



## INTRODUCTION: FEMINIST STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION

In paying particular attention to feminist contributions within communication studies, this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* marks a special moment within our field. I think that it is fair to say that feminist approaches to the study of communication have been scattered across the field, rather than singly planted in any one place. In contrast to the way in which American academic communications associations set off 'feminist sessions' from the rest of their programs, within Canadian associations there have been few such special events. While the singling out of particular modes of analysis may entail certain liabilities, the opportunity to bring together a few specifically feminist communication theorists has been, for me, a great pleasure and honour.

However, this special issue begs the question of what is special about feminist approaches to communication studies in Canada. As guest editor, I'll briefly outline some of the issues at stake that indicate to me the necessity and 'specialness' of feminist studies in communication, and then I'll let the articles speak for themselves.

In locating feminist studies in communication one needs to consider what makes Canadian communication studies distinct. This question is for me relatively easy to answer. Although the study of communications in Canada continues to expand into various different areas, I think that one can still feel the generative spirit of Harold Innis informing our field of study. When I teach undergraduate introductory courses in communication theory it is always a challenge and a pleasure when we arrive at Innis; a challenge because first-year students don't immediately find Innis' work very 'sexy', a pleasure because of the intellectual satisfaction that his ideas provide. Indeed, Innis' object of inquiry: the historical, social, economic, and political ways in which communications technology has structured Canadian society remains incredibly relevant and productive. Innis' concept of monopolies of knowledge

provides us with a map with which to understand the contours of our society and our field of study. As a feminist coming to communication studies, this map articulated in many ways with feminist maps that I had for charting and analysing the structure of power in contemporary societies. It seems to me that Canadian communications studies informed by Innis are particularly attuned to the specific ways in which individuals are positioned by and live with forms of knowledge that are in turn formed in specific patterns of communication. This theoretical ground can then support focused analyses of how monopolies of knowledge affect those in the margins, and notably the historical exclusion of women from centres of power (be it economic, political, or academic). These inequalities are no mere abstractions, and they are immediately felt. Thus, through feminist communications analyses we begin to approach the ways in which our everyday realities have been constructed. As Sheila Petty says in quoting the film theorist Christine Gledhill, this means that "we have to have some idea of where the 'real' itself is located, and how . . . we can derive knowledge of it".

This concentrated focus on the 'real', this attention to both the micropolitical as well as the structural is what exemplifies feminist studies in communication. Thus, feminist analysis investigates the ways in which we come to know ourselves: through forms of thinking and speaking; through the representations we see; in media accounts of who we are; in the filmic depictions of others; and, even, in the ways in which our very voices have been historically modulated by the commercial enterprise and quite private practice of talking on the telephone.

One can detect a specific feminist object of inquiry that unites this issue's different articles. This common object of inquiry is, of course, the ways in which women as historical subjects are positioned by different media practices. It is not, however, merely the category of 'woman' that is at stake here; rather it is the ways in which individual women have to negotiate and live with that category. As Teresa de Lauretis succinctly puts it: "The construction of gender is the product and process of both representation and self-representation" (de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* 1987: 9). Thus, in her article Donna Gill traces the representation of 'REAL women' in Canadian daily newspapers. In comparing the coverage of this group with that of feminism, Gill describes an emergent public discourse that reinscribes women in the home. Sheila Petty examines the tensions between the representations of African women in traditional society and those of women in modern African societies. Michele Martin's careful historical analysis of the ways in which 'feminine voices' come to articulate the demands of capital links women's everyday practices to an economic level of critique. In all these articles, then, the object of inquiry, women, extends to other forms of analysis. In these concrete instances of feminist communication studies we can see both the breadth of analysis as well as a critical attention to the specificities of women's insertion into the social formation. This then for me is the promise of specialness that this issue marks.

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