

MOVING PAST THE 'WHAT IF'

Taking women from suppression to full expression through The Magazine Club

By Shayna Wiwierski



Danielle Strang (left) and Jennifer von Berendt at the Creative Hive studios after filming episodes one and two of their upcoming docuseries.

PHOTO CREDIT: ROO BAKER.



From left to right: Jesse Szymanski, owner of Modern Muse Media, along with Strang & von Berendt at the Creative Hive studios on the first day of filming. Szymanski is the executive producer of the upcoming docuseries.

Two Edmonton women are working to shed light on the benefits and the 'how' of overcoming gender inequality and authority gaps in the workplace and beyond.

Jennifer von Berendt and Dani Strang are co-founders of The Magazine Club™ (TMC), an EdTech (education technology) platform that offers all women (cis, trans, and non-binary) the psychologically safe space and practice to rekindle their relationship with authentic expression to bring their differentiating ideas, perspectives, and opinions back into critical conversations.

Despite efforts and focus on getting more women in positions of power over the past decade, there is still a massive divide. One that is defined by many experts in the diversity and inclusion space as the authority gap. This means that, with some exceptions, the male voice, perspective, and opinion has been identified and elevated as the most authoritative and respected in the modern workplace. This bias has created an immense amount of invisible, yet visceral challenges for the credibility of perspectives outside the (cis, white) male experience.

"Women do not lack the confidence, do not lack the education or life and professional experience," says Strang. "All of these things are abundant. It's not the women, it's the environments that are the problem."

The idea for The Magazine Club came six years ago when von Berendt and another partner created a group where women gathered to deliberate and discuss award-winning magazine



Recent filming of the Magazine Club Practice with a diverse group of Edmonton women at the Creative Hive studios in Edmonton.



2021 Edmonton Mayoral Candidate Cheryll Watson sits with Strang (left) and von Berendt (right) after being interviewed on film for the upcoming docuseries. PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH HUNTER.

content. The intent was to build relationships, expand thinking, and invigorate polarizing discussions. What it ended up doing was facilitating deep personal and professional breakthroughs related to the harms that come from being suppressed and the power of being fully expressed.

“It is paramount that we create a space where women can feel influential, heard, understood, and respected as their full authentic selves,” says von Berendt.

“On one side I was this professional, this executive within a rapidly growing space, on the senior leadership team and the only mother, struggling to understand why I felt so unfulfilled,” says Strang. “It

was The Magazine Club that allowed me to think ‘okay, I am super expressed and respected in this space, but yet I feel so blocked and suppressed in [my day job]. Maybe it’s not just me. Maybe it is the environment that I’m finding myself in.’ That’s what we are looking to change with The Magazine Club.”

The Magazine Club platform is currently in the ideation stage. Once launched, it will be the world’s first unlearning platform for women where, through the monthly deliberation of magazines anchored in exceptional journalism, they re-create the space where women tend to abandon their deep opinions, ideas, and perspectives.

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Von Berendt and Strang are moving past their ‘what if’ by piloting The Magazine Club practice in a TV docuseries funded through Telus STORYHIVE. Since 2013, the Telus STORYHIVE program has funded productions and supported emerging filmmakers from B.C. and Alberta with mentorship and support.

“Currently, women receive only two per cent of available venture capital dollars. We had to get creative about what funding was available to us and piloting our idea through a documentary sounded like a really rewarding option,” says Strang.

Puneeta McBryan, executive director of the Downtown Business Association, recently participated in the filming of The Magazine Club pilot and shares, “There’s something about this experience that because of the way it’s engineered and designed, it creates the conditions for full authentic expression and deep conversation. It’s about letting your guard down and participating in a way that I don’t know we have otherwise in our lives.”

The series, which showcases the coming together of The Magazine Club, will be launched on the Telus Optik TV Platform this fall. Edmonton's Modern Muse Media and the Creative Hive are both women-led companies acting as key partners in the making of the series, which proudly features a 100 per cent women, trans, and non-binary production crew.

"We are excited about the experts and incredibly vulnerable stories that we have been able to gather for the series," says Strang. "In our own research that was conducted at the end of 2021, 45 out of 47 women expressed that they did not feel comfortable to fully express their ideas, perspectives, and opinions in their current environments. The call to

action is to look beyond diversity. Sure, you might be bringing more women into an organization, but that does not mean that her real expression is heard, valued, and respected. Think about what you are missing out on. What we are all missing out on."

Following the docuseries, the Magazine Club is aiming to co-produce an event later this year with the ECA for WomenBuild, which seeks to inspire, support, encourage, connect, and celebrate women in the construction industry. The event will invite women to bring their male work counterparts and explore how they can unlearn unhelpful conditioning together in a meaningful way.

"WomenBuild exists to elevate women

in construction through community. There is an overarching mandate to encourage women to follow their dreams, explore new possibilities, and create things in the world that are their own," says von Berendt, a past ECA board director. "Women have been creating ground-breaking innovations in typically male-dominated spaces. The construction industry has been one of them."

While The Magazine Club still has a way to go before launching, both von Berendt and Strang say that they hope to inspire others to move past asking "what if" and take the first step of pursuing an idea, even if it isn't perfect.

"The pressure for women to show up as perfect is paralyzing. I know so many women have incredible ideas that may never come to fruition because they have been convinced by the world and themselves that it's not perfect enough to share or test or try," says Strang. "If I can show up imperfectly with our previous experience as fuel behind us, build this idea, be afraid, but choose to rally a community of support and be really vulnerable about it all, the hope is to inspire other women to do the same. To lift that veil of imperfection stopping women from taking action and denying the world of their brilliance."

You can learn more about The Magazine Club at www.themagclub.org and financially support the completion and launch of their docuseries through the IFundWomen platform. ♦

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