

## Research in Brief

# “You Talkin’ to Me?” The Implied Reader in Canadian Business Magazine

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### ABSTRACT

**Background** This Research in Brief asks whether the implied reader of Canadian Business is gendered and exclusive of women, as claimed in the November 2013 Letters to the Editor of that magazine.

**Analysis** To answer this question, the author examined article subjects, illustrative photographs, and textual signals of the implied reader in all the style and fashion articles (43 in total) published in the magazine over five years, 2010 to 2014.

**Conclusion and implications** The analysis confirms the letter writers’ complaint that women readers are largely excluded from the implied audience of these articles.

**Keywords** Magazines; Business media; Gender; Narratology; Implied reader

### RÉSUMÉ

**Contexte** Cette Recherche en bref cherche à voir si le lecteur implicite de Canadian Business est mâle à l’exclusion des femmes, tel que le prétend une lettre à l’éditeur parue dans ce magazine en novembre 2013.

**Analyse** Pour s’adresser à cette question, l’auteure a examiné des sujets d’articles, des photos représentatives et des interpellations du lecteur implicite pour tous les articles de style et de mode (43 en tout) publiés dans le magazine pendant cinq ans (de 2010 à 2014).

**Conclusion et implications** L’analyse confirme la plainte dans la lettre à l’éditeur selon laquelle les lectrices ne comptent pas parmi les lecteurs implicites de ces articles.

**Mots clés** Magazines; Médias d’affaires; Genre; Narratologie; Lecteur implicite

### Introduction

In November 2013, *Canadian Business* magazine published three “Letters to the Editor” in which the writers took the publication to task for a recent piece on fashionable business attire. The October 2013 article to which the readers objected was titled “Million-

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Dollar Suits” (2013) and tagged “Look Like a Boss.” It featured four male CEOs of Vancouver start-ups. One reader commented, “I’m tired of being excluded” (Reimer-Epp, 2013, p. 6). A second observed that the story “left the impression that in 2013 to look like the boss, you have to be a man” (Greenhill, 2013, p. 6), and the third noted, “You completely failed to address one half of the Canadian population” (Storey, 2013, p. 6). This study looked to see whether the charge that the magazine excluded women readers applies more widely than to only this single article.

From the time of its inception in the late 1920s as an internal publication of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, *Canadian Business* has always had senior managers and executives as its target audience. Compared to 1928, however, in 2013 that target demographic included many more women. According to Statistics Canada (2016), in 2013 women held 30 percent of the positions in Senior Management Occupations and 54 percent of those in Professional Occupations in Business and Finance. Although these statistics indicate the significant progress made over the past decades, the continuing underrepresentation of women in the most senior leadership roles and on boards in Canada is also notable (Canadian Board Diversity Council, 2016). Groups that advocate for gender employment equity, such as the Council of Women World Leaders, point to the essential role of business culture, including the popular media, in realizing the goal of equal opportunities in the workplace (Ernst & Young, 2009). High-circulating magazines such as *Canadian Business* are important sites for the production and distribution of what Stuart Hall (2013) calls “cultural meanings,” including “mark[ing] out and maintain[ing] identity within and difference between groups” (p. xix). While previous studies have shown that women are underrepresented in business magazines as feature story and cover subjects, interviewees, and sources (Grandy, 2013, 2014; McShane, 1995; Shuler, 2003), this research shifts the focus to the implied reader of one of Canada’s most widely read business periodicals—and the gendered implications found therein.

### **Implied reader**

The concept of the “implied reader” is well known in literary criticism as a key component of narratology, the analysis of narrative (Bal, 2009; Fludernik, 2009). Unlike the actual reader/audience, the implied reader is a hypothetical construct, embedded in the text and existing on the same diegetic level as the “implied author,” a term coined by Wayne Booth (1983) in his 1961 study *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. When reading magazine articles, we can differentiate between the actual and implied reader, just as we can between the actual and the implied writer, with the latter being the persona the former adopts to speak through in an article, column, blog, or on social media. While fictional works contain an additional embedded layer occupied by the narrator and narratee, and narratologists warn against conflating the narratee with the implied reader, in non-fiction magazine articles these two diegetic levels are effectively collapsed into one—so the text’s implied writer is the narrator/speaker, and the implied reader the narratee/addressee.

The implied reader is also known as the implied audience, the reader-in-the-text, the mock reader, the construed reader, et cetera. Critics variously describe the implied reader as an image created by the author (Booth, 1983), the “role assigned” to the

reader (Ong, 1975, p. 17), or “the person the reader becomes when he or she follows all the directions in the text” (Strohm, 1983, p. 140). Readers constantly receive and interpret information about both implied writers and their implied readers. The presumed knowledge, political slant, cultural background, attitudes, aspirations, education, class, age, gender, et cetera of the implied audience can be either explicitly stated or “signalled,” to use narratologist Gerald Prince’s (1980) terminology. Prince identified seven signals of the narratee, including pronoun usage, questions, negation, and comparisons and analogies that assume familiarity. Business Communication scholars Thralls, Blyler, and Ewald (1988) describe the implied reader as a “mental construct” that the reader is “invited to enter, even though the characteristics embodied in that role may not fit perfectly his or her attitudes and reactions” (p. 47). However, Walker Gibson (1950), in an important early article titled “Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers,” states that if readers cannot assume “that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume ... we throw the book away” (p. 265). Or sometimes, as seen in the letters to the editor cited above, we lodge a complaint.

### Literature review

Although narratology began and is primarily associated with literary studies, critics have also examined the implied reader in non-fiction works. Del-Teso-Carvotto’s (2006) lexical analysis of American women’s magazines finds that their implied readers are revealed not only through advertisements and topics covered, but also through vocabulary frequency. She observes that the reader of traditional women’s magazines is “constructed in the text as in need of help,” thus “reinforcing patriarchal ideologies” (p. 2012). Daphne Jameson’s (2000) narratological analysis of shareholder reports uncovers in these seemingly dry texts a plethora of interesting relationships between the implied writer and implied reader, such as servant-master and teacher-student dynamics. Jameson also notes that the real reader might react negatively if the signalled characteristics of the implied reader (her example is an “older, conservative investor trying to preserve capital”) are at odds with the former’s sense of themselves, such as a “younger, aggressive trader willing to take risks to maximize returns” (p. 29).

Helen Ewald (1988) employed Prince’s signals of the narratee to analyze the implied reader in persuasive writing, such as the use of first-person pronouns to create a sense of agreement and intimacy between the implied writer and implied reader, as distinct from they/them/those who hold opposing views. Geoff Thompson (2012), likewise, analyzed the use of pronouns along with other linguistic elements to construe the “reader-in-the-text” of British newspaper editorials. He concluded that when a real reader’s characteristics match those of the “implied reader,” the former’s “world view” is affirmed (p. 97). Roei Davidson (2012) also noted pronoun usage in his analysis of implied audiences in American personal finance magazines, as seen in the editorials in each publication’s launch issue. Beyond their common characterization as self-reliant and resourceful, which Davidson connected with growing neoliberalism in the mid-twentieth century, he found the implied audiences in these publications to be “general, non-expert, and non-gender specific” (p. 12).

Like Thompson’s, Davidson’s, and del-Teso-Carvotto’s research, this study of the implied reader in Canadian Business magazine answers feminist literary critic Susan

Lanser's (1986) call for an expansion of narratology beyond the structuralist, systematizing description of texts into interpretive, political, or sociocultural analyses of narrative elements. As demonstrated by David Abrahamson in his book *Magazine-Made America* (1996), magazines play the dual roles of "both reflecting and shaping the social actualities of their time" (p. 3). Through the implied reader's projection of an ideal reader (Booth, 1983; Fludernik, 2009; Park, 1982), the business community that *Canadian Business* magazine serves is not only addressed but defined. Further, as a mediator between actual writers and readers (Prince, 1980), the implied reader can be seen as inviting certain readers to feel themselves legitimate members of a community—and barring others from doing so.

### Methods and findings

This study asks whether the implied reader of *Canadian Business* is gendered and exclusive of women, as claimed in the November 2013 Letters to the Editor of that magazine. To answer this question, the study examined article subjects, illustrative photographs, and textual signals of the implied reader in all the style and fashion articles (43 in total) published in the magazine over five years, 2010 to 2014. The articles all appeared in the advice and how-to section of the magazine. Style/fashion articles were chosen both because an article of that type prompted the "Letters to the Editor" and also because the implied reader is often prominently signalled in advice articles. Furthermore, because fashion remains a major signifier for expressing and regulating gender (Barnard, 2014; Crane, 2000), any gendering of the implied reader should be most evident in such articles.

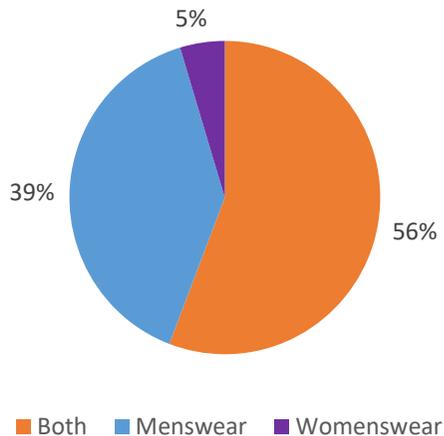
### Article subjects

The general subject of the 43 articles was first categorized as menswear, womenswear, or ostensibly both (see Figure 1). Two articles, both about women's shoes, fell in the womenswear category; one of these was a half-column (79 words), leaving just one full-page article on style for businesswomen. Seventeen pieces (11 full-page articles) were about menswear, including topics such as double-breasted suits, tuxedos, galoshes, men's hats, and men's dress shoes. The remaining 24 pieces (17 full-page articles) concerned subjects that would be ostensibly of interest to both men and women, such as high-status watches, monograms, summer-weight fabrics, Casual Fridays, golf clothes, et cetera.

### Illustrative photographs

Womenswear articles: Both of the articles on womenswear are accompanied by photographs of women's dress shoes. Menswear articles: The

Figure 1. Style/fashion article subjects in *Canadian Business*, 2010–2014



17 menswear stories are illustrated, as expected, by photographs of men and/or the menswear items under discussion.

### Articles of interest to both men and women

Of the 24 stories covering subjects relevant to both men and women, only five include women and/or women's (or unisex) items in the illustrations: specifically, articles about golf clothes, running gear, power accessories, summer fashion, and fabrics. The remaining 19 articles are accompanied by pictures that feature only men and/or menswear items, even though the story subjects are ostensibly ungendered. For example, a piece on spring break travel clothes is illustrated by a photograph of a suitcase full of men's clothing and accessories; a story about dressing like a dealmaker at a film festival shows menswear and men's accessories. Articles on Casual Friday, mending clothes, cold-weather style, and other ostensibly gender-neutral subjects are all likewise accompanied by photographs of men or menswear items. In total, as seen in Figure 2, women and/or womenswear appear in accompanying photographs for only seven of the 43 style articles from 2010 to 2014, in comparison with the 41 stories illustrated by pictures of men and/or menswear (five articles include both).

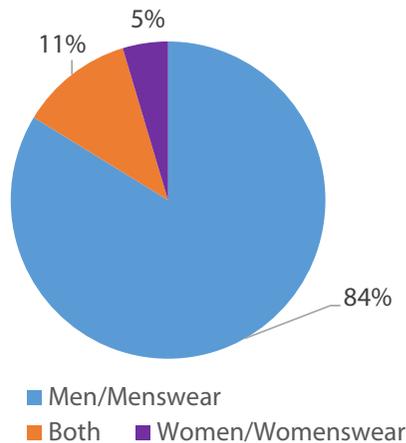
### Implied reader

Adapting the work of narratologist Gerald Prince (1980), the study next examined four textual signals to see whether the implied reader of an article was gendered: pronoun usage, specifically person-pronouns "you," "we," "they," and demonstrative pronouns such as "this," "these," et cetera; sentence modes, specifically interrogative and imperative; comparisons, analogies, and allusions; explicit references to gender, such as terms including man/woman, menswear/womenswear, gentleman, manly, masculine/feminine, et cetera.

### Womenswear articles

As expected, the implied reader in both womenswear articles is signalled as female. This is made clear in the second-person pronoun ("you") found in the title of the shorter piece: "How to Find a Pair of Heels You Can Wear All Day Long" (2010). Although the third-person pronoun is used in the full-page story ("if women are unsure, they can always ..."), the second-person pronoun in the sentence that follows signals an implied reader personally familiar with women's footwear options: "You know, just in case" (Warzecha, 2013, p. 87). This longer article, titled "The Rise of the Power Flat," also includes allusions to famous women (a French First Lady, a British

**Figure 2. Content of photographs illustrating style/fashion articles in *Canadian Business*, 2010–2014**



“it girl,” and a female musician) as examples of the growing popularity of flat shoes. In a more explicit reference to gender, this article also delves into the question of the symbolism of high heels. Quoted source Elizabeth Semmelhack, Bata Shoe Museum curator, challenges the notion that high heels convey “power in the boardroom” and posits instead that “the power being discussed is a woman’s sex appeal, not how much they’re changing the world” (Warzecha, 2013, p. 87).

### Menswear articles

As seen in the womenswear items and as expected, the 17 articles on menswear all signal a male implied reader. The use of “you” is ubiquitous; for example, “these hats will serve you well” (Young, 2010, p. 99) and “shipped to your doorstep” (Fawcett, 2013, p. 80). The second-person pronoun is often used in combination with the imperative mode, such as “you should try wearing one” (Leszcz, 2013, March 18, p. 59), and occasionally with the interrogative mode: “Can’t repeat the past? Of course you can” (“Get Your Gatsby On,” 2013, p. 95). Elsewhere, the implied gender of “you” is made more explicit in phrases such as “unless you’re a man who” (Leszcz, 2012, October 1, p. 84) and “whether you’re a man who” (Tay, 2012, p. 72).

The first-person plural pronoun is also used in two of these pieces to signal a gender-based intimacy between the implied writer and implied reader. A short piece on galoshes ends with the phrase “because in time, we all tend to inherit dad’s good sense” (“Splashy Attire,” 2012, p. 63). The complaint letters were published in the November 25, 2013, issue. That same issue included a full-page article that concludes, “In a powerful way, a tux says, We’re all in this together. And we look damn handsome” (Leszcz, 2013, p. 67). The gender of this story’s implied reader is further indicated in a quotation from a source, who describes tuxedos as “sober backdrops for the dramatic colour and flashes of flesh of *the women*” (p. 67, emphasis added).

Explicitly gendered phrases in the menswear stories abound, including, in a 2010 article on hats, “A man’s measure was long gauged by how he covered his crown” (Young, 2010, p. 99), and in a 2013 piece on the same subject: “[H]istorically, men wore hats to fit in; today, men wear hats to stand out” (Leszcz, 2013, March 18, p. 59). A piece on J. Crew describes the appeal of the retailer to “guys who like clothes, but not shopping” (Leszcz, 2012, October 29, p. 86). Of the 17 pieces, three, all published in 2013, are labelled with a MEN’S STYLE icon, although the general subject matter (wallets, tailors, office uniforms) is not de facto solely menswear. In the MEN’S STYLE article “How to Talk to Your Tailor,” gendered terminology and pronoun usage further suggest that, like those who order bespoke suits, tailors are male: “[T]he tailor is a craftsman ... he’ll produce precisely what is demanded” (Leszcz, 2013, May 13, p. 61).

As noted in the womenswear articles discussed above, the menswear stories make allusions to famous men, from John F. Kennedy to Elvis and including movie stars such as Humphrey Bogart, Clint Eastwood, and Robert Downey Jr. Comparisons to coats of armour and Superman’s cape appear in a story on the double-breasted suit (Leszcz, 2012, November 26), which is depicted as “the quintessential 1980s corporate raider uniform” and as “gently embracing the wearer in a time when plenty of bankers could use a hug” (p. 64). Women are thus effectively excluded not only from the implied audience but simultaneously from these professions in finance.

### Articles of interest to both men and women

As noted above, 24 articles were categorized as having subjects ostensibly of interest to both men and women. Pronoun usage and gendered content in four of these items signal that the implied audience includes both men and women. A story about high-power accessories, for example, presents advice on both “Her Jewelry” (“like your bag, it’s about quality”) and “His Tie”: “[T]his is where you add personality” (“High-Power Accessories,” 2011, pp. 60–61). A summer office style article states, “For either sex, open-toed shoes are a risky option,” but goes on advise, “[T]hese will let you bend the rules” (in reference to a pair of women’s shoes), and “[S]andals for men remain a must avoid” (Timm, 2011, pp. 78–79). Likewise, the short piece on caring for fine fabrics references both ties and handbags (“How to Care,” 2011), and “You Can Look as Good as the Pros” (2013) discusses both men’s and women’s designer golf-wear. Not coincidentally, these four articles are part of the five, noted above, that are accompanied by photographs featuring both menswear and womenswear.

Of the 24 articles on ostensibly gender-neutral subjects, one piece, on running to work, signals an exclusively female implied audience. The use of first-person plural pronouns combined with gendered language indicates that both the implied writer and implied reader are women: “our gear more college tee than Lululemon; our mantra more breathless obscenities than ‘You go, girl!’ affirmations” (Aarts, 2014, p. 72).

The implied reader is signalled as male in 18 of these 24 articles (75%). The frequent combination of pronoun usage with explicitly gendered references designates the implied reader as male; for example, “[Y]ou’re going to need more than a tin of Kiwi and an old part of boxers to wipe the last of winter’s salt from your wingtips” (“Get Your Shine On,” 2014, p. 63). The combination of “you” with demonstrative pronouns referring to menswear likewise signals a male implied reader: “[S]how your spirit and sport these [Olympics cufflinks] day or night” (Coholan, 2010, p. 60). Furthermore, this same article indicates the presumed gender of not only the implied reader, but also upper management when a man’s money clip is described as “the perfect gift for your fashion conscious boss” (p. 61).

The combination of the second-person pronoun with gendered references in these articles is also telling: mending rather than replacing fine clothing is said to give “you the air of a man who’s exacting but not fussy—an interesting man” (Leszcz, 2014, May, p. 70). A piece on lightweight summer suits states that “linen is a sweaty man’s friend ... but it’s important to clean your linen jacket regularly” (Nguyen, 2014, p. 103). Another article, on summer businesswear, clearly states the gender of its implied reader: “If you’re a business person, or more specifically, a business man without the option of wearing a skirt and sandals, this may be the year to rethink your summer wardrobe” (Chapin, 2010, p. 79). As seen in the running to work article, the first-person plural pronoun is used to forge a gender-based bond between the implied writer and reader in an article on expensive socks, which “few men can justify purchasing ... for themselves” but are “what we really wanted in the first place” (Leszcz, 2012, Winter, pp. 78–79).

Other examples of gendered language include phrases such as “A man in need of a suit” (Collier, 2011, p. 65) and “If in doubt, guys should wear suits” (Leszcz, 2013, September 30, p. 62). The latter piece provides guidance on dress codes such as “white

tie,” “black tie,” and “business formal,” but only for men, although these categories are arguably even more ambiguous and challenging for women to decode. A March 2014 article titled “Black Is the New Nothing” carried the promisingly inclusive subtitle “Why Wearing All Black Works Better for Women” (Leszcz, 2014, March, p. 70). The textual signals, however, clearly indicate that the implied readers are men, through phrases such as “a worthy place in any man’s closet” and “For most men, the question of all black ...” (p. 70). In making the argument that black suits are best reserved for funerals and black-tie affairs, the implied writer states: “On both occasions, the object is to blend—either to keep the focus on the deceased, or *the women*” (p. 70, emphasis added).

The famous people alluded to in this set of 24 articles include Prince, Johnny Cash, Prince Charles, Tom Cruise, and Malcolm X. The list of celebrities includes singers, athletes, movie stars, CEOs, and politicians; all are men. Most troubling, women are missing not only from the implied audience, but also from the business world some of these articles invoke. Monograms are depicted as a good way to stand out in a “sea of blue button-downs” (“Initial Here,” 2013, p. 79). An article titled “Why Cotton Is Cooler” defines “grown-ups” as “men who own two, three or four suits” (Leszcz, 2013, August 12, p. 48). Another article ends with praise for a practice called “Formal Fridays,” described as “a damn fine excuse for options brokers, or anyone else, to show up to work this Friday with carefully knotted ties” (Leszcz, 2013, April 15, p. 66).

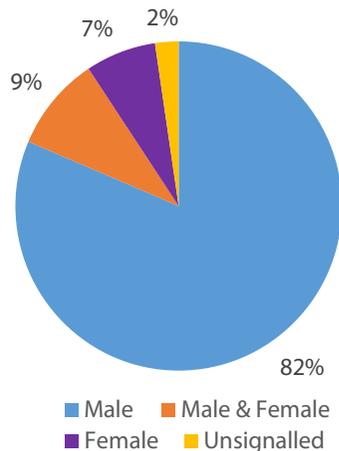
In total, as seen in Figure 3, 35 of the 43 style articles signal a male implied reader, three signal a female implied reader, four signal both male and female implied readers, and one does not signal the gender of the implied reader.

## Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the subjects, photographs, and textual signals in the style and fashion articles published in *Canadian Business* magazine from 2010 to 2014 confirms the November 2013 letter writers’ complaint that women are largely excluded from the implied audience. *Canadian Business* reader Kate Storey ends her letter to the editor by urging the magazine to make better use of its “power to shape popular business culture and to either reinforce or change gender biases” (2013, p. 6). This study suggests that greater attention to the gendering of the implied reader would be one place to start.

Although this study was limited to a small number of articles on a very specific topic, the concept of the implied reader could clearly be useful in analysing different kinds of articles in many different media texts. The gendering of the implied reader in a Canadian

**Figure 3. Implied reader gender in *Canadian Business* style/fashion articles, 2010–2014**



business magazine's style articles might seem a minor issue. However, this study highlights the value to scholars interested in representation of paying attention to not only what is covered in the media, and who gets to speak, but also who is addressed and thus included in—or excluded from—the cultural communities created therein.

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