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A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

Congratulations to David Shaw of the Los Angeles Times, winner of the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for Distinguished Criticism. As The Times' media critic, Shaw examines how the media covers the news, including the way the Los Angeles Times handles stories. His is a challenging assignment, but one of immense value to journalists and readers.

Shaw's work reflects Times Mirror's commitment to excellence, from our smallest newspaper—Greenwich Time, to the Los Angeles Times—the nation's largest metropolitan daily.

Journalistic awards are one measure of that excellence, readership is another. Total circulation for Times Mirror newspapers daily is now at 2,878,464, up 5.3%, and Sunday is at 3,589,371, up 9.9%, according to figures submitted to the ABC for the six-month period ended March 31, 1991.

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NEWSPAPER
SECOND CLASS P. O. ENTRY

She said. She said.

Newspapers must begin dealing with the gender-based concerns of men

By Jack Kammer

You can earn more money for your newspaper or syndicate by adopting an idea whose time surely has come: men—as in males—want more from their newspapers than sports, business and government.

They want to read about themselves as men, not as genderless front-page functionaries. They want to participate in the politics of gender. They want to balance the discourse that currently articulates only a female agenda on the pages of America's lifestyle sections.

If you follow this advice, you will reap an extra reward. American women will be drawn to your paper for challenging them, for not mouthing the women-are-right-men-are-wrong orthodoxy the way magazines, tv shows and self-help books do. Women are truly curious to know more about what men have to say.

Magazine publishers have already realized these facts. According to a fall 1990 Pacific News Service story by Walter Truett Anderson, "The publishing world is in a frenzy over how to come up with the men's magazine of the 1990s."

The book industry has realized it, too. Tom Grady, editorial director at Harper books in San Francisco, said that following the phenomenal success of Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Men*, "Publishers all over the country now are looking for men's books. I think we're going to see," Grady predicted, "a wave of books that don't attempt to make men feel guilty for being male, but which recognize the value of mature masculinity."

This new awareness of men is long overdue. Karen DeCrow, president of the National Organization for Women from 1974 until 1977, told me, "Discussion of men's issues is definitely going to increase in the 1990s. Any society that's been thinking for 20 years about women will have to think about men, too." *Playboy* contributing editor Asa Baber told Bob Sipchen of the *Los Angeles Times*, "For 25 years we've had very unbal-

anced reporting in the area of sexual politics and gender studies. . . In a marketing sense a vacuum was created."

No doubt you've seen the widely heralded reports claiming exactly the opposite of my proposition, claiming that men get too much coverage, that "coverage of women is inexcusably poor" and that "newspapers pretty much ignore 51% of the population—women."

These studies note that the people mentioned in news stories are usually male, but looking at men in their official capacities and claiming they have all the coverage is like looking at

• *USA Today* Index 1989: Men: 35. Women: 230.

• *New York Times* Quarterly Index, January-March 1990. Men: one, plus 14 "See Also" topics. Women: eight, plus 74 "See Also" headings.

You are skeptical, of course, that men really care about lifestyle issues.

Conducted for *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, the American Male Opinion Index 1990 asked men what matters to them; 84% said family; 65% said personal growth and fulfillment. These were the top two categories.

Men's Life magazine conducted a similar study. When asked what is

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women in supermarkets and complaining they have all the food. Just as dutiful mothers seldom indulge their own tastes in planning meals, men in the news are seldom acting as men for men. It is important to note also that many if not most of the newspaper stories these studies tallied are about the same small handful of men being counted over and over again.

Moreover, in one of these surveys, researcher Junetta Davis revealed just how inauspicious male appearances in newspapers can be. Her study confirmed her hypothesis that "men would appear in the news more often because of their occupations, in sports or as criminals." Although Davis did not call attention to the fact, her data showed that in all eight papers she surveyed, men more often than women were portrayed unfavorably.

To learn what newspaper stories are really about, rather than merely who is in them, let us count non-sports stories in newspaper indexes under "Men" and "Women" headings:

• Maryland Newspaper Index 1989. Men: eight articles. Women: 139 articles.

• *Washington Post* Index, January 1989. Men: 4. Women: 21.

most important in their lives, money, sex, fame, career or marriage, five out of eight American men picked marriage. No other choice even came close. If they had an extra hour in the day, 59% of married men would spend it with their families. Fifty-two per-cent of married men said they would turn down a promotion if it meant giving up time with their families.

What is the topic men most frequently talk about with other men? Sports? Politics? Business? No: women (23%). (It is true that *Men's Life* folded after one issue, but make no mistake about the cause: according to the *Los Angeles Times*, the start-up magazine sold 250,000 copies on newsstands and went under only because of a "lousy advertising climate and the financial woes of owner Rupert Murdoch.")

Since you are naturally interested in capturing young readers, consider the fact that while a predictable 66% of women aged 18 to 24 told *Time* magazine they would be interested in staying home with their children, the figure for men in the same age bracket—who have no tradition and little social support for choosing the option—was an astonishing 48%.

You might ask yourself with
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(Kammer is a free-lance writer on gender issues and is based in Baltimore.)

Shop talk

(Continued from page 120)

some alarm where these trends are reflected in your product.

Aside from the researchers I have mentioned, another person who argues that you are paying too much attention to men is Scripps Howard vice president Susan Miller. In attempting to convince you to devote more coverage to women, she notes that sports and business rank low with women readers.

"We shouldn't conclude, however," she says, "that women inherently have no interest in sports or business sections. Women simply are not particularly interested in the current content of these sections."

Following Miller's reasoning, we shouldn't conclude that men inherently have no interest in lifestyle. Men simply are not particularly interested in the current content of these sections. Most men do not relate well to reading that the male culture is one of "power, objectification and violence." Most men are weary of the female agenda which dominates what one newspaper executive called "Daughter of Women's Pages."

Soft news, the stuff of lifestyle sections, is often regarded as a lesser form of journalism because of its relaxed approach to objectivity, but it cannot be dismissed as having little significance in men's lives.

job discrimination, unwed fathers, the "feminization of poverty," criminal justice, date rape, sexual harassment and many, many others.

I hasten to make perfectly clear that the problem of imbalance is not feminism, but something broader and more ubiquitous in American culture, something I call feminacentrism, the unspoken assumption that what women say about certain topics—men, children, family, sex, relationships—is inherently, unarguably right.

The chief shortcoming of feminacentrism is that it tends to grant women absolute impunity in social problems and to shift blame and scrutiny entirely toward men. The phenomenon is not new. Shakespeare observed it in *As You Like It*: "O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool!"

Allowing women to avoid responsibility and self-examination is a sure-fire formula for failing to solve problems between the sexes and for exacerbating anger and resentment in men.

The other shortcoming of feminacentrism is its inability to see and deal with problems faced by men. For a story reporting that 3,416 men were murdered at work (82% of all at-work murders) *USA Today* on August 5, 1987 used this headline: "732 women were murdered on the job." Men who read this kind of coverage cannot avoid detecting a severe journalistic disinter-

women is barking up the wrong tree. Why continue to provide a section that is 90% for women if that's not the direction your paper is going?"

By publishing a lifestyle section that appeals to men, you would strike your competition at their weakest point, you would be offering men something they can get nowhere else, though books and magazines, as we have seen, are scrambling to satisfy the need.

You, however, much more than books and magazines, are ideally situated to succeed in the male lifestyle market. Books and magazines must make huge, long-range guesses about their coverage of men.

Bob Sipchen, writing in the *L.A. Times*, said that "Men's magazine editors find themselves in a sort of rugby scrum, with everyone kicking desperately to gain possession of the male reader."

If a magazine charts an errant course toward capturing men's interest, it will learn of its miscalculation only after months have passed and huge amounts of money have been spent. But you, at your newspaper or syndicate, have the advantage of almost instantaneous feedback, invaluable in revising and fine-tuning your approach on a virtually daily basis.

Here is how I would recommend that you begin.

- First, recognize that allowing men an equal or at least substantial voice in lifestyle will inevitably result in men wanting to say such shocking things as men are basically good and women aren't perfect. Incredibly but truly enough, this will upset a few women and their gallant male protectors. Following are a few ideas to help you handle such complaints.

Kay Haugaard has written for over 140 publications. "The only things I have trouble selling," she told me, "are things in which I'm the least bit critical of women. It seems as though you simply cannot say anything against women, which doesn't please me as a woman, because wasn't that what the women's movement was about, for women to be treated as equals, to be taken off our pedestals?"

Haugaard was moved to pen the following verse, the humor of which you might find handy in dissipating criticism of your new policy of gender balance.

In these days of the male chauvinist pig

His wrongs to the female figure real big

But men criticizing women would raise a royal row

Has the female of the species

The other shortcoming of feminacentrism is its inability to see and deal with problems faced by men.

Max Frankel, executive editor of the *New York Times*, said at a conference in October 1990 that what some call "soft news" *The New York Times* calls "the vitals of human affairs."

Betty Friedan, noted feminist author, said soft news is "the significant news as far as I'm concerned."

In fact, the relaxed approach to objectivity only endows soft news with more impact. Indeed, in the hands of a writer with a political agenda or an ideological axe to grind, there is precious little difference between soft news and propaganda.

We have seen its terrible effectiveness in denigrating men, advancing a feminine agenda and creating a serious imbalance in discussions of important social problems like domestic violence, child support, child custody, teenage pregnancy,

est in their situations. When you ask them to subscribe on the basis of your coverage of sports, business and politics, they look at your competition—magazines, radio, tv—and ask, "Why should I?"

Scripps Howard's Miller argues that you should copy your competition to appeal more to women readers. "Increase content designed to appeal to younger women. . . Top-ics of special appeal to younger women include. . . top-ics targeted by women's magazines. We should also cover what's in this month's magazines," but why devote precious resources to fighting your competition's strength?

As Nanette Wiser, marketing director/editorial manager for Copley News Service, told me, "Anyone who designs a lifestyle section just for

become a sacred sow?

America's third president also offered a few words which might help to stave off the accusation that you are anti-female, or chauvinist, or Neanderthal. You might observe, "As Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1820, 'Here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.' If the male viewpoint is wrong, those who find it erroneous may attempt to prove their case. If it is right, all of us—you and yours included—will benefit. I expect that none of this is either right or wrong. I only expect it to be interesting, thought-provoking and refreshing. It will induce more people to buy our product—the newspapers we publish and the features we syndicate."

- Second, make a long-term commitment to ascertain and give men the coverage they want. It will take a while for men to understand that you

beat, such as tv, movies or music, while women are free to cover whatever topic strikes their fancy, frequently a topic involving sexual politics.

- Fifth, as a cost-saving measure, tell your syndicate sales reps that you want to buy a columnist whose orientation is pro-male. If you are a syndicate, sign one or two of the men's activists who are currently writing clearly, compellingly and without compensation for various men's newsletters.

- Sixth, allow men to define themselves. In preparing this article I have been struck by how often that idea comes up in men's discussion of gender issues.

Sam Allis, as the token male in *Time's* Fall 1990 special issue on women, wrote, "What do men really want? To define themselves on their own terms, just as women began to do a couple of decades ago."

The result: You'll sell more papers and syndicated features and do a better job of serving the real needs of your communities.

really have developed an interest in their personal happiness. Encourage men to provide feedback by telephone; men write fewer letters than women do.

- Third, announce your new policy to your staff in positive terms. Explain it as one of inclusion, not exclusion. Make it clear that your intention is a) to capture a male readership, and b) to make your female audience not only remain but grow by providing women with new and refreshing male perspectives. After all, women have been complaining for years that "men don't talk."

- Fourth, consider the advice of David Powell, lifestyle editor of the *Indianapolis Star*. He told me, "The most important thing in getting balanced coverage is getting a balanced staff." He said that when he started in the *Star's* lifestyle section in 1984 he was the only male.

"I've hired two men since becoming editor," he said. "There are only 13 full-time staffers, four of whom are men. I rely on the staff to represent diverse interests and reflect what's going on in society."

Be aware that even if your newspaper bucks the national statistics that show significantly more women than men are staff writers in feature and lifestyle sections, a hidden imbalance may nevertheless exist. Frequently male staffers are assigned a narrow

Asa Baber in *Playboy*, January 1983, wrote "It is our responsibility to define ourselves instead of letting others do that."

In December 1978, Baber quoted a college professor who said, "... in redefining their role in society, women have begun to redefine, or misdefine, manhood ... I'm not sure women can be trusted in their redefining. They've never been men."

Best-selling author Robert Bly tells of a man who cried for joy when his son said, "I want you to understand one thing. I don't accept my mother's view of you any longer." Bly comments that women "can be judgmental about masculine traits that are merely different or unexpected."

- Seventh, be prepared to face criticism from women's groups who make more noise than their numbers warrant. You can justify your new policy by telling them what two noted feminists, Karen DeCrow and Betty Friedan, told me.

DeCrow, the former NOW president, said, "It is certainly not anti-feminist to discuss men's issues. Men have always had legitimate issues connected with parenting, the requirement to support families, and their role options which are much more limited than women's."

Friedan, the feminist trail blazer, said that current definitions of

news are "an iron mask that prevents a full understanding of men and do not allow for a full definition of masculinity. They produce an obsolete polarization of sex roles. They do not do justice to the identity of the human who happens to be male."

If women's protests are loud and organized enough, have your promotion department ready to capitalize on their criticism to generate interest, publicity and support.

- Eighth, promote your new lifestyle section in terms that will appeal to men. Definitely do not intimate that your coverage is about men learning to cry or "open up" or "share their feelings." Avoid references to "today's new man." Refer to concepts to which men have been trained to respond: fairness, justice, even-handedness, balance, equity. Refer also to the one need I believe American men in 1991 most desperately wish to have met. Let them know they are appreciated. If your lifestyle section is called "Lifestyle" or anything similar, change its name. Expecting men to respond to a features section called "Lifestyle" is like expecting women to be enthusiastic about a sports section called "Sweat."

- Ninth, have your promotions department let women know why they will enjoy and benefit from your new approach. Use these quotes from Robert Bly's best-seller:

"Conscious fighting is a great help in relationships between men and women."

"A good fight gets things clear, and I think women long to fight and be with men who know how to fight well."

Bly also quotes eminent psychiatrist Carl Jung as having said, "American marriages are the saddest in the whole world, because the man does all his fighting at the office."

Moreover, men have been beaten and berated into submission by intimidation, blaming and misinformation. However, men are not by nature submissive, and everyone wants to be appreciated. Men will therefore embrace, though cautiously at first, a newspaper which follows the principles of fairness, balance and equity to demonstrate the justice, need and value of defending and appreciating men, and eventually to require women to defend—in a spirit of love and social betterment—a few items in their own behavioral repertoire. Women, too, will find your honesty valuable and commendable.

The result: You'll sell more papers and syndicated features, and do a better job of serving the real needs of your communities.