Males sign off as more women enter TV newsrooms

BY PAUL FARHI
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WASHINGTON - As news director of WTTG-Fox5 here, Katherine Green gets stacks of tapes and resumes from reporters and anchors - some young and green, others older and seasoned. But the most common characteristic is: Most are women.

By Green's estimate, women applicants outnumber men about 3 to 1. Bill Lord, Green's counterpart at the local ABC affiliate, sees much the same ratio and says the percentage of women has increased yearly.

"It's actually more difficult now to find a strong male anchor than a strong female," Green says. "Why? I'm not really sure I can answer that."

People in the TV news business have been wondering the same thing.

When women made their first strides into television newsrooms some four decades ago, their presence was something of a shock to the male establishment (a period of change humorously portrayed in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and more recently in the Will Ferrell film "Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy"). But nowadays, the gender roles are reversed. Women increasingly make up the majority of anchors and TV reporters, and many have key behind-the-scenes jobs.

And men? Outside of a few traditionally male bastions - the sports guy, the weathercaster, the boss - men are disappearing from TV newsrooms.

Perhaps the most visible symbol of female ascendancy is Katie Couric, who in September will become the lead anchor of CBS News, the first woman to hold such a job without a male co-anchor at a traditional broadcast network. But the trend is apparent nationwide. Although the male-female anchor pair is still the industry standard, two-female setups are common in local markets. Viewers rarely see men paired as anchors, or even going it alone - the norm a generation ago.

Women reached statistical parity with men on the anchor desk in the early 1990s, and their ranks have been climbing since. The number of female anchors reached a record high last year, accounting for 57 percent of the positions in a nationwide survey conducted by the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Just as impressive are the gains in the rest of the newsroom. Women account for more than half of TV reporters (58 percent) and such middle managers as executive producers (55 percent), news producers (66 percent) and news writers (56 percent).

At the bottom of the career ladder are even more women: Almost two-thirds of bachelor's degrees in journalism and mass communications were awarded to women in 2004, according to research by Lee Becker of the University of Georgia. These days, when educators such as