

"WHEN WOMEN BECOME VISIBLE, THEY ARE LIKE GIANTS": A PROGRESS REPORT

Sylvia Spring

Cet article tente de présenter l'arrière-plan de la lutte menée par les femmes canadiennes contre les stéréotypes de rôles sexuels à la radio et à la télévision. Les femmes ont commencé à présenter leurs soucis au CRTC en 1973, quand les Femmes pour l'action politique ont mené ce qui deviendrait, par la suite, la première d'une série d'études monitrices démontrant à un gouvernement récalcitrant et à l'industrie que la représentation des femmes à la télévision et à la radio est insultante et inexacte. Dans les quatorze années suivantes, les femmes ont fait d'importants gains pour conscientiser le gouvernement, l'industrie, et le public à ce propos. Évaluation-Médias est devenu le groupe de pression national officiel sur cette question et a obtenu d'impressionnantes victoires récemment auprès du CRTC. Sa plus récente entreprise-monstre est de réécrire la loi Canadienne sur la radiodiffusion. Y réussiront-elles? Certainement! Ces femmes sont elles-mêmes devenues des géantes.

Giant Steps

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, I want to tell you that we women are about to make a giant leap forward, into the media spotlight. Communications policy is about to change drastically and Canadian women are playing a pivotal role in this event. We have been building our case for the non-sexist portrayal of women on and in Canadian television and radio for over ten years - doing an excellent job of it too. Now it's time for our government to make a definitive commitment towards ensuring women's rights in law.

The Broadcast Act, comparable to the Constitution for Canadian broadcasters, is about to be rewritten. The big question is, *will it be done with a real understanding of the implications it will have on the future of Canadian women?*

Remember what we women had to do in 1981 to ensure that we were guaranteed equality in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms... NOTWITHSTANDING

anything? We had to get pushy, organized, vocal and cohesive. Well, we're having to do the same thing again. Because once the Act is rewritten it will not be touched again for another fifty or more years.

STEP ONE: How we got here

Some of you may remember how, when the women's movement was being reborn in Canada in the late 1960's and early 1970's, one of the first targets of our outrage was the 'boob' tube (literally). How could anybody be expected to take women seriously if we were portrayed as those silly twits who jigged across our TV screens nightly? Or worse still, we were largely absent when anything serious was being discussed or documented. We were either invisible or 'over exposed.'

The first group to make a major noise about the portrayal of women on TV was Women for Political Action. In 1973 they made a major intervention to the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) against the CBC, claiming that the corporation was guilty of either under-representing women in much of their programming or sex-role stereotyping them when they were used. At the same time, women within the CBC began to complain that they were not being given equal opportunity for advancement, training and pay.

Across Canada women began to speak out against the often insulting and inaccurate ways they were being portrayed in advertising, and a general climate of dissatisfaction grew. But no concrete action was taken by either the government or the industry for over five years -- despite the growing body of studies, books and articles on the subject of sexism in the media. In 1978, when the CBC's licence was again up for renewal, NAC (the National Action Committee on the Status of Women) intervened, saying that CBC's portrayal of women was deplorable and unacceptable. Other women's organizations from across Canada joined in the protest. Finally in 1979, Al Johnson,

CBC's President at the time, held a two-day seminar in Ottawa on "The Portrayal of Women on the CBC." He and his top executives listened while representatives of women's organizations and experts in the field of sexism in the media presented a very strong case for the necessity of policy and guidelines that would help the CBC present a more accurate image of Canadian women.

As a result of that consultation the CBC developed policy that they hoped would help improve their portrayals of women. They also promised to educate and sensitize their staff on the issue, as well as promote equal opportunity within the corporation. On paper, it all looked good.

Meanwhile, CTV, our other national English network, along with many small, independent TV and radio stations were bombarding the public airwaves with extremely offensive programming and advertising. Although Canadian women protested as individuals and in groups, it was much more difficult to have any impact or be taken seriously by these diverse and often hostile broadcasters. Clearly there needed to be some national, official treatment of the whole issue.

Since the Canadian airwaves are owned by the public, and since the CRTC regulates and supposedly represents the public's concerns to the electronic media, concerned Canadian women began to pressure the CRTC to come up with guidelines and regulations that would help eliminate offensive portrayals of women. In 1979 the CRTC announced the creation of a task force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media.

STEP TWO: (which took three years)

To make a very long and painful story short, this task force was to develop within a year a list of regulations for the industry that would eliminate sexist content. But since the force was made up of broadcasters, bureaucrats and feminists, it took over three years to find a

force.

We were led to believe that women's issues would be very thoroughly dealt with in the report. We had nothing to worry about.

Well, surprise, surprise. When the report finally came out it seems that many of our most critical concerns had either fallen between the cracks or were sloughed over in legislatively meaningless generalities and wishy-washy 'humanist' type phrases.

If the government were to follow the recommendations of the Caplan-Sauvageau report as it exists now, women would *not* be ensured equality rights in employment, in representation or in freedom of expression. Sexually abusive programming would *not* be prohibited nor would the CRTC be able to legally enforce many of the regulations that many women demanded of them.

STEP NINE: A step in time saves nine

At the time of writing this piece, the CRTC recommendations on Sex Role Stereotyping have not been officially released. But reliable sources have revealed that the CRTC in fact has granted us some of our major demands. Compliance with the guidelines on sex-role stereotyping will be mandatory for every broadcaster; in fact, it will be made a condition of licence renewal. The industry must make progress reports to the CRTC, and the Commission will do another large national monitoring in 1988. Broadcasters must also live up to all the promises they made at the big self-regulation hearings... including CBC.

Bravo! MediaWatch has succeeded in achieving its original and major mandate... to get the CRTC to regulate broadcasters on sex-role stereotyping. Over the past four years of our existence women's concerns have become **VISIBLE** to the CRTC, the broadcast industry and the general public. There has been a major change in the Commission's attitude and awareness of the whole subject of media representation of women and MediaWatch has played a **GIANT** role in that transformation. Now we can pack up our bags and go home. Right? Wrong.

When we started out to get rid of sexist broadcasting we never imagined that we would get involved in major legislative change. We had thought that our mission was to get the CRTC to represent the voices and concerns of 52% of the population to the 48% who

BRAVO! MEDIAWATCH HAS SUCCEEDED IN ACHIEVING ITS ORIGINAL AND MAJOR MANDATE...TO GET THE CRTC TO REGULATE BROADCASTERS ON SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING.

control the broadcast media. But if the Broadcast Act does not provide the teeth for the CRTC to enforce these new regulations or allow them to require broadcasters to hire and train more women or prevent pornography from being aired, then our job is not completed. Sigh.

STEP TEN: Never fear, MediaWatch is here!

There is no way we can let this issue drop. We've worked too long and hard and made too many important gains to give up now. So MediaWatch has decided to launch one more large scale offensive. We are planning to hold a large weekend summit of our own in Ottawa where representatives from Canadian women's groups will meet with leaders from the broadcast industry and government. Through discussions, debates and workshops we will attempt to arrive at a consensus on what changes are needed in the Broadcast Act to ensure equality for women. Then we will submit our very strong recommendations to the parliamentary committee whose job it is to draft the new Broadcast Act.

Communications Minister, the Honourable Flora MacDonald thinks this is a great idea and has been very supportive. After all, she has had to fight within her own party and in parliament for legislation that would ensure native women's rights and equality for women in the work place. Now it is her responsibility to see that the Broadcast Act gets rewritten in such a way as to guarantee that our electronic media "accurately reflects 100% of Canada to 100% of its citizens."

By the time this article is published, the great MediaWatch meeting will have happened. The parliamentary committee will have heard our strong, reasonable and fair arguments for ironclad clauses that ensure equality. And we should all be waiting with baited breath to hear the announcement of the new, improved

Canadian Broadcast Act from the Honourable Flora MacDonald.

If, however, the summit has not occurred by the time you read this, then you will know that we giant women of MediaWatch have a giant problem and will need your help. We can never afford to become invisible again.

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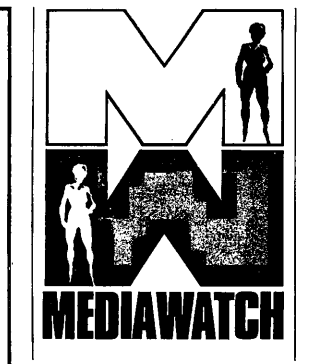
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*The quotation in the title of this article is from Québec writer Louky Bersianik.

Sylvia Spring has worked in and around the media for over twenty years as a writer, director, producer, photographer (and in many more assorted and sordid roles). She was one of the six public representatives on the CRTC Task Force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Electronic Media and a founding member of MediaWatch / Evaluation-Medias. She is presently living and working in Montreal and Ottawa.



QU'EST-CE QUE EVALUATION-MEDIAS/MEDIAWATCH?

Evaluation-Médias

MediaWatch, founded in 1981, is a national women's organization which seeks to improve women's portrayal in the media. This article outlines Media-Watch activities, and encourages all women to involve themselves through the submission of complaints about sex-role stereotyping in advertising.

Fondé en 1981, Évaluation-Médias/MediaWatch est un organisme national de femmes qui a pour but d'améliorer l'image des femmes et des jeunes filles dans les médias. Il vise à éliminer les images sexistes et pornographiques et à encourager la diffusion d'images qui reflètent l'évolution des femmes et les rôles divers qu'elles assument dans la société canadienne.

Cet organisme a été fondé par des femmes de toutes conditions sociales. Elles ont pris conscience de la nécessité d'une voix unifiée afin que les annonceurs, les diffuseurs et les gouvernements reconnaissent le fait que beaucoup de gens sont insultés et choqués par la fausse représentation des femmes dans les médias. En ce sens les efforts de Évaluation-Médias/MediaWatch ont déjà un impact sur les politiques des médias quant aux stéréotypes sexistes. Plusieurs de ses fondatrices représentaient le public dans le groupe de travail du CRTC (Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes) sur les stéréotypes sexistes dans les médias. Le rapport de ce groupe "Images des femmes" (1982) établissait des directives à suivre pour les médias et leur donnait

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A qui de droit:

Ma compréhension des stéréotypes sexistes concorde avec la définition du Conseil de la Radiodiffusion et des Télécommunications Canadiennes, telle qu'énoncée dans son rapport "Images des Femmes". Conséquemment, je veux dire quelque chose à propos:

RADIO Lettres d'appel de la station _____ Emission ou annonce publicitaire _____ Jour & heure _____ Média Canadien seulement Mon commentaire est le suivant:	TELEVISION Lettres d'appel de la station _____ Emission ou annonce publicitaire _____ Jour & heure _____ Média Canadien seulement	IMPRIME Nom de la publication _____ Article ou annonce publicitaire _____ Edition (date) _____ Média Canadien seulement
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Nom _____

Adresse _____

LES STEREOTYPES SEXISTES SONT:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De ne pas représenter des femmes de couleurs, de différents âges, et de différentes grandeurs et grosseurs. • De ne pas tenir compte du fait que l'expérience de vie des femmes est de plus en plus diversifiée. • De ne pas présenter au public un éventail complet des professions, aujourd'hui occupées par les femmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L'invisibilité des femmes dans les discussions sur plusieurs sujets. • De présenter les femmes comme objets sexuels et objets décoratifs. • L'invisibilité de femmes spécialistes et de femmes qui prennent des décisions. • D'utiliser un langage qui suggère que toute personne, à moins de spécification contraire, est un homme.
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Les stéréotypes sexistes sont nuisibles aux femmes parce qu'ils les déshumanisent, les dénaturent et les dégradent. La forme extrême de cette déformation est la pornographie.

ÉVALUATION-MÉDIAS/
MEDIA WATCH
 Évaluation Nationale des Images
 des Femmes dans les Médias

S.V.P. Veuillez conserver une copie pour vos dossiers et envoyez une copie supplémentaire à: Évaluation-Médias/Media Watch:
 Évaluation-Médias C.P. 1687, Succ. H Montréal, Que. H3G 2N6 MEDIAWATCH: 209 - 636 West Broadway, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1G2

une période de deux ans afin d'améliorer leur représentation des femmes. Évaluation-Médias/MediaWatch a également présenté des mémoires au CRTC concernant la télévision payante, le prévenant qu'une programmation "adulte" mal définie et non-réglée, ouvrirait la voie à la pornographie dans les foyers. En janvier 1983, ces prévisions se sont réalisées.

Évaluation-Médias/MediaWatch s'est engagée à travailler dans cinq champs d'activité:

Assistance

- fournir des représentantes locales à travers le Canada qui éduqueront et feront évoluer l'opinion publique en ce qui a trait au sexisme et à la pornographie dans les médias.
- fournir les ressources et les procédures qui assureront que l'industrie des communications et les gouvernements sont au courant de l'opinion publique.
- regrouper les femmes qui se sont senties isolées et inefficaces et qui veulent faire partie d'un groupe imposant et productif.

Education

- conscientiser les Canadiennes et Canadiens qui ne sont pas sensibilisé(e)s aux effets néfastes du sexisme sous toutes ses formes.
- familiariser le public avec les directives données aux industries de la publicité, de la radiodiffusion et de la télédiffusion sur les stéréotypes sexistes et avec l'engagement du CRTC d'évaluer l'efficacité de l'auto-réglementation de l'industrie des communications après la période d'essai de deux ans.

Communication

- fournir des personnes ressources, de l'information, des publications et du matériel audio-visuel afin de stimuler la participation des Canadiennes et des Canadiens à l'amélioration de l'image des femmes dans les médias.

Recherche

- fournir aux groupes de volontaires des moyens de surveiller la programmation de la radio et de la télévision locales afin d'évaluer les progrès de l'auto-réglementation.

Interventions

- améliorer l'image des femmes dans les médias par la présentation de mémoires, etc., dans le but d'influencer les législateurs (trices), les dirigeant(es) ainsi que celles et ceux qui prennent les décisions dans le secteur privé.

Quelques exemples de stéréotypes sexistes:

- ne pas représenter des femmes de couleur, de différents âges, de différentes tailles;
- ne pas tenir compte que l'expérience de vie des femmes est de plus en plus diversifiée;
- ne pas présenter au public un éventail complet des postes occupés par les femmes;
- l'invisibilité des femmes dans les discussions sur plusieurs sujets;
- présenter les femmes comme des appâts sexuels et objets décoratifs;
- l'invisibilité de femmes spécialistes et de femmes qui prennent des décisions;
- utiliser un langage qui suggère que toute personne, à moins de spécification contraire, est un homme.

Toute plainte mérite d'être acheminée à Évaluation-Médias/MediaWatch par le biais de la formule ci-jointe à l'adresse suivante:

ÉVALUATION-MÉDIAS
C.P. 1687, succ. H
Montréal, Québec
H3G 2N6

RESIDUALS

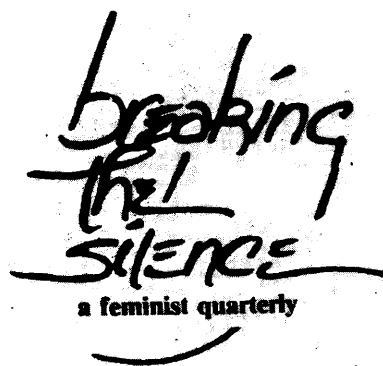
if we could erase
all sexual images
which depict violence
degrade women
men and children
sex and intimacy

if we could separate out
good images
from bad ones
right from wrong
sex from violence

if we could decide
what was truly erotic
not distorted
or unreal
or fused with pain

would there be any sound left
any visual image
any
thing

Judith Posner
Toronto, Ontario



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