



## Book review

D. Chambers, L. Steiner and C. Fleming

*Women and Journalism*

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■ Reviewed by Gertrude J. Robinson, McGill University, Montreal

There are three reasons why this is a 'must read' book. To begin with, it is one of the rare texts that takes a historical perspective which reaches back more than one decade. In each of the chapters the activities of females in the profession are traced back to before the suffragette movement in the mid-19th century. Another strong point of the volume is that it compares opportunities for women in journalism in the USA with those in Britain. This comparison indicates that professional practices are *not* universal but country specific. They differ because the two countries have different political, legal and economic frameworks. Finally, the book is interesting because it compares print with broadcast media, as well as the new internet technology, and is thus able to show that professional access, promotion, beat assignment and working climate within the newsroom are all structured by gender. However, these gender structurations vary for the different media. In general, it seems as though female journalists today have better access possibilities in broadcasting (at least in the USA) than in print. The same may also be the case for small- and medium-circulation papers, as I have discovered in Canada. The new medium of the internet, though it offers new groups and feminist information networks, turns out to be male dominated (73 percent) like all new technologies have been in the past.

Three authors wrote this ambitious book. They are Debora Chambers, reader in the Sociology of Culture at Nottingham Trent University, Linda Steiner, associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University, and Carole Fleming, a lecturer at the Centre for Broadcast Journalism at Nottingham Trent. The book contains 12 chapters, including an Introduction and a Conclusion. The Introduction, 'Women and Journalism in the USA and Britain', describes the volume's goal as examining

the status, practices and experiences of women journalists in the two countries. Topics included are: women's influence on changing news agendas and values; how gender structures newsroom work on both sides of the Atlantic; and how gender affects women's performance in the profession, including the difficult issue of how gender interferes with 'professionalism' as defined by males.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to 'Early Women Journalists: 1850–1945', and Chapter 2 covers 'Women Journalists in the Post-war Period'. It is divided into separate sections on British and US newspapers; women in radio and female status in the television industry in the UK and USA. Chapter 3 covers the education and training of female journalists and demonstrates that the 'craft' roots in Britain and the profession's union organization have made it much more difficult for British females to get a relevant education, than for Americans. Here journalism has been taught as a university subject since the early 1900s (Missouri).

Chapter 4, 'One of the Boys? Women's Experiences with the Glass Ceiling', explores women's professional progress in both the print and electronic media. It demonstrates the vertical segregation of female staff into the lower positions and into the less important 'soft news' beats, like consumer affairs, lifestyles, etc. The result is that female-produced stories will have less chance to appear on a paper's front page or in the newscast line-up. Horizontal segregation by gender makes it more difficult for females to rise to managerial positions in the traditional print and broadcast media, except in small-scale alternative publications. Chapter 5, 'Gendered Newsroom Cultures and Values', debates whether female staff have different professional values from their male counterparts and discovers that socialization on the job precludes such differences, except under very special circumstances, namely the case of what may be called the 'feminist' journalists. Less than one-fifth (17 percent in the USA) of all female staff define themselves as such. Females have, however, broadened the news agenda and 'humanized' it. Yet, this shift is not so much attributable to gender, as to media competition and the increased 'commercialization' of the news in capitalist Britain and the USA.

Chapter 6, 'Challenges to Sexism and Discrimination', surveys the history of female challenges to the masculinist newsroom culture as well as the legislative redress which equity legislation offers in the two countries. Once again, there were earlier opportunities for female class action suits against newspapers and the AP news agency under Title VII of the anti-segregation laws in the USA. In Britain, these interventions had to wait until the 1980s and are grounded in the European Community's Treaty of Rome. The next three chapters deal with alternative journalism, a topic that is rarely treated elsewhere. Chapter 7, 'The First Wave of Women's Alternative Journalism', and

Chapter 8, 'Women's Alternative Print Journalism of the 2nd and 3rd Waves', as well as Chapter 9, which covers alternative broadcast and internet sites, provide an up-to-date listing of women's most effective alternative organizations in the past and present. Women's entry into the prestigious war-correspondent group is covered in Chapter 10, offering individual female experiences from both the USA and Britain and the particular gender challenges that this position imposes on females in non-western countries.

Chapter 11, 'Post-modern Journalism and Its Implications', for female staff and the Conclusion, which focuses on the new medium of the internet, address issues of narrative style and female access to what Habermas and others have called the 'public sphere'. They find that the so-called 'post-modern journalism' is confessional and has therapy value but that it is also depoliticized and focused on consumption and superficial 'style'. As such, it does not offer female staff an opportunity to raise their voices and provide alternative interpretations of public issues, which are constituted through political, economic and government reporting, from which women are excluded. Post-modern journalism also implicitly subverts the feminist demand that 'the private is political'. Altogether this is a volume that is based on wide-ranging empirical evidence, that makes complex arguments and that provides much provocative food for thought.