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# Editorial

*Marion Colby and Shelagh Wilkinson*

Working in the area of Affirmative Action is one of the most frustrating and compromising of all feminist enterprises. In the first place, Affirmative Action is considered the responsibility of top management; therefore the affirmative action officer or women's advisor attempting to implement affirmative action must report to a President or Vice-President. 'Report to' is really synonymous with carrying out policies and procedures. If top management of business, government or educational institutions intended to have equal distribution of men and women at all levels of salary and responsibility, then their policies would reflect this: the work of the affirmative action officer would be to report on the rate of success and to identify barriers which presumably would be eliminated.

As those of us who have worked in this area are well aware, the real goal of most 'affirmative action' policies is to maintain the unequal status quo, and to justify the barriers as 'necessary' due to financial difficulties or as 'natural' due to cultural expectations. Top ranking bureaucrats – who run their businesses and organizations on statistics, percentages and flow charts – claim that the statistical compilations necessary to implement Affirmative Action are beyond their comprehension! Personnel officers – who draw up detailed job descriptions and complex salary grids – claim to be overwhelmed by the four simple criteria used to determine relative value of work: skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

The contents of this issue reflect the failure of most voluntary affirmative action programs. Will changing the terminology 'affirmative action' to 'employment equity', as Judge Abella recommended in her Royal Commission Report on *Equality in Employment*, result in equal opportunity for women? The persons currently working as affirmative action officers are women who are dependent on their salaries and already in a vulnerable garrison position. We requested articles from many of them but, not surprisingly, discovered that if facts are revealed, then jobs are in jeopardy.

The articles we have gathered together focus on the major employment sectors in which women are currently engaged in the struggle for affirmative action – including education, government and labour. They reflect the diversity of feminist viewpoints and strategies for change. And the voices sounded range from cautious optimism to disappointment and despair. We also have a few articles that deal with prerequisites or complements to affirmative action, such as universally accessible daycare, job sharing, enhanced self-image and math/science phobia.

Is affirmative action merely a "Catch 22?" In spite of some of the weaknesses and criticisms of the Abella Report, it is the best document produced to date in Canada. Until Canadian women have the power of redress which comes from legislated affirmative action, tokenism will remain.