

# Masculinity and the Making of Trans-Canada Air Lines, 1938-1940: A Feminist Poststructuralist Account

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## Abstract

*This paper presents a feminist poststructuralist account of the role of men and masculinity in the development of Air Canada, specifically in its early years and the development of the organization's culture. It is argued that an understanding of the development of gendered practices (i.e., the development of male associated or dominated work) over time can help us to understand and identify how such practices develop, are maintained, and also change.*

**JEL classifications:** J71, M14, N72, N82

**Keywords:** Masculinity, Organizational culture, Identity, Gender, Business history

## Résumé

*Le présent article est un compte-rendu féministe et post-structuraliste du rôle que les hommes et la masculinité ont joué dans le développement d'Air Canada et, particulièrement, dans l'institution de sa culture sexiste. L'auteur soutient que la connaissance de la façon dont cette culture s'est instituée (celle qui fait croire que les postes d'Air Canada sont réservés aux hommes) peut nous permettre de mieux comprendre et de mieux déterminer les mécanismes de son établissement, de son maintien et de son évolution.*

**Mots clés :** Masculinité, Culture d'organisation, Identité, Genre, Histoire d'affaires

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Within the literature on gender and organizational analysis, organizational culture has been identified as an important arena for the development and generation of discriminatory practices (Aaltio & Mills, 2002; Gherardi, 1995; Wilson, 2001). While a number of studies, including the Canadian Royal Commission on Equity in Employment (Abella, 1984), have explored contemporary aspects of the relationship between gender and the culture of an organization (cf. Wilson, 1997), few have analysed that relationship over time (cf. Morgan, 1988). The importance of the latter approach, we contend, is that it allows researchers to track not only the manifestations of discriminatory practices, but also to track how they develop and change over time (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). In this way, we can gain an understanding of the processes of change that are central to the problem of redressing discrimination at work, with the overall aim of developing policy suggestions and anti-discrimination change strategies. Within that framework, we

have embarked on a feminist poststructuralist study of selected companies, including Air Canada; drawing on extensive archival materials, existing published histories, and interviews with former employees. In this paper, we focus on the foundation and early years of Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA), the predecessor of Air Canada, and the role of men and masculinity in the shaping of the airline's culture and the restricted hiring of female employees.

## Studying Organizational Culture over Time: From Theory to Method

The study outlined in this paper was undertaken, or "crafted," within the framework of post positivist qualitative methods (Prasad, 2005) and in particular, the feminist poststructuralist approach. From this perspective, we have not set out to document historical facts so much as "interrogate" historical documents to see what they tell us about the conditions under which gendered processes and practices develop (Weedon, 1993). This means that we do not simply accept his-

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torical statements (whether corporate documents, or interviews) as representations of simple or underlying truths, but rather as clues to dominant discourses that create the conditions under which certain understandings (e.g., discrimination) are possible. To take an example from a positivist historiographic approach, Philip Smith's (1986) history of Air Canada can be read as an account of the key events in the life of the airline. A feminist poststructuralist reading, on the other hand, will analyze the work as a selected marshalling of detail (e.g., stories of key managers and their handling of certain events) to understand how the process serves to favour certain types of masculinity (e.g., the heroic pilot) over other types of masculinity (e.g., the deft steward) and most types of femininity (e.g., the matronly secretary). This reading will also analyze the ways that this process contributes to our understandings of the present (i.e., reading history to understand the present).

In developing a feminist poststructuralist approach we have developed and utilized a number of key concepts for studying the development of organizational culture over time. Centrally, we draw on Smircich's (1983) notion of organizational culture as a root metaphor for making sense of the configuration of practices and processes that influence behaviour in organizations. This means that we do not view the culture of an organization as a concrete entity, as some *thing* that the organization owns (Schein, 1992), but rather as set of experiences that influence how people feel about the organization and who they feel is an appropriate or privileged part of it. We view gender as socially constructed (Mackie, 1987) rather than fixed or essential. Here we view historical materials as contributing to our understanding of the *notion* of men and women, rather than a descriptive record of men and women. In terms of developing a history, we suggest that a potentially fruitful way of studying time is not as a continuous process but as a series of discrete periods of time. Drawing on Mills' (2006) notion of junctures, we argue that "the history of a given organization should not be seen as a series of progressively changing events but as a series of key time frames, which shape how things were viewed at a given period of time" (Mills, 2006, p. 12). In other words,

"while a particular set of factors may come together to create particular ways of viewing the world, a change in those factors can lead to a change in the subjectivity of those involved, creating different ways of viewing the world over time. To understand a particular juncture we need to understand not only the main features involved but also the particular subjectivity of the time" (Mills, p. 12).

### *From Theory to Method*

As has been discussed at length elsewhere (Mills, 2000, 2002a, 2002b), the study of organizational cultures over time present some unique problems. A central problem is the existence of cultural traces (i.e., archived corporate materials, the availability of former and existing members of the organization, and written histories). Few organizations provide such possibilities: the Hudson Bay Company (Newman, 1985, 1987) is a rare example, but there are some airline companies, including Pan American Airways, Air Canada, British Airways, and Trans World Airways, that have corporate archives and have been the subject of written histories (see respectively Bender & Altschul, 1982; Pigott, 2001; Reed, 1990; Rummel, 1991). Arguably, the value of airlines for the study of gender discrimination is their link to gendered imagery (e.g., the sexy stewardess, the heroic pilot) that pervades popular culture. Corporate archives, however, are problematic. The problem with drawing on archival materials includes the fact that the material has been selectively collected (e.g., to represent images and understandings of events from a corporate perspective), and was based on original materials that were themselves selectively developed (e.g., to build a sense of corporate identity, to sell products, etc.). The same is true of corporate histories that are often written with the purpose of documenting select aspects of a company over time (e.g., focusing on events that describe and explain a company's financial ups and downs, or market dominance, etc.). As Rowlinson and Procter (1999) put it, the "systematic study of individual firms on the basis of their business records" (p. 380) serves to highlight some factors to the exclusion of others. Thus, archives and written histories present the feminist poststructuralist with a wealth of material, however problematic. Nonetheless, the selective character of the materials do provide important clues to dominant and widespread forms of thinking that can be said to provide a framework within which people made sense of their company. This forms the basis of a feminist poststructuralist reading of archival material and written histories: namely, the material acts as clues to the gendered sense of an organization.

### *Multiple Masculinities and the Early Years of Air Canada*

In studying airline culture over time, we use the hiring and promotion of women as an organizing principle seeking to explain how an organization develops a point in time (juncture) where its treatment of women is markedly different from how it regards women at another juncture. TCA, for example, did not hire any women

in the first fifteen months of its existence, then only hired stewardesses for the next two years, before hiring a substantial number of women to a range of jobs (cf. Helms Mills, 2002).

What is immediately evident in the study of Air Canada is that in the first few years there were virtually no female employees. It was essentially a male organization. This initial juncture provided the focus on our study: the relationship between masculinities, the development of the airline's culture, and subsequent workplace practices. Here we take as our starting point the work of Collinson and Hearn (1994, 1996) who argue that studies of workplace discrimination have tended to ignore the role of men. They contend that different ways of thinking about manhood and womanhood, especially where this is translated into a number of workplace behaviours and expectations, can have a powerful influence on hiring and promotion practices. In other words, different forms of masculinity can have differential effects on the hiring of women and men.

In the process of the research, we undertook extensive archival research at the Air Canada collection, housed at the National Aviation Museum in Ottawa. On several visits to the archive between 1999 and 2004 we "interrogated" (Prasad, 2005) hundreds of corporate documents, including in-house newsletters (i.e., TCA News, Transcanews, Between Ourselves), annual reports, corporate brochures, memoranda, advertising copy, newspaper and magazine articles, and transcripts). We also analyzed several histories of Air Canada and its predecessor Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA), including Ashley (1963), Brunet (1981), Collins (1978), McGregor (1970) Pigott (1997, 2001), Shalla (1997), and Smith (1986). A limited number of (open ended) interviews were conducted with former Air Canada employees to gain a feel for people's experiences of airline life.

The paper begins with a look inside the airline in 1937 and then explores some of the factors that contributed to the exclusion of women from the airline in its first fifteen months.

At this Juncture: TCA 1937-1941

An Act of Parliament created Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA) on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1937 as a wholly owned affiliate of Canadian National Railways (CNR). Men dominated all levels of the new company, from the board to the operational managers and down to the air and ground crews. By the end of December 1937, the company employed seventy-one employees all of whom were men. It was not until July 1 1938 that TCA hired its first female employees: flight attendants Lucille Garner and Pat Ecclestone (Lothian, 1979). Over the next eighteen

months TCA increased its employee numbers to around five hundred, of whom the great majority were men. This increase was concentrated in maintenance and overhaul (233 employees), station, clerical and other staff (89), communication and dispatch (81), piloting (54), and administration (12). A little over six percent of employees were female at the beginning of 1940, with the largest group consisting of stewardesses (28 employees). The only other women to be hired over this period were in limited traditional female jobs, including a housekeeper, a stenographer, and a clerk-stenographer. Only after June 1940, and the onset of World War II, did TCA begin to hire female clerical and secretarial staff in any numbers but even then there were only eighteen female employees in the non-stewardess ranks of the airline by December 31<sup>st</sup> of that year.

The men, who constituted all management positions and the great majority of other employee positions, came to TCA with a range of experiences within generally male-only environments. These experiences were shaped through such things as warfare and military life, government and politics, business and economics, railway work, engineering shops, the cutthroat world of U.S. commercial aviation and Canadian bush flying. These collective experiences appear to have coalesced around three dominant forms of masculine experience: Canadian railway work, bush flying, and the highly competitive U.S. commercial aviation industry.

Railwaymen were an important influence on the board of TCA, not only because the airline was under direct control of CNR, but because their influence was tempered as part of a board of "able businessmen" (Smith, 1986, p. 54). It was at the important operations levels that a group of former U.S. commercial aviation businessmen played key roles in shaping the rules of the new company. Below them, the pilots and mechanics, who were dominated by former bush flyers, put their stamp on the emerging day-to-day expectations that influenced the life of the airline. The backgrounds to each of these major forms of masculine experience provide clues to the gendering of the TCA culture.

*The TCA Board and the Canadian Railwayman*

The TCA board had a built-in majority of CNR directors, including: James Murdoch, a "tall, tough Bay Street lawyer" (Smith, 1986, p. 54), who ran Noranda Mines and was on the boards of several other mining and copper companies as well as the CNR. The remaining directorate included (Fraser, 1937); Herbert Symington, who was also a board member of several utility companies throughout North America, and "whose mild, round face and pince-nez belied his strength and astuteness" (Smith, 1986, p. 54); William Gagnon who was the

chairman of several companies in brewing, banking and aviation; and Sam Hungerford, the President of CNR, who headed the board of TCA and served as the airline's first president.

Hungerford had spent his lifetime in a railway industry that had been developed out of strong competitiveness by pioneering and often ruthless entrepreneurs and financiers, and out of the labour of thousands of men, organized into rough, tough, hard living work crews living in camps and emerging townships that were often characterised for their violence and hard drinking (cf. Berton, 1971). Hungerford became a machinist apprentice with the Southeastern Railroad at the age of fourteen when the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was completing its trek to the pacific coast. He eventually joined CNR in 1910 as a superintendent of rolling stock. He became general manager of CNR in 1922, Vice President in 1923 and President in 1934 (Financial Post, 1936). By dint of this latter position he was made chair of the new airline's board. A railwayman through and through, Hungerford invented several mechanical devices used in railroading and became an authority on all phases of the business (Smith, 1986). He has been described as "tall, spare, flexible, indicative of careful living and suggestive of great endurance; registering power, even when silent, and a great believer in competition" (Smith, p. 54). A traditionalist, it was said that Hungerford was educated at "the university of Hard Knocks" (Knowles, 1932).

The other board members consisted of Commander C.P. Edwards, Chief of Air Services in the Canadian Government's new Department of Transport; George Herring, the Chief Superintendent of Air and Land Mail Services of the Post Office Department; and John Wilson, the Controller of Civil Aviation (Ashley, 1963).

We know little of the personal attitudes of these men towards women but we do know that the railway industry that Hungerford grew up in resembled the masculine experiences of bush piloting in post-World War I era leading up to the establishment of TCA. The industry was almost wholly financed, built, and run by men, with virtually no women to be seen either inside the industry or otherwise associated with it. The early labour force has been described as "roughnecks" (Berton, 1971, p. 196); men who were viewed as "ill-bred and offensive in their manners (Berton, p. 111), and who were prepared to work "in the wilderness without women and children" (Berton, p. 109). As will be later explained, this also characterised bush flying experiences. We also know that Hungerford felt that women should be devoted wives who are "always ambitious for her husband's career" (Knowles, 1932).

Of the non-CNR board members, John A. Wilson is known to have opposed female flyers on several occa-

sions. In the mid-1930s the Department of National Defence changed existing rules and restricted government assistance with flying to men only (Spring, 1994, p. 9) and women flyers were even turned down by John A. Wilson for administrative posts within the Department of Civil Aviation. A few years later, with the onset of war, Wilson, as controller of civil aviation, had a hand in excluding women from any form of government flying (civil or military) and four female flyers ended up flying for Britain's wartime Air Transport Auxiliary.

If nothing else, the broad background of railway work and the attitudes of Hungerford, Wilson and other directors served to reinforce subsequent attitudes toward women and women's work in the new airline. Busy with the affairs of CNR, Hungerford left the day to day running of the new airline to his Vice President of Operations Philip G. Johnson.

#### Commercial Aviation in the U.S.A., 1918-1930

It was Johnson and his handpicked team of leaders that put their stamp on the operating rules of the airline (Smith, 1986). That team consisted of D. B. Colyer, H. T. "Slim" Lewis, O. T. "Ted" Larson, S. S. "Steve" Stevens, W.A. "Bill" Straith, and Oliver West.

American born Johnson started his working life as an engineer with Boeing during World War I and became the company President nine years later. Under Johnson's leadership, the company acquired airline interests that by the 1930s had grown into United Airlines (UAL). In the mid-1930s, Johnson and a number of other airline presidents were found guilty of unfair practices by the Roosevelt Administration and banned from the airline business for a period of five years. The ban did not extend to Canada and Johnson was recruited by C.D. Howe to run the new TCA.

Working out of a small office suite in CNR's Head Office in Montreal, Johnson was assisted by two senior administrators from the railway company, W.F. "Bill" English and F. T. "Fred" Wood. English, described as "a burly, florid man", had worked for CNR since 1908 and was seen as something of a "father figure" around the airline. He is credited with establishing "the family atmosphere" that characterised TCA in its early years (Smith, 1986, p. 107).

Johnson divided the new airline into two major divisions (Eastern and Western) and hired Colyer as his "detail operation man capable of supervision and instruction in all matters of operation" (Smith, 1986, p. 59), Lewis as superintendent of flying, Larson as meteorologist specialist, Stevens to supervise communications, Straith as chief instructor, and West to organise and head maintenance and engineering (Smith). Colyer, Lewis,

Larson, and West were all recruited from United Airlines, Smith came from Eastern Airlines, and Straith from Northwest Airlines (Leigh, 1989).

Johnson and his team were very much the product of the cutthroat commercial aviation business that developed in the U.S. following World War I. Unlike the U.K., where civil aviation was dominated by a handful of airlines (Mills, 1994), the US industry consisted of hundreds of operators focussed on mail carrying operations in sharp competition for limited government contracts. Passenger operations on any scale did not begin to take shape until the mid-1920s.

The aviation business environment in the U.S. was shaped by fierce competition (Josephson, 1944). In its earliest stages, a number of independent operators set up business across the country. These pioneer operators have been described as colourful figures; they were World War I flyers who liked planes and adventure, risking their lives to blaze the aviation trails (Smith, 1944). According to one airline founder, the pioneers all competed furiously, but they had their own camaraderie: "They would fight to the death to get routes, but they could still be friends. They were all boys together. Really, they were like a lot of bar-room gamblers" (Sampson, 1984, p. 42).

The level of competition is indicated by the following facts: (a) in 1921 there were 88 airline operators (only 17 of whom were in operation two years later); (b) in 1922 there were 125 operators (less than half of whom were still operating the following year); (c) in 1923 the number of operators rose to 129 but was down to 44 by 1928; (d) in 1929, there were number of mergers and dominance by the four major airlines: United, TWA, American, and Eastern (Smith, 1944; Williams, 1970).

By 1929 a breed of big business operators crowded out the independent promoter through a series of mergers and takeovers. In the place of the pioneer operator "there appeared a new breed: Wall Streeters" (Smith, 1944, p. 95). These men brought a new level of ruthlessness to the business. "The holding company appeared, forcing out 'the little fellow' ruthlessly" (Smith, p. 130). The first of the new great aviation companies to emerge was UAL. Fred Rentschler and William Boeing (of Boeing Air Transport) bought out two other small airlines and eventually pressured a larger airline, National Air Transport (NAT), to sell out. When initially learning that NAT was resisting takeover, Rentschler is said to have commented, "in best Robber Baron form [that] the air between the coasts is not big enough to be divided" (quoted in Smith, p. 140). Eventually UAL, with three other large airlines, operated as a virtual oligopoly with the collusion of the U.S. Postmaster General.

It was in this context that Johnson, Colyer, Lewis, Larson, Stevens, Straith, and West learned the ropes in

the aviation business. It was not only a business constructed from different forms of military and competitive forms of masculinity, but one where women were absent from almost all of the core jobs. Despite the high profile of a number of women flyers at the time, women were effectively barred from commercial flying. This briefly changed in 1934 when Helen Richey was hired as a copilot with the small Central Airlines. A change in government rules that restricted female commercial airline pilots to fair weather operations forced Richey to quit the following year; it was the 1970s before the next female pilot flew for a US commercial airline.

Women did manage to enter the airline business as stewardesses in 1930. By this point, U.S. airlines were attempting to build their passenger services but were coming up against a general reluctance of people to fly. Although the established practice in Europe was to hire male stewards, mimicking the practice on first-class ocean liners and railway services, UAL's Philip G. Johnson was convinced to hire young nurses. This was thought to provide a gendered psychological edge whereby the very idea of young women as flight crew would encourage grown men to fly (Nielsen, 1982). The insistence that these young women have nursing credentials was in part to convince the flying public of the propriety of the move and in part to assuage management's initial reluctance to hire women. That this move was controversial within the industry can be seen in the fact that Eddie Rickenbacker, head of Eastern Airlines, flew to UAL's headquarters to pressure Johnson to change his mind. Within UAL itself there was resistance from the pilots who argued that they were too busy flying to look after a helpless female crew member (Nielsen). Nonetheless, once UAL started the process, other airlines followed suit including American (in 1933), TWA, Western, National, and even Rickenbacker's Eastern Airlines in 1934. Rickenbacker was sold on the idea that female flight attendants would be useful "to allay the fears of our potential lady customers" (Rickenbacker, 1967, p. 246). In all cases, female flight attendants were required to be young (early 20s), physically attractive (controlled through height and weight restrictions), and possess nursing qualifications. As a commentator of the time expressed it, "the airlines viewed their stewardess-nurses ... not as medics but as professional nurturers" (Corn, 1983, p. 89).

From within the formative years of civil aviation in the United States, Johnson and his small band of instructors imposed their own strict standards on the newly formed TCA and, in the process, "created a solid esprit de corps, a mystique almost, that persisted long past the era when everyone in TCA knew everyone else" (Smith, 1986, p. 59). These instructors were

tough and at the top of their field [and] quickly set the pattern for the new TCA and established [exact-ing] standards of performance and reliability . . . From the start, their emphasis was on discipline and the over-riding importance of safety — a lesson they drilled into everyone down the line, not merely the pilots (Smith, p. 59).

Lewis, for example, “tall, taciturn, and case hardened, looking – even in a business suit – as if he had just climbed off a horse” (Lothian, 1979, p. 44), laid down the rules and procedures of flying and ensured that they were followed. Pilots who failed to follow the rules felt the wrath of Lewis (Lothian). In a similar vein, “Steve Stevens used to tell the radio technicians he hired: “If you ever make a mistake and cause an accident, you’ll be blackballed for life” (Smith, 1986, p. 59). This tough, disciplinarian way of operating the airline imposed a sense of masculine behaviour on the airline and, in all likelihood, influenced early hiring practices. There existed not only the restricted hiring of women to flight attending positions, but also the restriction of the type of woman that was hired to that position. In any event, all early hires such as pilots, engineers, mechanics, sales people, accountants, radio technicians, office positions and baggage handlers were men. The great majority of who were recruited from bush flying operations.

#### Canadian Aviation and Bush Piloting

Bush piloting began in Canada shortly after the end of World War I (Time-Life, 1983) when war-surplus planes were used for spotting forest fires and surveying. This use soon included a number of other tasks that took pilots deep into the northern regions of Canada as they surveyed possible mining areas, carried men and equipment to mining and exploration sites, mapped uncharted territories, flew medical supplies to isolated communities, and engaged in search and rescue work (Shaw, 1964).

The economics and social context of bush piloting influenced the rise of certain forms of masculinity (Mills, 1998). At the end of World War I, over two thousand trained combat pilots returned to Canada, many of who were now looking for commercial flying work. Aeroplanes were fairly expensive, work was few and far between, and competition for jobs was often sharp and cutthroat (Milberry, 1979). The social context of bush flying involved conditions of danger, isolation, uncharted and often harsh territory, and male dominated operations and communities (e.g., mining towns). In these conditions certain images of men and women came to dominate bush piloting and the communities they served and worked in. The archetypal bush pilot was seen as

daring, heroic, tough, rugged, womanising, and self-reliant (Henry, 1983). It has been argued that the extraordinarily dangerous flying activities of the bush pilot

made them larger-than-life folk heroes to the people in the regions where they flew. Stories of the bush pilots’ skill and often foolhardy courage grew and multiplied ... Newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s reported their more remarkable triumphs [and . . . from] all these tales and newspaper stories grew a body of lore as dramatic as the heart-stopping legends of air combat produced by two World Wars (Time-Life, 1983, p. 20).

Despite differences between individual flyers, folklore encouraged certain images of the bush pilot against that which a sense of masculinity was judged: they tended “to fit into a pattern. [Interest and admiration] seemed to develop in [them] a cocky, swashbuckling manner” (Shaw, 1964, p. 177). Some have imaged bush pilots as having a “penchant for revelry” with “drink and women . . . seldom far from the fliers’ minds’ after a hard day’s work” (Time-Life Books, 1983, pp. 22-23).

The world of bush flying was very much “a man’s world”. In the isolated communities served by the bush pilots there were very few women, usually the wives of prospectors. This was reflected in local stories and histories. One account of Yellowknife (in Canada’s Northwest Territories), for example, speaks of the “early prospectors, miners, pilots, police and administrators and the women who cooked and washed clothes and sometimes even prospected with the men” (City of Yellowknife, 1984, p. 5). One of the first non-native women in Yellowknife came as the wife of a local doctor in 1937; another came as a cook in her brother’s café. Women were very much second class citizens and when a bar opened in the local hotel “women had to sit outside and wait for bottles to be passed through the windows” (City of Yellowknife, p. 14). By 1938 the “rough, lusty and loud” city had only a dozen women in a population of eight hundred, including the first woman prospector, Vicky Lepine (City of Yellowknife, pp. 6-7) Even Lepine spent much of her time washing clothes during the day and washing dishes in the café at night.

Not surprising, there were virtually no women in the fledgling aviation industry. The few women that were hired were taken on as stenographers and clerks. For example, at the Winnipeg operation of Western Canada Airways in 1929, there were dozens of male employees in the engine and rigging shops and in the stores but only one female employee; stenographer Miss M. Short (Western Canada Airways, 1929). Nonetheless, the individualism of the industry allowed for individual decisions. When, for example, Stuart Graham, Canada’s first bush pilot, set off on his historic flight, his wife Madge,

a landscape artist, was the navigator (Ellis, 1980; Pigott, 1997). When WCA was established, James Richardson appointed his wife, Muriel, as its Vice President (Pigott, 1998).

In the 1920s and 1930s, aviation in Canada was seen as a mixture of adventure, danger, and excitement. However, it was a transitory business. Through the years of the Great Depression, numerous aviation ventures came and went and bush pilots went from job to job. It was an environment and socio-economic climate that encouraged the view that aviation was a man's job that did not encourage the inclusion of women. This background shaped the experiences of many of the men who came to work for TCA in 1937. Donald MacLaren, Art Rankin, Jack Wright and Dick Leigh, for example, had worked together for Western Canada Airways, the bush piloting operation of James Richardson. Pilots Lewis Leigh, Ronald George, David Glen, and M. B. "Jock" Barclay all worked together for Canadian Airways Ltd., which was considered "a bush plane corporate empire that extended from coast to coast" (Leigh, 1989, p. 55).

MacLaren, TCA's first employee, exemplifies the airline's bush piloting heritage. MacLaren, a noted wartime fighter ace with a reputation in bush flying, was appointed as Assistant to the Vice President of Operations. He had learned to fly and shoot in the remote Peace River region of Alberta where his father ran a fur trading post (Cosgrove, 1966; Wise, 1980). Joining the Royal Flying Corps in 1917, MacLaren became "one of the worlds' most skilled and dangerous combat pilots" (Wise, 1980, p. 484) and with forty-eight victories in eight months, he became the fourth highest ranking Canadian ace. After the war, he began his own bush flying operation before working for Western Canadian Airways and Canadian Air Lines (Pigott, 1997). Around him was a group of men, recruited from bush operations and flying clubs (Air Canada, 1986), who were "a diverse and enthusiastic group of rugged individualists" (Lothian, 1979, p. 46).

In these early years TCA employees "were a close-knit, enthusiastic group, aware not only of their good fortune at having steady government jobs during the Depression but also of being part of a great adventure" (Pigott, 1997, p. 75). Part of the adventure involved the dangers associated with flying, part with preparedness to undertake a range of tasks, and part with a work ethic of full and dedicated commitment to the company. Thus, for example, despite specific job titles, most employees were expected to do a range of jobs. Radio operators, for example, were selling tickets, checking-in passengers, assisting with engine run-ups, and making out manifests in addition to radio work, and engineers "loading mail and baggage and rolling the passenger steps to the door of the aircraft" (Pigott, pp. 74-75). Even co-pilots under-

took in-flight passenger service (Collins, 1978). Nonetheless, some argued, the work was so engaging that, unfortunately for their families, "TCA took over employees' lives. [Employees] didn't want to do anything but work" (quoted in Pigott, p. 75). Sometimes there wasn't a choice: "The drill back then was to work a long day, literally from sun up until your work was done — and seven days a week, if necessary" (Pigott, p. 75).

In summary, by December 31<sup>st</sup> of 1937, TCA was an airline composed solely of male leaders and employees. Not one single woman was employed by the company at that time, nor would be for another six months. Interpersonal relationships were characterised as a strong sense of masculine esprit de corps built out of the imposition of firm discipline. There was stress placed on rules and procedures from the top and a sense of rugged individualism and adventure among employees. It was a man's world informed by various strands of masculine values and experience. One strand was rooted in the entrepreneurial experience of the highly aggressive and competitive U.S. commercial aviation business shared by Johnson and most of his senior management team (Allen, 1986). This was manifest in an insistence on discipline and control. Although board members were composed of several men from the ranks of government and the state-owned railway, their backgrounds were in the discipline of the air force and the fierce competitiveness of mining, utilities, railways, and brewing and aviation entrepreneurship. The board members, then, were not at odds with those involved in the day-to-day operations of the airline. The informality of Johnson's executive team would, in all likelihood, have gelled with expectations of ruggedness from pilots and engineers schooled in bush piloting. The attitudes and experiences of the men who constituted TCA very much mirrored the industry as a whole.

#### *Women and Aviation in Canada*

Prior to World War I, the fledgling nature of aviation meant that few men and no women had taken to the air as pilots, although Grace Mackenzie made history in 1910 by being the first Canadian woman to fly as a passenger (Ellis, 1980). The war opened up opportunities for an expanded number of young men to gain pilot licenses by joining the Royal Flying Corps. After the war, many of these went into bush flying. Despite the absence of a number of young men due to wartime activities, very few women were employed in the aviation industry during World War I and even fewer found their way in the postwar development of bush flying. This was indicative of gendered attitudes throughout Canada at the time. In the U.K. and the

U.S., tens of thousands of women were engaged in aviation work.

From the beginning there were strong attitudes against women flying. When Madge Graham acted as navigator on board a seaplane piloted by her husband in 1919, Admiral Byrd commented that, "flying seaplanes over land is suicide and taking a woman along is criminal" (Render, 1992, p. 7). As for bush flying, women were not accepted "because it was assumed that they lacked the physical strength to manhandle cargo or the ability to cope with conditions in the bush generally" (Render, p. 7). In the words of Z. Lewis Leigh, "We wouldn't have dreamed of sending a girl into the bush" (quoted in Render, p. 7). In a similar vein, bush pilot Ron Pickler contends that, "Management was not about to lay itself open to criticism that it was sure to receive if it sent a woman alone in the bush. The bush was crude enough even for a man" (quoted in Render, p. 7). These concerns, however, were moot as women had little opportunity to obtain the necessary flying or mechanical qualifications.

Towards the end of the 1920s the Canadian government, responding to a shortage of pilots, encouraged and funded the establishment of flying clubs. This provided unexpected opportunities for women. So entrenched was the idea that women should not fly that the government, not foreseeing the advent of female flyers, didn't bother to include prohibitions. Thus, it was that Eileen Vollick became, in 1928, the first Canadian woman to become a licensed pilot (Ellis, 1980). At first Vollick was rejected by the local flying club until she could obtain direct approval from the Department of National Defence (DND): "no woman had previously made such an application" (Render, 1992, p. 13). The DND delayed the process for three months and then changed the age rules, insisting that she had to be nineteen rather than the usual seventeen years old required of male pilots. Similarly, when Marjorie Chauvin Herity tried to join her local flying club in Alberta, she was told that she "had better sprout wings because only men had the right temperament to pilot a plane" (quoted in Render, p. 14). An article entitled "Should Women Fly?" in a 1929 edition of the Saturday Night magazine summed up the general attitude:

A considered opinion among nerve specialists is that, while a woman is quite as equal to managing a car or a plane in normal conditions, and will probably use more care and common sense, when it comes to meeting the unexpected she is far more likely to lose her head (quoted in Spring, 1994, p. 7).

Throughout this era, women were hindered by widespread prejudices about female sensibilities and flying. This was reinforced not only by the reluctance of flying

instructors to accept female applicants, but also by the high costs associated with instruction, which varied from \$9-\$17 per hour at a time when the average weekly wage for women was around \$13.50 week (Render, 1992, p. 19). Men could often avoid this by working in the hangar in exchange for flying lessons, which was an option not so readily available to women: "the idea of a woman cleaning oily engines or doing odd jobs around the club did not sit well with the men of the time" (Render, p. 20). The onset of the Great Depression further hindered any chance that women had of obtaining flying licences. This strengthened the general attitude that men are the primary breadwinners and consolidated the resistance of bush companies to the hiring of women, which was also reinforced by government attitudes. Thus, the few women who were able to gain a commercial pilot's licence were unable to find work. When Daphne Paterson applied for a commercial pilot's licence in 1930, government officials told her that she was unsuitable because she was a woman (Render, p. 23). That year the DND changed the rules governing the licensing of women pilots requiring them to report for a medical exam every three months (rather than the six months required of men).

#### Modifying the Gender Gestalt: TCA and the employment of Women, 1938-40

In July of 1938, TCA made the decision to hire female flight attendants. However, this did not represent a dramatic shift in gendered thinking. By the time Lucille Garner and Pat Ecclestone started work on July 1<sup>st</sup>. TCA had reasonably well-developed passenger routes and were looking to provide the now standard in-flight services that characterised U.S. airlines (Lothian, 1979). Female flight attending was the standard in many of the large US airlines so it was not a stretch to employ stewardesses. Phil Johnson, of course, had been in charge of UAL when they had introduced the first stewardesses some eight years earlier. In a classic example of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), TCA modelled its new stewardesses on practices throughout the commercial aviation business in the U.S. Lucille Garner was made Chief Stewardess and sent to UAL for training where she adapted their recruitment and training manual for TCA. Recruits were required to be between 21 and 25 years old, registered nurses, under 5' 5" and 125 lbs., unmarried, with a personable manner, no eye glasses, and her parents' written permission (Air Canada Archive: Garner Files). Standing alone, most of these characteristics are not necessarily gendered. The height restriction, for example, could be explained through reference to the size of the airline cabin: Pat Ecclestone, at 5' 3 1/2" had to bend her head to get into the plane and

walk up the isle (Lothian, 1979). Nonetheless, the interpretations placed on the various requirements constructed a gendered image of the flight attendant. For one thing, the understandable weight restriction was constructed in a less understandable way to favour only those whose weight was proportional to her height (i.e., overweight women were not hired). The more subjective requirement of a personal manner readily lent itself to particular (narrow) images of female sexuality. An early characterisation was of the stewardess as “a Florence Nightingale type of image. Nurses were used to comforting strangers and they were trained to know what to do in an emergency without getting upset about it” (Newby, 1986, p. 1). Corporate strategy designed to overcome fear of flying contributed a glamour aspect to the image. Thus, it was stipulated, “stewardesses must be practical and poised women, cheerful and tactful and experienced in the art of helping people forget their nervousness and helping them feel at ease” (quoted in Piggott, 1997, p. 89). This was an essential aspect of the required labour. The stewardess was seen as the main form of communication between passengers and pilot and, according to one news report of the time, was expected to “combine the comeliness of Venus with the capabilities of Florence Nightingale” (quoted in Collins, 1978, p. 8). In the late 1930s stewardesses had become *the* glamour career for women and this was reinforced by the sheer number of women who applied for the limited number of jobs. In 1938 alone, TCA had over one thousand applicants for little over a dozen positions (McEachern, 1938). In the words of TCA of the time, “the stewardesses are a credit to Canadian womanhood both in efficiency and charm” (Trans-Canada Air Lines, 1938). It would be two more years, and the exigencies of war, before TCA hired women for positions other than that of a stewardess.

### Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we have used a feminist poststructuralist analysis to reveal the embedded nature of masculinity and maleness in the development of TCA and Air Canada and in subsequent discourses about the airline. Airline histories and archives focus almost exclusively on the role of men in the making of Air Canada. In the process, they give us strong clues to the underlying masculine values of the emerging culture and of the stories told about the airline. By focussing on men and masculinity we have attempted to show how these served to structure the developing culture of the airline.

What we identify is the three dominant and complementary forms of masculinity that are railway work, Canadian bush piloting, and U.S. aviation entrepreneur-

ship. These forms influenced employment practices in the early years of TCA. This contributed to an environment and the establishment of a corporate culture built around certain masculine associated traits including rugged individualism (as an expected interpersonal display), strict discipline (as a required organizational behaviour), tough and aggressive leadership style, and appeal to a sense of camaraderie built around masculine-associated references to danger, adventure, pioneering, and a drive to succeed. This sense of organization was reinforced through recruitment practices (i.e., largely from bush piloting) and the establishment of an all-male environment. Within this context, the notion of womanhood was constructed from narrow lenses that rarely cast women as anything more than lovers, wives, and mothers. These attitudes infused the developing rules of the company, with an emphasis on camaraderie as an organizational response to problems, discipline as a way of doing things, and recruitment practices, which assigned limited roles to future female employees.

The one area of female recruitment, stewarding, owed as much to mimetic isomorphism as it did to gendered sensibilities. Existing industry practices and TCA’s organizational strategies designed to overcome public fear of flying contributed to the gendered construction and maintenance of the stewardess role as focussed on glamour and nurturing. This, in turn, was reinforced by the overwhelming number of recruits whose own sense of glamour (good pay, travel, and independence) melded with that of TCA’s.

How different forms of masculinity influenced the culture of TCA overtime will help us to understand something of the process of organizational change and redressing employment discrimination (Helms Mills, 2002) and contribute to the growing debate around the long-term study of organizational culture and gendered practices (Aaltio & Mills, 2002).

In 1984, the Abella Commission report on equity in the workplace examined the practices of eleven crown corporations, including Air Canada. It found that women only constituted 29 per cent of Air Canada’s workforce (Abella, 1984). This was a lower percentage than during wartime some 40 years earlier. As at the start of the airline in the late 1930s, Air Canada’s female employees were concentrated in clerical and service jobs that constituted more than 75 per cent of those categories of work. Only three percent constituted upper-level managers, and less than eight percent constituted middle managers (Abella). In terms of hiring, promotions, and earnings, there continued to be substantial gaps between how Air Canada treated male and female employees. Summarising the problem, the Abella Commission argued that the problem lay not in individual attitudes but in “systemic discrimination,” embedded in the struc-

turing and practices of the organization (Abella, p. 9). In dealing with the problem, it concludes that “systematic discrimination requires systematic remedies” (Abella, p. 9). To that end, it continues,

rather than approaching discrimination from the perspective of the single perpetrator and the single victim, the systemic approach acknowledges that by and large the systems and practices we customarily and often unwittingly adopt may have an unjustifiably negative effect on certain groups in society” (Abella, p. 9).

It is our contention that in order to undertake a systemic approach, we need to analyze the cultural understandings within a given organization to understand how people are developing and making sense of certain practices and systems. To that end, we have attempted to show how one particular organization, Air Canada, developed a gendered organizational culture and the shape that culture took in the earlier years.

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