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The Women Want Equity While the Boys Get IMAX

By Pat Hacker

L'auteure soutient que l'Office national du film ressemble aux autres milieux de travail où les femmes tendent de provoquer le changement. Une prise de conscience graduelle a suscité le désir et l'inspiration nécessaires pour entamer le changement. Des efforts doivent maintenant être déployés pour permettre aux femmes des minorités visibles, aux autochtones et aux handicapées de s'affirmer.

It is difficult to make reporting on employment equity sexy, even from the National Film Board of Canada. Equity reporting still operates in the sphere of data collection and analysis, and from a rational and structured statistical point of view.

For many of us equity figures are like technical points in law—very important to the implementation of change and not recognizably experienced in the daily lives of most women. Many working women, unionized or not, in large or small companies, have not yet come into personal ownership of employment equity as a concept, never mind as a reality. The ideals of "equal opportunity" and "affirmative action" pass by without a noticeable impact.

Women are not disinterested, unable, or unwilling to grasp the meaning and impact of employment equity. Equity, at the best of times, creeps along very carefully and very correctly, like so much of women's lives. Most employment equity practitioners are women and have a commitment to achieving parity of access to all levels of employment, remuneration, training and opportunity.

In the film and television industry, there is yet another kind of equity, portrayal equity, concerned with the presentation of women and girls in the media as passive, vulnerable, willing and silent victims preoccupied with perfect beauty. Repeated in programs and articles and advertisements, this image has a direct and personal effect

on the home, school, and work life of women and girls. However, achieving portrayal equity makes the leaders in the male dominated media and advertising industry worry that profits will drop and that they will be uncomfortable and lost in a world of 'new' and unfamiliar females.

If we want to know what women want we have only to ask. Regardless of the labels, "feminist" or "not feminist," women say over and over again in questionnaires and studies that they want an equal chance at training, money, jobs and satisfaction, freedom from harassment and violence; and freedom from discrimination with regard to gender, race, physical disability and all the other internalized and institutionalized prejudices. The same things everybody else wants.

Like the chants at rallies, the question is called—What Do We Want? The response—Equity! The next question—When Do We Want It? And, of course, the answer is—Now!

There is enough documented evidence telling us that equity programmes are working but that they can work better, and carry women further, faster. Progress is at a snail's pace. But where determination and commitment are present, change can occur with the speed at which action plans are developed and resources allocated.

Where the political will is present to make immediate and conspicuous changes, history has demonstrated that change is possible—even within a bureaucracy—immediately. When the political will is present, hiring can be focused on target groups. Training opportunities can be created to shoehorn target groups into vacancies and specially designed positions. Until very recent times we never questioned these practices.

Equity Can Work

That's the good news. In the case of the National Film Board of Canada, the intro-

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duction of the Employment Equity Programme in 1987 is a statistical turning point of positive evidence.

For example, the number of films directed by women in the French Programme over the 53 years of the NFB's existence¹ averaged 11.6%. Not a very respectable figure. Yet in the three years between 1987 and 1990, the period after the equity programme was introduced, the number of films directed by women in the French Programme appears to double and almost triple.²

The NFB's Equity Programme History

The National Film Board of Canada is an agency of the federal government, unlike the CBC or Telefilm Canada, which are corporations of the government. As an agency of the government, the NFB is not included in the government's legislation. The NFB operates a voluntary equity programme under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The National Film Board's brief to the CRTC in 1990 prepared by Lyndsay Green, identifies the key elements that have allowed the considerable and expanding success of the Board to bring about institutional change.

These include a Corporate Commitment to the production of programmes by women and from women's perspectives as a stated priority. The NFB has set women's film-making as one of three organizational priorities for 1990-93 along with the environment and race relations.

Against the backdrop of the 1987 establishment of the NFB's Employment Equity Programme it is significant to note that the NFB projects with women producers received 33% of the total production budget allocations in 1987-88. In 1988-89 they increased to 39% and in 1989-90, 41%. Projects with women directors increased from 32% of production allocations in 1987-88 to 42% in 1989-90.

The NFB endorses the principle that "women must hold parity in decision making positions in order to establish policies, assign priorities, allocate resources and make decisions about such matters as the form, content and distribution of productions" by, for and about women.

Monitoring is the second key element operating in the NFB's success and en-

ures a measurement of the system's progress. The NFB Employment Equity Office is reporting most of the data regarding occupational distribution, average income levels, participation rates and budget allocations to women's productions.³

The above commitments have indeed resulted in greater portrayal equity in NFB films. Females were represented in overall numbers relative to the 1986 census data.

However, the NFB is not without negative stereotyping and "in 11% of productions with female characters the females were portrayed in either subservient or inferior positions or as lacking self-esteem or self-confidence."⁴

While current projections anticipate that the NFB, as a whole, will achieve its stated goal for parity by 1996, it is expected that certain occupational categories will lag behind. According to the Employment Equity Programme Activity Report November 1988 - April 1990, within all occupational groups the average annual salary of men exceeds the average annual salary of women except in the Office Staff category where the average annual salary of women exceeds that of men by \$310.00. It should be noted that the number of women in this category is 195 to 18 men. It should be further noted that of the 18 occupational groups and sub categories with the Board, Office Staff is the second lowest paid category, with the highest number of women represented.

The enforcement element of success in corporate social change rests with tying measurable results to managers' performance reviews.

Studio D - The Equity Leader

It is clear that Studio D is the Equity Leader of the National Film Board of Canada. Established in 1974, it was the first publicly-funded feminist production unit in the world. In 1980, Studio D launched the Federal Women's Film Programme⁵ and in 1986, *Regard des femmes*⁶ was created.

A major step forward for race and gender equity, *New Initiatives in Film* was developed by Studio D in 1990 to provide film-making opportunities for First Nations women and women of colour.

A guiding influence behind the creation of the Employment Equity Pro-

Training is the aspect of equity that truly underpins change.

gramme and the Women's Market Forum, Studio D has instigated and actively supported a number of Film Board studies and research papers that make clear the need to expand and create opportunities for women.

If the equity programmes and measures undertaken by Studio D were taken out of the overall statistics of the NFB, the statistics would drop dramatically. Studio D props up the organizational stats.

The Popularity of Women's Films

Women's films are the most rented and the most purchased products of the National Film Board, in the English and French Programmes. In the fiscal year 1990-91, nine of the eleven most frequently borrowed English language films were produced by, for and about women on subjects of vital interest to women.

In the same fiscal year, four of the top ten selling films and videos were women's films. *Goddess Remembered*, a Studio D production directed by Donna Read and produced by Margaret Pettigrew; *No Way! Not Me*, an Ontario Centre film directed by Ariadne Ochrymowych and produced by Silva Basmajian; *To A Safer Place*, a Studio D production directed by Beverley Shaffer and produced by Gerry Rogers; *Apprendre ... Ou A Lasser* from the French Programme and directed by Diane Beaudry, and *The Company of Strangers*, from Studio B—the Feature Studio production directed by Cynthia Scott, are just a few examples of the most popular films.

Women's films have also received numerous prestigious awards for the National Film Board and for Canadians. In 1982 Terri Nash's film, *If You Love This Planet*, received an Academy Award in the Short Documentary category, in 1983 Cynthia Scott's *Flamenco At 5:15* won an Oscar in the Documentary Short Subject Category and more recently, in 1988, *Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief*, directed by

Carol Geddes won the Bronze Apple Award at the National Educational Film & Video Festival in Oakland, California. In 1991 JINETTE PELLERIN'S *L'ame Soeur* won the Prix d'excellence/Realisatrice at the Atlantic Film Festival. *Playing For Keeps*, directed by Lyn Wright received a Blue Ribbon at the American Film and Video Festival. In 1992 *Strings*, an animated short directed by Wendy Tilley has been nominated for an Academy Award.

NFB women's productions have been the first to examine social issues that were previously taboo, such as Bonnie Sherr Klein's 1981 landmark film, *Not A Love Story*, about pornography, and Beverley Shaffer's *To A Safer Place*, about incest, and *Loved Honoured And Bruised*, a film about wife assault directed by Gail Singer.

So How Do Women Fare at the NFB Compared to the Private Sector?

Toronto Women in Film and Television (TWIFT) has produced two reports on women in the industry: "A Statistical Profile of Women in the Film and Television Industry"—a 200-page study done in 1990, and "Changing Focus," a statistical analysis published in 1991.

There are disturbing figures highlighted in the report. For example: "Telefilm Canada (the Crown Corporation that invests \$100 million annually in the private sector film and television production) figures reveal that in 1987-88, women producers received only 9 percent of funds."

In the same period, women producers at the NFB received 33% of the total budget allocation and have increased this amount to 41% in 1990.

"In private-sector production, where most of the films and videos are made, women make up just over a quarter of the labour force. And this labour force is highly segregated, with most women doing traditional jobs near the bottom of the hierarchy. Women dominate in certain

so-called pink-collar ghettos; of 51 percent of the jobs in the private sector, women hold between 70 and 93 percent of the jobs in six categories: production secretary/bookkeeper, script supervisor/continuity, art department trainee, wardrobe, makeup artist and hair stylist."⁷

Training

While equity, to be effective, must be a mesh of conditions, understandings and commitments present and operating at the same time, *training* is the aspect of equity that truly underpins change.

In 1986 the International Youth Year Training Programme (IYY) provided six months of full time paid training for 26 women aged 17 to 25. The intensive training included all aspects of film production—camera, sound and image editing, directing, art direction distribution and promotion. Several films were produced, including *Thin Dreams* and *Children of War*. This programme included Aboriginal, Black, Asian, English- and French-speaking women. Following their training in the IYY Programme these women have become well established within the film industry.

Since 1987, 300 women have received short term hands-on training in production related jobs. In addition, long term apprenticeship training varying in length from 1 to 2 years has provided on-the-job training for women in technical positions such as lighting, sound editing, set carpentry, engineering and projecting.

The Employment Equity Program Activity Report (November 1988-April 1990) states: "For the fiscal year 1988-89, \$120,000 was spent under the institutional training programme, of which 53% was allocated to training women."

Summary

The National Film Board is not unlike other workplaces where women are try-

ing to effect change, to make their mark personally and professionally, to achieve their entitlement and access to the opportunity that has seemed so much a matter of male privilege. The strength and inspiration for change at the NFB has grown from the efforts of the women at the Board and from a gradual evolution of consciousness.

While all women at the NFB have a greater struggle ahead, especially in the face of backlash, more effort needs to take place within NFB management to make way for the creative expression and participation of women of colour, First Nations women, Inuit women and women with disabilities.

The continuous staff at the Film Board as of March 31, 1991 was 681: 3.7% (25) are visible minority, 1.3% (9) are disabled persons, and 3% (2) are indigenous people.

Yet within the film and television industry the NFB is an equity leader.

Landmarks in the NFB's Progress Towards Employment Equity

1978 Studio D is created. Kathleen Shannon, first Executive Producer of Studio D seeks training programmes for women at all levels of film production.

1978 *Women At the National Film Board: An Equal Opportunity Study*—a document including 38 recommendations. Clair Brassard, Terri Nash, Micheline St-Arnaud, Marie-Pierre Tremblay.

1978 The NFB establishes the Equal Opportunities Programme.

1980 The Federal Women's Film Programme is launched by Studio D.

1985 Women are specifically acknowledged in the NFB's Five-Year Plan submitted to the Minister of Communications.

1986 Bill C-62 is enacted, guaranteeing employment equity in Canada and establishing the study and implementation methodology for the special programmes.

1986 *Regard des femmes*, the women's documentary film production unit of the NFB's French programme is established.

1986 *Equality and Access: A New Social Contract* is written by Bonnie Dia-

mond and Francine Fournier.

1987 The NFB's Employment Equity Branch is launched under the direct authority of the Government Film Commissioner. A director is appointed and the first action plan submitted.

1987 The Women's Forum, a regional team of marketing representatives within the English Programme is established with a mandate to maximize the creative use of films relevant to women.

1988 *Employment Equity Activity Report 1987-88*.

1990 *Employment Equity Programme Activity Report, November 1988-April 1990*.

1990 New Initiatives in Film is established by Studio D.

1992 Studio I (Indigenous Peoples production studio) is established in Edmonton, Alberta.

Representation of Women in Ten Occupational Groups at NFB (1987-1990)

Year	Employees	Women
1987	726	339 or 47%
1990	692	346 or 50%

Executive category increase from 21% to 29%; Intermediate increase from 21% to 31%.

Filmmakers constant at 33% (51 women:102 men).

- Filmmakers—6 groups:
 1. Producers increase from 30% to 32%.
 2. Directors increase from 33% to 39%.
 3. Cinematographers steady at 13% (2).
 4. Editors (sound/image) steady at 47%.
 5. Assistant to production steady at 18% (assistant director, editor).
 6. Animators, Illustrators steady at 31% (other filmmaking occupations).
- Scientific and Professional 58% (librarians, nurses, engineers).
- Technicians increase from 15% to 23%.
- Supervision and Coordination increase from 26% to 47%.
- Office Staff constant at 92%.
- General Services decrease from 19% to 15% (storekeepers, messengers).

Conclusion

Aretha Franklin has a song, "Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves," and it seems this has been the case at the NFB. From the initial efforts of the women at the Board to approach systemic discrimination and invisibility by calling for, and working to establish institutional programmes, headway has been made advancing the organization toward its own corporate equity goals. This effort makes the NFB an industry leader in equity programming.

¹ The NFB was established in 1939 with a mandate to present Canada to Canadians and the rest of the world.

² The Format programme, used by the NFB to track and recall data on its entire film and video collection, is currently being coded to supply statistics on the gender of principals in film produced by women since the Board's beginning in 1993. Until the exact number of NFB films produced and directed by women can be established through a Format search, these figures must be considered unverified.

³ The NFB hires annually between 3,000 and 5,000 short term free-lance employees. At this time there are no figures on the distribution nor the amount of money received by gender.

⁴ NFB brief to CRTC 1990, Lyndsay Green.

⁵ The Federal Women's Programme collaborates with 13 federal departments and agencies to produce films on diverse subjects of concern to Canadian women.

⁶ Women's documentary unit of NFB French Programme.

⁷ *Changing Focus*.

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