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

what I'm really looking for is someone just like ME

campaigning for better communication

THE BT FORUM
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Preface

The 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

In 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?

The 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
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 areas – particularly in readership of parliamentary news.

**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.

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.

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

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.

6. Women either fear or dislike polarised debate and the expres-
sion 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.

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.

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.

CONCLUSIONS (Regional newspapers)

There are three major differences from national newspapers:

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

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.

3. Editors and editorial staff now acknowledge the use of mar-
ket 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.

**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.
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-
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
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.
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
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?
Most 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
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-
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 in newspapers was done by men'
Jane Reed, director of corporate affairs, News International, addressing journalism students at City University, London, November 1996:

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.

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Circulation figures in thousands

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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.
The difference in the male and female readership of education news was not so pronounced but clearly women do the major worrying about their children’s future!

That news about Britain rates highly is an important reminder of why people buy newspapers – for news. This should delight all editors. A top slot for European news will surprise many: journalists tend to think of Europe as “boring” but there’s wisdom in the streets and readers clearly feel the need to understand the influence of Europe on their futures.

In comparison, American news, much favoured by editors, is way down the list for both men and women. On the men’s list it is No.27 (23 per cent of readers find it “very interesting”) and on the women’s list it ranks 33rd (15 per cent of readers find it “very interesting”).

Missing from the women’s top ten but present in the men’s is international news, parliamentary news and news about the economy. On the women’s list international news comes just outside the top ten, at No. 16 (26 per cent of readers find it “very interesting”) but economic news and parliamentary news is way down the list. Economic news is No. 31 (18 per cent) and parliamentary news ranks 32nd (17 per cent).

This is worrying and the interviews which follow reveal that this may well be because of the way it is written. Women readers prefer news written in an accessible style. Often economic news can be demanding and often it relates more to the well-being of the country, rather than the reader. And without doubt women dislike the way in which political news concentrates on conflict and controversy. (See page 30) The poll findings should encourage editors to look at both these areas and find ways of making them more female-friendly.

**Other findings:**

- Women are more interested in profiles of people in the news, social gossip and royal news – in other words people. The gap between male and female readers of royal news is wider than might be expected: 27 per cent of women find it
very interesting and only 10 per cent of men.

■ The letters pages interest women which could mean that women are interested in a wider view of opinions and are also attracted by the participatory nature of letters pages.

Comparisons with the past are difficult. A survey in 1983, carried out by MORI among readers of quality and mid-market Sunday newspapers only, has been used to offer a glimpse of the way men’s and women’s reading habits have changed. The 1983 survey graded responses while the 1996 survey concentrated on “very interested” and this has tended to increase the number of “very interested”. Nonetheless it offers guidance.

The analysis indicates a swap in interest levels in two areas:

■ Leisure activities and hobbies were read more by women than men in 1983, now they figure in the men’s top ten.

■ Environment and conservation were also read by more women than men 14 years ago and now they figure in the men’s top ten.

The comparison also shows that the gap between the interests of male and female readers could be closing.

Clothes and fashion, food and recipes, education and letters all figure in the women’s top ten now, but male interest in these areas has increased.

In return more women are showing a real interest in business news.

The alarming finding is that the gap between male and female readers of parliamentary news has seriously widened. In 1983 a mere 7 per cent more men found such news very interesting; in 1996 the male lead has increased to 18 per cent. This reinforces the views expressed in this report that women are rejecting the way in which the subject is covered.
5 – National newspapers

Interviews took place with the following:

Current editors: Rosie Boycott, editor of the Independent on Sunday (she was the first woman editor of an upmarket paper). Amanda Platell, at the time, “acting” editor of the Sunday Mirror. These were the only female editors at the time of the research.

Former editors: Eve Pollard, of the Sunday Mirror and the Sunday Express; Sue Douglas, the Sunday Express.

The choice of former editors was determined by the need to have a downmarket and midmarket paper in the survey and by the fact that the Sunday Mirror is politically left of centre and the Sunday Express (now called The Express on Sunday) is politically right of centre. To have included the former editors of the News of the World and The People would have meant over-stressing the downmarket.


Since women have been appointed to edit only Sunday newspapers the daily market has been included by choosing a sample of female decision-makers at The Guardian (left of centre) and The Times (right of centre).

Gender

Most journalists in this survey recognised there was a difference in the way they viewed potential stories for publication in their newspapers. Some were clear that this “difference” was related to gender because they had been hired to improve the female readership of newspapers (Eve Pollard). Two (both at The Guardian) down-played gender difference and others said they could not be sure.

Sue Douglas: “I don’t know if I am gender led in the way that I look at the world or the way I choose news stories, because I have worked for the best part of 20 years in what is essentially a male bastion and to try to be successful you get to be somewhat male about these things. So to tease out what I know to be my female instinct is quite difficult and may well be a function of my character, independent of sex.”

Amanda Platell recognises that she learned to define a “good story” from what was going on around her in male newsrooms.”
and says women soon learned to provide what was required even if their instincts might have taken them slightly elsewhere.

"Most of us who are now at the top level have been through the very macho process of story-getting. If anything, we have got to try and go back and find our instincts again and rely on them more."

The race for women readers was widely recognised by the journalists interviewed.

Rosie Boycott was the only journalist to say that she aimed for more women readers than men. "I want more women readers. I'd like more women readers than men. I would like 60:40."

Amanda Platell: “Everyone wants more women readers. Even the Sun has increased tremendously the amount of stuff in the paper that is directed to women. But it is very difficult to get the under 35s. At the Mirror we have a huge proportion of women who work part-time and who have families. Time is more precious. A very large proportion of our readers have the radio on in their workplace or at home, so they are getting news all day. That combined with television means, for the dailies especially, there is less need of a newspaper."

The news agenda — content

There is no denying that the content of news pages has changed in recent years. In the past upmarket newspapers, in particular, were reliant on news from major institutions and concentrated on the doings and sayings of a small clique who walked the corridors of power. Now our society is more democratic, more pluralistic. Power and influence are in the hands of many people, so more voices need to be heard. And many more subjects are covered in order that newspapers can offer something different from radio and television. Most of the women interviewed acknowledged that their news priorities were different and therefore they were part of this change. Not only did they ensure that stories of particular interest to women got into the papers, but also that they were prominently displayed.

Rosie Boycott: “I want women to feel that the things that concern them are not trivial. I certainly try to get more stories of interest to women in the paper, issues to do with health, children, work. For instance, I pulled an anorexia story onto the front page recently because it interests me. I doubt if a man would do that.”

Eve Pollard: “Women editors are obviously looking for things they think will interest other women. I was appointed to encourage female circulation to go up. I think women are interested in education and in health care and social policy and this is reflected in the fact that these were the areas women were encouraged to write about once they were no longer confined to women’s pages. When I was editor of the Sunday Mirror we had a campaign to have work based crèches removed from the list of tax perks.

"At the Express we campaigned for after school clubs so that mothers who wanted to go back to work, or those in work, did
not have to worry about collecting their children at 3.30. I am
glad to see that Tony Blair is now trying to implement such a
scheme.”

Mary Ann Sieghart: “If I edited a paper I would give more
prominence to news about work-life issues and family related
issues, particularly children, education and elderly dependents
because these are big issues for women – and for men, actually,
but men tend to divorce their public life from their private life
more than women do.”

Tessa Hilton: “I certainly find I relate to stories as a mother
and in this way might highlight a story my male colleagues
might over-look or play down. There was one about a child at
primary school who was seen imitating oral sex. Immediately I
saw that story I thought what a terrible problem it posed for par-
ents of children at that school and about that child and what his
home is like and so on. There are lots of men on the paper with
young children, but I don’t think they would really have been so
interested in the story as I was.”

Harriet Sherwood, news editor of The Guardian, contradicted
this view: “I think that being a parent has quite an impact on
your judgment of stories. You are more likely to be open to sto-
ries that relate to family life. Being a parent gives you a different
perspective on life, but I don’t think that is necessarily different
for men or women.”

Georgina Henry (also of The Guardian): “The news pages are
changing. But I don’t think that this is coming from women, a lot
of it is coming from men. I don’t come to this job with some sort
of particular agenda. As a professional newspaper person, I
want to produce a paper that sells well and builds readers in a
very, very tough market.”

Do women make a difference?

Yes. Predictably, they have introduced to the news pages sub-
jects previously ignored, down-played or dumped in women’s
pages. These subjects tend to underline women’s roles as "moth-
ers’ and as "carers” – caring for children, caring for the elderly –
as well as health matters and the problems of combining work
with family life. This finding echoes those of American
researchers who highlighted the increasing use of and promi-
nence of content of direct interest to women.

Only one person, Mary Ann Sieghart, questioned why these
subjects should be considered of interest specifically to women.
Clearly, the subjects ought to be of equal interest to both men
and women. Maybe the alacrity with which all newspapers have
extended these sections and awarded front page space to the
subjects demonstrates that men could become as interested.

However, women’s contribution to the news agenda is not
restricted to so-called women’s areas. Their visions encompass a
wider agenda.

Sue Douglas: “There has been a long regime of similar stories
that form the staple fare for newspapers and it is quite narrow.
The whole of Fleet Street feeds from the same trough and I think
Chaps of both sexes

an imaginative editor should go and find a completely different trough. We should not just be competing with everybody else to report the best version of the same story. News, after all, can be anywhere. It didn’t necessarily happen this morning.

"Women could be better at looking at different areas for news. There is a biochemical foundation to us being more imaginative – that is a fact."

Victoria Brittain: "Women will make a difference to what goes into newspapers because women on the whole have wider interests and are a bit less conventional and you are likely to get a more eclectic mix, which has to be good for a paper. We are less on the treadmill of orthodoxy for careerist reasons than men. I think there is one thing that is probably quite specific to gender: women tend to be less ambitious than men and therefore take more risks and are more likely to go with a story that they personally fancy, even if no one else can at first see the point of it."

Mary Ann Siegbert: "I would give prominence to social trend type stories; the way we live now and the sort of people we are. And I’d like to do more success stories because I am interested in how to solve problems.

"I heard a story from the chairman of Unipart of how his company, with a big factory in Oxford, offered free car-maintenance and driving lessons – in a disused field – to local youngsters so they could learn to look after cars and value them. This kept them off the street and away from joy-riding. At the same time, by talking to them, they discovered how the kids broke into cars and were then able to find a way of immobilising cars so the children couldn’t steal them.

"It’s a really interesting story. But men are so obsessed with topicality and ‘pegs’. What’s the peg for running the Unipart story? There isn’t one except that it happened and it’s interesting. But papers are so obsessed with events rather than processes and I think that might be a male thing. I’d do more about the way things work and don’t work and less about who held a press conference yesterday."

News agenda — style

There is general acknowledgment that women approach stories in a different way. This has already been referred to by Jane Reed and Charles Moore (page 16). And this is common to both tabloid and broadsheet markets. What this means in practice is that women will find a way to "humanise" or "personalise" a story to make it relevant to the reader and more accessible. On the whole, women do not wish to write about issues in the abstract, issues for issues’ sake, they wish to explain how issues affect people. It is a desire to include, rather than exclude; a desire to get away from the days when news was written by the elite for the elite: the days when Peter Jay, writing an economics story for The Times boasted he had written the story to influence three policy-makers!

Croceau and Hoynes (page 14) argued that male professional values favoured the abstract knowledge of experts and deval-
ued the concrete experience of individuals. Women favouring the personalisation of news are, in fact, valuing the concrete experience of individuals as much as knowledge of experts.

**Tessa Hilton:** “When people start talking about male journalism and female journalism, the male stuff is usually issue-based and the female stuff is people-based. Female has become shorthand for people.

“If a foreign news story is merely a straight news story, supplied by an agency like Reuters, I will turn the page. I am not interested if they are issue based and not about people, individuals and their lives. I read Ann Leslie in the *Daily Mail*. She personalises stories and is a powerful writer.”

**Rosie Boycott:** “Everyone needs to know about EMU, but the way that it is currently written leaves readers not understanding how it affects them. I like to deal with issues in terms of how they affect people, more than just issues for their own sake. You need to retain the political seriousness but also try to humanise the story. News shouldn’t be done entirely personally, but you should try to inject a personal level in it. This should run right through the paper. A City story about a merger should answer the questions: does it mean more jobs or fewer jobs? Better pensions or smaller pensions. The City is always seen as this thing that doesn’t have much relationship to our lives which is complete bunk. The City has enormous impact.”

**Lindsay Cook,** former City editor of *The Times* agrees:

“The basic rule we all learned years ago was, if a story’s important it is because it affects a lot of people. I want to offer stories that interest employees, company chiefs, customers and shareholders. I think there are still many stories serving shareholders and company chief executives, rather than a broader group of readers.

“Our budget pages last time showed how we do this. I thought it was going to be a boring, cautious budget so we got together half a dozen of those cult television characters that everyone knows, Inspector Morse and Gary and Tony from *Men Behaving Badly*, and got the television companies to give us a breakdown of what the characters smoke, drink, and whether they had a mortgage. It was humorous and made the budget more accessible.”

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**Do women make a difference?**

Yes, women humanise or personalise a story in order to make it accessible to a wider variety of readers. They also prefer to explain how the news relates to the lives of readers. And they prefer to set a story in context.

**Sue Douglas:** ‘I think a woman is much more likely to think laterally about the fringe issues around a story. The male attitude is to home in and just get the bloody story!’

**Amanda Platell:** “Most women I have ever worked with tend to look at a story slightly differently. And I think that is advantageous in an era where you have to be looking for twists and turns in stories. I want to get to the heart of it. I want to see why

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*You need to retain the political seriousness but also try to humanise the story*

— Rosie Boycott

*A woman is much more likely to think laterally about the fringe issues around a story*

— Sue Douglas
the thing has happened, what the relationships were that existed between people. That’s what interests me and I know it interests a lot of readers.”

Victoria Brittain: “Foreign stories are different now. All kinds of things get into the papers that wouldn’t have done 10 years ago. Our correspondents are encouraged to move beyond the political arena or the economic arena and try to see social stories or cultural stories. There is more emphasis on trying to make the thing seductive and easy to read, more emphasis on personalities. That kind of thing has its place but I wouldn’t like to see it take over. There’s no way you can transform Washington politics or European commission politics into easy to read personality-based stories.”

These comments on “humanising” a story, relating it to the reader’s life, and setting it in a context so that the significance becomes obvious, demonstrate that news stories are becoming more like features. The feature side of newspapers has been the female side of newspapers. Now women are moving into news, they are taking their feature approach with them.

In the past women have not tried hard enough to get into the news pages and this is partly because news was written in a way that didn’t interest them. By legitimising the personal approach to stories one of the barriers to women in newsrooms has been removed. One newspaper, above all others, has been responsible for the spread of this approach: the Daily Mail. Several women, Sue Douglas, Eve Pollard and Tessa Hilton, worked for the Daily Mail.

Sue Douglas: “A lot of people have looked at the Daily Mail and decided that they want that kind of feature treatment for their papers. It didn’t just make it more interesting for women, it just made it more interesting.

“In the mid-Eighties on The Sunday Times news started to become featureised. Rightly, in my view. Otherwise news can be something you feel you have got to get through, like bran flakes in the morning: it is good for you. This happened because of tv and magazines. Until then, women had been inevitably pushed towards the feature side of newspapers, but once papers became more responsive to features they were promoted.”

Features

The influence of magazines on newspapers is profound. It began in 1962 when The Sunday Times produced the first colour magazine in order to create a home for consumer advertising. In the last 15 years the feature content of newspapers has spread beyond the colour magazine, into specialist supplements and into news presentation.

Newspapers have long been envious of the huge, buoyant market for women’s magazines. The Periodical Publishers Association estimates annual expenditure on consumer magazines for 1996 as £1.31 billion. The growth in sales of men’s lifestyle magazines FHM, Loaded and GQ also has been impressive. The magazines’ “secret” has been to focus on the reader, to
talk to the reader. Newspapers in the past have focused on one another: they operated with one eye on their competitors.

To gain a slice of magazine readership has therefore been a major aim of newspapers. How to do this? By hiring women with experience in the field. The first eight women to edit newspapers came via the feature side of newspapers – and often from magazines. (Wendy Henry, Eve Pollard, Patsy Chapman, Tessa Hilton, Bridget Rowe, Amanda Platell, Sue Douglas and Rosie Boycott). They were appointed to increase female readership and to provide more of the feature material found in successful consumer magazines.

It is no coincidence that all the women editors so far have been appointed to Sunday newspapers. These always have colour magazines and are always more feature orientated. Readers buy them as much for entertainment and information as news.

**Amanda Platell, Sunday Mirror:** "Newspapers are becoming more like magazines and that is no accident. Our readers look to the paper for escape. All the research shows that people come to the paper now for entertainment and the women are very interested in anything to do with television stars and soap stars. They enjoy what we call triumph over tragedy stories that you get in magazines.

"Women are really most interested in the things which touch them. That is why women would be interested in the story of Gazza (the footballer) beating up his girlfriend. They are interested because the human drama of famous people is always fascinating and because all of us have friends who have been beaten by their boyfriends or know someone who has. It is one of those things that gets you, it really affects you. That wouldn't have been a *Mirror* front page in the past, but things have moved on. The story of Gazza's girlfriend put on 35,000 sales so you can see people really are interested in those sort of stories."

**Rosie Boycott** is happy to see features expand further: "On the feature side we need more on emotional issues, the handling of your marriage and handling of your life. It's not just women's feelings – it's making human feelings more prominent. It's about humanity rather than dryness. I want the whole paper to have the sense that it is there for you, talking to you. It is on your side, it is a friend. Magazines sell millions living off that formula."

They may, but **Eve Pollard** feels we have gone far enough down the magazine road:

"I think newspapers work best when the newspaper is a newspaper and the magazine sections focus on the features. We are getting to the point where there are too many features. Features on skin care are much better done in magazines with colour and space to test one product against another. And how much more space is going to be given to health matters! It's everywhere and it's too much. It can be dangerous as it is frightening people: they are running around diagnosing themselves."

Much of the expanded features content has been devoted to leisure activities with supplements devoted to listing what's on and where to go and others dedicated to gardening, travel, DIY
and fitness. This demonstrates that newspapers are concentrating on the reader as consumer – and this, of course, ties in with the search for advertising.

Another area of expansion has been articles about relationships and the emotional side of life. This includes what Amanda Platell has called stories of triumph over tragedy, from the serious – how I coped with cancer, losing my job, my son dying – to the bizarre – how I coped with my husband changing sex.

This expansion also includes what Rosie Boycott describes as "the emotional"; how to handle your marriage, your partner, your children, your friendships, your boss.

This has been an extraordinary change from previous decades when talking about oneself in private let alone in public was frowned upon. What started in the "let it all hang out" Sixties on a personal level has now been transported into the public domain.

Theodore Zeldin, in An Intimate History of Humanity, points out that we are living in the age of intimacy. Nothing is taboo. We must share our intimate thoughts with the world. That we do so in print shows we could be closer to a definition of newspapers as "society talking to itself".

That the inclusion of such material in newspapers comes at a time when women are to be found in ever increasing numbers cannot be coincidental. Women have always been more inclined than men to talk about their emotions and their relationships. Most of this material is written by women.

Tessa Hilton: "If I have got a rather important but difficult interview which involves somebody really opening their heart and talking quite frankly, it is usually my choice to send a woman."

It is interesting to note, however, that there are signs that men are beginning to feel able to share their intimate thoughts with the reader. The last year or so has seen publication in the upmarket newspapers of half a dozen major articles by men sharing their experience of facing serious illness, their father's death, the birth of a child.

Sue Douglas: "Men probably have had a bit of a rough deal because it has been set in stone for years that they have to be interested in certain subjects, sport, politics and serious issues, when some of them are just as interested in human stories."

As the barriers come down between what men can do and what women can do, what interests women and what interests men, personal writing could be freed from gender bias. This would perhaps encourage men to move over and women to move into the two areas in newspapers which seem stubbornly to remain male enclaves.

Leader writing

The two areas are leader writing (editorials) and political writing. These two areas remain the "unreformed" part of newspapers. Readership of both areas, by women, is low; only 18 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women read editorials and parlia-
mentary news is read by 30 per cent of men, but only 17 per cent of women

Mary Ann Sieghart, leader writer, The Times: "I think there are few women leader writers because there is a stereotyped notion of how women's brains work compared to how men's brains work. Men are thought to be more convergent, more dispassionate, more analytical than women. And women have been assumed to be better at writing the empathetic, people-orientated stories. The stereotype may be borne out by averages. Probably, on average, woman are more empathetic, and are better at writing about people than men, but it doesn't mean that every woman lacks the analytical skills that men are more likely to possess.

"There are some editors who instinctively, without questioning it, give less weight to women's views. Also, some editors may think that women are more muddled thinkers and therefore it is not just that they don't think their views are unimportant, but that their views won't be expressed quite so coherently as men's views. (This is not the case at The Times where there are two women leader writers.) And I have to say that women are also less confident about putting their views across than men."

This is an area of the paper where visions are forged. What do we miss? How would things be different if there were more women? It could be that when there is an item in the news pages about how few women professors there are in British universities, there could be a leading article stressing the need for change. It could be that more female leader writers would write articles decrying a culture that encourages both men and women to work long hours to the detriment of both family life and a more rounded life.

Sue Douglas has suggested that if she had stayed editor of the Sunday Express longer than seven months she would have seriously considered dropping the unsigned editorial in favour of signed articles. But heavy-weight signed articles do not often carry female bylines.

Ann Applebaum, former deputy editor of The Spectator, and now political columnist of the London Evening Standard, agrees with Sieghart’s call for greater self-confidence.

"To be interested in writing opinion articles you have to be interested in a certain kind of thinking. You have to want to win the argument and dismiss your opponents and you have to go through a list of why you are right and other people are wrong. It is true that women are taught less how to debate. British men have this amazing ability to debate anything from any point of view whether they believe it or not. This is the public school tradition. Boys are taught that. And it's also self-confidence. It is partly about not being afraid to be wrong. I worry a lot about being wrong, or being thought to be stupid or thought to not know what I am talking about. I also have a terror of being thought boring and unfunny.

"My dream is to be able to write on the one hand and on the other hand and, having thought about it carefully, this is the conclusion I come to. But I know you can't write columns like that."
Or leaders. You need to have very, very firm opinions and a belief in your own opinions.”

Sue Douglas: “It's true boys, particularly those who have gone to public school, will have been taught to argue a line. I wasn't taught to argue. Also we - women - don't want to look foolish. My husband (Niall Ferguson, tutor in modern history at Jesus College, Oxford) does Question Time and if he forgets who the president of Poland is, he doesn't mind, but I think I'll look foolish. We have an aversion to looking foolish. What man cares about that?

“We women fail to express our views forcefully and tend to be afraid of polarised arguments. We are happy sitting on the fence and seeing two sides to things. Women aren't strident enough and polarised enough in their views of the world. We have shades of grey which is very healthy but it doesn't make for good opinion-writing. English women are like wallflowers compared to Americans. It's pathetic. Why don't we stand up for what we think?”

Cambridge University, concerned at how few women get first class degrees, undertook research under the chairmanship of Peter Clarke, Professor of Modern History. The committee's conclusions state:

“From initial scepticism we have come to the view that there may be something gender-related in the way that many undergraduates write. The marks of what we would identify as women's style include: preference for cautious, discursive and synthetic approaches. A willingness to consider a range of views and a strong personal investment in getting it right. The male way would be a more argumentative and self-assertive approach to questions, risk-taking, the bold affirmation of a particular view and the confident dismissal of others.”

The Cambridge view is that caution and synthesis can easily turn to fuzzy thinking, so too can an assertive and argumentative style of writing easily become mere meretricious cleverness, in which rhetoric and self-confidence mask clumsy interpretive skills and thin historical knowledge. The irony of this is the female preference for caution, discursiveness and willingness to consider a range of views are in fact the qualities valued in research. But if you don't get a first you don't get to do research, so fewer women work in universities to challenge the initial bias.”

Do women fear the polarised approach or do they dislike it? Sue Douglas: “I would do it because my profession demands it. I wouldn't do it out of choice... unfortunately, I do see largely shades of grey.”

Politics

Coverage of politics helps to define a newspaper, give it the character and confidence that attracts readership. There are no women political editors at the moment. There are now junior member of the political teams, who, because of their status, are expected to uphold the old traditions of cosy chats with minis-
letters and cosy chats with fellow journalists to decide the day’s agenda. Or expensive lunches which can only be justified if a half-sentence indiscretion can be blown to headline proportions; or encouraging the furtive “leaking” of information by MPs more concerned with self-interest than the public interest. The politics of politics takes precedent over the exposition and exploration of policy. No one is giving a thought for the needs of the reader. It is a microcosm of the way newspapers used to be: engaged in a blinkered symbiotic relationship with the powerful.

This is most clearly demonstrated in the coverage of Europe. Our newspapers have written more about who is “pro” and who is “anti”, and the resulting splits, than they have about how it affects our lives. Where they have tried to explain, they have favoured polarised arguments for and against, say, a single currency rather than attempt to explain the advantages and disadvantages in a way which informs readers and allows them to make up their own minds.

Most of the decision-makers in this survey remarked critically upon the way in which politics concentrates on controversy and division, making it clear that as women they do not favour this approach.

Mary Ann Sieghart, *The Times*: “Westminster is a very very old-fashioned place... like an extension of school, a single sex school. I found the “demon eyes” advertising horrifying – portraying quite a decent man as the devil. The men all thought it was a jolly jape and part of the cut and thrust of politics. They quite admire the aggression in it, and I don’t find aggression all that admirable. I find it unpleasant.”

Lindsay Cook, *The Times*: “I think we overplay domestic politics. When I was editing on a Sunday I am frequently heard to say: ‘I want something real happening to people, not just people talking about what they might be doing’ which is what I regard politics as. I’m interested in the single currency, of course I am, but not the minute posturing, the moves one way or another. These are less important to me.”

Tessa Hilton, *Daily Express*: “Broadsheets follow the twists and turns of politicians in much the same way the tabloids follow the twists and turns of soaps. Both overdo it. I think that following soaps endlessly is lazy journalism and I think that following Parliament endlessly is lazy journalism too.”

Georgina Henry, *The Guardian*: “We ought to be very careful about the habit of print journalists combing Sunday television programmes that nobody has bothered to watch in the first place to see if they can find politicians disagreeing. It is a growing thing, but not to be welcomed.”

Sue Douglas talking about *The Sunday Times*: “There was a tendency to choose a political splash every week. I would try to steer away from that very obvious knee jerk political story of yet another row, say, yet another Euro row. It’s more about MPs’ news than about politics.

“I never did a period in the lobby and I wish I had. I think it would have been invaluable. It’s a clubby little closed shop and has remained remarkably impregnable and unchanged for

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*I want something real happening to people, not just people talking about what they might be doing*  
— Lindsay Cook

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*The quality papers have a worse track record on promoting women than the bottom end*  
— Sue Douglas
years. It is seen to be one of the most powerful jobs: the political editor traditionally has the editor’s ear and is the right hand man. I think this is one of the reasons why the quality papers have a worse track record on promoting women than the bottom end. Women just aren’t included. A lot of it is who you know, and which school did you go to, and what did you say your father did?”

**Rosie Boycott:** “Men tend to look at the more gladiatorial aspects of politics to do with the war between the parties. But politics, is about your life. It is important to remember that politics determines how you live and women have a closer connection with how we live. It interests me that women vote much less than men.”

**Eve Pollard:** “In newspapers everybody wants to talk about politics. It is perceived as the grown up thing to do. It is the sophisticated thing to do. Politics is reported in terms of conflict and controversy. I don’t think this is appealing to women. I think women are not adversarial in the same way. We don’t like a fight. To me political writers have wildly overblown ideas of their importance. The smallest story is given huge projection at the expense of things of importance to the paper’s readers. But it is very hard to stop it if you are an editor, particularly if you are a woman because they say ‘she doesn’t understand’.”

The coverage of the 1997 election campaign brought these arguments into focus. The absence of women was noted by commentators. Mary Ann Sieghart, who attended the regular morning party press conferences, remarked that only two women ever asked questions: she and Eleanor Goodman from the Channel 4 News. Otherwise the cosiness of the occasion was heightened by the party leaders referring to male political editors by their first names.

A Fawcett Society report, published in the run up to the 1997 election, also suggested that women voters are put off by the confrontational nature of Westminster.

If the style of reporting strangles women’s interest so, too, does the content. Another report published in March by the Women’s Communication Centre, *What women want from politics*, highlights the fact that the issues of greatest concern to women are way down the political agenda, particularly at elections. These issues include the usual child care, equal pay and so on.

The 1997 election saw 101 women on the Labour benches. This may well be the cue for an assessment of political coverage. Within weeks newspapers were noticing a change of mood in the House:

“MPs say the new women members have had a civilising influence on… male colleagues.” James Landale, *The Times*, May 24, 1997.

“New Labour MPs have chorused the need to ‘move beyond confrontation’ and create a ‘more consensual House of Commons’.” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 26, 1997.

The writer, Anne McElvoy, went on to suggest that consensus is decaffeinated politics. “The pursuit of really important reforms – in education, health and welfare – will entail Labour
forging and fighting foes on its own side, never mind the Tories." But, surely, consensus politics means finding agreement where you can, and fighting only when it is necessary. Eve Pollard has advocated the removal of all three areas listed above from adversarial politics.

The new mood of Parliament could be encouraged by newspapers and could bring about a change in political reporting. Or newspapers could destroy it by their desire to see politics only in terms of confrontation. It would seem that women stay away from political reporting, in much the same way as they stayed away from news reporting, because, in part, they do not like the way it is done.

The MORI poll commissioned for this research shows that few women read Parliamentary news: there must be a link between the style and the lack of readership.

**Achievement**

How much has been achieved by the increasing number of women in newspapers? A considerable amount, but this is limited by the difficulties of working without a critical mass of women.

**Eve Pollard**: "Now that I am away from newspapers, I can see them more as a reader than a journalist. I find very little in newspapers that actually talks about life the way it is. When I was an editor I did try to report on life the way it is. After I'd been on holiday, I'd see things differently and come back and, for example, do more on family life because most of us live, work and die in families. But after a while I'd find myself listening to the views of the staff who were mainly male, middle-aged and white and far more concerned with what the other papers are doing. You need many more women around in newspapers before the atmosphere and attitudes change. You certainly need more women at conferences where decisions are taken. With only one or two voices wanting changes you might get a more realistic approach and newspapers that reflect more accurately what is going on."

**Sue Douglas**: "I hated splashing on the same story as everyone else. But sometimes I was under a lot of pressure, always on a Saturday night, from my deputy or whoever was night editing, to run with the latest news story. I remember one Saturday about 11.30 pm I was getting near Oxford where I live and the car phone rang and it was my deputy saying: 'Sue, the others are leading on McDonalds deciding not to go with British beef.' I preferred our story - I forget now what it was - and I told him we wouldn't change it. Then, as I am driving past McDonalds, I thought: 'Bloody hell, everybody is going to be shocked by this story and we are going to have to do it.' So there I was feeding from the same trough but my instinct was not to."

Not that she always gave into male pressure. She is proud of her visual sense and of her "poster" front pages: a picture and no words. She was also responsible for the *Sunday Express* front page headline "BUNCH of SHITS". (John Major had used the
words to describe Euro-sceptics) and this caused controversy. The men said 'No' on grounds of taste rather than accuracy. The Sunday Express lost a number of readers as a result. They claim that Ms Douglas did not understand the readers. Sue Douglas argues that in order to get the paper talked about and bring in younger readers, an editor has to be prepared to lose some older readers who are not prepared to move with the times.

If pitting oneself against the dominant culture is going to slow the rate of change in newspapers so, too, is the fact that women are by no means united in approach.

Mary Ann Sieghart: "I, at the age of 36, belong to the first generation which has felt able to speak up for feminist views, because all the women above me have had to pretend to be men in order to get on. The generation just below tend to be post-feminist and quite like the idea of saying 'We don't need any help!' Then there is clearly a niche in the market for their kind of views. Editors are much more likely to want to print a column by a woman who argues that 'feminism is crap' than they are to publish an article by a woman who says 'we ought to have quotas'."

What has happened to circulation figures under women editors?

### Sunday Mirror readership:

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Figures in thousands Source: National Readership Survey

### Sunday Express readership

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Figures in thousands Source: National Readership Survey

Readership of the Sunday Mirror under Eve Pollard's editorship, 1987-1991 went up for three years and down for the fourth year. The percentage of women readers remained constant at 48. Since 1991 the paper has had five editors, three of them women, Bridget Rowe, 1991-2; Tessa Hilton, 1994-6; and Amanda Platell, 1996-7. The readership has steadily declined; the percentage of women readers rose to 50 per cent in 1995 and then dropped back.

Under Eve Pollard's editorship, 1991-4, Sunday Express readership went up initially and remained equally male and female; then readership began to decline, with women reaching above 50 per cent.

The only sensible conclusion is that both these newspapers are on steady downward curve; when
readerships goes up it went up in equal numbers of male and female readers; when it began to decline male readers quit first.

Women readers have always had problems with newspapers. A survey of a representative sample of 500 women conducted by NOP for the London advertising agency, Grey, in 1996 said:

■ 88 per cent of women thought that national newspapers were biased against women and
■ 75 per cent said that they could not name a national newspaper that was on their side at all.
Newspapers should have woken up to the opportunities involved in appointing women editors probably 20 years ago, but there’s a time lapse because newspapers are quite old fashioned. They are a mature product, they have an in built resistance to change which is the last thing you need.

Mike Glover, editor-in-chief, Yorkshire Evening Press.

Regional daily newspapers have been in decline since the mid-1950s. Between 1955 and 1995 evening newspapers overall lost sales at around one per cent per year. The decline has been caused by the explosion in other media and changes in life style, as well as the failure of those in charge to spot the changes and move with the times. There is much inertia in the system. Those who grew up in the Fifties became editors in the Seventies bringing with them old habits. Some regional dailies carried both national and international news and imported features from London.

Traditionally, peak sales for evening newspapers were between 5 and 6pm when men left work. They bought their papers at the factory gate or at the newsagent’s by the bus stop on the way home. Now they go home in cars, cannot park by the newsagents, and get their wives to pick up the paper, as they collect the kids from school. Women, therefore, now do the buying. And much of the reading. So content had to change. Regional newspapers are now consumer and family orientated.

The change was forced upon them by the mid-Eighties. Free sheets had appeared in the Seventies. They pinched local advertising and devoted their small amount of editorial space to local news. The free sheet impact was profound. To regain classified and retail advertising the paid-for papers also began devoting themselves to local news. And they went tabloid to attract similar readership to the national tabloids. And they became consumer orientated. These three facts meant, in the view of their controlling boards, these new-look regionals were suitable vehicles for women to edit. There were no more editorials on national and international topics to be written!

Other explanations offered by Mike Glover for the arrival of women in the editor’s chair include:

- women have accepted the need to be single-minded in getting to the top
- a need to make papers more appealing to women who both buy and read them
women are better suited to make the pitch for family readership
women are perceived to be better at managing change

Regional newspapers deny that they are “dying”. They argue that once they have changed their role they have a lively future, and most analysts agree. At the end of 1996, evening newspapers were still struggling to hold onto readers. Of the top six evening papers bucking the trend in declining sales, two are edited by women (Reading Evening Post and Express and Echo, Exeter). More than half the country’s weekly and morning titles had increased circulation.

Regional daily newspapers

There are 94 regional daily newspapers – five have female editors. They are: Anita Syvret, Gloucestershire Echo, Cheltenham; Rachael Campey, Express and Echo, Exeter (now editor, Plymouth Evening Herald); Alison Hastings, Newcastle Chronicle; Liz Page, Yorkshire Evening Press, York; Kim Chapman, Reading Evening Post.

Anita Syvret, the first to be appointed in 1990, declined to take part in the survey saying that a “journalist is a journalist” and that she did not wish to answer gender-related questions.

Other editors also expressed concern, at first, about the focus on gender. They say it is difficult to know whether newspapers change because a woman is in charge, or because women are moving with the times and being led by circumstances beyond their control.

The stronger element of denial by regional editors of the influence of gender may result from the fact that they are editing daily newspapers where “news” is at the top of the agenda. Indeed they came to their posts via news and subbing and production – the most traditionally male dominated parts of a newspaper. National newspaper editors are editing Sunday newspapers and they came to prominence via the magazine and feature route. In other words, it was easier and more obvious for national newspaper journalists to acknowledge that being a woman was a factor affecting their interests, views and decisions.

The first women to reach the editor’s chair are anxious to feel they did so because “they were the best for the job”. It was not because there was a smidgen of positive discrimination, or because the “time was right” or there was publicity mileage to be made out of groups that had appointed women. They resent any thought that they were appointed to increase female readership in order to attract advertising and argue they were appointed to raise circulation – as any man would be. In any event, regional newspapers do not have to fight so hard for female readers. There is often an even split in the readership and sometimes women outnumber men.
Management style

The difference in male and female management styles, and the way women tend to be less hierarchical and more inclined to build teams, came up naturally in conversations with most regional editors. Women editors were clear that macho management by bullying and by ritual humiliation, which is standard practice in so-called Fleet Street, is no longer acceptable and certainly not suitable for the 21st century.

This subject rarely arose in the national newspaper interviews. Victoria Brittain, foreign news editor of a department of the Guardian which employs more women than men, said:

“There is no doubt about it, in my view, that the kind of harmoniousness and ease in problem-solving that we now have is quite different. Women tend to be just a bit easier to work with. They are good at working in teams, they are good at listening to other people. Nobody is throwing their weight around saying: ‘Do it like this’. Instead they are saying: ‘What do you think?’ On the whole this tends to produce a more creative mix, in the way stories are laid out and how they are chosen in the first place.”

Mary Ann Sieghart also pointed out that when a group of women on The Times was asked to work together to produce a list of the 100 Top Women the atmosphere at meetings was quite different:

“There was no bull shit. We just didn’t seem to mind saying to one another that we had not heard of so-and-so. We had a task to complete, and egos did not get in the way.”

Regional newspaper groups believe in management training and send their editors on courses to make them aware of different styles and to absorb the current thinking. On national newspapers management training for the editorial decision-makers is at best in its infancy or, at its worst, considered unnecessary.

Alison Hastings, Newcastle: “In the past the regional press looked for rottweilers as editors. Then they looked at staff turnover. It was horrendous and they decided that this was expensive and that we had to start looking after people. I think women are naturally good at this. Men can learn but you can spot someone who is using techniques and someone who is genuinely concerned. As a general rule, I think women are the more caring, sharing gender, more open with people, more able to talk honestly. Women tend to listen more, they are more open to ideas and they don’t have the sense that they can’t lose face.”

Liz Page, York: “There is more emphasis in building the team and treating people like people. We have moved away from the old journalist practice where they yelled and swore at each other. There is now more of a recognition that you do have to work together to achieve things. And I do think, in that sense, being a woman is an advantage.

“This is because our upbringing as women teaches us to get on with other people and work in groups. We work together well in groups, whereas men from the outset are taught to compete and be the best. And having spent some time at mother and toddler groups I think it is astonishing how differently boys are
treated to young girls: boys are still encouraged in competitive activity; girls aren’t as much.”

**Kim Chapman** (Reading): “I think there is a change of management style for all of us. When you go on a management course now they teach you something very different from my experience of 20 years ago. They teach you to communicate. They say we are all in it together, let’s all sign up to it. Someone has a vision, but unless you get everyone to sign up to it, it is not going to work. There are various ways of doing that. One has to ask the staff to come up with their ideas of what the task is and how we deal with it. Now to me that is a much more womanly way of looking at life. If you look at how Mums act towards their kids, you’ll see what I mean. Twenty years ago in newspapers it was much more hierarchical and there were strikes and picket lines!

“I also think women are easier to get on with, more reasonable. They are task-orientated. They don’t have to battle with their egos. I find it exhausting. It’s awful, isn’t it? I find I have to say to a man, now, let’s deal with the ego bit and now… this is what I need you to do!”

Did women in the work place change the management style or did the management style change and make it much easier to promote women? I don’t know. I think one of the reasons why women are getting promoted now is because they are cheaper. Women are grateful to be promoted and subconsciously people think ‘I don’t have to pay her so much’. When you are cutting costs, that is an easy way.

**Rachael Campey** (Exeter): “I used to be hierarchical. I was brought up in a tradition of hierarchy within newspapers. I used to be like that, but I have watched others and I have been on one leadership course at Ashridge management college for a week which I thought was wonderful. I was the only women there and nothing came out during that week ‘because I was female’. It’s all to do with personality types, rather than male and female. Some people are control freaks and others make instant judgments on people and then never change their minds. And there are people who are free and easy and more artistic. The subject is fascinating. We had to see what we were doing that was rubbing people up the wrong way. And then we had to see what we were doing that actually got the most out of them.

“I learned to try and understand how a decision I made would impact on others. When I first came to Exeter I did some things without understanding how the staff would respond. Some decisions you have to make yourself, but there is a lot I could take on board from the staff. That was the biggest lesson I learned: knowing the levers to press to enable them to seize opportunities.”

That there is a difference in management style is no longer controversial. Men working for women are now prepared to admit differences.

“I feel much more comfortable walking into Alison’s office and saying, ‘listen, my daughter’s not very well or it is my wedding anniversary and I want to take my wife out. I couldn’t have
said that to a male editor. In fact, she has made me go home a couple of times when my wife has not been very well. It’s good, really good. We work extremely hard here, very long hours sometimes, and I shouldn’t be afraid in this day and age to go and say ‘Look I am a father, I have got responsibilities outside this place.’ It is good that I can. It is a definite plus without a shadow of doubt.” David Bourn, news editor, Newcastle Chronicle.

“I would say that women have less need to show off than male bosses do. The men like to remind the staff who is boss, whereas I don’t think women who have got to that position really feel the need to ram it down their staff’s throat. Women are also more straightforward. The male editors I have worked for have been more, not devious exactly, but they would not just come out and say what they meant. They always had another agenda under the table. Women aren’t like that.” Mark Hoey, assistant editor, news, Reading Evening Post.

Newspaper content

Market research is guiding regional papers. This has happened in the last handful of years. The sales of regional newspapers were falling and readers could no longer be taken for granted. It was felt that research could halt the decline by discovering what readers wanted. Thomson Regional Newspapers (TRN) – now Trinity – were the first to use extensive research. The nationals use market research, too, but the influence of the advertising and marketing departments is not nearly so overt: editorial decision-makers are still inclined to believe research only when it confirms their own prejudices.

Alison Hastings (Newcastle): “Project Electra, the title of the research done for TRN, has done more to change the way women are treated in newspaper pages than anything else. The main findings were that women did not want women’s pages. They felt that such pages were saying to them ‘This is your bit of the paper, therefore the rest is obviously not for you.’ They felt women were very under-represented in business and sport; that there were too many sexist photographs and sexist captions. If there was a new strip for the football team it wasn’t shown on a footballer, God forbid, but on some model sitting there with a cheesy grin and some, awful, awful caption. And all the women and most of the men found it patronising.

“We did not take note of this because we are feminists: we did it because we were a dying industry and we wanted to increase circulation. I was heavily involved in Project Electra and because of its finding it is much easier for those working on our titles to say what is acceptable and what is not. I do occasionally have to stamp on a sexist picture or a sexist caption but only rarely and only rarely do I have to cut ‘blonde, bubbly, mother of two’ from copy submitted by agencies. All our staff now know that is not acceptable.”

Liz Page (York): “When I first realised the change in Thomson newspapers, which meant that they seemed to go for shopping
‘That’s what it’s about: thinking like a reader’
– Liz Page

and a much more consumer-led news agenda, I thought ‘good heavens, this is absolutely dreadful!’ I had worked on papers which were traditional and often led with crime stories, so I had quite traditional values. It took a while to rethink what news is really all about and what people in their ordinary lives are interested in. I had a few years out looking after my children and I think this helped the adjustment because you start to think like a reader instead of a journalist. That’s what it is about: thinking like a reader.”

Once, newspapers were produced by journalists for journalists and mention of the reader was rare. Now thinking like a reader is a mantra.

Alison Hastings (Newcastle): “If there is a mortgage rate cut most journalists think of themselves and go mad about the story, but here in Newcastle we have an ageing readership who don’t have mortgages but they do have money in building societies. So when the rate is cut it is bad news for them because they are not getting the interest they had hoped for. We did a competition a while ago and the promotions guy wanted the prize to be a year’s mortgage paid! I discovered that out of 350,000 readers only 76,000 had mortgages!

“Every year we make a presentation to the staff saying this is what the Chronicle is; this is where we are going; this is the sort of story we want; and this is the sort of writing style we want you to adopt. The staff are very focused. If I went to the youngest trainee and asked what is the target market for the Evening Chronicle and should I use this story or that story, they would be able to tell me. It has taken a lot of hard work but was worth it.”

Does the news agenda change because the editor is a women?

Liz Page (York): “I think there are certainly some things that we give more prominence to, or opportunities that we have noticed, because I am a women. For example, we have launched an appeal to raise £50,000 for a scanner for the hospital which will be used to help treat pregnant women and menopausal women who may have some cancer problems. I deliberately embarked on it because I thought that, as the first women editor, I would like to do something for other women.

“I also think health stories have developed much more. We had a health reporter when I came here and I have now strengthened that by having another reporter to cover social affairs, problems for single mums, battered women, all that sort of thing.

“Certainly there is a change in the use of pictures. Picture desks would think a women in her underwear selling a car was a great idea for a photograph. They know better now! Our sports desk is exceptional. At the Northern Echo it was very male-orientated. The pages hardly ever mentioned women. We don’t have a major football team here so we have to concentrate on sport at
grass roots level which both men and women can participate in. So it is very even-handed coverage."

Rachael Campey (Exeter): "I am not going to try and hide the fact that there are things that interest women more than men. Sometimes I do pick stories because I am a woman. When the nationals did a story on Princess Di and cellulite we did go out to a gym and do a light piece on what to do about it. After all, every woman is confronted by this damn problem!

"So yes, I have tweaked things. After all I know that 50 percent of my readers are women. I have done stories about two consultants who are women who have been appointed to the hospital here. I have tried to explain female health problems, the pill or whatever. I have gone into education a bit more. We do a lot on schools and lots of pictures of children.

"I am a great one for going into shops and bus stations and talking to women. There are a lot of women’s groups here in Devon and I have made an effort to go to them to see what issues interest them. This may be a woman-orientated thing, I think it is, but I am not ashamed of that because getting out there and meeting women has made me re-evaluate my news judgment. I am not married, I don’t have children, so I must find out about these things. That is a conscious effort. I am probably out giving talks once a week and that is a deliberate attempt to keep in touch. I don’t think men do that."

Alison Hastings (Newcastle): "I make sure there is a picture of a woman on the front page every day. I monitor how many pictures of women we have in sports section. And we now cover female friendly sports, like synchronised swimming. We are specifically going for family type stories as our target market is 25 to 45 year olds and they have families. I think the fact that I am a parent has meant that I have influenced some decisions and made the paper more family friendly, but that is also a group decision.

"The content would not be a lot different if I was not here. I have an editor-in-chief who is very female friendly and there is nothing he or I would do differently from a content point of view. I think you can have men who are switched on to women and you can have men who aren’t. I have to say that you are less likely to get men who are attuned to the female friendly side, but at the Evening Chronicle this is not the case."

Kim Chapman (Reading): "Content has got to be aimed at all sectors of the community. Now there are maybe 110 stories in this paper of which some will be of more interest to men and others of more interest to women. But generally speaking most of them will be of interest to people, men or women, because they are into bell ringing, or going on country walks or they are interested in business or traffic problems.

"You might say that women are more interested in a story on nursery vouchers because they may be left holding the baby a bit more than men. But when I look around and see some of the men I know, they are massively into their families, and Reading has got a much higher level of families with lots of children than most towns."
"Bringing up children, the worth of nursery vouchers, everyone is affected by that. If you have got children, you are going to have a view on that. Whether they think they are going to get their £1,100 in their pocket, thank you very much, or whether they are thinking it is disgraceful because their political views are against it. Or whether they will or won't cover the whole costs and whether or not there are enough nursery places. We are always trying to spark debate, to get people talking. I don't know if that is a female thing or whether that is really what good journalism should be about."

As with the national press, the arrival of women in decision-making roles in the regions has increased the content of particular interest to women. It has also coincided with the retreat from quasi-national news and the rediscovery of the importance of local news and more local news. A move which won the approval of female editors. But local news with a difference. News that was accessible and relevant to readers. News with a human angle.

Alison Hastings (Newcastle): "Most of the news content of the paper is human interest because that is what our readers want. The group did even more research after Electra and discovered that there was too much institutional news and too much bad news. We weren't doing enough human interest stories and we weren't being useful.

"The council is a huge issue because it affects so many people with homes, social services, education. We used to send a reporter to council meetings to write down what everyone said. We didn't bother to get a reaction from a human being in those days, no one bothered with the people affected by decisions. Now we don't go to council meetings most of the time. We get the agendas and then we go to the relevant people and cover the story that way. At council meetings you get people bickering. We don't want to hear them slagging each other off. That is not the point. What we want to put in the paper is how the decisions affect people."

Kim Chapman (Reading): "What kind of stories do I like in my paper? People stories. That doesn't mean a heart-rending tale. A mum whose child weighed only a bag of sugar, really, that is so dull. I look at something that has happened and say how many people will that affect, how will it affect them and what is the story behind that? That's a people story. You're telling people why something is happening, not just that it has happened. Journalism is about people and what they do and what happens to them and how what happens to them affects everybody else and what they argue about and what they wear. How could it be about anything else? There isn't much scope on a small local paper for ambulance chasing or those endless rows in council meetings and people throwing mud at each other. No one could give a toss about that because they didn't even know who they were and they didn't want to know because they were boring. They want to know what is happening that affects them.

"And they want to know in some detail. There is general
agreement that women tend to be more thorough, think around the implications, go to more sources and to take longer over a story. Male reporters can be faster, and tend to skimp on detail.”

Rachael Campey (Exeter): “I don’t make a big thing of this but I think getting into personalities, interviewing people in greater depth is probably more of a female instinct. I am hugely curious, I am just nosey, I would like to know more about them. I think we like going into greater detail. Women tend to be more thorough. They go into things and they will dig a little deeper. Men take a much more blustery approach. They have that kind of confidence and are more simplistic. Analysis is very important. That is what readers here are saying they want; they want to understand the news. It is important for us to look hard at the issues. I think sometimes it is laziness that stops people going beyond the actual issue that is being debated.”

The aim of all the papers is to be part of the community, reflect the lives of those in it and campaign on their behalf whether it is over speed humps, schools crossings, issues that make people feel that the paper cares.

Kim Chapman (Reading): “It is not enough to say what is happening, you can change things and if we all cared about something, we could do something about it. I like to run campaigns that do something. That satisfies my missionary type nature, and it satisfies my idealistic desire that we all get together in a community. In my first year here, I spent much time out meeting people finding out what they really cared about. People are concerned about traffic fumes and pollution. There is definitely a strong green feeling in this town. We have just done some market research and the researcher said, ‘I have never seen a town that scored so highly on concern for the environment.’”

It would seem that the regional press has gone even further than the national press in putting the reader centre stage. Economic necessity drove the change. Out went the traditional journalism devoted largely to reacting to events, waiting for something to happen and then sending a reporter along - news that revolved around councils, court, police calls and Rotary clubs.

In so doing it has transformed coverage of local politics and there may be lessons here for national newspapers. Many council meetings are now said to be much shorter because reporters are no longer there to encourage bickering by reporting it. The needs of the community have been given priority over the need for publicity by community leaders. For the young male reporters this approach is now seen as “modern journalism” as much as new journalism influenced by women.

As with national Sunday newspapers, women were offered editorships at a time when circulation was falling. What, then, has happened to circulations under their editorship? Here there is a north-south divide. The southern based newspapers have seen circulations begin to rise; this has not happened yet in the north. This is partly to do with the need for readers to change their habits and have newspapers delivered to their homes.

‘Analysis is very important. Readers want to understand the news’
– Rachel Campey

‘You can change things. I like to run campaigns that do something’
– Kim Chapman
Rachael Campey (Exeter): editor 1991-96. By the time she moved to the Evening Herald, Plymouth, the circulation had increased by one per cent (December 1995, 30,812; December 1996, 31,135).

Kim Chapman (Reading): editor from 1994. When she arrived the circulation was 24,108. It is now 24,200, despite the circulation area being trimmed. The paper now only covers greater Reading and does not attempt to be a Thames Valley paper as in the past.


Weekly newspapers were also hit by the arrival of free-sheets. They have always been concerned with local news and providing a service to the community. They have never tussled with national news or international affairs. There have been women editors of weekly papers for many years and there are at present around 30. In response to competition, they have become ultra local, “parish pump” in their approach.

Yvonne Evans, 61, has been editor of the Radcliffe Times for 20 years. She has only worked for the one paper which she joined after graduating from Manchester University. She says that when the vacancy occurred she was the most senior journalist in the office. If she hadn’t got the job it would have been a clear case of discrimination.

“At the time I did an interview for Woman’s Hour because it was unusual for a woman to be an editor. There is no difference in my approach to running a paper. Sex does not come into it. I am an editor, not a female editor. What I want and what the readers want is a community paper. They do not want feminist views and they wouldn’t want me to concentrate on female issues.”

The weekly editors are among the least gender conscious. Out of seven interviewed, four denied that their gender made a difference to newspaper content.

Sarah Taylor, 30, editor Hounslow Chronicle: “It is not something I have considered. I don’t see it as a male-female thing. I don’t see any difference in my news either on the front page or inside. We are all after the same thing. We are all trying to build on readership. It is just to do with your news sense, what you think is important. To me quirky stories are as good as hard news.”

Sheena Crawley, 61, Harrow Observer: “I do have different priorities from a man but they are tempered by the demands of a normal newspaper. There is a different balance in this paper, but it is not a radical thing. I have just more things of relevance to women readers.

“We recently had a feature on a further education college which is closing its creche. This is obviously very serious for mature women students who don’t have much money and who are only able to continue their education if they can use the creche facilities. This college had been promoting equal opportunities, but what they are doing in my view is shutting themselves away from the women who they are trying to attract. In
another paper this might not have got the same amount of space.”

Greta Moorley, 57, Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser: “I do have a different news agenda. I have to hold myself back because I find I am having too many pictures of dear little children because I love to see their happy smiling faces! I am sure a man would not do that.

“Human interest is the best story you can have, above crime. I think men prefer crime because they don’t have such depth of feeling as a woman. A woman will put herself in the place of an aggrieved person. If we had a car crash we could go for the family angle rather than the horror.”

Jane Daly, 45, Crosby Herald: “If it is a good news story it is a good news story. I have never thought that I have a different agenda because I am a woman. I think if there are any different news stories in my paper it is more down to taste than gender. As a journalist I am looking for the more human side of a story, but it is not because I am a woman. If, say, you have a traffic accident, then you have to bring out the human element in the tragedy. I had a story about a six-year-old who died in a car crash and instead of headlining the article ‘Girl, 6, killed in car crash’, we put ‘Sophie was an angel’. Putting names in the headlines gives the story a human feel to it.”

Penny Dargavel, 50, Driffield Times: “It doesn’t really matter whether you are male or female. If you write about human interest news you are respecting what the readers want.”

As with the daily regional papers, the weekly editors were certain, however, that their management style differed.

Sarah Taylor: “My management style is hands on and approachable. I am tough and aggressive when needs be. I can lose my rag at people if they deserve it. In my experience, I am more approachable than the men I have worked with. I try to build up a rapport with my staff. If they have got a problem, I hope they know they can come to me.”

Shena Crawley: “Some women in charge do act like clone men. I think they feel they have to. They feel they have to be tougher. Women are more consensual. I would rather everybody was happy with my decisions because everyone spends a lot of time at work and they must enjoy what they are doing.”

Greta Moorley: “I am softer than a man. I don’t think I am strong enough, particularly with staff. If reporters have a lot of work and they have a date or something, I always say give it here, I’ll stop on and do it. I don’t think a man would do that. I always say the best job I ever had was being a deputy to a male editor. I thought I had the best of both worlds. He could be firm with staff and make all the nasty decisions.”

Jane Daly: “I learned to toughen up when I was news editor. A reporter told me to fuck off when I asked him to do a job he didn’t like. After that I got tough. I have recently appraised my management techniques. I used to say ‘do this or do that’ and not ‘what do you think of this?’ But I went on Trinity’s management course and that taught me to approach staff in a differ-
ent way. I don’t just see them as people behind a keyboard. If they are unhappy then it will affect their work.”

Penny Dargavel: “I think women have to be more assertive than men because they still have hang-ups about being in charge. When I first became editor I was more aggressive because I was trying to prove a point. People said they were nervous of me, but now they feel I am more approachable.”
8 – Conclusions

National newspapers

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.

1. 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 judgments and basic instincts.

2. The MORI poll specially commissioned for this project shows that men and women find different areas of newspapers of more interest. The gap in interests has narrowed in some areas over the last 15 years, and in some areas it has widened. This is most noticeable with parliamentary news.

3. Even within the current limitations of working in what is still a male-dominated culture, women have already made a difference.

The first eight women to edit national newspapers came to the editor’s chair via the features side of newspapers and often from magazines. (The eight are: Wendy Henry, Eve Pollard, Patsy Chapman, Tessa Hilton, Bridget Rowe, Amanda Platell, Sue Douglas and Rosie Boycott.)

They were hired to increase female readership by providing the kind of feature material found in consumer magazines.

4. All eight were appointed to Sunday newspapers (News of the World, The People, the Sunday Mirror and the Sunday Express). Sunday newspapers are always more feature orientated and readers buy them as much for entertainment and information as news.

They were appointed to edit papers with circulations that had been declining for some years. Some, including Eve Pollard, have managed to achieve a temporary rise in circulation with the female readership remaining constant. Others, including Tessa Hilton, have temporarily increased female readership while the overall circulation fell.

5. 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 reflect society more accurately than, in the past, their narrow agenda allowed them to do. However, the drive for ever more intimate stories encourages the publication of the bizarre and the prurient.

6. 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 may have been downplayed 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.

7. 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 like to communicate with the reader,
- women tend to be more people-orientated rather than issue orientated,
- women place greater importance on seeing news “in context” rather than in isolation,
- 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 television. 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 features department, partly because they disliked the way news was written.

8. 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”.

9. Women either fear or dislike polarised debate and the expres-
sion of strong views; they see more “shades of grey”. This may account for the fact that there are few female leaders and few female writers of polemical articles.

10 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 may change the mood of the House of Commons and this could in turn encourage a different approach to political reporting.

**Regional newspapers**

There are three major differences from national newspapers:

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 features side. Also the editors have been appointed to daily newspapers where news leads the paper rather than the feature-orientated approach of Sunday papers.

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. Women also show concern about over-long working hours and are keen to allow staff time for family commitments. 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.

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 interests 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. Only local news 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. 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.
9 – Recommendations

The conclusions show cause for celebration but not complacency. Women can take much of the credit for making our newspapers more women-friendly and generally more readable.

But there’s more to do:

■ Women decision makers should push harder for the management changes seen in the regional press to be generally adopted.

■ They should be arguing for a working environment that brings out the best in people, a policy which keeps staff on side, rather than merely in line.

■ And they should fight against the culture of long hours by helping their staff pursue a better balance between work, and family and social commitments. It makes sense because it makes better journalism. It makes sense because publishing articles suggesting that other sectors should make these changes while demanding killer-commitment from your own staff is hypocritical. No journalist minds working long hours when it is necessary, but a culture that suggest you must been seen at your desk at all hours is unnecessary.

■ Women decision-makers should extend the gains made in accessible news reporting to the coverage of politics – both of Westminster and Brussels. Now is the time. The new government has clearly done its homework and is also aware of the gender gap in political reporting. Why else did Tony Blair announce his first major assault on the dependency culture, on a housing estate surrounded by those who might have most to gain from his vision?

If this approach continues, Tony Blair will have forced a change in the way journalists write about politics. And if he continues to make his policy statements outside Westminster, in the morning, this will end the need for reporters to hang around half the night in the bowels of parliament. The reporting of conflict and controversy should never be abandoned but it should not take precedence over explaining the changes that are taking place.

■ Women decisions makers should question the glut of confessional journalism. It was fun when it was new but pages of inti-
mating details of relationships are becoming banal and often bizarre. We should not go back to concentrating on public policy but we should draw back from constant examination of personal life.

Women decisions makers should throw away the office contact books and compile new ones. Too often, newspapers go the same experts for opinions and make no attempt to approach the growing number of women experts. Such a move would access different ideas and would raise women’s visibility, particularly in front page stories.

In America, an annual survey called *Women, Men and Media* (Freedom Forum, New York) has been monitoring women-in-the-news since 1989. In 1996 the survey showed that even though the number of women journalists grows each year, women remain significantly under represented as sources and subjects of news. Male voices, activities and images saturated newspaper front pages: 85 per cent referred to men. There is no such survey in this country. There should be.

Women decision makers should allow time for reflection: if we acknowledge and examine differences, we can help forge a new synthesis and new visions.

*The 21st century could belong to women but we do not wish simply to swap the dominance of one sex for the dominance of another. Who wants boys suffering from anorexia and girls behaving like Gazza?*
What newspaper readers are very interested in

Here is a list of things that some people find of interest in their newspapers. Which, if any, do you think you are very interested in reading in the national daily newspapers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV &amp; radio listings</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local &amp; regional news</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical &amp; health news</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News about Europe</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International news</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV reviews</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the week's news</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports reporting: football</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; conservation</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure activities &amp; hobbies</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters page</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; holidays</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>Food &amp; recipes</td>
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<td>33%</td>
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<td>Sport scores and results</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; family money matters</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film reviews</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports reporting: other sports</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>News about the Third World</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements for jobs</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic news</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary news</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>News about Northern Ireland</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of current affairs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes &amp; fashion</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horoscopes</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer issues</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Profiles of people in the news</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular science reports/articles</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music reviews</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Base: 2,026 British adults aged 15+
19-22 January 1996
Chaps of both sexes

What newspaper readers are very interested in (continued)

Here is a list of things that some people find of interest in their newspapers. Which, if any, do you think you are very interested in reading in the national daily newspapers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News about America</td>
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<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigative journalism</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements for holidays</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book reviews</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal news</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News about the Middle East</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News about Russia/Europe</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motoring articles</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports reporting: cricket</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence &amp; disarmament</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business news</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion polls</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political gossip</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social gossip</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>News about Africa</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader column/editorials</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News about Asia &amp; China</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre reviews</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock exchange news/information</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements for cars</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements for property</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoons</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial relations</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports reporting: tennis</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports reporting: horse racing</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Chess</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 2,026 British adults aged 15+
19-22 January 1996
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