



Go to the front page of *The Guelph Mercury*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*. Look at any major newspaper. And count. Count the number of times that women are the subject of stories. Count the number of times their names are mentioned. Count the number of times they appear in photographs.

And then go back and count the number of times that men's names and faces appear.

What you will find is that women appear in only 13% of the lead stories, according to a recent study by the University of Southern California. If you check the Sports section, you will find that out of 100 sports stories, 7 are about women. Although they make up more than half of the population, women are virtually absent from the front pages of our nation's newspapers.

Can the absence of women in the news be simply explained by the uneven distribution of women and men in our society's positions of power? Are there no women out there worth more than a token mention now and again? Are women doing nothing worthy of recognition?

Ironically, when their stories do make the front page, women often grab the headlines because of their connection to powerful men.

For example, early last year, the American media feasted on Gennifer Flower's disclosure of her 12 year affair with President-elect Bill Clinton. 300 different news sources attended a *Star* press conference that introduced Flower's story to the public. Many of those in attendance were from the mainstream press, not the tabloids.

In contrast, stories that deal with women's achievements are often not covered by the popular press or placed underneath Dear Abby. For example, when a group of more

If you guessed men, you'd be right.

Four years ago, Southam (one of Canada's major media conglomerates) organized a task force that found only six of Southam's 120 senior executives were women. In 1992, the number had risen to a mere eight out of 120. In Canada's broadcast media, women occupy 15 per cent of the positions in the public sector (CBC and educational networks), but in the private sector this number dwindles to a meager one per cent of the positions.

Because they control most of the editorial power, men define the news in Canada. Not only do they decide which stories to place on the first page, but they also define which stories are "newsworthy" and how they should be reported. Unfortunately, their choices reinforce the male-dominated, conservative agenda that controls Canadian media, and the results are often insulting and harmful to women.

For example, a nation-wide Canadian Press story was circulated to national newspapers on the December 1991 acquittal of Queen's University student, Robert VanOostrom. VanOostrom was charged with sexually assaulting three Kingston women. In the story, the reporter claims that VanOostrom was "chased from the courthouse" by a "mob" of feminists from Queen's, "a hotbed of radical feminism." Not only does the reporter not bother to inform his readers how many women he considers to be mob, but his use of loaded descriptive words like "mob" and

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Would a more appropriate name be THE GLOBE AND MALE?

than 800 women won the largest sex-discrimination court award in U.S. history in April 1992, most newspapers paid little more than cursory attention to this historical moment. *The Edmonton Journal*, a highly respected newspaper, covered the story in a 50 word blurb.

Who decides whether it is Flower's story that makes the front page or the sex-discrimination case? Who decides how much attention a story deserves? Who is in control of the nation's news rooms? Who makes the editorial board decisions?

The above story is taken directly from the University of Guelph's *Peak*.