

These recent books on journalism focus, respectively, on gender issues and on subjectivity, with varying degrees of success. Gertrude Robinson’s book, Gender, Journalism and Equity, amalgamates the last 30 years of her research as a mass communication scholar at McGill University in Montréal. Those decades have taught Robinson that, in her words, “gender matters” in the field of journalism. As a social scientist, she sees journalism as a social system that “is itself defined by gender preconceptions.” She is particularly interested in the systemic reasons why, after thirty years of feminism, female journalists are still treated as a minority in newsrooms, why most reporters of both sexes consider women’s issues tangential, and why many academics writing about journalism and journalists continue to ignore gender in their analyses. She does not limit her overview to Canada and United States but looks at several European studies as well.

Her chapters cover gender theory as it applies to journalism, an overview of the status of female journalists in Canadian newspapers and television, an international overview of gender in newsrooms, the impact of the “glass ceiling,” equal opportunity legislation in North America and Europe, equity rules pertaining to broadcasting, and the impact of globalization on gender in the public sphere. She arrives at a number of conclusions, both firm and tentative. They are interconnected. She writes that the gender roles reporters take on are not fixed, but malleable, depending on the circumstances; few of the women would consider themselves activists in that they consciously bring their feminism to their roles as reporters. Gender assumptions still determine how well female journalists are treated and paid once they are hired. It is too early to tell if women in senior management will make a difference as equity legislation has helped North American women find newsroom jobs but not necessarily get promoted. Newsroom cultures regarding gender bias in staffing and programming still vary widely, but women have made more inroads in broadcasting than they have in newspaper publishing in Canada. We have yet to see the real effects of globalization on the status of women in the news, but they may lose out to new technologies, media convergence, and deregulation.

This book holds a wealth of useful information and has a lot to offer journalism scholars and practitioners. One of its strengths is that it incorporates the best gender theory and surveys of the journalism workforce by leading academics in the field, especially in the United States and Europe. Robinson cites them liberally, as well she should, to show how scholarly analyses of women in the journalism workforce and portrayals of women and their issues have progressed, or not. Many of those studies are relatively recent and allow her to draw together a well-constructed argument that liberal assumptions about the progress of women in journalism cannot be taken for granted. In that respect, this study provides a good overview of feminist scholarship in the field.

The weaker chapters are the ones that focus on Canada, mainly because they are outdated and repeat Robinson’s early to mid-1990s studies on women journalists in Canadian newspapers and television. Much of this work was carried out in partnership with Armande Saint-Jean of Laval University. Variations on these studies, which were pub-
lished in several different journals at the time, pointed out that, despite the influx of women into journalism schools since about 1970, the proportion of women in newspapers 25 years later was still 28%, and in television 37%. I have always felt that women in radio news and current affairs should have been included in these studies, especially because of their relative progress in public as opposed to private broadcasting.

One of the unfortunate gaps in this book is the failure to update those statistics to include not just radio, but the impact on gender equity of the more recent business changes in the newspaper publishing and broadcasting worlds; for example, the conservative Hollinger takeover of the liberal Southam dynasty in 1996 and the subsequent rush to convergence that spawned CanWest Global. Admittedly, it is much more difficult now to gather statistical evidence because the same equity studies are not being carried out in the industry as assiduously as they were in the early 1980s and early 1990s. In tandem, there should be more substantial analysis of the ways in which news reporters have portrayed and discussed women in this country in the last decade. Given the ongoing debate about whether or not one’s gender has an impact on how one covers the news, this kind of updated Canadian content would have been a welcome addition.

The other flaw in this book is careless editing. Mistakes have been made that simply should have been caught. For example, the British Trade Commissioner kidnapped by the FLQ in 1970 was not Marc Cross, but James Cross. The head of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which reported that same year, was not a judge, Rosalie Abella, but a broadcast journalist, Florence Bird, who also headed a study of gender equity at the CBC a few years later. Such carelessness robs this book of some of its academic authority, which is a shame.

Veteran journalist Linda Kay’s *The Reading List* is a different kind of book altogether. Kay, now an assistant professor of journalism at Concordia in Montréal, has made a coming-of-age experience in her younger life as a cub reporter, the vehicle for a discussion on journalism ethics, objectivity, and truth. Essentially, it is an introspective reminiscence on her youthful, brief, working friendship with the American journalist and writer, Norman Algren, and its professional and personal impact on her. This book represents a segment of her Master’s thesis, rewritten in popular style, but it does not really work, either as a scholarly investigation into journalistic subjectivity or as a memoir.

In the early 1970s, Kay took a job on a Paterson, New Jersey newspaper just when her generation of young women journalists were fighting to be accepted in general news. She was ambitious and wanted to make her mark, but she also had a lot to learn. Algren, over forty years her senior, was the author of *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *A Walk on the Wild Side*, and other classics. In 1974, she orchestrated a meeting with the writer, who had just moved into town to research a book about the conviction of Rubin “Hurricane” Carter on a triple murder charge eight years earlier. Kay admired Algren’s books and wanted him to be her mentor. As it turned out, the ambitious young journalist and the seasoned veteran both cooperated and competed in their investigative journalism on the Carter case. Their prison visits to the Black boxer and Algren’s apparent sympathy with him are very much part of the ethical discussion. Algren wrote about the case in *The Devil’s Stocking*.

In her book, Kay raises some pertinent, ageless questions about making friends with news sources and other journalists and then using them emotionally, or being used, for a good story. That is useful, especially for journalism educators who want to talk to their students about personal involvement with one’s interview subjects and one’s colleagues on the job. The reading list that Algren gave her as a guide to good writing, on the other hand,
is never really discussed, despite the title of this book. Did it not contain any clues as to what he expected of himself and of her?

This memoir veers off course in other ways, especially when personal as opposed to professional introspection takes over. Kay makes much of the fact that Algren had once been a long-time lover of the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, but never told her about it, or other personal details of his life. She found his reticence disappointing, given that she thought they were friends. She discovered later that Beauvoir had actually written about her relationship with Algren quite openly in *Force of Circumstance*, her memoirs of 1965, much to his displeasure. Maybe he thought Kay already knew, or he just did not want to talk about it. The fact that he was upset by these kiss-and-tell revelations had little to do with her, anyway, and absolutely nothing to do with Rubin Carter. It seems that in her pursuit of questions regarding narrative truth, she has made much more of her friendship with Algren than he ever did himself.

Perhaps the real lesson to be learned here is that three famous names and one brief chapter in a young reporter’s life cannot sustain even a short, book-length treatise on ethics, or a memoir, for that matter. Given Kay’s subsequent years of experience as a general news and sports reporter in San Diego, Chicago, and Montréal, I expect she has a lot more interesting material to offer her readers, and it was disappointing not to see more of it here. Her editors should have encouraged Kay to confine the Algren episode to one solid section and devote the rest of the book to fleshing out other ethical insights and lessons from her life as a reporter. That would be a real service, especially now when the limits of journalistic integrity are increasingly strained.

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