

## WHEN WOMEN TRY TO WORK WITH TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY... \*

**Peggy Kelly**  
**Freelance Journalist**

Are the media mirrors or makers? Does television merely reflect society or does it influence a society's norms? On this question, Margaret Gallagher says:

"Public broadcasting incorporates, and apparently successfully accommodates, two conflicting ideologies." Gallagher (1986:203)

Gallagher analyzes how public service broadcasting systems in western European countries refer to both the mirror role and the animator role, to rationalize their unfair treatment of female employees.

My approach is similar but is situated in a local Canadian context. Data for my analysis is derived from a contract negotiated by the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET). Journalists are not included in this union, nor are they included in this essay. I will use the structure and working practices of a private, metropolitan television station in Ontario as an example to support the first contention, that television reflects society, and further, that television harbours the same systemic discrimination against women as does patriarchal culture.

The prevalent devaluation of a woman's role in any community results in her restriction to boring, repetitive work which pays far less than men's jobs. In 1985, Canadian women earned only 65% of men's wages (Howell, 1987:13). Invariably, a woman's job offers little hope for career advancement and women in television are faced with the same frustrating scenario.

\* The privacy of all employees and management discussed in this paper has been respected by changing their names.

### Systemic Discrimination

Systemic discrimination is the result of this female devaluation and is based on a solid foundation of hiring practices which favour men and on male-gendered language. I intend to discuss all three components of this structure, but let me begin with the overall situation.

The division of labour according to sex exists in all industrialized nations. When the industrial revolution moved the family's productive labour from the home to the factory in the mid-nineteenth century, women were left in the home. Separation of the public and private spheres of life supports the division of labour into men's work and women's work. Women who look for salaried jobs outside their homes most often find employment in the service industries: cooking, cleaning, sewing, serving food. In television, the female-gendered service jobs are also similar to woman's work in the home: production assistants, make-up artists, wardrobe assistants, programming clerks, receptionists and secretaries. What is the rationale behind this national division of labour by gender? I believe it is based on women's position in the scientific world-view.

Women's reproductive capacity represents nature at large, in the scientific mind. Before the seventeenth century, people had inaccurate knowledge of men's true role in the reproduction of the human race. Early scientists, or natural philosophers, portrayed the pregnant woman as an incubator, a receptacle for a fully-formed, miniature human being who was produced by the male. This misinterpretation of the major role women play in the reproduction of the human race led to an artificial dichotomy, which creates an opposition between care-giving activities and productivity. Early philosophers rationalized a strict separation between nature and science, and reserved science for men. Later, during the Enlightenment, Descartes' philosophy of the subject (*cogito, ergo sum*), which concentrates on the centrality of a male subject in a world of others, placed nature and others in the role of fulfilling the needs of the subject.

Today men are fully aware of their essential, yet relatively minor, role in human reproduction, but sexual stereotypes persist. Female children are socialized to be passive care-givers, and male children expect to become powerful producers. It's well known that role genderization encourages one sex to exploit emotions, and the other to deny emotions. Perhaps due to unacknowledged feelings of helplessness in the presence of female reproductive power and unacknowledged feelings of powerlessness in the face of death, men have tried to separate themselves from nature by a forced objectivity.

### Objectivity

The main requirement for entrance to the realm of technology is objectivity because technology reveres objectivity. Technology is applied science and science is one source of our patriarchal culture's reverence of objectivity. The father of modern science, Francis Bacon, saw nature as feminine, ripe for mastery by male scientists who "storm her strongholds" through experimentation.

"His central metaphor - science as power, a force virile enough to penetrate and subdue nature - has provided an image that permeates the rhetoric of modern science... What is most immediately conspicuous in that imagery is its denial of the feminine as subject—a denial often taken to be generally characteristic of the scientific endeavor." Fox-Keller (1985:41,48)

Many men in technological fields presume that technical aptitude derives from gender. The unconscious, deep-seated belief, that the words 'masculine' and 'technical' belong together, is based precariously on men's claim to a superior level of objectivity. If women represent nature, how can women be objective?

Women are not wanted in the technical occupations which demand a pretense of objectivity, because women are not supposed to be mechanically-oriented. Such an aptitude in a woman is called 'unfeminine'. It's convenient for men to see women this way because if one half of the population is convinced to assume all the nurturing, caring and repetitive chores of daily life, the other half is free to be creative and productive.

### Horizontal Segregation

In *Horizontal and Vertical, the Dimensions of Occupational Segregation by Gender in Canada*, Gale Moore defines the horizontal element of systemic discrimination in paid employment.

"Horizontal segregation exists when men and women are working in largely separate occupations." Moore (n.d.:8)

For example, in 1981 77.7% of all clerical jobs in Canada were performed by women while only 13.6% of jobs in the transportation and communication sectors were held by women (Moore, n.d.:22).

Television is a very technical industry, and t.v. jobs are concentrated in the production area, a field which requires specialized knowledge of theory and equipment. There are few women working in production; in fact, most women in television are concentrated in clerical jobs. Gallagher's research unearthed these statistics in the European television industry.

"To take the administrative sector as an example, 60% of all women working in television are found here, but just 2% of these women are in the top two tiers of the administrative hierarchy. By contrast, although only 15% of all men working in television are in administration, 20% of these men are in the top two tiers." Gallagher (1986:206)

In 1975 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Task Force on the Status of Women published their national report, *Women in the CBC*.

"We found that the majority of women—just under two-thirds—are secretaries and clerks in administrative support jobs. Eight hundred and seventy-seven—about one-third—are in jobs related to program production. The remaining 5 percent are in management and specialist positions." CBC (1975:20)

In 1974 the CBC's women employees earned an average of twenty-seven percent less than male employees. This wage gap increased to thirty-one percent with the age and seniority of the employee. For example, after thirty-three years of service, a female CBC employee realized a fifteenfold salary increase, whereas her male colleague saw his salary rise by a factor of thirty. Across Canada, the average male employee of the CBC enjoyed three opportunities to advance for each chance open to a female employee.

In 1986 the government of Canada instituted the Employment Equity Program which demanded that all federally-regulated industries, including communications, provide a detailed analysis of their workforce composition. In 1988 the first submissions from Canadian broadcasters confirmed that little had changed.

"In its report, the CBC boasts that women are 'better distributed throughout the workforce and are less ghettoized than women in other media', and it does hire a larger ratio of women than do other broadcasting firms. However its salary summary shows a familiar pattern: the majority of women make less than \$35,000 and the majority of men make more. Men also appear much more likely to be hired, except for clerical work, and are more likely to be promoted. These trends are borne out at the CTV and Global networks." Rauhala (1988:A15)

In 1986, female employees of the private network I will discuss were also concentrated in the administrative sector: switchboard, accounting, traffic, secretarial. The traffic area, which is responsible for producing a list of all items broadcast by the station each day, was composed of five female clerks and two female supervisors. All switchboard operators were women, while all shipping clerks were male. This is horizontal segregation.

The 1985 contract between the union (NABET) and management, at this particular local of the network, lists twenty-two job categories. Table one reveals how many of these jobs are open to women and men, the number of pay levels open to each sex and their respective salary ranges in dollars. Significantly, occupations in which both men and women are employed are few (nine), but they enjoy the same range of salary as do the male-gendered jobs. This is because the supervisor in each mixed category is a man. The number of levels open to members of female-gendered occupations is skewed by the inclusion of a few women in higher-paid, male-gendered jobs, such as two female directors. In reality, the majority of women at this t.v. station had only eight salary levels through which to advance. A woman can earn from \$244 to \$541 per week, depending on her length of employment. In contrast, male-gendered occupations offered a wider salary range: \$244 to \$715 per week.

For a concrete example, let's examine two categories from the NABET contract which are clearly gendered occupations: switchboard operators and shippers. Category G includes switchboard operators and receptionists, while shipper/receivers and drivers make up category P. The female employees in category G can move from

salary level 1 to level 4, that is, from \$244 to \$378 per week, but the male employees in category P have more leeway for promotion, from level 1 to level 6 or from \$244 to \$467 per week. These two jobs are comparable in responsibility, stress level and knowledge and I suspect that an equal pay for work of equal value program would result in the switchboard operators being admitted to pay scale six. This Canadian example is consistent with Gallagher's European findings.

"As a generalisation it is true that when a job category is dominated by women, that job tends to be relatively poorly paid....However even when doing the same job, women tend to earn less than men." Gallagher (1986:208)

### Vertical Segregation

Vertical segregation, through which women are relegated to the lower-paying tasks within an occupation, is also evident in the NABET classification system. Table two illustrates how this principle operated in 1985 at the Ontario television station I studied.

Women held the majority of clerical jobs in pay scales 1-8, which paid \$244-\$541 per week. The majority of technical jobs were filled by men who earned \$299 to \$715 per week in scales two to thirteen. Not only do male-gendered technical jobs start at higher salaries, they also offer more opportunities for raises. Salary levels for supervisors were not available because these employees, as middle managers, are not included in the union. Only three supervisors out of eleven were female, and all three worked in female-gendered, dead-end departments: traffic (programming) and switchboard.

When I worked at this television station, there were three artists in the graphics department: two women and one man. The man was the supervisor, and his salary was slated at \$541 a week after three years of service. The female, junior artists received \$434 a week after the same length of employ. Similarly, in the promotion department, there were three staff writers: a male boss and two female writers. After two years of service, the supervisor could earn \$402 a week (scale 6) and the writers could earn \$336 a week (scale 3).

The accounting department employed seventeen people: thirteen women, four men. Two of these men held the supervisor and senior accountant positions. All the women in the accounting area were clerks. Secretaries and receptionists in all departments throughout the station were women while all executive producers, department heads, the general manager, the vice-president and the president were men.

In the operations department, where all the actual production takes place, women were also concentrated in lower-paid, female-gendered jobs, such as videotape librarian, wardrobe, make-up and production assistants. Of six directors, two were women. All technicians except two were men.

In 1983 I found myself at the bottom of a vertical segregation ladder. I started working for this employer as a film librarian, in 1978, at a salary of \$158 a week. By 1983 I was performing three job functions (film editor, electronic-news-gathering editor, film librarian), and my male supervisor called me the 'ideal floater', but I wasn't paid accordingly. I worked with two men, Dave and Sean, who shared two of these three job functions. My male colleagues were paid \$477 a week (scale 8), and I earned \$354 a week (scale 5). For twenty-five percent less pay, I did thirty-three percent more work. My third job function, research and administration of the film library, was devalued because it was gendered as women's work. I spent a lot of time and energy lobbying both union and management to get this discrepancy eliminated. In fact, I had to threaten management with a complaint to the Human Rights Commission in order to get equal pay for equal work. When I approached my department's male executive about a raise, his response was "And what about Dave?", as if to suggest that I should be more concerned about Dave's promotional chances than my own. Perhaps this manager saw ambition as a male-gendered characteristic. (As we shall see, Dave received more than his fair share of support from this same executive). In *Machinery of Dominance*, Cynthia Cockburn wrote that this kind of struggle is experienced by women in all technical fields.

"Women have to fight to be taken seriously as workers. They have continually to assert themselves if they are to get the training, the tools and the experience that are available to men." Cockburn (1985:203)

Working mothers are at an additional disadvantage because of the double workday. Family responsibilities make it difficult, or impossible, for these women to work overtime, or on shifts. Susan, a co-ordinator in the traffic department, was caught in this trap when she became a mother. Susan had been trying to transfer to a technical job in operations for several years, but she was repeatedly rejected on the basis of her clerical background and lack of technical expertise. However, on-the-job training wasn't available to this bright, hard-working employee. Susan's husband worked in the operations department of the same television station, and his technical position on a production crew often took him out of town, for example, to record a sports event at a remote location. When Susan became pregnant she gave up all hope of escaping the clerical ghetto in traffic, and finding satisfaction in a more challenging area of work. She believed that one member of her family should be available on a regular basis to deal with daycare arrangements and care for their child.

Affirmative action program designers propose the introduction of temporary bridge positions, to fill the gap in employees' knowledge or work-experience. A job such as videotape librarian, which combines clerical and technical duties, could have introduced Susan to the video technology, and, as an integral part of the operations department in this t.v. station, did not need to be artificially created. However, at the time Susan was struggling to enter the technical arena, videotape technology was being introduced to all parts of this station, and, those technical employees whose jobs became obsolete as a result of video, had priority.

For example, the supervisor of the film processing laboratory was transferred to operations when the film lab was closed, and he became the senior videotape librarian. The incumbent videotape librarian, a woman who had run the video library single-handedly for three years, trained this male supervisor in the administrative aspect of her job and became his assistant. The gap between their wages is startling. The female, junior videotape librarian could earn from \$357 to \$402 per week (scale 5). The male, senior videotape librarian earned \$541 to \$678 per week (scale 12) at the time of his job change. He had accumulated many more years of service than his female assistant, but his transfer into her job territory eliminated her chances for promotion. A female ghetto was created. Pat and Hugh Armstrong discovered similar situations in offices across Canada.

"The segregation of the labour market, the high female unemployment rates, their own training, and family responsibilities lock these women into the 'female' jobs." Armstrong (1983:52)

Likewise, Susan remained in a female-gendered job from which she could see no chance for promotion. As a traffic co-ordinator, Susan could earn anywhere from \$357 to \$467 a week, depending on her seniority.

These Canadian illustrations echo Margaret Gallagher's European conclusions.

"...over time, a higher proportion of women is left behind in the lower-level, lower-paid jobs." Gallagher (1986:209)

I was also a victim of this praxis. In 1984 I took a step back in my career to move to the operations department, where the new technology and the secure jobs were located. The department's policy dictated that I must begin as a videotape recorder (vtr) operator, a job which was below my level of experience. Another film editor, who had no videotape experience, entered operations as a vtr operator in 1979. As an ENG (Electronic News Gathering) editor, I had acquired plenty of videotape work experience.

In 1985 the film department was closed down completely and my colleague, Dave, was promoted to a more senior job in operations, a videotape recorder (vtr) editor position. As a vtr editor, Dave's salary was listed in scale 10 or 11, where he could earn \$590 or \$640 a week. As a vtr operator, my salary fell into scale 8 and I earned \$500 per week. In addition, I worked on a 24-hour rotating shift, whereas Dave never worked past midnight. The operations supervisor claimed that his entry-level policy had been over-ruled by the president of the station (the same executive who had been reluctant to grant equal pay for equal work in 1983 was president at this time). Management refused to address this inequity when it was brought to their attention, and the union refused to file a grievance.

In the space of six years at this television station, three women were left behind as a result of the introduction of new technology, and three men were promoted.

### Hiring Practices

Discriminatory management practices are based on discriminatory hiring practices. Women's technical education and experience are undervalued in the eyes of many managers. As in the general labour force, women who seek technical work in television must be highly qualified to equal male applicants of mediocre qualifications. The informal apprenticeship system, through which inexperienced and uneducated workers are hired at the assistant level and taught on the job, favours male candidates over female. This imbalance stems from the sexual division of labour practised throughout society.

Typically, a young man who applies for a job at this Ontario television station will begin working in the staging department as an assistant. In staging, he will apply his 'male' hobby skills learned from his dad on week-ends, or in high school shop classes, to the serious business of a career. He need have no post-secondary education to start building and painting sets for the production of a television program. This is a locus of systemic discrimination: an area of work to which men are admitted simply because they're men. Women are refused opportunities to work on sets based on assumptions about low-level carpentry skills and lack of physical strength.

Although it's true that most women lack carpentry skill, it's false to assume that women are incapable of acquiring this knowledge. This is the real truth: young women are socialized to avoid gaining experience in any occupation labelled 'man's work' and adult women are penalized for not having these same skills. As for the objection that women are too weak to build sets, I have seen very slender men of five feet-five inches, at work in the staging department. When they can't lift something they wait until someone else is free to assist. This is considered normal and acceptable by all concerned, but if a woman asked for help in a similar situation, her request would be used against her, as evidence of incompetence. This is clearly a double standard.

At the same t.v. station a young woman looking for a foothold on the television career ladder is channelled into the t.v. service occupations. If she begins by working on the switchboard, she may progress to a receptionist position, to the accounting department or to traffic: all female ghettos. Gallagher also found this deplorable situation to be the norm in Europe and the British Isles.

"...across all of the organisations studied, the average woman was at a disadvantage compared with the average man right from the date of recruitment. She was appointed to a lower-level job, in a lower salary band."  
Gallagher (1986:2)

Jane, a graduate of a college program in radio and television arts, discovered this double standard through personal experience. Jane also had work experience as a



mail clerk (sorting and delivering mail), but when I met her, Jane was a switchboard operator on the evening shift. She applied for a mail clerk position when an opening was announced by the shipping department because it offered a daytime schedule and she would be in a strategically better position to try for a technical job in production. Jane's plan was a sound one, because a former male shipping clerk had progressed to chyron operator, a much better-paid technical position. However, the male supervisor of the shipping department bluntly told Jane that he didn't want any women in his office. Instead, he hired a man from outside the t.v. station, even though company policy stated that internal applicants had precedence, and the union contract stipulated that all jobs must be posted within the station, prior to advertising publicly. Jane was unaware of her rights and did not approach the union.

The same supervisor who refused to hire Jane because of her sex had two of his sons working for him in the shipping department at that time. A third son of this same man had been promoted from shipping to printing, which pays a higher salary. This young man had no post-secondary education, yet he learned a highly-skilled trade, printing, on the job and on his own time. He progressed from a salary of \$215 a week in scale one, to \$500 a week in scale nine. In spite of her post-secondary education, Jane was earning \$215 a week, as a switchboard operator, and she could look forward to earning no more than \$378 a week in the future: a comparatively dim future indeed.

In 1978, Canadian women like Jane, who acquired post-secondary education, earned 53.5% of the salaries paid to men of the same educational level (Labour Canada, 1981:13). The Armstrongs found anecdotal evidence for these statistics.

"Although the overwhelming majority (of women workers) have at least graduated from high school—they have on average more formal education than their male counterparts—they have fewer opportunities for promotion, and receive lower wages, fewer paid vacations, and lower and fewer benefits, including unemployment insurance benefits." Armstrong (1983:122)

The introduction of a central personnel office, which would be responsible for the administration of an equitable hiring policy and for the incorporation of union contract stipulations in company policy, would eliminate discriminatory hiring habits such as practised by the shipping department supervisor at this t.v. station.

### Language

Besides unfair hiring practices, systemic discrimination is also evident in the male-gendered language which is used in all phases of television production. A glance at the union classification system of occupations is enough to tell the reader which gender the union expects its members to be: cameraman, audioman, boom man, lighting man, dolly man, cableman, wireman, propsman, film/eng cameraman (NABET contract 1984/85). In *Grammar and Gender*, Dennis Baron addresses this issue.

"The practice of treating the masculine as the linguistic norm has been called by Dale Spender, in *Man Made Language* (1980), 'one of the most pervasive and pernicious rules that has been encoded'". Baron (1986:3

Baron agrees that "attitudes toward men and women have become attitudes toward language" (Baron, 1986:10). The social process of gendering male and female people is reflected in language.

It's not surprising, therefore, that the word 'control' is used repeatedly in television jargon. The director in studio control communicates by microphone with the camera operator and audio technician in the studio. Central control is the main electrical area connecting this t.v. station to its transmitter and receivers. Quality control is a high priority process which occurs at every step of production. In this sense, television is a true representative of technology. Both share a common goal: control of the visual and aural environment. Television must control thousands of technical and human variables in order to produce a high-quality program.

"Modern technology has become symbolic of male domination. Technology, far more than science (in which women are better represented), is about control. Harnessing nature to serve man's needs, exploiting natural resources, diverting the flow of rivers, manipulating the physical world - all of these are controlling activities. And in our world, control and domination are masculine prerogatives." Griffiths (1985:60)

Griffith's point is exemplified in the term 'master control', which is also a room in the bowels of this urban t.v. station. The final version of each production is broadcast from this small control room. When I worked in master control, sound and picture were occasionally mixed there, but this area's main function is quality control. The station's reputation for professionalism rests on the shoulders of the technicians in master control.

In *Words and Women*, Miller and Swift explain the etymology of master.

"*Master* and *mistress* are striking examples. Both come from the Indo-European root for meaning "great" or "much", and in some contexts both retain a sense of authority over others (though today the others are more likely to be pets than people). In their most common uses, however, master now denotes excellence in performance, and mistress labels the so-called kept woman." Miller & Swift (1976:64)

The sexual connotation of 'mistress' devalues the work performed in a room named 'mistress control' so the only way to neutralize the male-gendered term 'master control' is to drop the 'master', and refer to control room. The more frequently women enter this realm of technology, the more urgent becomes the need for neutral jargon.

Technical language and discriminatory hiring practices support the systemic discrimination women find in television. The 'pattern of reality' European women

experience in television is remarkably similar to the difficult situation of women t.v. technicians in Ontario. Perhaps this is so because western patriarchal ideology flourishes in the television industries of both continents, and, because television is a mirror of cultural ideology.

In conclusion I'd like to quote Susan Crean.

"Researchers and management experts have theorized that the first stage entry of women into a previously all male occupation, up to 20% or 30% participation, may be shocking but it is not dislocating. That is, women can be accommodated relatively painlessly and their presence does not imply fundamental alterations to the job or the environment." Crean (1986:20)

This process may be 'relatively painless' from the male viewpoint, but, as I have shown, it is enormously difficult for the women involved.

"Whatever the perks in being the First Woman, it is a lonely position and doesn't change much. McQueen has an acute appreciation of the vicious circle. 'You have to have more women in to change things, but until you change things you won't have more women'". Crean (1985:339)

In *Women in Broadcasting: Perceptions of Workplace and Career*, Egan and Goodman assume that new technology will admit women workers.

"Gender blindness is most established in the more recently developed hi-tech fields, where men are accustomed to women learning and working alongside them. Broadcasting falls into the middle of the traditional-to-high-tech spectrum. The newsroom is a historically traditional male bastion; the more hi-tech areas, such as satellite-linked international communications, are newer and presumably more open to females." Egan & Goodman (n.d.:2)

I offer this quote as a particularly glaring example of the social sciences neglect of technically-oriented women. It's been my experience that "the more hi-tech areas" in television are closed to female workers.

I'm amazed at the lack of research available on women who work in technical occupations within the broadcasting media. On the one hand, this should not be surprising, because women have been kept out of these occupations, by the systemic discrimination I've been describing in this paper. On the other hand, research into this situation could perhaps serve as a strategy for focusing attention on the reasons for the small numbers of women employed in technical occupations. Hopefully, a raised public consciousness would support and encourage more women to enter the technical arena. In turn, their presence would open up traditionally male fields to other women. A national study of female employees in the Canadian broadcasting industry may provide a tentative step towards this goal.

TABLE 1

## HORIZONTAL SEGREGATION

	Male Occupations	Mixed Occupations	Female Occupations
Number Of Jobs	55	9	20
Number Of Levels	13	13	11
Weekly Salary Range	\$244-715	\$244-715	\$244-640

Source: Contract, National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians-CLC, January 1, 1984 to December 31, 1985

TABLE 2

## VERTICAL SEGREGATION

Type Of Work	Salary Scale	Departments											
		Programming*				Operations				Accounting			
		M	W	T	%W	M	W	T	%W	M	W	T	%W
Supervisor	Non-Union	1	2	3	66	3	0	3	0	2	0	2	0
Technical	2-13	0	0	0	0	85	2	87	2.3	0	0	0	0
Clerical	1-8	0	6	6	100	2	3	5	60	2	13	15	87

Type Of Work	Salary Scale	Departments											
		Graphics				Switchboard				Shipping			
		M	W	T	%W	M	W	T	%W	M	W	T	%W
Supervisor	Non-Union	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	100	1	0	1	0
Technical	2-13	1	2	3	66	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clerical	1-8	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	100	4	0	0	0

Source: Contract, National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians-CLC, January 1, 1984 to December 31, 1985

\* Programming includes Traffic

Legend: M: Men W: Women T: Total %W: Women as percent of total

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