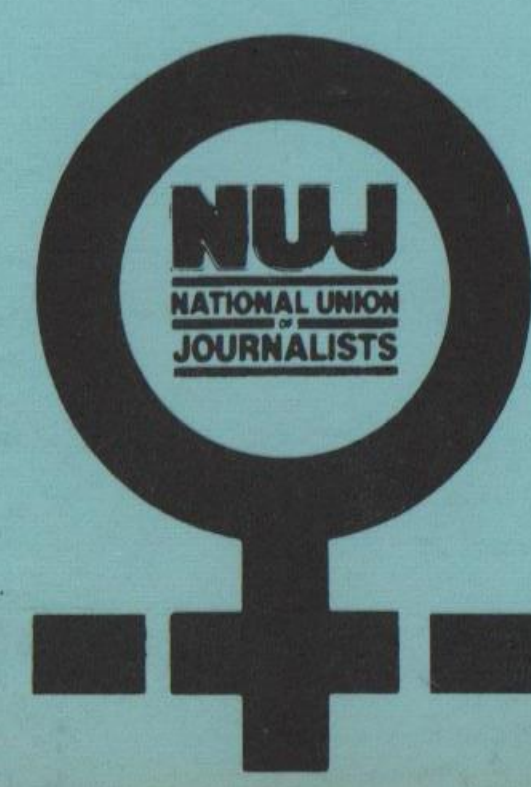


# IMAGES of WOMEN

guidelines for promoting equality  
through journalism



**Equality Council**



Cartoons by Jo Nesbitt

Equality Council, National Union of Journalists,  
Acorn House, 314-320 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.  
Tel.: 01-278 7916.

First published 1975.  
Second edition 1977.  
Revised edition 1984.

Printed by Shadowdean Ltd. (TU)  
Mitcham, Surrey.  
Tel.: 01-640 6021.

## Introduction

Journalists have played a major part in perpetuating the image of women as second class citizens. The aim of this booklet is to encourage journalists to take responsibility for changing this.

All members of the National Union of Journalists are expected to carry out its policy in the course of their work. The policy is simple – to promote equal rights for women and men. The union campaigns against all inequalities in accordance with Clause 10 of its Code of Conduct. This says:

**Journalists shall only mention a person's race, colour, creed, illegitimacy, marital status (or lack of it), gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant. A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination on any of the above-mentioned grounds.**

The image of women now projected by the media breeds a notion that they are incapable and unworthy of achieving equality. So it is up to journalists to ensure that women are portrayed as they really are – in all aspects of their complex and varied lives.

Our object is to show how everyday words and phrases help to form and perpetuate a discriminatory, patronising attitude towards women.

Most of these words and phrases could be avoided, without spoiling the quality of journalism. We have suggested alternatives which may be useful – although, of course, they will not work in every context. We are not laying down rules. We simply want journalists to think twice before they write, to examine the implications of what they are saying and to consider expressing themselves in other ways in order to promote equality.

These guidelines were originally adapted from a draft code of practice which was drawn up for a conference on women workers in the communications industry in January 1975. They are primarily aimed at newspaper and magazine journalists but they are relevant to all sectors of the media.

We do not regard them as definitive. We hope they can be developed and improved. The examples included in this third edition are totally new, but their message remains the same. Please send us suggestions, additional material, examples of discrimination and any other material you consider relevant.

NUJ Equality Council  
March 1984



# Images of women

Many journalists have a habit of describing women in terms of their marital status and physical appearance, in contexts where they wouldn't dream of describing men in similar terms.

## Examples

Wealthy spinster Kathleen Calhaem, the evil plotter who ordered the murder of a love rival, was jailed for life yesterday.

A jury at Winchester Crown Court took just over four hours to agree unanimously that the bespectacled retired businesswomen hired a hitman to kill 46-year-old Shirley Rendel. (*Daily Mirror*)

**HAIRDO WIFE SO CUT UP!** – Pretty mum Nina Waldock tore her hair out after going to a unisex salon with her husband Malcolm. For she was charged nearly twice as much as he was for a similar haircut. (*The Sun*)

The two advantages of camping near the French are first, they cook all the time and you'll never go hungry, and secondly, if there's a teenage daughter about, she will strip down to the bottom half of her bikini and provide a useful distraction from the creepy crawlies. (*Mail on Sunday*)

In my house we are battening down the hatches and lashing the women to the mast (well you've got to put them somewhere) as the new telly season bears down upon us. (*Oxford Times*)

Check relevance by the double standards test:

Father-of-two Neil Kinnock  
Teacher's husband wins *Mastermind*

If the description isn't relevant, why use it? Women are people in their own right. They do not need to be defined in terms of their relationship to a man, nor in terms of the way they appear to men. How often does the Press refer to a man as a "divorcee", "widower" or "married to a typist" (or engineer/office cleaner etc)?

Women reach adulthood at the same time as men, but it is surprising how often journalists give the impression that they are still immature, by calling them "girls". And why is it necessary to quote a woman's age where a man's would be irrelevant in a similar context?

## Examples

When she (Peter Jay's former lover and family nanny) moved out three months ago, the poet Stephen Spender's 31-year-old daughter Lizzie moved in. She is a former close friend of the Shah of Iran's last Ambassador to London, Parviz Radji. (*Daily Telegraph*)

**MARRIED TO AN ACTOR** – A funny and fascinating tale of what it is like to be married to an actor, kept members of Hendon and District Federation of Townswomen's Guilds enthralled last week.

The occasion was the Federation's Spring Event at Hartley Hall, Mill Hill, and the guest speaker was Mrs Diana Sinden, wife of Donald, who also belongs to the acting profession. (*Hendon Times*)

In our picture are: Lorraine Southby, 19, Bert Tranter, branch manager, Alison Isles, 20, Julia Carter, 17, Gordon Smith, chief cashier, Gerry Mannion, 17, and sitting is Belinda Parsons, 37. (*Ealing Gazette*)



It would help if more journalists used the prefix Ms in place of Mrs or Miss, particularly if that is how a woman refers to herself. When a story refers to a married couple, both partners should be presented as equals.

## Examples

John Smith and his wife Jane  
A farmer and his wife

## Alternatives

John and Jane Smith  
(or Jane and John Smith)  
A farming couple (where appropriate)

Please avoid the gratuitous display of women's bodies. The use of "cheesecake" to sell newspapers is exploitative and perpetuates the myth that women's chief purpose in life is to gratify men. How often does a news photographer ask a man to pull his trousers tighter for the picture?

Let us put an end to this sort of generalisation:

## Examples

The ladies, as well as senior citizens and the handicapped, will find the Subaru 4WD automatic with optional power steering a joy to handle with ease and a joy to drive with safety. And now, the fair sex, too, can dare to venture off the beaten track with their Subaru. (*Subaru brochure*)



BBC chiefs claim that top stars such as Steve Davis and Alex "Hurricane" Higgins are not glamorous enough for the viewers.

Nick Hunter, head of Northern TV sport, said: "If Steve Davis and company bending over a snooker table can turn on women viewers, imagine what attractive women players can do for men." (*Daily Mirror*)

Presumably the only Foreign Office secretary who could do shorthand was either painting her nails, visiting the hairdresser or chatting on the phone to her Mum. . . . (Ann Leslie on the Grenada invasion on Radio 4's *Stop the Week*)

## The invisible woman

Women constitute over half the world's population, yet journalists often present their material in a way which suggests that women scarcely exist. They habitually under-represent them as workers, creative and decisive social beings, providers as well as dependants, and members of victimised social groups (such as oppressed races, homosexuals and religious minorities).

### Examples

NEWSMEN AT BBC ORDERED TO LEAVE – The dispute led to a blackout of Thursday's 9pm news after a walkout by journalists, including the presenter, Sue Lawley. (*The Times*)

SECRETARY GENERAL IS RETIRING – 'Time for a younger man' Hugh Jones tells Steel. (*Liberal News*)

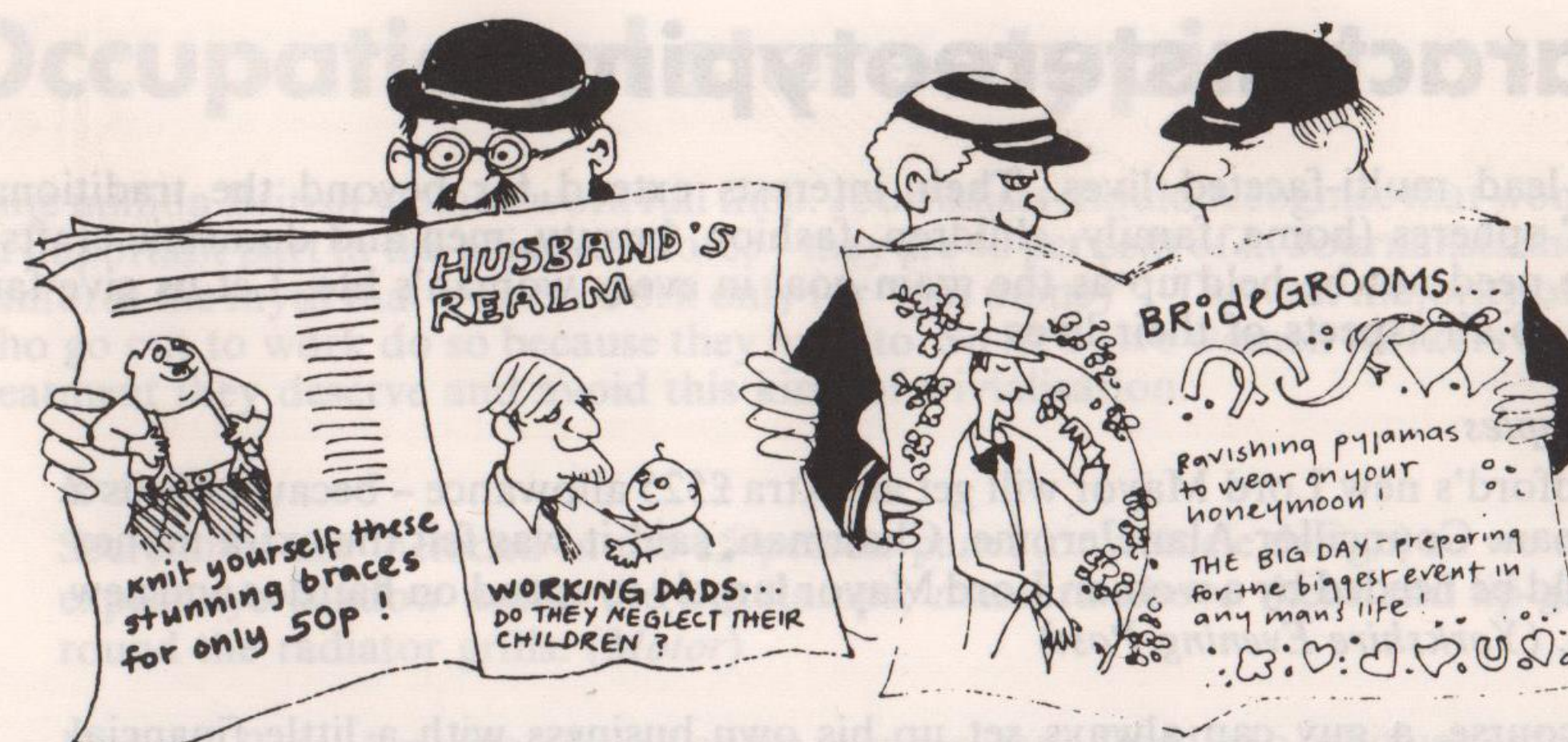
The words "man", "men", "he", "his" and "him" are often used to describe human beings of either sex. This can't be dismissed as an insignificant literary convention. Inevitably it gives an impression that women are absent, silent or simply less important than men.

### Examples

And so from now onwards the pressure is back on the GP. He is within his right to refuse smear tests unless a woman is over 35 or has had three pregnancies. (*Daily Mirror*)

Marilynn Nicholson's work has been featured in the Museum previously when she was Craftsman of the Month. (*Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery Newsletter*)

Ms Carrie Pester, a spokesman for the (Greenham) women. . . . (*The Guardian*)



When referring to either or both sexes, but not specifically to the male sex, try to avoid the words "man" or "men". There are plenty of alternatives such as "person", "people", "human beings", "men and women".

Avoiding "he", "his" and "him" can be more difficult, since the repeated use of "he or she", "his or hers", "him or her" can be clumsy. But "they", "their", "them" and "s/he" often can be used instead.

### Example

The motorist . . . he

### Alternatives

Motorists . . . they

Other words of masculine gender can often be avoided where they do not apply specifically to men.

### Examples

the man in the street  
chairman  
foreman  
mankind  
manmade  
spokesman

### Alternatives

ordinary people, men and women in the street  
chairwoman, chairperson, who chairs . . .  
supervisor  
people, humanity  
synthetic, artificial, manufactured  
official, officer, representative, the police said . . .

It is remarkable how often journalists assume that all their readers are men.

### Examples

And if watching an absorbing game of cricket only to be disturbed by the frequent queries on the spectacle by your good lady then here's your chance.

If she doesn't fancy reading up on the large cricket section then the 432-page hardbacked volume can be utilised as a handy deterrent for any future verbal disturbances. (*Newcastle Journal*)

Leave your car behind. Your wife can put your car to better use. She will be able to use it for shopping and taking the children to school. (*BR leaflet*)



## Character stereotyping

Women lead multi-faceted lives. Their interests extend far beyond the traditional "female" spheres (home, family, children, fashion, beauty, men and domestic crafts). Marriage need not be held up as the main goal in every woman's life. Let us give fair coverage to all aspects of their lives.

### Examples

Bradford's new Lord Mayor will get an extra £525 allowance – because she is a woman. Councillor Alan Jerome, Chairman, said it was felt the extra money would be needed by a woman Lord Mayor largely to spend on hairdos and new hats. (*Yorkshire Evening Post*)

Of course, a guy can always set up his own business with a little financial backing from Daddy. Or, better still, go into Daddy's business – there's nothing like starting at the top!

When it comes to careers, girls are in another category altogether. A job is merely regarded as a time-filler between leaving school and getting married. After all, as long as a girl knows how to make a decent chicken soup, she doesn't have to worry. (*Jewish Chronicle*)

I'll bet the vast majority of women, including *Honey* readers, do not have dreams about nuclear war, let alone recurring ones, and while they undoubtedly dream about being chased by all kinds of men and Things, I don't believe that "fascists" ever come into it. (Paul Johnson, *The Spectator*)

No aspect of the human character is the monopoly of one sex. Women and men are equally capable of being gentle, aggressive, strong, weak, stupid, bright, brave and cowardly. They deserve to be represented as whole human beings, not as "masculine" and "feminine" stereotypes. Please let us avoid clichéd references to "dumb blondes", "nagging wives", "the fair sex", "the weaker sex" or "the little woman" which only perpetuates the stereotypes.

### Examples

It's what every woman should be – soft, smooth, white, delicious, seductive and with a trace of the devil. What can it be? *Fish soup*. No ordinary fish soup. (*Daily Mirror* women's page)

There have been a large number of sightings, a high proportion of which have been by responsible, steady sorts of guys, like airline pilots and ship's captains, and not hysterical wives and small schoolboys trying to get their names in the papers. (Lord Hill-Norton, Admiral of the Fleet, on UFOs in the *Manchester Evening News*)

... Her music is not, though, as unassuming as this may suggest. Certainly there is nothing feminine about it, knows where it is going: it is lucid, candid and to the point. (*Radio Times*)

## Occupational stereotyping

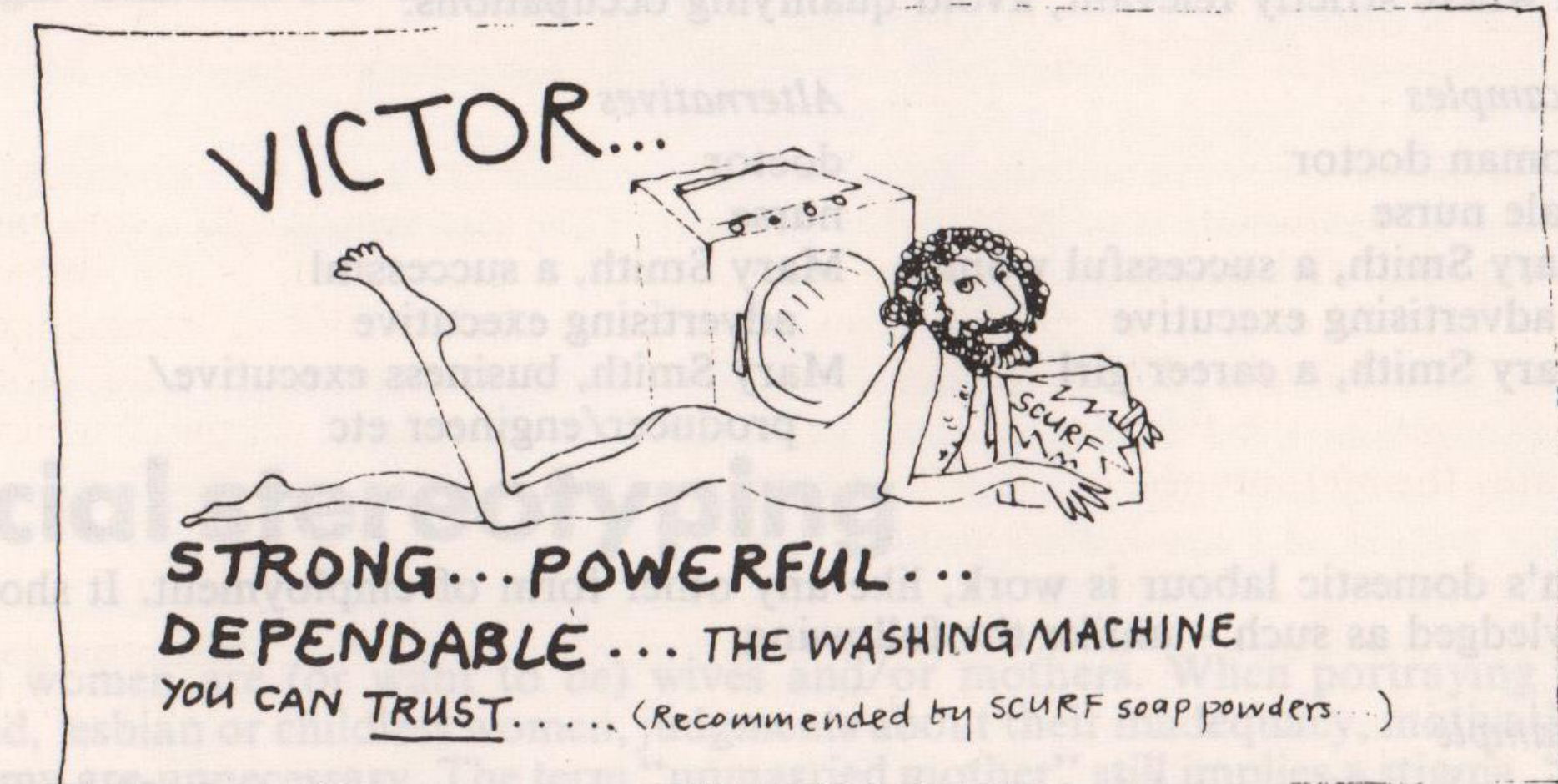
Nine million British women work full time. Journalists should recognise that women play an important part in the paid workforce – they are 40 per cent of it. Journalists should not reinforce the myth that women work only for "pin money". The vast majority of women who go out to work do so because they have to. So let's give women workers the serious treatment they deserve and avoid this kind of trivialisation.

### Examples

Secretaries are included in the 15-person panel (on vehicle design) so we may expect eye shadow under the headlamps, mascara above them and lip-gloss round the radiator grills. (*Motor*)

Dr Sally Ride, America's first woman in space, thundered into orbit yesterday... without her lipstick. ... Among her personal kit 32-year-old Sally took skin moisturiser, deodorant, brush and comb, toothbrush and toothpaste but, said NASA officials, there was definitely no lipstick or perfume. (*Sunday Express*)

Their comedy (Morecambe and Wise) has gone as flat as a Paris model. And although there's the occasional neat touch, if that's all you want you'd be better off harassing the office secretary. (*Sunday Mail*)



A HANDBAG AT THE COALFACE – American Joy Huitt took her handbag underground yesterday to a meeting with Yorkshire pitmen.

The mother-of-six, a miner back in Utah, spent two hours at the coalface of Sharlston Colliery, near Wakefield, as part of a fact-finding world tour for America's 3,700 pitwomen. Joyce, 48, said: "The men were very welcoming."

British law still forbids female miners. Sharlston manager Mr Tommy Mottram, a former Army major, said: "It is one of the few places where men can get away from women." (*Daily Mail*)



The division of jobs into "men's work" and "women's work" is artificial and unfair. Jobs can usually be described in a way which does not exclude one sex.

#### Examples

railwaymen  
policemen  
businessmen  
salesmen

#### Alternatives

railworkers  
police officers  
business executives  
sales representatives

Where women have entered traditional "male" spheres of work it helps to avoid portraying them as rare exceptions that prove the rule.

#### Examples

In the micro industry 99.9 per cent of customers are men, largely because the product is beyond the cerebral capacity of the weaker sex and also because it doesn't come in pretty colours. (*Computing Dealer*)

The only way we could place the same kind of reliance on a women as on a man and thus take the chance is if a women came to us and said she had been sterilised; that would prove she was really serious about her career. (*IBM Personnel Management Magazine*)

Except where strictly relevant, avoid qualifying occupations.

#### Examples

woman doctor  
male nurse  
Mary Smith, a successful woman  
advertising executive  
Mary Smith, a career girl

#### Alternatives

doctor  
nurse  
Mary Smith, a successful  
advertising executive  
Mary Smith, business executive/  
producer/engineer etc

Women's domestic labour is work, like any other form of employment. It should be acknowledged as such – unlike the following:

#### Example

Britain's jobless total last month took a surprise upward turn of 120,300 to 3,199,678 – representing one in seven of the working population. (*Daily Mail*)

Married women are not necessarily "housewives". Many also work outside the home. Remember, too, that not all consumers are "housewives". Men and women, single and married, go shopping.

#### Example

Another food price shock for the housewife. (*Daily Star*)

Journalists often assume that women (particularly married women) are less able than men to achieve success in areas of work outside the home.

#### Example

Everybody connected with the investment business has been astonished by the upsurge, during the last ten years, of popular interest in and knowledge about investments. Housewives now listen to radio programmes discussing the relative merits of national savings certificates and building society schemes. They send in intelligent and complicated queries about currency fund and index-linked pension plans. (Brian Walden in *Reading Evening Post*)

Women who combine marriage with paid employment or other activities should not be congratulated in patronising terms, regarded as oddities, or denigrated for neglecting their domestic duties. How many interviewers would ask a man how he managed to combine marriage with a job?

#### Example

My fervent wish is that we shall find in 1984 that the Russians are prepared to negotiate realistically on mutual disarmament so that it will be possible to stop the deployment of cruise missiles and send the Greenham Common women home to their husbands and children. (Robert McCrindle, MP, in *Epping and Ongar Guardian and Gazette*)

## Social stereotyping

Not all women are (or want to be) wives and/or mothers. When portraying single, divorced, lesbian or childless women, judgments about their inadequacy, motivations or autonomy are unnecessary. The term "unmarried mother" still implies a stigma, "single parent" does not. Marriage and the nuclear family do not constitute the only viable domestic arrangement. Those who choose to live otherwise should not be portrayed as misfits.

#### Example

A pink and mauve bus designed to help lesbians and other women with social problems was on the road yesterday. The £55,000 mobile advice centre, aimed at reaching women who cannot get to the town hall, was launched by Ken Livingstone's girl friend Kate Allen, who is "chair" of Camden Council's Women's Committee, in North London. (*Daily Mail*)



Try not to reinforce the notion that women should be totally responsible for housework and children. Avoid denigrating, ridiculing or unduly commiserating with men who look after children or carry out household duties.

#### Example

The housewife likes to be taken out for dinner primarily because she can dress up a little, and someone else prepares the food, serves it and then clears up afterwards. Her husband likes to eat out because it is more difficult for his wife to have a row with him in public, he has a wider choice of drinks than at home and, anyway, it's a change from his wife's cooking. (*Caterer and Hotelkeeper*)

## Women as activists

Journalists should recognise that women participate in politics and trade unions. The terms "trade unionist" and "politicians" do not refer solely to men and should not be used as if they do. The activities of women trade unionists and politicians deserve full and serious coverage.

#### Examples

**OFFICE GIRL MERLE JOINS BUSES BOARD** – Premier Margaret Thatcher last night stepped into the storm over Red Ken Livingstone's decision to give a top job to a young black beauty. . . .

Controversial Mr Livingstone has appointed Left-wing Councillor Merle Amory to the board of London Transport. . . .

But Merle's new colleagues, led by board chairman Dr Keith Bright, said the 25-year-old secretary was ill-suited to the post. They also believe she will be Mr Livingstone's political stooge. (*The Sun*)

Using every means she can to get around her constituents is Social Democratic Party candidate for Nuneaton and Bedworth Ruth Levitt. . . .

Said Ruth, easily the prettiest of the election choices: "I want to get to see as many people as I can before polling day."

The flashing ankles of the lady who has been a pillar of strength to Mr David Owen in the House of Commons are attracting much attention. (*Nuneaton and Bedworth Extra*)

Trade union journals and press officers have a special responsibility in this respect. They should not trivialise women members. One trade union journal discontinued a regular feature "Prettiest Recruit of the Month". NUJ members, embarrassed by the sexist cartoon Varoomshka in their own journal *The Journalist*, successfully campaigned to remove it.

Female relatives of male trade unionists are not inevitably opposed to industrial action, although this is often implied in the Press. The alleged conflict between the "housewife" and the male striker has been exaggerated and exploited by the media. It should also move away from presenting women trade unionists as either shop-floor sex symbols or battleaxes.

The ideas and activities of the women's movement extend into important areas of political, social and psychological life. Please give fair and adequate coverage to the movement. For years it has been ignored, trivialised and denigrated.

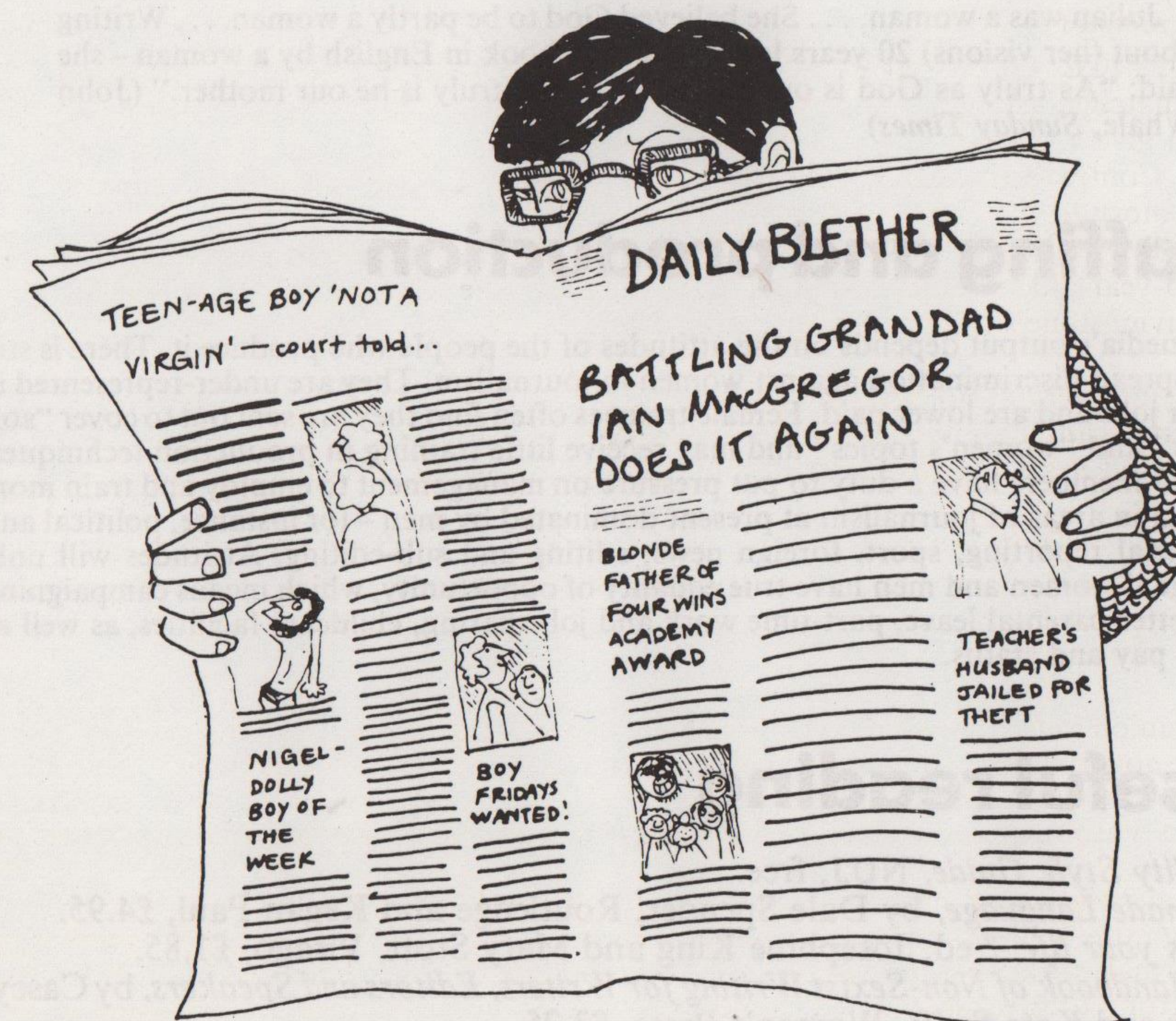
#### Examples

Once fat was a feminist issue but now it's Mum who's the hot topic across lentil stews in women's collectives up and down the land. (*Mail on Sunday*)

**GREENHAM HUSBAND'S SUICIDE** – A founder member of the Greenham Common peace camp denied yesterday that her husband's suicide had anything to do with her campaigning.

Dr Ann Delahunty, aged 30, was speaking after an inquest was told that her husband, Dr Robert Williams, aged 36, stabbed himself four times in the heart with a kitchen knife.

"Bob was very unhappy about a lot of things, but there was certainly no friction over my peace campaigning," Dr Delahunty said. (*The Times*)





# Refuting myths and stereotypes

Journalists have a responsibility to publicise information which refutes myths about women and corrects popular stereotypes.

## Examples

Camden's Women's Bus was firmly on the road this week after a successful public launch on Saturday – despite a hostile reception from some national newspapers.

And on Tuesday evening the borough council's women's committee agreed unanimously to report *The Daily Telegraph* to the Commission for Racial Equality for their "racist" leader on the subject of the bus. (*Camden New Journal*)

**JULIAN – A PATRON SAINT OF EQUALITY** – English cathedrals are resounding with a new name. At Durham last weekend, York yesterday and St Paul's today . . . there have been or are to be observances celebrating Julian of Norwich. . . .

Julian was a woman. . . . She believed God to be partly a woman. . . . Writing about (her visions) 20 years later – the first book in English by a woman – she said: "As truly as God is our father, so just as truly is he our mother." (John Whale, *Sunday Times*)

## Staffing and production

The media's output depends on the attitudes of the people who produce it. There is still widespread discrimination against women in journalism. They are under-represented in senior jobs and are lower paid. Female trainees often find they are sent out to cover "soft issues" and "women's topics" and may receive little training in production techniques.

NUJ members have a duty to put pressure on management to employ and train more women in areas of journalism at present dominated by men – for instance, political and industrial reporting, sport, foreign news, editing and sub-editing. Attitudes will only change if women and men have true equality of opportunity, which means campaigning for better parental leave, part-time work and job-sharing, childcare facilities, as well as equal pay and status.

## Useful reading

*Equality Style Guide*, NUJ, free.

*Manmade Language*, by Dale Spender, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £4.95.

*Is this your life ?* ed. Josephine King and Mary Stott, Virago, £1.85.

*The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing for Writers, Editors and Speakers*, by Casey Miller and Kate Swift, Women's Press, £3.25.