Canada: The Paradox of Women in News

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Introduction

If the proportion of women in news is the coarse measure, then women journalists in Canada may be seen as doing well compared with their peers in other countries. Canadian companies surveyed for the *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* (Global Report) (Byerly 2011b) found women to be situated at most levels of the news industry in near parity with men in the majority of occupational groups; however, they remain marginalized in senior-management and governance roles. There are many women journalists in positions of power across news – but few high-profile senior women leaders. There are even fewer, however, who self-identify as feminists (Freeman 2001). Despite gains in the number of women who are directly involved in news creation, there are not enough senior women working in the news media of record across the country. As Byerly (2011b) notes, ‘glass ceilings [in the Americas region] were especially noticeable in Canada, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and the United States’ (Byerly 2011b, p. 149), with structural inequities and underrepresentation of women in news content still posing serious concerns. Indeed, if one examines the negligible number of lifetime achievement awards allocated to women journalists as an indication of the acknowledged contribution of women to news in Canada, then we still have a long way to go. Canada’s largest journalism awards across media operated by the Canadian Journalism Foundation (CJF) have only given 5 white women lifetime achievement awards (Trina McQueen, Doris Anderson, June Callwood, Sally Armstrong and Lise Bissonnette) out of 17 winners in total since the award was first offered in 1996.²

This chapter explores the most recent data available on the number of women employed in mainstream news in Canada, drawing from the 2011 *Global Report*. The discussion will also address some general history of the country and its media, with a more specific focus on occupational status,
gender-equity policies and some past research on women in news in Canada. While near parity in some news roles seems to indicate a step forward, men, not women, remain largely in decision-making positions in top-level leadership of the country’s main media (Byerly 2011a). Newspapers appear to be less advanced in this area than broadcasters. There has yet to be a woman editor-in-chief or publisher of Canada’s largest national daily newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, while the largest metropolitan daily newspaper in the country, the *Toronto Star*, has only had two senior women news leaders, managing editor Mary Deanne Shears (1997–2004) and publisher Jagoda Pike (2006–2008) in its 120-year history. In broadcasting, there have been a number of women in top jobs, with early pioneers from Nellie McClung, the first woman on CBC’s board of governors (1936–1942), to Trina McQueen, who was the first female CBC vice president of news, current affairs and *Newsworld* (1988–1993) and the first woman president and chief operating officer of the CTV Inc. (2000–2002). Today, that tradition in broadcast continues with Jennifer McGuire, the first woman appointed to the top news role across platforms at the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), as editor-in-chief and general manager in 2009, and Wendy Freeman, who was appointed the first female president of CTV News, the country’s largest private TV network, in 2010. Women in news in Quebec have had a slightly better record with Lise Bissonnette, the first woman to run the influential French-language *Le Devoir*, one of the most revered papers in Canada, holding the position for almost a decade (1990–1998) in the latter part of the 20th century. A number of other well-known women leaders in broadcast and newspapers have also run papers, including Senator Joan Fraser, former editor-in-chief of the *Montreal Gazette*, the province’s largest English-language newspaper (1993–1996). Not surprisingly, however, Canadian newspapers hire more journalists than do broadcasters, with the number of news workers ‘greatly’ exceeding broadcast, according to a study of two major media markets, Montreal and Vancouver, which makes the inadequacy of senior-women newspaper leaders even more problematic (Canada 2004, p. 43).

The Canadian media landscape consists of largely privately held newspapers, magazines and online news websites, and a combination of public and private broadcasters. Broadcast media are licensed and regulated by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The public broadcaster, the CBC, receives close to $1.15 billion in federal government appropriations annually as part of its approximately $1.5 billion budget (CBC Strategic Plan 2012) and ranks 16th among the 18 Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries for government support at $34 per person compared with the average $87 per person for public broadcasting (Nordicity Study 2011). Other forms of regulation that cover private media concerns include the Competition Act (Canada 2006), which regulates