons as a whole, however, women make up only 17 per cent of the total.

Nonetheless it is hoped that the numbers are high enough in the governing party to begin the transformation of women's voices into women's visions. Not merely visions limited to so-called "women's interests" – equal pay, crèche space, and flexi-

---

*A civil servant who selected people to sit on public bodies said, in 1978 he was looking for 'chaps of both sexes'*

---

---

*Women in the Parliamentary Labour Party are close to the critical mass which will make a real difference*

---

---

*The first women to edit national newspapers were appointed in 1987*

---

ble hours – but broad visions of the future of our communities, our country and our world.

Newspapers are also taking part in this powerful and profound change. Some 50 per cent of those entering the industry are now women; and an increasing number are being appointed to decision-making roles.

In 1987 the national press appointed its first women editors, Wendy Henry at *The News of the World* and Eve Pollard at the *Sunday Mirror*. They were appointed to edit Sunday newspapers without a supporting critical mass of female staff and with circulations that had a majority of male readers. The regional press appointed its first daily paper female editor in 1990. They were chosen to edit newspapers which often had a majority of female readers.

By 1995 research produced for the launch of *Women in Journalism* showed that female decision-makers in national newspapers hovered at a maximum of 20 per cent. Not a critical mass. Yet.

We need to start thinking, now, how we intend to use this growing influence. It is not easy to overturn entrenched male values particularly in newspapers, a mature industry where male norms have prevailed in some instances, for more than 200 years. Even when women reach a critical mass on the editorial floor, proprietors and boards are likely to remain a male club. Changes will not happen without vision and vigilance.

Two out of three people read a national daily newspaper regularly. Newspapers sift the world's news and select information they think we ought to know about or items that will interest us. Regularly they tell us what to think. What we read is often talked about at home, in the work place, in the pub. Furthermore, radio and television often follow the agenda set by the press. Newspapers, therefore, play a crucial role in forming public opinion and describing social reality. They are a vital tool of communication.

This research seeks to discover what is happening to newspapers now women are being promoted to decision-making roles. As the gender of the gatekeepers changes, what impact is this having on newspaper content?

It seems an easy question to answer. It is not. Birth, background, race, gender, education, life experience and personality, all influence one's view of the world, guide one's interests and affect one's decisions. To isolate gender is difficult. But important.

There is now a mountain of research which suggests gender is one of the most important determinants of human behaviour. Studies which began in the first decade of the century with Freud, proliferated with the resurgence of the women's movement in the Seventies. Now psychologists and linguists can reach the international bestseller lists with titles such as Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* and Deborah Tannen's *Talking from 9 to 5*.

As a result we have come to accept that there is a set of attributes and interests mainly ascribed to men and there is a set of

---

*There is a set of attributes and interests mainly ascribed to men and a set mainly ascribed to women*

---



attributes and interests mainly ascribed to women. And we all appear somewhere on a scale between two extremes. Gender pattern is a tendency not an absolute divide.

In journalism, female war reporters were the first under the microscope. Anne Sebba, in *Battling for News*, states that women reporters are more likely than men write about hospitals, orphanages and dislocation of the population in wartime. Men write more than women about who is dominating the front line, the number of aeroplanes shot down and military hardware.

This report tries to tease out further patterns among women journalists.



## 2 – Society talking to itself

FOR CENTURIES the gatekeepers on newspapers, from the editor through to section heads (news, features, arts, sports, business etc) were men. A certain type of men: elite, white, tough, patriotic and with (even when they behaved otherwise!) a high degree of respect for government policy-makers. Such men favoured detached, dispassionate analysis. Such gatekeepers hardly provided views, images or perspectives from a wide variety of men – let alone women. The result was news and analysis by and about a narrow range of other men with similar attitudes and interests.

Arthur Miller, the American playwright, described newspapers in 1962 as “society talking to itself.” Hardly.

A glance at the newspapers of 100 years ago shows they were dominated by conflict, crime, division and confrontation: the themes of history. Even 40 years ago they were high-minded, funless, dry and gloomy. And women were invisible.

Women have been squatting on the fringes of newspapers for centuries. The Sixties saw the “fringe” seat become the “token” seat. Women were allowed to look beyond the pinnacle assigned to them by men – the editorship of the women’s page – and edge towards doors marked education, health, welfare and consumer affairs.

The promotion of women into decision-making roles began just over a decade ago. Most newspaper circulations had been in decline for some years. This decline in readership has meant that newspapers have had to court sales aggressively. Women readers were an obvious target. The advertisers said so. The big advertisers were no longer happy with long lead times. Boots and Tesco wanted to be able to cut the price of goods on Tuesday and advertise the fact immediately.

“It’s all about money and survival. The big retailers didn’t want a majority male audience. Women still do most of the shopping or make most of the buying decisions and, in these circumstances, they need to be attracted to the paper and maintained as loyal readers.” Jane Reed, director of corporate affairs, News International.

In order to get the advertising, newspapers had to get women.

How to do this? With an expanded use of features. Women were buying magazines rather than newspapers. Therefore, the argument goes, the recipe for winning more women readers was to print more of the type of material found in magazines. As well as increasing the feature content, editors looked at the news

---

*‘Society talking to itself,’  
Arthur Miller describing  
newspapers in 1966*

---

---

*In order to get advertising  
newspapers had to get  
women*

---

---

*A tough market meant newspapers could no longer afford a cavalier attitude to women*

---

agenda and decided to broaden its appeal. The explosion in other media meant that many people got the headline news from radio and television and if they were to continue buying newspapers something extra was needed. Also, the wealth of news available meant that there was a greater need for explanation and context. Snippets of news lead to information overload and a lack of understanding.

The point, then, is clear: newspapers have never had it so tough. Only the upmarket daily newspapers sector (*The Times*, etc) is expanding. The downmarket (*Daily Mirror*, etc.) and the midmarket (the *Daily Express*, etc) are fighting falling circulations. This tough market meant that newspapers could no longer afford to have a cavalier attitude towards half the population. Economic necessity drove them to listen to women. Can it be a coincidence that the first papers – the downmarket Sundays – to appoint women editors were those whose circulation was falling fastest? Their expertise was needed to start or improve colour magazines as well as newspaper content. They had a hard task.

Wendy Henry was appointed editor of *The News of the World* in the autumn of 1987. For the previous four decades the paper had been losing circulation. In 1955 its sales touched 8 million; in 1985 it was 5 million, today it is just over 4.5 million. The decline was arrested in the Eighties, first by Nicholas Lloyd and then by Wendy Henry. Since 1990 sales have continued downwards.

Eve Pollard became editor of the *Sunday Mirror* in December 1987. The paper had been losing circulation for four decades. In 1955 it sold 5 million, by 1985 it was 3 million and today it is 2.3 million. The circulation went up during the first two years of Eve Pollard's editorship and then from 1991 has continued to decline.

Bridget Rowe became editor of *The People* in 1992. The paper has been losing circulation for four decades. In 1955 it sold 5 million, by 1985 it was 3 million, today it is 2 million. The circulation continued to decline whoever was at the helm.

The papers with stable or increasing circulations have been slower to promote women. But they have had to follow. It is now trendy to have female executives. Every male editor must be able to parade a senior woman or two or otherwise feel vulnerable to accusations of discrimination. And the same applies to regional newspaper groups: the Nineties have seen a handful of women editors appointed. What the ailing Sunday tabloids started – the hunt for women readers – has spread. So what do women offer: what different do they make?

---

*Papers with stable or increasing circulations have been slower to promote women*

---

## 3 – The answer so far...

**M**OST OF THE DEBATE about women's influence in newspapers has taken place in America. The earliest research dates from the late Seventies. A study in 1978 by Doris Graber (*Women and the News*, New York) suggested there was no major gender-related difference. The view then was that women had merged with the male culture.

By 1992 the picture had changed. Margaret Gallagher, in *Communication Research Trends*, reported that a survey among managing editors of the 100 largest daily newspapers in the USA found 84 per cent of respondents agreed that women have made a difference both in defining the news and in expanding the areas of news. The study suggested women journalists had made an impact in the area of women's health, family and child care, sexual harassment, discrimination and other social issues.

Other highlights include:

...fear that women's presence would down-grade the profession:

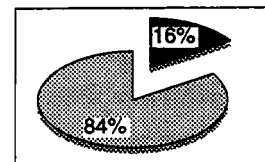
■ The *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (1986) reported research done by the University of Maryland. This study showed that 60 per cent of journalism students were women and it was suggested that, if this trend continued, journalism might become a second class profession such as nursing and teaching!

... possible impact on content:

■ "If women became the majority in news work, the nature of news may change. Studies have shown that society acculturates men to be more attuned to conflict, controversy and confrontation and women to be more attuned to harmony and community and this may affect, at least to some extent, what is regarded as news. The nature of news may change from a sceptical watchdog approach to one of soft features or news that is broader in scope." 1986, the *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*

... this is good news for some:

■ David Lawrence, publisher and chairman of the Detroit Free Press, said in the *American Journalism Review* that the



*Eighty four per cent of managing editors of US dailies believe women have influenced the definition and range of news*

---

*Men are more attuned to conflict than women who seek harmony and community*

---

terms "hard news" and "soft news" were outdated stereotypes and newspapers now needed to broaden respect for parts of the paper beyond what many call "hard news".

"We are now beginning to understand that social conditions, trends, background and thoughtful interpretation are part of the mix of responsibilities that has nothing to do with gender and does not mean surrendering the watchdog role.

"If women think twice about controversy and conflict it could mean that we stop covering politics as though it were a football game. We might see less emphasis on who is up and who is down. Instead our coverage might emphasise the substance of the candidates, their philosophies, the issues and the choices facing us." David Lawrence says he can hardly wait!

**...Two years later conclusions were bolder.**

■ Kay Mills, *A Place in the News*, (Dodd, Mead, 1988): "Women writing and editing news had made a profound difference not only in what was reported but also where it was displayed in newspapers." Newspapers large and small were now seeing the front page potential of stories affecting men, women and their families. Once such stories were to be found only on women's pages. Examples cited included birth control development, companies using day care facilities as bait to recruit and hold young men and women; a hospital banning a brand of nappies which caused rashes; toxic shock; and kidnapped kids.

Furthermore, where women covered the same stories they sometimes elicited a different slant on a story. Mills suggests women are more willing to ask basic, broad questions: the kind of questions that may help demystify the world of arms control, for example.

**... and another two years later...**

■ Joan Konner, dean of graduate journalism at Columbia University, demonstrated in the *Bulletin of Association of Newspaper Editors* (1990) that women were making a difference by analysing the front pages of the *New York Times* for 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989. In 1979 "new" stories, stories about the care of the elderly or social trends, began to appear on the front pages. Konner believes the position of these stories shows the distinction between hard and soft news is blurring and that a shift in priorities is taking place.

**... the male view...**

■ *Men, Masculinity, and the Media* (ed. Steve Craig, 1992) contains a chapter, *Men and the News Media* by David Croteau and William Hoynes, Boston College Media Research and Action Project, which makes sense of much of the above. Croteau and Hoynes argue "that male quantitative dominance also contributes to a form of qualitative dominance. This qualita-

---

*Nappy rash and toxic shock have become front page news*

---

---

*The distinction between hard and soft news is blurring and a shift in priorities is taking place*

---

tive dominance is likely to be felt long after relative numbers of male and female journalists have equalized.

"Why? Because male dominance has led to the promotion of male professional values and news gathering techniques. These include 'a search for objectivity' which values the abstract knowledge of experts and devalues the concrete experience of individuals; relies upon official voices of those in power though they may differ on specific policy details; verifies facts by turning to powerful institutions with large public relations departments, and relies on dramatic conflict to make a story interesting."

This approach "legitimizes the world view of a tiny segment of our society, granting a particular elite the authorship of reality for millions of news viewers and readers. This sort of undemocratic privileging of one experience over those of women, people of colour, and political dissenters is counter to the notion of a free press."

The Boston research, which centred on a television programme much like BBC 2's *Newsnight*, is the clearest statement of male professional values to be found. The clearest statement of female professional values comes from Finland (Zilliakus-Tikkanen, 1993) and was reported by Margareta Melin-Higgins, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh, to a conference held in London in April 1997. She said:

"Female journalism has seven characteristics:

- prioritising soft or female subjects (education, culture) as opposed to hard news,
- greater importance put on wholeness and contexts instead of single incidents,
- concrete explanation of the consequences of events for individuals, everyday life,
- personal commitment to and empathy for the people who are dealt with in the news,
- non-hierarchic news-room structures; informal management, collectivism,
- combining of personal identity and professional identity and
- experimenting in form and content."

Although no research has been done in this area in Britain, two statements are worth mentioning.

In *The Guardian* of October 3, 1996, Charles Moore, Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, is quoted as saying:

“Until recently everything important on the papers was done by men, and that was naturally enough reflected in the product. Then people woke up to the fact that 50 per cent of readers were women... there started a trend towards the feminisation of newspapers. That's not necessarily downmarket at all. It doesn't mean triviality; it means a stronger sense of the human interest in a story. There was a curious sense of dryness in the old days.”

---

*'Until recently everything important in newspapers was done by men'*

---

Jane Reed, director of corporate affairs, News International, addressing journalism students at City University, London, November 1996:

*'I don't call it feminine journalism: I call it thinking about the reader journalism'*

What Charles Moore refers to as the feminisation of the media, is in fact the humanisation of the media. Women are interested in the same things as men, by and large, but they approach the issues in different ways. The single currency is interesting in a political sense – the Mexican stand-off between Britain and other EU countries, for instance, – but women need also to see the human face of it, the jobs, migration of labour, what it will mean on the ground in terms of coins and slot machines. How the change-over will affect the everyday business of getting on a bus.

Some editors realised that in order to attract women, you needed to change the tone of voice of your reporting. Four years ago *The Telegraph* employed a woman executive on the news desk to review all the news stories and to give them broader appeal. It worked. Other papers have done the same. The number of women reading *The Telegraph* has gone up by 11 per cent. In the last five years *The Times* female readership has increased by 52 per cent.

There were no drastic changes, just prioritising differently, using a different picture, fewer straight headshots, handling the story a different way. Thinking about why people might be interested in the story. I don't call this feminine journalism: I call it thinking-about-the-reader journalism.

*The Daily Telegraph* now has exactly the same number of women readers as in 1991. *The Times* now has more women readers but the percentage remains the same as it was in 1991.

<b>The Times</b>				
	All	Male	Female	% women readers
'91	1035	612	428	41
'92	1027	629	398	39
'93	1255	731	524	42
'94	1455	841	612	42
'95	1680	975	705	42
'96	1904	1126	778	41

Circulation figures in thousands

<b>The Daily Telegraph</b>				
	All	Male	Female	% women readers
'91	2492	1368	1124	45
'92	2534	1390	1144	45
'93	2725	1515	1210	44
'94	2579	1394	1185	46
'95	2721	1505	1216	45
'96	2542	1418	1124	44

Circulation figures in thousands



## 4 – What do women readers want?

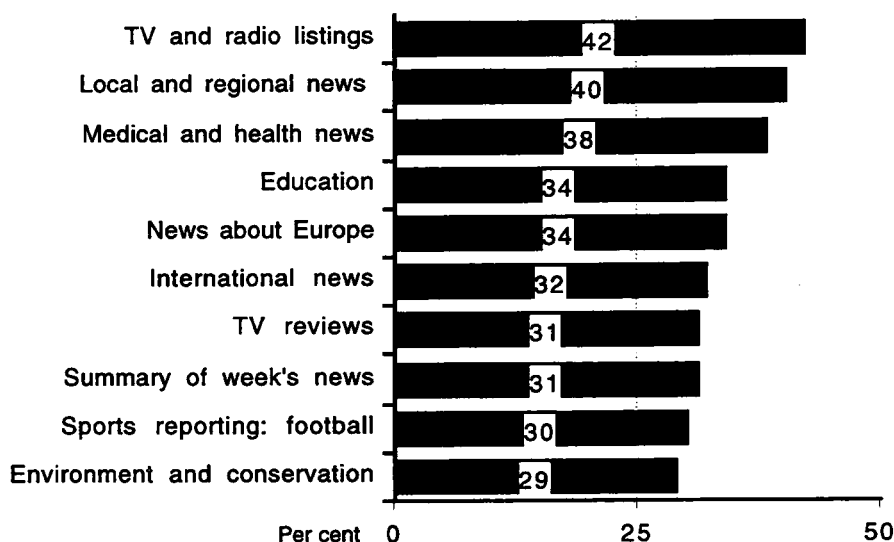
DISCOVERING what women prefer to read in papers is an important part of the process of finding out if women journalists have a different agenda. There ought to be a correlation. Before starting the interviews, MORI was commissioned to do a special poll. In January 1996 the pollsters asked 2000 men and women what they were “very interested” in reading in national daily newspapers. (A full list of the 60 categories is printed in the appendix.)

The women’s top ten is significantly different from the men’s. The list contains some expected subjects and some unexpected.

It comes as no surprise to discover that women are interested in cooking and clothes and horoscopes, and men in sport. It explains why, in recent years, editors have increased coverage of these areas. The popularity of television and radio listings plus television reviews (for both men and women) is also predictable and explains why newspapers have put so much effort into providing guides once the *Radio Times*’s monopoly ended.

Medical and health news heads the list and education is not far behind. This indicates that firstly women are interested in subjects close to home; subjects that have an immediate effect on their lives and the lives of their families. Almost half the women were “very interested” in medical and health news, while fewer than a third of the men had the same preference. The medical and health category also includes diet and fitness and the pursuit of the body-beautiful and, as we know, some women do appear pre-occupied by these concerns.

### Top ten interests



Top ten interests among all readers — responses of men and women combined. For a full comparison see appendix 1. Source: MORI