



POWER AND ITS STRATEGIES

How can women's power be defined? How do we perceive it? What are the obstacles to women being involved in the decision-making and power structures? At this Network meeting, Lise Gervais, from Relais-femmes, and Danielle Fournier, retired professor from the *École de service social de l'Université de Montréal*, demystified the relationship of women with power and gave some strategies that may motivate women to get involved.

THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

A meeting of the Women's Network of the Federation took place on November 13 and 14, 2012 with the theme "Power and its strategies". In order to pursue the discussions and reflections that began at the previous Network meeting on the subject of women and power, the members of the Network were invited to a training session entitled "The relationship of women with power", given by Lise Gervais, from *Relais-femmes*, and by Danielle Fournier, retired professor from the *École de service social de l'Université de Montréal*. Everyone was asked to share their personal history with power and become familiar with the different concepts of power and their application.

During these two days, the members of the Network also had to analyze different scenarios of power and participate in a practical exercise to express their point of view during a democratic decision-making process. Despite the obstacles and the challenges facing women in the decision-making and power structures, they were able to identify potential solutions that will certainly be useful in their role as union activists.

Several contradictory feelings co-exist when there is a question of the relationship of women with power. Certain experiences have resulted in progress, making gains, obtaining prestige, developing pride in acting or still in solidarity and in supporting one another.

Other experiences with power have made women uneasy like cases of abuse, competition, the impression of never measuring up, the feeling that the other must be "crushed" in order to measure up. Women are particularly afraid of taking too much space, of preventing others from being successful, of deviating from social norms and having to face the hostile reactions from men faced with the success of women.

THE IMPACTS OF SOCIALIZATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF WOMEN WITH POWER

The complex relationship of women with power is marked by personal experiences, but it is also influenced by socialization. According to Francine Descarries, the concept of socialization refers to "the process that introduces a person to her culture and consequently teaches her to live in society and to decode the ways of doing things, of acting, thinking and feeling her environment. It includes all relationships, social interactions and the experiences in which individuals, more or less consciously, acquire and integrate the attitudes and the skills necessary to live in society!" (our translation)

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WHEN WILL THERE BE PARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN?

Power is often wrongly perceived as having a negative connotation. Women are generally less inclined to exercise power. In fact, a minority of women hold positions of power, even today.

In her last book published by *Éditions Stanké* last October and entitled *“Les femmes au secours de l'économie: pour en finir avec le plafond de verre”* (Women rescuing the economy: to end up with the glass ceiling), Monique Jérôme-Forget states that if we continue at the same pace, we will still have to reach age 72 for there to be a parity between men and women on the boards of directors of major companies. Even now, men are still a majority in the world of politics.

How to explain this state of affairs, despite the fact that for at least 50 years, women have been in the labour market, contributing to the economy and participating in societal life just like men? Must we deprive ourselves of the major contribution of women in the places where decisions are made on the major orientations of our society, our workplace? In order to take our reflection further and demystify the concept of power, the members of the Status of Women Committee chose to make this the subject of the two networks in 2012.

This reflection and increased awareness of the power that women have are essential for the society in which we live to evolve. I invite you to take your rightful place as a unionized worker, as a woman and as a healthcare professional.



Michèle Boisclair, Vice-President and political officer for the Status of Women



NEWS FROM THE STATUS OF WOMEN SECTOR

Back to the 12 days of action campaign



The 12 days of action for the elimination of violence against women campaign took place between November 25 and December 6. “Women are still victims of violence because they are women, and also because: we don’t believe the women, we make excuses for the men, we keep silent and we spread sexist and racist stereotypes” was the theme for this year. To support this campaign,

the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) posted video clips and published a call to action in the major media outlets to eliminate this violence. There was a major rally on December 6 at the *Palais de justice de Montréal* to commemorate the victims murdered at the *Polytechnique*. ■

Source: FFQ

World March of Women

On December 10, the World March of Women organized a 24-hour period of feminist actions throughout the world to denounce the commodification of natural resources and their impacts on women.

Despite chilly weather in Montréal, a rally took place at Place Ville Marie from 12:00 to 13:00.

In the evening, speakers from Québec, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Columbia and a representative from the Aboriginal women of Québec came to explain the different impacts and issues linked to the commodification of natural resources. ■

Source: FFQ



Follow-up on motion M-312

On September 26, 2012, the minister responsible for the status of women, Rona Ambrose, voted for motion M-312. Following this vote which was at the very least surprising, the *Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances* (FQPN) launched a campaign to educate Ms Ambrose.

For eight weeks, the minister received lessons by letter, Fax, Twitter or Facebook so that she would be updated on the issue of freedom of choice or still to let her know the importance of maintaining free access to abortions.

This campaign ended the week of December 10. The FQPN could reopen the campaign after the holiday period in the event that she has not learned her lesson this time.

Source: FQPN

POWER AND ITS STRATEGIES (CONT'D)



Lise Gervais, from Relais-femmes, and Danielle Fournier, retired professor from the *École de service social de l'Université de Montréal*

A SUCCESSFUL WELCOMING ACTIVITY

Upon their arrival at the Women's Network, the participants had to reflect in order to analyze their experiences with power in their personal lives, their professional lives and in their commitment. They had to create a picture using the major facts and events and their impacts. Several shared what their experiences with power have been and what they have retained from them. It was very interesting to see the various situations in which these women have taken control over their lives. What is striking is that power is often seen negatively and that it even sometimes causes fear but all these women reported positive experiences with power. Like, when power is used properly, how it can be beneficial for us and for others. And you, how do you see power?

Par Patricia Lajoie, member of the Status of Women Committee

POWER AND ITS STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

Here are the impacts of socialization on the relationship of women with power:

A young girl learns to:	A young man learns to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be concerned with her appearance Consciously give importance to how she is judged Listen to others, be sensitive to others Not over estimate herself, look to set limits To feel at ease in a restricted and domestic environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act without restraint Value himself and feel appreciated for what he does, rather than for what he is Believe it is important to perform See few limits concerning his possibilities and, first and foremost, to feel ready to measure up to anyone Believe that the public arena belongs to him² (our translation)

Despite significant progress, stereotypes of the prescribed roles still exist and considerably influence the way female leadership is accepted.

THE OBSTACLES TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN AT DECISION-MAKING LEVELS

There are many obstacles to the involvement of women at decision-making levels and power such as age, the distribution of tasks, the lack of know-how in communication and the tensions in the male-female relationships. As an example, family responsibilities hold back women age 35 and younger from holding high-level positions. The glass ceiling, defined as an invisible barrier created by behavioural and organizational biases, must not be forgotten as it prevents women from having access to positions of power.

As for the glass wall, it consists of invisible barriers, but in a vertical fashion that keep women in less strategic and visible fields (human resources, administration, communication, etc.).

"The values expected and often developed by women being contradictory with those patriarchal that are valued in the power structures, it is not surprising that women are disparaged whatever their relationship with power: "[...] if they assert themselves and directly exercise their power, they are perceived as aggressive, hard or rigid; if they don't do it, their ability to hold a position of authority is questioned..."
(our translation)

Simone Landry, 1989

To combat these problems and promote women's involvement in the power structure, there are several action strategies that can be used, such as diffusing information, consciousness-raising, mutual support, public education, awareness, mentorship, demands and political pressure, etc.³ (our translation) ■

To find out more about Relais-femmes: www.relais-femmes.qc.ca

1. Francine Descarries. 2006. "La construction sociale des différences sexuelles: " Du côté des petites filles" Actes du colloque 2006 : De la crinoline au string, Montréal, Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale et leurs enfants.

2. Ibid.

3. Françoise De Bry. 2006, *Les femmes dans l'entreprise. Un problème de responsabilité sociale.* [<http://www.lux-ias.lu/PDF/DeBry.pdf>]

At the microphone: Ridza Cléophat, *Centre de soins prolongés Grace Dart*





At the microphone: Huguette Fortin, CSSS de Beauce

AN ENTERTAINING DELIBERATION

The speakers at the Network had us experience a mini Federal Council during which the participants had to play the game and take a decision on the following motion: “That all healthcare professionals hold full-time positions”. It was a pure delight!

It was the first time at the microphone for several, and it allowed them to break the ice in a friendly atmosphere. Each person was assigned a role, to agree, disagree or be indecisive about the motion. Then, they had to express their opinions individually and argue according to the role they had been given.

It was to be a democratic process according to the following six components:

- A climate where respect, listening, openness as well as acceptance of others’ choices reigned;
- The sharing and understanding of the information;
- The deliberation;
- The decision;
- Action;
- Evaluation for returning to the issue, action and the process in general.

Here are some of the arguments heard, comical at times:

THE FORS:

- The stability of the care teams;
- A reduction in independent labour;
- Better planning of the family budget;

- Those who do not have a full-time position retire with fewer benefits.

THE CONS:

- Take advantage of the summer to work less to take time for oneself and the children;
- The work overload is always there and full-time work brings about an increase in absenteeism;
- I don’t need to work full-time, as my husband has a good job;
- More time for the family.

THE INDECISIVES:

- Experience has made them happy with both choices;
- Suggestions were made: pilot project, impact committee, etc.

Everyone completely enjoyed doing this exercise. The smooth progress of the activity in a democratic climate, good listening skills of the “delegation” and the arguments given made this activity very rewarding! In conclusion, it is no small feat that this mini Federal Council enabled the members of the Network to better understand the influence of their power and the way to exercise it.

By Marie-Ève Bertrand, member of the Status of Women Committee



At the microphone:

1. Josée Anctil, CSSS de Montmagny-L’Islet
2. Adrienne Ouellet, Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke
3. Maryse Laflamme, CSSS du Haut-St-François

OPINION QUESTIONNAIRE ON POWER

Power Women's Way ♀

During this Network, the participants were invited to answer an opinion questionnaire on power, organized by the members of the Status of Women Committee. This comical activity sounded out their perception of the different statements linked to the relationship of women to power. The results can be found below.

Statement	Yes	No	Maybe
1. A woman questions herself more than a man on the rightness of her moving up to a position of power and on her ability to fulfill the mandates that she is given.	71%	12%	17%
2. Even if positions of power are open to women, it remains a man's world.	86%	7%	7%
3. Power changes the relationships between men and women.	81%	6%	13%
4. Women are not equipped to deal with conflict situations.	3%	78%	19%
5. It is difficult to reconcile family life with a political career for a woman.	50%	33%	17%
6. One must not be too sensitive in positions of power. It is much easier for men.	28%	45%	27%
7. Women must prove themselves doubly to be noticed in senior management positions.	80%	7%	13%
8. Women do not always have a positive view of power.	49%	28%	23%
9. Women today take more risks and accept more challenges.	85%	10%	5%
10. Women are generally afraid of power.	33%	28%	39%

Source: Simone Landry. 2011. « Le pouvoir, c'est pas sorcier : il suffit d'en avoir les clés », PratiCom, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 160 p.



THE NETWORK'S FAVORITES



Although published in 1999, this book is still relevant. The author, Manon Tremblay was inspired by the many accounts of female members of parliament in order to better define how the presence of women in the political world can change the way of doing things in the political process.

In addition to containing different statistics on the topic of female representation in politics, the author tells us about the different visions that female members of parliament have about the role that they must play, the means at their disposal to carry out that role, the different obstacles encountered. Lastly, this book also intends to be a reflection on the different contribution that women can have in the world of politics.

For the author however, a critical mass of 30% of female representation must be reached so that they can influence the way of doing things in the political process. As with everything that affects women, patience and especially perseverance must be shown in order to be successful in bringing about change. ■

By Claire Alarie, member of the Status of Women Committee

This small book from Simone Landry certainly met my expectations. It is related to power, easy to read and has a very detailed theoretical content. It contains different concepts linked to power, such as the abuse of power, the relational aspects of power, the sources and forms of power, the social determinants, the leadership styles, the strategies of influence, women and power and, lastly, the fear of power.

Are women afraid of power? You might recognize yourself, as a woman in the following statements taken from the book: "Afraid of being criticized, judged, blamed, of provoking hostility, of being ridiculed, caricatured, of having to fight, walk over others, of being abandoned and finding oneself alone at the top." (our translation)

I recommend this book to deepen your knowledge and in reference to our two networks. Enjoy the read and make your mark! ■



By Véronique Fois, member of the Status of Women Committee



This book written by Pascale Navaro, Journalist and also a columnist at *Télé-Québec*, is a little gem. We understand why women represent a positive asset in the political world. Other than to say that the government must be egalitarian with a 50% representation of women, what do women really bring to governments? This book gives you the answers.

By beginning with a brief history of women in politics, then to politics as a mother, the support that women in power have had, what they think of their power, the existence of women in politics, female solidarity and concluding with the strategies for getting more women elected, the analysis and the interviews with women in power make this work more real and very interesting. I find that this book makes us reflect on our power and especially the commitment we need to have if we want to change things.

I invite you to read it and leave you with this short phrase taken from the book: Riane Eisler, a human rights specialist in the United States says: "the status of women is a more reliable and fair indicator of a country's quality of life than its GDP". ■

By Patricia Lajoie, member of the Status of Women Committee