



Outsiders Still: Why Women Journalists Love—and Leave—their Newspaper Careers. By Vivian Smith. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2015. 254 pp. ISBN 9781442627956.

As I took up Vivian Smith's book, *Outsiders Still: Why Women Journalists Love—and Leave—their Newspaper Careers*, news broke that the newsroom to which I once belonged, *The Edmonton Journal*, was hit by a new round of layoffs. The first publicly-reported dismissals were those of the paper's female editor-in-chief and female managing editor.¹ Altogether, thirty-five people were dismissed as operations at the *Journal* and *Edmonton Sun* were folded together (CBC News, 2016), and across the Postmedia Network's chain, fifty-five other jobs were cut to scale back costs (Bradshaw, 2016). Days later, the *Guelph Mercury*—first launched in southern Ontario in 1867 and last owned by Metroland Media Group Ltd., part of the TorStar Corporation—published its last issue and closed its doors, a response to declining advertising revenues (*Guelph Mercury*, 2016).

These are the stories of Canadian newspapers struggling to survive. In *Outsiders Still*, however, Smith—a journalist, media consultant, and university sessional instructor—works to redirect her reader's attention from cutbacks to questions about what enables women to have or prevents women from sustained participation in Canada's newsrooms. Her focus is not on the death of the newspaper, but on the personal stories of women journalists working at Victoria's *Times Colonist*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Hamilton Spectator*, and Halifax's *Chronicle Herald* newsrooms. Yet her redirection is ultimately productive on both counts—Smith concludes with recommendations for newsroom leaders to take “smarter risk[s]” (p. 212) to survive. These include reorganizing work flows to reduce costs in a more cooperative fashion than through layoffs and facility closures (p. 212). Her findings ground advocacy for rethinking how newsrooms work now, and support the need to invest in developing diversity and leadership for the future.

Refreshing as this is, the book also vacillates, at times, between working as a love letter to, or autopsy of, traditional newspaper careers without fully investigating emerging alternatives. Smith acknowledges, “The days of the well-paid, union-rate, print-only journalism job are all but over” (p. 6), however the potential to climb a newsroom's ranks—from cub reporter to, perhaps, the editorial/management team—is still positioned as an ideal trajectory. There are differences in pay and perceived job safety between permanent, contract, and freelance positions, and Smith's focus on women's underrepresentation in the higher reaches of newsroom hierarchies shines light on whose pay might generally be lesser and whose job permanence might more likely be endangered. In North America, women freelancers outnumber men and they are typically paid less than their male counterparts (McKercher, 2014, p. 222), meanwhile unpaid work and internships are “crowding out paid entry-level work” (McKercher, 2014, p. 224). However, not discussing what a journalism career might look like going forward—how are women journalists experiencing “new” or online

journalism organizations and start-up ventures—seems an oversight as more people lose, or have never had, permanent paid positions at mainstream newspapers. The scope of this study limits the ability to grapple with such questions though. Most of the nearly thirty interviewees were employed at the five newspapers listed above at the time of Smith's research.² Perceptions of power and inequality are based upon their experiences and the stories they told of their own working lives. This explains why one participant, for example, described freelance work not only as potentially scary, but akin to “being an Avon lady part-time” (p. 112). Questions about the working experiences of women in new media platforms may more appropriately be the premise for another study altogether.

The potential limits of personal narratives are also evident in the profile of the participants: most are white, heterosexual, and middle class. Smith chose participants from similarly-sized dailies owned by different companies, spread across the country, and employing a range of women in their editorial departments. Though Smith writes, early on, that she is “not ‘doing’ intersectionality” (p. 16), this does not mean race, sexuality, class, or ability are completely ignored. However, the stories shared tend to centre on an over-arching heteronormative view of the challenges women face in newsrooms. For example, how motherhood and childcare can disrupt a woman's newspaper career is discussed throughout the book. This reflects the lived experiences of many of the interview participants (and Smith herself), but a reader can be left wanting to know more about how women journalists push their newsrooms to navigate other kinds of challenges, too.

Overall, Smith's work is most successful in identifying the motivations and challenges of individual journalists, and in finding patterns that illustrate similarities and differences of viewpoints between generations. If gender is Smith's primary focus, age is her second; three of the book's seven chapters are structured around age groups—“senior women print journalists,” “mid-career participants,” and the “youngest journalists.” These chapters include brief autobiographies of each participant, typically subtitled with a key quote defining her story as she told it. The chapter, “Of Darkness, Dragons, and Black Holes,” allows for differences between age groups to be better explored, as Smith shares the results of newsroom-based focus group interviews where participants can be seen to learn from each other and engage in new ideas about power structures within their workplaces.

Throughout, Smith includes lengthy excerpts from interview transcripts, affording the reader an opportunity to feel as though they, too, are part of the conversation. For the reader preoccupied with the future of journalism—whether from the vantage point of the academy or the newsroom—or the reader more generally interested in the ever-evolving experiences of women in Canada's workplaces, *Outsiders Still* is a pleasure to read and a solid example for further studies.

Notes

1. Former *Journal* editor-in-chief Margo Goodhand offered an insightful look at her own last day, and the state of affairs at Postmedia, in *The Walrus* weeks later.

2. Not all of Smith's interviewees worked at one of the five newsrooms discussed in her book. In her penultimate chapter, dealing with stories of women who had left their newsrooms since participating

in the study, Smith includes the story of a former *Toronto Star* journalist now teaching at the University of King's College in Halifax.

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