

# **MEDIA SYSTEMS, EQUAL RIGHTS AND THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: GENDER AS A CASE IN POINT**

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Equal rights regulations and affirmative action are sometimes thought of as restricting the freedom of the press. In this article I will contradict this argument and instead claim that the provision of equal rights is a decisive indicator of press freedom in the media. The focus will be on the gendering of the media system and on gender equality, but much of what I say is applicable to issues of race/ethnicity, class and age as well as religious rights. Gender issues today are very much intertwined with issues of ethnicity and class and I will refer to this off and on in my discussion.

## **Press freedom: Controlling or extending the rights of individuals and groups**

Tied to the principle of publicity, press freedom is related to the establishment of a democratic public sphere, which allows citizens to communicate freely and without censorship. In his insightful study on the 'The Principles of Publicity and Press Freedom' (2002) Splichal has critically evaluated the emergence of press freedom in its historical and philosophical relationship to the principles of publicity. The major principles of publicity were freedom of thought and freedom of expression, both being directed against the secrecy prevailing in feudal society. Splichal points out that freedom of the press was originally conceived as an extension of these two principles and promised to help fulfil Kant's goal of achieving the common good by allowing for a common reasoning. These ideas are at the core of the idea of enlightenment. They have formed the shaping of the European nation-states and also count among the founding principles of the European Union. Critical theories of the public sphere, prominent among them Habermas' analysis of public discourse, have relied on these ideas as well.

Splichal points out that the idea of press freedom diverted from its original focus and often came to be thought of as the pursuit of freedom by the media. Thus, it no longer served as an extension of the publicity principles by granting the individuals' rights to freedom, but as a means for controlling mass behaviour. Especially when it is linked to freedom of enterprise and private ownership, freedom of the press can be a powerful force restricting, not enhancing public debate. In countries where the media system is highly concentrated, be it as a state monopoly or by private ownership, grave danger exists of excluding particular social groups and rendering oppositional opinions invisible. On this ground, Splichal (2002: 83–5), Hamelink (2004) and others have called for introducing a right to communicate to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It would distract from the main topic of this volume to elaborate further on this idea. Suffice it to say, when I mention press freedom in this article I do not refer to its historical occurrence as a restricting force in the public discourse, but as an idea facilitating it by extending the principles of publicity. Freedom of the press, hence, does not primarily refer to freedom *by the press*, but to the freedom of publication of ones opinions and views *by the citizens through the media*. Realizing press freedom then entails the rights of individuals and social groups to receive all the relevant information necessary in order to participate freely in the public decision-making process and to form, express, and finally publicize their opinions. The degree to which these rights are guaranteed is a decisive measure for the degree of press freedom in a society.

The realization of freedom of the press thus encompasses two aspects: there is a legal aspect that entails the formal right to receive and transmit information without the interference of the state or other outside authority and guarantees an independent press. The other aspect requires a more in-depth look at the media system and addresses the prerequisites for participation and inclusion in the media, both as subjects to speak and have one's opinions heard, and as objects to be talked about and be represented in a non-discriminatory fashion. When seen as a guarantor of freedom of thought and freedom of expression, freedom of the press is linked both to the content of the media (does it provide adequate information?) as well as to the participation in media and communications (do the different social groups have access to the media or are some of them excluded?). This more substantial aspect, then, brings us to the discussion of a normative framework for the realization of freedom of the press in the case of women.

At the very influential Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, at which the European Union played a very active role, twelve critical areas of concern for women and for the improvement of women's rights across the world were identified (Beijing 1995). 'Women and the Media', Section J, was based on the 'Toronto Platform for Action' (Toronto 1995), drafted at the UNESCO symposium 'Women and the Media, Access to Expression and Decision-Making'. In its preamble the Toronto Platform called for 'new opportunities for the participation of women in communication and media and for dissemination of information about women'. It held that it was necessary to increase the number of women in all areas of the media, but especially in the technical and decision-making fields. The range of action recommended went from facilitating training for young women to a recognition of the importance of women's media networks and alternative media produced by women. Obviously all of these are connected to the shaping of the media system.

With regards to media content, the Toronto Platform called for an improvement of the largely negative and stereotyped portrayal of women, and it condemned pornography and sexism. To this end, gender-awareness programmes targeting media professionals of both gender and

gender-sensitive editorial policies, including the adequate use of language, was recommended. The platform furthermore suggested the introduction of media-monitoring bodies for editorial content and for advertisement. The demand for diversity features prominently in the Platform for Action. Achieving diversity both with regards to the access to media by women of different social backgrounds and lifestyles as well as with regards to their representation constitutes an important goal in the document. Following to a large extent the suggestions of the UNESCO symposium in Toronto, the Beijing Platform for Action named two major strategic objectives to provide for gender equality in the media:

- *Strategic Objective J.1.* Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
- *Strategic Objective J.2.* Promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media. (Beijing 1995)

I will focus on these two goals, one being concerned with access and participation and the other with representation, and ask to what degree these have been achieved. To this end, I will first present results from the Global Media Monitoring Project (2005) with a focus on the data that refers to the European participants. Then I will introduce the analytic concepts proposed by feminist scholars, which allow us to assess the gendering of the media both with regards to its occupational dimension and its content dimension. Based on this overview of gender studies research, in the conclusion, issues and questions are identified that need to be addressed when asking to what degree the two strategic objectives are fulfilled by the media system in different countries. In 2005 the European Union evaluated the outcome of the Beijing Platform of Action and established indicators for its successful implementation, but this was not yet done for the area of concern, 'Women and the Media' (see Roadmap 2006). A realistic assessment of these issues would help in determining factors that hinder or facilitate the fulfilment of press freedom for all citizens and for the different social groups they belong to.

### **Press freedom and the gendering of international media systems**

*A global average: Europe in the Global Media Monitoring Project*

The Global Media Monitoring Survey collected data on the gendering of the world's news media on inconspicuous days in 1995, 2000 and 2005 (GMMP 2005). In 2005, data from 76 countries was gathered, among them 24 European countries. A number of Eastern European countries that had not participated in the two previous surveys were represented. The data provide a good overview of the gendering of the news, but is not reliable in every detail, monitoring only a single day in the media's news reporting. Also, the national findings are based on different samples and sample sizes, but weighting measures have been introduced to account for these differences. The data, furthermore, has been collected on the basis of the same coding scheme and for a clearly defined body of news stories. Despite the above mentioned limitations, the GMMP now constitutes the most comprehensive data base and provides the best comparative data not only on a global scale, but also as regards the European countries (see Gallagher 2001). The GMMP 2005 comprises an impressive number of 12,893 news stories taken from television, radio and newspapers worldwide. About a third

of these were collected and analysed in Europe. Both participation and representation of men and women in news stories is addressed.

As to the issue of *participation and access*, the first objective of the Beijing Platform for Action, the GMMP shows that women and men present the news in about equal proportions and this was true for all three years in which the survey was conducted. The number of female reporters is traditionally much lower than that of female presenters, but the GMMP notes a steady increase in the percentage of news items reported by women: from 28 per cent in 1995 to 31 per cent in 2000, reaching 37 per cent in 2005. However, these data need to be differentiated, with female reporters gaining much more ground in radio and television than in newspapers and reporting considerably more on local events than on national or international ones. The European percentages, calculated as the average for the participating 24 countries, lag a few points behind the global ones, but the diversion is small.

Table 1 presents the combined figures for news presenters and news reporters in the different countries and shows stark differences among them. Germany has the lowest percentage of women news presenters and news reporters with just 27 per cent, followed by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal, where under 40 per cent of the personnel in the news rooms are women. On the other end of the spectrum are Georgia and Serbia and Montenegro with 80 and 74 per cent female news presenters and reporters respectively. In thirteen countries – just over half of the total – the differences between women and men are only small, with women's participation ranging from 45 to 55 per cent. There is a slight tendency, then, for Western European countries to lag behind in women's employment in the media when compared to Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. One possible explanation of this focuses on the tradition of public service broadcasting in Western European countries. This appears paradoxical since public service TV was meant to ensure plurality in news and access of all social groups to broadcasting, but feminist scholars have pointed out that public service broadcasting was at the same time tightly linked to a pedagogy of information that favoured elite politics and 'hard news' and neglected other issues (for an overview see Klaus 2005: 235–40). But the great differences between reporters and presenters in the different countries and with regard to the different media need to be kept in mind, so that a single explanation for the variation is certainly inadequate.

When looking at the characteristics of news presenters on television, a striking pyramid emerges with regards to age. Within the younger age groups the percentages of female presenters is much higher than in the older ones. Women seem to vanish successively from the screen, the older they get. There are only two topics that women report on more frequently than men. These are the weather and stories on poverty, housing and welfare. With regards to celebrity news as well as arts and entertainment, the number of female reporters is just a little smaller than that of their male colleagues. On the other end, sport is the least likely to be reported on by women, with four out of five stories being told by a man. Women are also underrepresented in reporting on politics and government. The GMMP concludes: 'Overall, male journalists report at the so-called "hard" or "serious" end of the news spectrum such as politics and government...Female journalists are more likely to work on the so-called "soft" stories' (GMMP 2005: 19). However, it should be stressed that, with the exception of sports, the differences are in no way overwhelming or always clear-cut. The GMMP results suggest that women now have a greater share in the making of the news, but the design does not allow for a look at the decision-making level of the media. Also, the rather high percentage of women presenting and reporting news stories is counteracted by the low number of women represented in the news.

**Table 1:** News presenters and reporters and news subjects in Europe.

Europe	News presenters and reporters				News subjects			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Austria	29	48%	31	52%	21	12%	160	88%
Azerbaijan	55	45%	68	55%	13	15%	73	85%
Belgium	47	37%	80	63%	79	31%	179	69%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	84	51%	82	49%	57	15%	324	85%
Croatia	58	46%	68	54%	108	26%	313	74%
Estonia	47	49%	48	51%	45	24%	142	76%
Finland	41	47%	47	53%	114	29%	277	71%
Georgia	24	80%	6	20%	10	19%	43	81%
Germany	88	27%	239	73%	146	22%	505	78%
Hungary	32	50%	32	50%	25	12%	185	88%
Ireland	70	54%	60	46%	84	26%	234	74%
Italy	676	52%	624	48%	244	14%	1502	86%
Malta	49	42%	69	58%	59	17%	295	83%
Netherlands	31	36%	54	64%	47	24%	147	76%
Norway	63	44%	80	56%	81	26%	229	74%
Portugal	73	37%	124	63%	73	20%	299	80%
Romania	87	52%	80	48%	39	23%	133	77%
Serbia and Montenegro	132	71%	54	29%	62	17%	311	83%
Spain	124	49%	127	51%	153	22%	552	78%
Sweden	122	51%	119	49%	112	30%	262	70%
Switzerland	52	46%	60	54%	35	17%	175	83%
Turkey	188	39%	297	61%	127	19%	559	81%
United Kingdom	118	35%	217	65%	131	25%	401	75%
Uzbekistan	26	55%	21	45%	9	15%	51	85%
TOTAL		48%		52%		21%		79%

Source: GMMP 2005: 135 and 120–1 (newly arranged and partly recalculated).

The representation of women as news subjects is strikingly low and lags far behind their role in everyday life. Only 21 per cent of news subjects are women and in only 10 per cent of the news are women central to the stories. They are more important in stories on crime and violence at the periphery of the news. Also, they appear much more often as celebrities, royalty or as ‘ordinary people’, while experts and spokespersons are overwhelmingly men. Women are largely absent from the area of politics and economy, and even more surprisingly also seldom featured in education, child-care, consumer issues or HIV-AIDS. Only 4 per cent of the news stories

explicitly deal with equality issues, which are conspicuously absent in the reporting on politics and economy. At the same time, news stories are twice as likely to reinforce (6 per cent) blatant gender stereotypes as to challenge (3 per cent) them. The GMMP concludes:

Blatant stereotyping is alive and well in news reporting around the world. Nor is it limited to the gratuitous display of female flesh – although there are plenty of examples of this. Sexist reporting extends to a very wide range of stories – including sport, crime, violence, and even politics. (GMMP 2005: 20)

The GMMP summary notes a link between the gender of the news reporter and the news subject, with women relating more stories that feature women and also more often raising gender equality issues, but this could also be an effect of the topics women report on. A gender-sensitive language is often lacking from the stories and where a differentiation between men and women would be appropriate, as for example in the case of the consequences of social childcare arrangements or the average figures for pension rights, such figures are rarely presented.

Table 1 highlights the representation of women as news subjects in Europe. The overall average in the European countries for which data was provided is 21 per cent and thus identical to the global average. But again, a closer look at the table reveals great differences between the different countries. Belgium, Sweden and Finland are the leaders with about 30 per cent of the news subjects being women. Austria and Hungary are on the other end of the continuum, featuring only 12 per cent of female subjects in their news. Just a little higher are the percentages for Italy and Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Uzbekistan. In half the countries women make up 20–30 per cent of the news subjects. Most Western European countries are in this group, while the Eastern and Southern European countries represented in the survey display figures below the average. The Northern European countries have the best score when looking both at the percentage of women among the news personnel and as news subjects.

In summary, the GMMP shows that women seem to have made greater progress in the newsroom than in their representation in news stories. But a division of labour seems to exist with men reporting in the more central areas of news. Also, women appear more frequently on television and are on the average much younger than their male colleagues. It needs to be kept in mind that the GMMP cannot look at the level of decision-making and provides mostly quantitative data. The gendering of the news to the disadvantage of women is especially obvious when looking at the content of media and the subjects that are allowed to speak. Overall, only one in five news subjects is a woman and fewer appear as experts. However, while blatant stereotyping and sexism still exist, they are found only in a minority of the news stories. On the other hand, the GMMP found incidences of male and female reporters that actively support gender equality. Feminist media studies have tried to make sense of the different findings and provide theoretical concepts that help to explain the relationship between women and the media and to consider this relationship in their respective social and cultural contexts.

*The occupational dimension: Participation and access of women to the media*

Lünenborg (1997) and Gallagher (1990) have systematically collected comparative data on the employment of women in journalism in Western European countries, and Gertrude Robinson (2005) has done the same for the United States and Canada and contrasted these

findings with some of the European data. These authors provide a frame for analysing the gendering of the media system (see also Ross and Byerly 2004). Very little systematic data exists on other parts of Europe. Lünenborg (1997: 119–31) points out that the percentage of female journalists had been especially high in the Eastern European countries prior to the demise of communism. Today, a lot of variation exists in the different transformation states, but it seems that in the majority of countries the percentage of female journalists declined dramatically after 1989.<sup>1</sup> In the German Democratic Republic, for example, the number of female and male journalists was about equal, but after the unification of Germany the percentage of women declined drastically to about 30 percent, and thus to the level of the West German employment figures.

Despite such differentiation, however, the discrimination of women in the media work force has been a common feature across the European countries and was also visible in the Eastern European communist countries (Lünenborg 1997; also Ross 2005; Zoonen 1998). The existing data reveals a *vertical segmentation* between men and women employed in media and communications. The concept of a vertical segmentation was introduced by Neverla and Kanzleiter (1984) as an important feature of the labour market and refers to the gender hierarchy in existence in the media. The more a position is associated with competence, privilege and decision-making power, the higher will be the percentage of men holding this position. The reverse is true as well: the lower a job in the media's hierarchy, the more likely it becomes that a woman will hold it. In all the countries for which such data exist, a majority of the secretaries in the media offices are women, while they are much less represented on the editorial staff and only rarely own media businesses. Within journalism the pyramid shows up when comparing the percentage of women and men that are employed as trainees, as full-time journalists or as editors-in-chief. Recent surveys conducted in Germany and Austria suggest that very little progress has been made with regards to the representation of women in the latter group (Weischenberg, Malik and Scholl 2006; Kaltenbrunner et al. 2007). Another indicator of vertical segmentation of the journalist work force is that of wage difference, with women in the same jobs earning less than their male colleagues (Allen 2004: 124).

Neverla and Kanzleiter (1984) identified another form of gender division in the media workforce, which they called *horizontal segmentation*. They found that there were areas of women's and men's employment that mirrored the traditional division of labour between the sexes (also Zoonen 1998: 34). While the percentage of female journalists was high in the family and health departments, it was very low in the areas of sports, politics and business. There is an ongoing debate among German communication scholars as to the extent of horizontal segmentation in today's media. Lünenborg (2001) has pointed out that studies often present a misleading picture of female employment when providing percentages only. Since women are a majority of the work force only in lifestyle, health or family departments, it appears that they are employed solely at the margins of journalism. But these are generally also small departments and when Lünenborg recalculated the actual employment figures, it immediately became obvious that women, just like their male colleagues, work overwhelmingly in the areas of local news, politics or economy and thus are firmly positioned in the centre of the profession. Lünenborg concluded that many studies overestimate gender differences because they treat gender as an all-encompassing, ever-present variable of individuals while at the same time neglecting the multi-dimensional aspects of the gender category.

In Germany, Austria, the United States as well as in many other countries, the vertical segmentation specifically has not diminished as much as one could have expected, given the fact that for a number of years now the majority of trainees in journalism education are female and women enter the journalistic workforce with a more solid educational background than their male colleagues. Feminist scholars have blamed the gendering of journalism for this situation. Gender is not only a personal system, socializing the individual, but also a structural force that is shaping social institutions and value systems. The gendering of media and journalism includes the high regard for values such as objectivity (Allen 2004: 120–2) and an elite orientation, but can also be seen in the gendered climate of the newsroom (Robinson 2005; Ross 2005), in the competitive structuring of media and communication (Weish 2003), in male-centred career networks and work schedules that are antagonistic to family life (for an overview see Klaus 2005: 177–80). This is the reason why the number of women in higher education or in journalism training does not automatically translate into more women gaining decision-making positions in media and communication. The GMMP and other research indicates that some progress has been made in the employment of women, but almost nothing is known about the chances for minority women or transgender women to gain access to the media workforce, which appear to be very slim.

At least two things are needed to change the male dominance in the journalistic workforce and to allow women a fair share in the decision-making processes. One has to do with standards for gender equality within the media organizations and the other with equal access to communication and media policies. In Germany, the greatest advances in the employment figures of women in media have been made in those businesses where affirmative action and gender mainstreaming policies were introduced, as was the case in the WDR, a public German broadcaster situated in Cologne. A commitment to gender equality is almost invariably tied to the existence of women's media organizations or networks of feminist journalists, who formulate common demands and interests. It is the political arena where the most important decisions on the media system are made. The number of women in the political decision-making bodies, in governments, parliaments and political parties can have an influence on media and communication policies. In some countries female politicians and women's organizations are represented on regulatory media boards. Such decision-making power at the level of the media and of politics also increases the chances of women and women's organizations to influence the representation of women by the media.

*The content dimension: The representation of women by the media*

A balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women was the second objective put forth in Beijing (1995). The lack of women as subjects in news stories has been a clear finding of the GMMP. In none of the participating countries is there a balanced gender portrayal. Quite a few indicators confirm the existence of gender stereotypes in the news, such as the lack of women as experts and spokesperson, and their attribution to the 'softer' news items and to the private issues. Already in 1978, when Gaye Tuchman summarized the feminist research findings, she concluded that the portrayal of women was not a mirror of society, but lagged far behind the social changes that had occurred. According to Tuchman, the portrayal of women was characterized by their *symbolic annihilation and trivialization* in the media.

The *symbolic annihilation* can best be seen in the marginal status of women in political reporting and in a language-use that renders women invisible. In many countries the masculine forms are favoured in the media. For example, in the German-speaking countries journalists claim



overwhelmingly that the masculine form is the generic neutral, despite evidence to the contrary, and that to add the female form would also be awkward. In the context of the EU-funded project 'Gender, Politics and Media: Challenging Stereotypes, Promoting Diversity, and Strengthening Equality' (2005)<sup>2</sup> Pantti (2005) has provided an excellent overview of previous European studies conducted in this area. The results show that symbolic annihilation is firmly linked to the *trivialization* of women and many of the findings reverberate the results of the GMMP. Pantti concludes that the media images discriminate against women in politics by a variety of means such as:

- Their invisibility
- The specific topic selection, whereby women appear in 'soft news' and men in 'serious' or 'hard news'
- The firm connection made between women and their family status
- The focus on the looks, styles and appearances of female politicians
- A gendered use of language when characterizing politicians
- The framing of female politicians in the context of gender in contrast to their colleagues.

The symbolic annihilation and trivialization resulting from a focus on the styling and on the private lives of female politicians, and their stereotypical portrayal by the media creates a double-bind situation for women in politics, who appear as incapable politicians when they act feminine and as anti-feminine, and thus not to be trusted, when they act like men.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, male politicians were not placed in such a gendered frame, as Pantti (2005) remarks: '(M)en are more likely than are women to be described in gender-neutral terms'. In this way, men, their actions and areas of interests are conceptualized as the norm in political and public life, while women appear as the diversion from it. In an EU-project focusing on 'The Role of Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power' (Latvia 2004) the absence of references to their gender in the reports on male politicians has been fittingly called the 'silencing of gender'.

In her comprehensive discussion of the lack of advances made towards an adequate portrayal of women by the media since the Beijing Conference, Pandian (1999) used mostly data from outside of Europe, but much seems to apply here as well. Aside from the scarcity of information on women, the lack of women as news subjects and their stereotyping, Pandian identifies *negative and derogative images of women* as an important problem area, hindering the fulfilment of the goals articulated in Beijing. Many European studies have painted the same picture with women often being used as sex objects in advertisements. They are also much more frequently portrayed as passive victims than as active subjects. Violence against women in media is frequently sexualized (Röser 2000). In this way it is tied to pornography and linked to an irresponsible reporting on sexual violence against women (Zoonen 1994; see also Allen 2004: 136–41).

Examples of inadequate reporting on male violence against women can be found in German and Austrian news stories on the murder of a woman by her ex-partner. While women nowadays are rarely portrayed as bringing about their punishment by lewd or promiscuous behaviour, those stories almost invariably appear under the headline of a 'family tragedy'. Thus the crime is equated with other tragic occurrences such as accidents, fatal illnesses or natural disasters that befall a family unit. The silencing of gender can be seen at work in this example since the social reasons for these crimes, which are rooted in the existence of a power relationship between the

sexes and in the prevalence of traditional concepts of masculinity, are thus rendered invisible. Such gender stereotyping has very real consequences for the women and men in the audiences. In a German study, Röser (2000) has shown how media violence that reinforces the imbalance of power between men and women is perceived as a threat by female viewers in real life, hindering their freedom of movement in the public realm.

Alternative gender portrayals are rare in the news, but there seems to be some more progress in the fictional programs. Klaus and Kassel (2005) found that Austrian entertainment series in 2004 featured a wide variety of traditional as well as non-traditional gender images with genres being directed at young people and comedies presenting a more modern image of women's lifestyles and career options. However, according to that research, not much progress has been made in regards to the verbal and nonverbal interactions of men and women in the different series that tended to be conventional, with women portrayed as the weaker sex and the caretaker of men and children, while men were portrayed as much stronger and protective, but also as less caring in the family context. As has been found in other countries, very little coverage is given to equality issues and alternative images of women in all types of media content in Austria (Klaus and Kassel 2007). This points to the necessity of supporting the publishing by different women's groups of alternative media that can counter some of 'the irrelevance of mainstream media content to the real lives of women' (Pandian 1999: 464).

When compared to the occupational arena, the rate of change with regards to the gender portrayal in media seems to be even slower. The search for explanations for the persistence of vertical and horizontal segmentation in the media workforce and for the annihilation and trivialization of women by the media has led to new research questions. Pantti (2005) points out that research on the relationship between gender, media, and politics initially focused on the (in) visibility of women, then analysed the specific coverage of female politicians and finally turned to questions of *gendered mediation* by the media. The feminist research agenda has altogether shifted from a sole concern with media representation of women to a more differentiated approach that focuses on the multiple ways in which gender is constructed by the media. This has led to a greater scrutiny of professional norms and working procedures in journalism and of the hierarchies of values in effect in media content.

The objectivity norm and the norm of fast reporting in the news selection process has been especially questioned by feminist scholars, as has the devaluation of entertainment programmes that are more closely associated with female audiences, and the unqualified condemnation of the recent changes in news production (Lünenborg 1997). News values do not lend themselves to a discussion of structural factors, either, and this means that social problems of inequality and exclusion are rarely addressed. In Germany and Austria researchers have suggested to add xenophobia/ethnicity and misogyny/gender as news values, with foreigners and women having less chance of appearing in news stories than native citizens and men, even if the events concerned display the same number of news factors (for example Prenner 1995). Few media professionals are aware of these implicit biases in the news rooms and production departments. The European 'Screening Gender'-Project<sup>4</sup> supported by the European Union and organized by five European public broadcasters between 1997 and 2000 as well as the 'Gender, Politics, and Media'-Project mentioned above developed material for comprehensive gender-awareness training of the media staff using different examples from media content. Also, some organizations

of female journalists have put out guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language by media in their countries.

Ethical standards for media and journalism that include principles for an adequate, non-sexist, and non-discriminatory gender portrayal could be installed by legislation or by a voluntary self-monitoring of the media. Some countries introduced an ombudsman or organizations that provide opportunities for audiences to take action against sexist, violent and derogatory media images. In Germany as well as in Austria regulatory bodies exist at which protest against advertisements can be directed. Charges of discriminatory or sexist practices always feature prominently in the complaints raised, but the ruling triggers only moral sanctions. A similar function for journalism is held by the 'Deutsche Presserat', which serves as a self-regulatory body for media content, but it is called a 'toothless tiger' since its sanctions are not binding. Undoubtedly, restrictive measures need to be complemented by a conscious effort to diversify gender images and to support gender equality in society. In order to achieve this, alternative, feminist, and minority media should be subsidized, and provisions should be taken to allow that voices from civil society can also be heard in mainstream media. Germany, for example, requires private TV stations to give a time slot to independent media production companies and both Germany and Austria have a triadic structure in their broadcasting systems, with community media being supported as a third pillar besides private-commercial and public stations.

### **Conclusions: Prerequisites for equality in the media system**

The two strategic objectives laid out by the UN are obviously interlinked. Only when women in the media are portrayed as actively engaged in politics, work, and public affairs, will women in the audiences be encouraged to participate in all areas of social life. The social responsibility of the media extends to portraying a wide variety of gender and sexual relationships, thus enabling women and men to make informed choices from the great variety of options open to them today. This goal can better be achieved when more women are present at all levels of media production, but also if women can actively engage as audiences with the media content available. This requires that women have the technical means as well as the competences to access and to choose from all media content. In many countries women still have less access to the Internet and have even less often the technical skills or the self-esteem to successfully use ICTs for their information and publication needs. This problem has been addressed in terms of the Digital Divide, which has narrowed considerably in the Western European countries, but which is still wide open in technologically and economically poorer countries and in those states where a stricter gender division prevails.

Press freedom can only be realized to its full extent when all citizens have equal access to the media. As gender research has shown in the case of women, no country has as yet achieved this goal. But there are important differentiations between the countries. In order to compare and evaluate the extent of gender equality, and thus the degree of the realization of press freedom in the different countries, a number of indicators have proven useful. While women should be treated as a social group and their status analysed in comparison to that of men, also necessary is a more differentiated approach which addresses the situation of women of different ethnic groups and class backgrounds and of diverse sexual orientations and lifestyles. Comparative data that need to be collected include:

*Indicators for participation and access to the media*

- Number of women in media workforce
- Percentages of women in different areas of media and hierarchical positions
- Wage differences between men and women
- Representation of different social groups in decisions making bodies for media content and media policy
- Representation of women and women's groups in regulatory media bodies
- Representation of women with regards to media ownership
- Extent of the digital divide and measures to counteract it.

*Indicators for gender equality in media content*

- Representation of women as subjects in news stories
- Representation in different subject areas
- Rules against pornography and sexual violence in media content
- Financial and other support for alternative media and community programming
- Gender training for editorial staff
- Rights of audiences to shape media content by ombudsmen or monitoring bodies.

To overcome the structural barriers for the participation of women in media and a non-discriminatory gender portrayal by media, conscious measures need to be taken. Vertical and horizontal segmentation of the labour force, as well as the symbolic annihilation and trivialization in the media, is a result of a dualistic gender regime in effect in society. Although men are also affected by gender stereotyping, the construction of gender by the media supports a power imbalance that discriminates against women. Undoubtedly, progress, albeit much too slow, has been made towards a better representation of women both at the level of the workforce and of media content in many countries. Although statistics on this are much needed, it is safe to say that the progress that has been made favours middle-class, heterosexual, Christian and native-born women, while migrant women, lesbians, Islamic and working-class women are still largely absent from the media workforce as well as from media content.

**Notes**

1. Pantti (2005) reports the same in regard to the number of women holding a political office.
2. See *Portraying Politics 2006* for detailed information on the project and the resulting research and training toolkit.
3. Women in journalism who enter male-dominated fields and positions face a similar double-bind situation.
4. Detailed information on 'Screening Gender. Promoting Good Practices in Gender Portrayal on Television' including the training tool kit can be found on the Internet (see *Screening Gender 2000*).

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