

Perhaps the most successful result of the European Co-Production Association, which partners seven leading public broadcasters, has been a miniseries called *The Manageress*. It is about a woman thrown into the role of running a professional soccer team. Encountering hostility from the players at the outset, she eventually earns their respect and becomes just like any other boss. The theme of the program, produced by Sophie Balhatchet of UK company Zed, touched such a responsive chord with audiences around Europe that a second series of six episodes is in production. Unlikely as the story sounds, it may be a more plausible scenario in soccer than the television industry in many places.

"Women are more creative than men, more level-headed, more intuitive, less autocratic and far less egotistical," says Marialina Marcucci, president of European satellite service Super Channel, adding thoughtfully: "Not that one should generalize, of course."

Yet, there is a generalization regarding women in the tv business that is easy and fair to make: they usually don't get the jobs at the very top and, as in other industries, to make progress they have to be better than their male competitors. Marcucci herself is one of only a handful of women who actually hold number-one positions, and able as she is, it would be misleading to ignore the fact that her family happens to own the channel that she runs.

Margaret Gallagher has been conducting research on women in broadcasting in Europe for the European Commission since 1983. "The last ten years have seen very little change in employment patterns in the industry," she says flatly. "With all the other changes taking place in television, this decade has not been the most auspicious period for pushing ahead with equal opportunities."

When it comes to appointing women to high positions, there are enormous differences between countries, and

## Women At The Top Of A Man's World

It's tough to get there. But some make it, despite the odds



Harari: traditional discrimination is on the way out

between organizations within those countries. How the new terrestrial, satellite, and cable channels which have sprung up in Europe over the last couple of years compare with the old broadcasting institutions, will be revealed by an updated Euro-Commission employment study due to be published later this year.

The Commission's research to date has revealed that women tend to be concentrated in a comparatively narrow range of generally poorly paid jobs in the tv sector. The majority are employed in administration, often as secretaries and clerical assistants. At West Germany's ZDF, for example, the most recent statistics, show 72% of all women are working in administrative and clerical positions. In the European production sector, although there appears to be a relatively high proportion of women, most are employed in the lower levels of the production hierarchy (production assistants, floor managers, assistant producers). At the BBC, for instance, 57% are in these positions, compared to 18% of all men. In technical and engineering positions the number of women employed is negligible, amounting to only 3-4% at most.

In upper management positions, the statistics for women employed vary enormously according to the way in which 'top management' grades are classified. Gallagher's research shows that the vast majority of women in the top three management grades of television are still on the lower two rungs.

When the Euro-Commission began this project, says Clare Mulholland, deputy director of television for Britain's Independent Broadcasting Authority, "it was thought that television would be an interesting area to study because it was believed to be a progressive industry, and also a very influential one." The image of women portrayed on screen was thought to be adversely affected by the lack of women in key positions behind the screen. Mulholland, a member of the Euro-Commission steering committee on equal opportunities and also responsible for reporting on the panel's progress to the European Broadcasting Union, thinks the committee has been very influential in increasing awareness of the problems facing women in tv, although the employment figures produced every two years have revealed disappointing results.



Most people have a pet theory about why this inequality exists, and how and when, if ever, it is going to disappear. The issue is tied up with society, culture and politics. Women overwhelmingly confirm that basic chauvinism and prejudice are still disturbingly prevalent among male bosses and employees. The tv industry is not as liberal or progressive as many of those within it would like to think.

Simone Harari is one of an impressive list of French women who are exceptions to the rule – president and director-general of leading French producer-distributor Télé Images, and also of new joint venture FuturImages (with Group W of the U.S.). Like many successful women, she is reluctant to blame any of the difficulties or problems she has encountered in her career upon her sex. “That would be too easy,” she says.

Harari attributes the tendency of tv companies towards employing men in top management positions to “the industry’s traditional incestuous links with politics and big business”. She says: “Television is part of a historical cycle which has taken society through the agricultural, industrial and service industry phases into an era increasingly dominated by communications.” According to Harari, this phase, coupled with the expansion of the tv industry in terms of people employed, will stimulate a trend, already in progress, for employing more women in tv. Traditional discrimination in a non-competitive, ‘closed shop’ environment, she says, is on its way out.

### **Chauvinism and prejudice are still prevalent**



**Cotta: not hindered by being a woman**

Later this year, traditional discrimination and ways of countering it, will be the focus of the first EBU/Euro-Commission conference on women in broadcasting at the Zappion Congress Centre in Athens. In a few months, British industry women will launch a UK chapter of Women in Film, the American women’s association for professionals in the film and tv industries.

The chairman of WIF(UK) – “I don’t think chairperson or chairwoman sound right.” – is Lynda Myles, who was once senior vice-president, creative affairs (Europe) for Columbia Pictures, and is now commissioning editor for drama at BBC. She hopes that in addition to lobbying for better pay and conditions, the group will enable women to establish contacts with members of the parallel organization in the U.S. and also in Europe, where further chapters are being set up. As well as creating a wider forum for the discussion of issues, Myles hopes this will lead to professional collaboration – and co-productions.

The timing of these initiatives is crucial. Ten years ago, Myles says, the idea of establishing a “not-so-old girls network”, to counter the old boys, would have fallen flat. Now, there are a significant number of talented and experienced women tv and film professionals, interested in pooling their resources and uniting to advance the cause of women in the European tv industry. Although women are still overwhelmingly the minority, particularly in top

management positions, there are enough of them to present quite a formidable lobbying force.



**Myles: a not-so-old girls network**

Mulholland, who has been in the UK television industry for 25 years, does not feel she has been discriminated against at any point during her career, but says: “I have observed, in many areas, that jobs in

mid-management were not advertised, but were hand-picked, and this is how the pattern of employment in many companies has emerged. Men simply know more men and are more likely to choose someone they know, so the situation is self-perpetuating.” If more jobs in mid and top management were advertised and more women were encouraged to apply, the situation might change.

Yet not everyone accepts that there is a problem. The French representatives on the Euro-Commission steering committee, don’t think it’s necessary to have definite policy objectives to enable women to reach high positions. And well they might, for the French tv industry already has a proven track record for employing and promoting women in top management.

Michèle Cotta is head of news at TF-1 and from 1982-86 was head of the tv regulatory body that preceded the CSA. She feels she has been helped, rather than hindered, by her sex, because of the active encouragement given to French industry to employ increasing numbers of women over the years: French organizations are required by law to prepare an annual report showing employment, recruitment, training and salary levels of women and men. Cotta likes to think that France is ahead of other countries in this field, but also thinks the communications industry is a particularly “trendy” industry, and developments within it have taken place at a faster pace than in others.



Pascale Breugnot, creative director at TF-1, also feels that the opportunities for women in French television are plentiful, particularly in creative areas, production, direction and presentation. "Women tend to be more pragmatic than men and are perhaps better at adjusting to new situations, so the new tv environment presents excellent opportunities for them," she says. The key, she says, is not to try to imitate men, but to complement them: "I have always tried to be innovative and my role has always been totally different to that of men in the business."

Other women currently playing prominent roles in the French tv industry include Dominique Cantien, artistic director at TF-1; Christine Ockrent (current affairs), Anne Sinclair (news presenter and journalist) and Eve Ruggieri (director of programming) at Antenne 2; Dominique Alduy, head of FR3; and Catherine Tasca, deputy communications minister at the French ministry of culture.

Elsewhere in Europe the situation is much less happy. In Spain, Pilar Mirò, who held arguably the most important post attained by a woman in the European tv industry, resigned as head of RTVE following a scandal in which she was alleged to have used RTVE funds for personal clothes and jewellery. She has since disappeared from the Spanish tv scene and as yet no other women have risen to prominence in her wake.

In the UK, there are women in high places, such as Ann Harris, managing director of Telso International; Marga-

ret Matheson, ex-director of production at Zenith and now in a key policy job at Carlton Communications, and Vivien Wallace, head of international for Granada. But there has never been a woman in the top seat at BBC or any of the 17 ITV

companies, and the boards of these companies are still overwhelmingly male-dominated.

Elsewhere in Europe, the situation is similar, with only a few prominent women in the industry (like Ulrike Wolff, editor in chief of NDR in Germany and Ingrid Dahlberg, head of drama at SVT-1 in Sweden). There are notably more women at the head of departments like children's or educational programming, than there are in more 'weighty' areas like news and current affairs.

Elsewhere in the world, there are organizations with women in prominent positions. In Egypt, they have played an important role in the development of television and currently the heads of both state channels are women, Madiha

Kamal (first) and Sohair El Itriby (second). At the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, the general manager is Wong-Lee Fiook Tin.

At Hong Kong's Asia Tv the chief executive officer and director is Selina Chow.

Chow says that in Hong Kong, the tv industry has always been particularly open. "Women have had pretty smooth sailing and have been fairly prominent in the development of Hong Kong tv over the last 20 years. Because the industry is relatively young we haven't

had to live with a lot of old established prejudices. Hong Kong is also basically a very pragmatic society and women who entered the industry at its birth in

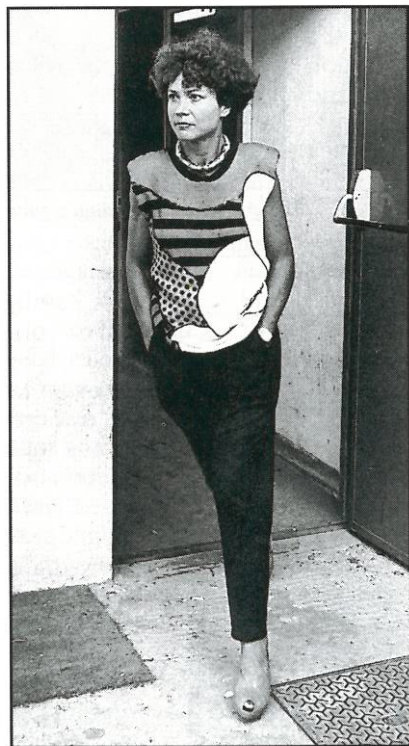
the 1960s as rookies, have been rewarded for their commitment and endeavors."

Nevertheless, Chow recalls encountering a fair amount of resistance during her first appointment to a senior position –

as general manager in charge of the tv operation at Run Run Shaw's Television Broadcasts (TVB). "I felt quite acutely that there was an obstruction to my being promoted any further, despite my contributions to the company," she says. "In those days there were no women on the board of TVB, and the chairman, a British-educated Chinese, was an overt chauvinist." Chow remembers a discussion she had with him about politics in 1977, during which he exclaimed, "A woman prime minister for the UK? Over my dead body!"

Unable to cope with such attitudes, Chow left the company and became general manager of the now defunct Commercial Television (CTV), then launched her own production company. Since taking over as chief executive of ATV, she has taken the channel from strength to strength, and has managed to combine a successful career with motherhood. She admits life is not always easy for working mothers, but says that in business, "a woman has a psychological advantage. She can always go back home and be a housewife!"

When it comes to equal opportunities for women, the U.S. tv industry is generally far more advanced than that of most other countries. Pat Mastandrea left the Fox Network in the U.S., where she was vice president in charge of sales and marketing, to take over as joint managing director of Murdoch's UK satellite venture Sky Television early last year. She says, "I think it's easier in



**Breugnot: creative opportunities**



**Chow: psychological advantage**

**The key is not to try to imitate men**



the U.S. because women have made much more progress. The problem in Europe is there are so few women in middle-management. You don't just take someone from five rungs down the promotion ladder and make them boss - there's a normal process to go through. In the U.S., women are further along in that process, but it will happen here eventually."

In the U.S., legislation has played an important part in encouraging women into the industry. The Equal Employment Opportunities Act of 1972 provided a number of women, often referred to as "the class of '72", with openings. Among them was Marcy Carsey,

co-owner and executive producer of *The Cosby Show*, Lucie Salhan, president of domestic tv for Paramount, and Suzanne de Passe, president of Motown Productions.



**Mulholland: self-perpetuating situation**

Other important women in the U.S. include Bridgette Potter, senior vice president, original programming at HBO; Kay Koplovitz, president of the USA cable network; Esther Shapiro, formerly Aaron Spelling's vice president for corporate and creative affairs and, with her husband, owner and creator of *Dynasty*, and Ruth Otte, president and chief operating officer of the Discovery Channel.

NBC correspondent Mary Alice Williams is currently on maternity leave, and when she returns to the network, her responsibilities will be 'redefined'. Before joining NBC she was vice president of Turner Broadcasting, and said the newer companies like Turner and Fox, "have a much better track record than the others. Not because the older companies are more sexist, but because the labor pool from which executives were picked was mostly male for so long." When CNN started in 1980, she said: "We had the values and the labor force of 1980, and we needed smart, aggressive people who were willing to take the risk to come here and make this sucker work. We don't care about your architecture



**Marcucci: women are less egotistical**

or your plumbing. We just want to know if you can do your job."

And women in the tv industry worldwide are proving that they can do their jobs, if not better, then as well as any man. Positive action schemes, training programs and organizations like WIF on both a national and international level have increased awareness of discrimination and inequality, and that awareness is gradually filtering through to employment patterns. It may be some time before a woman becomes head of a U.S. network, or Rai, or BBC. But it is no longer unimaginable. **TBI**

*With additional reporting by Janet Tomkinson*

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