Becker or Craig Allen of Arizona State University look over their broadcast journalism classes, they often don't see a single male student looking back.

"Young men are just not interested," says Allen, who runs the broadcast news program at ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. "There's been almost an evacuation of men from this field."

News managers look on these numbers with a mixture of pride and mild alarm. Pride because decades of equal-opportunity employment rules, inclusive hiring policies and viewer acceptance of diversity have opened up what had once been a preserve of men, and primarily white men. But concern, too, since the male exodus threatens the traditional anchor model, in which a male-female duo is sitting at the head of a symbolic nuclear family. There is also some debate about whether the "feminization" of the newsroom has led to a more female-oriented news agenda.

"We're not at the four- or five-alarm stage yet, but I do think the trends are very concerning," says Jerry Gumbert, chief executive of Audience Research & Development, a Fort Worth-based consulting firm. "There's a growing sense in newsrooms that good men are becoming harder to find, and that we're becoming too female-heavy."

So where have all the guys gone? Many observers suggest their departure reflects the transformation of TV news from a "glamour" business to a low-wage, no-growth field with limited career potential. With TV stations laboring under the same financial pressures as others in the media, men might be finding better opportunities elsewhere.

Although the rewards of making it to the top remain great - anchors make millions of dollars and reporters typically make more than $200,000 a year at the network level - there isn't that much room at the top.

Fox News Channel, the top-rated, all-news cable network, for example, employs fewer than 100 anchors and reporters. Employment in the business at all levels and positions amounts to only about 25,000, says Bob Papper, a Ball State University professor.

Newcomers tend to start their careers in small markets at small salaries. The median annual salary for a reporter working in the smallest third of TV markets is $20,000, according to the RTNDA. It can take years to climb to a larger and better-paying station. The heady days of the '80s and '90s, when all-news cable stations were blossoming and broadcast stations were expanding their newscasts to more hours, appear to be over.

"You could make the argument that it's (more lucrative) to go into the military than it is to go into TV news," Papper said.

Papper theorizes that women have a natural advantage over men on TV: "If you take the typical 22-year-old woman, dress her up and put makeup on her, she looks like an adult. With a 22-year-old guy, you can do just about anything and he still looks like he's going through puberty." So a woman "can get a better job on the air and advance more quickly than a man."

A more important question might be whether the influx of women changed the news itself. Although cause and effect are hard to separate, there's no doubt that the news looks much different today than before women were a factor in producing it.

"When I look back 30 years or so, to when my career began, there was so much more emphasis