

WOMEN IN NEWSROOMS: IDLE HOPES FOR THE CONQUEST OF THE MASCULINE FORTRESS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to systematize and review academic texts dealing with the presence (absence) of women in the newsrooms, both as decision makers and staff members, and its impact on media content. The author argues that there is no direct or causal relationship between the presence or absence of women in the newsrooms and the gender stereotypes in the media content, as there are many other factors affecting both the media content and the individual gender performance. The paper offers a detailed discussion of some of these factors, e.g. non-dichotomic gender essence, the absence of feminine solidarity, institutional factors and media logic, horizontal and vertical newsroom segregation, sexual harassment and others.

KEY WORDS

women – newsroom – decision making – media content – gender stereotypes – horizontal/vertical segregation

1. Introduction: Framing the topic within media studies

For the past few decades mediated communication has belonged among key areas of feminist and gender studies mainly due to its expected influence on the continuation or redistribution of power relationships in the society. Classic studies as well as the latest edited volumes and indeed individual studies from geographically and culturally distant countries offer a relatively consistent picture of themes, paradigms and methodologies in current feminist and gender approaches in media studies. Despite the rather complicated classifications offered by leading theoreticians in the field (van Zoonen 1994) we can structure gender studies approaches to media into three groups that correspond to the most general division of areas within the field of media studies (institutions/production – contents – audiences). Some of the by now classic areas of gender media studies involve media contents and their ideological bias (particularly the patriarchal one) or culturally orientated reception studies that provide an alternative approach to the role of popular culture in the lives of men and women. Approaches that concentrate on women's position in institutions and their influence on media contents are also central. And it is these last approaches that we deal with in this article. We focus mainly on the perspective according to which there is no direct relationship between the number of women and their positions in media institutions and media contents, in particular in terms of the representation of women and men in these contents. The approaches to the representation of women in media institutions and their share in decision making positions that we deal with in this text are closely related to the critical political economy approach developed within media studies and that particularly in relation to what its leading representatives have announced

as a new approach to the study of media within critical political economy – namely an interest in the conditions of production and their influence on media contents with a stress on various criteria (including that of gender) that influence the uneven distribution of power in society. (Mosco 1996: 267)

Discussions about the influence of the gender structure of media institutions on media contents – the basic topic of this article – somewhat neglect the third basic component of media models – the audience – and consequently the cultural perspective that plays a crucial role in creating a fuller picture of the potential influence of media institutions and their products on society.¹ It is only in exceptional cases that authors explicitly admit (cf. Wackwitz – Rakow 2007: 265) that the exploration of the relationship between the position of women in media and changes in the representation of women (and men) in media contents does not in itself imply an influence of these contents on individual audience members or on the society as a whole.²

2. Feminist and gender media studies³ – basic principles

In the introduction to her *Feminist Media Studies* Liesbet van Zoonen argues against what she sees as a dominant perception that feminist approaches to media represent “a univocal, confident and unswerving denunciation of popular culture, both for its sexist and oppressive portrayal of women and for the devastating effects it is supposed to have on women and men.” (van Zoonen 1994: 1) She suggests that an understanding of feminist criticism as rigid and stringent is, however, also common within the women’s movement itself as it produces “wholesale and merciless condemnations of media output”. (ibid) Van Zoonen’s view that the question on the gendered character of media can only be answered on a case by case basis within actual historical and cultural circumstances and that it is necessary “to counter the view of media institutions as ideological molochs producing univocal sexist, capitalist and patriarchal content” (van Zoonen 1994: 43) is shared by the authors of the edited volume entitled *Gender and Newsroom Cultures – Identities at Work*. Marjan de Bruin, one of the editors and authors, devotes the introductory part of her text on the organizational, professional and gender identities to a key topic within gender approaches to media research – methodology. She explains that

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- 1 Even the author of this more narrowly conceptualized text leaves the complex issue of effects of media contents aside on purpose.
 - 2 E.g. Meyrowitz contributes the discussion on gender biases in media contents by introducing a viewpoint that proposes to explore the positive aspects of “traditional” representations of male and female roles (in television broadcasting) which are by nature different, dichotomous. His optimism stems from the presumption that although the content of television broadcasting is male (produced mainly by men) it nonetheless de facto disturbs the traditionally different behaviours of boys and girls and their worldviews as it enables both sexes to share the same information. “In the same way television has reduced the mystification of ‘the other’. By including boys and girls, men and women, in the same informational environment, it opens the behaviour of both sexes to public scrutiny and analysis. ... Ironically, the more ‘directive’ and ‘instructional’ television content is concerning the traditional division of roles, the more it may undermine those same structures in everyday interaction. Because it is experienced publicly, very sexist television content may be sowing the seeds of its own destruction”. (Meyrowitz 1985: 217)
 - 3 In this text we work with both terms and treat them basically as synonyms. A text that does not deal with specific problems that would require defining both terms against each other makes it possible to work with these terms in line with the feminist paradigm as C. M. Renzetti and D. J. Curran argue in their book *Ženy, muži a společnost* [Women, men and society]. They write about a feminist paradigm that does not involve a uniform viewpoint but rather various feminist approaches that share – among others – an interest in gender inequalities in society and an effort at social change. (Renzetti – Curran 2003: 30-35) Neither do the quoted authors explicitly define their actual position in the field of feminist or gender media studies.

in the course of research the truthfulness of respondents' statements is not crucial for her, as she is above all interested in how people perceive and describe what they comment upon. (de Bruin 2004: 8) Her approach is shared by a number of authors whose texts we rely on here and who aim to gather the comprehensive accounts of women (and also men) working in (mainly news) media. Karen Ross argues that we need to take into account the influence of cultural and professional knowledge systems on journalists' everyday lives and to uncover specific meanings that people associate with their behaviour. Indeed, even within one interpretive community we find various voices – thus even journalists who represent one professional group do not express the same views. (Ross 2004: 154-155)

Margareta Melin-Higgins stresses three feminist epistemological concerns that she thinks are important for any study⁴ – reciprocity i.e. erasure of the distinction between subject and object and non-hierarchical research arrangements, reflexivity and an admission of the fact that knowledge is always political and research is always carried out for someone. (Melin-Higgins 2004: 202) Thus, the author argues, research should be political and aiming at action and change. An interest in the political, or more precisely activism, and a stress on action and change are typical of much gender research devoted to the position of women in media and that either in the role of objects (most frequently of news) or producers. This link between research and activism is visible in analyses of the situation in countries with a significantly different socio-cultural background – such as India, the Arabic countries of north Africa (Maghreb) or South Africa but also in texts written by western European or north American authors. (Creedon – Cramer 2007; Dasguptain Bhagat 2002; Gallagher 2005; Morna 2007; Nicholson 2007; Steeves 2007; Wackwitz – Rakow 2007) Colleen Lowe Morna, the editor of a volume mainly quantitatively⁵ mapping the situation in South African newsrooms and entitled *Glass Ceiling Two: An Audit of Women and Men in South Africa Newsrooms*, explicitly alerts to the politically engaged approach of the research team. The study attempted not only to describe the situation but also to identify strategies that could result in changes to the current situation. “No more lip service but action is needed” became the slogan particularly in the first phase of the *Glass Ceiling* (Morna 2007: 5) research. Rajashri Dasgupta's chapter on the study *Status of Women Journalists in India*⁶ entitled “Butterflies No More” refers to the interrelationship between research and activism when mentioning that for some women filling in questionnaires in fact represented a process of learning, debating and becoming aware of topics that they did not notice before or did not pay much attention to. (Dasgupta in Bhagat 2002: 31)

One of the most engaged approaches to gender (respectively feminist) research characterizes the report *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2005*

4 Similarly, Laura A. Wackwitz and Lana F. Rakow point out the specific characteristics of feminist communication theory: “Feminist communication theory is not just taking account of women's absence from media professions or of images of women in media content. It is not simply a feminist perspective on communication theory. Rather, feminist communication theory provides alternative ways of understanding *theory* as well as alternative ways of *theorizing* communication and media.” (Wackwitz 2007: 257, original emphasis)

5 The project *Glass Ceiling Two* further develops the first phase of the project which concentrated on a qualitative analysis of the position of South African women journalists in particular in management and mapped what they identified as obstacles in their work.

6 The project was initiated by the National Commission for Women and carried out by the Indian Press Institute with the aim of identifying topics that influence the position of women working in print media. It formed part of a wider study analysing the position of Indian working women. (Morna 2007: 1)

(further GMMP) edited by Margaret Gallagher.⁷ The author argues that GMMP has always aimed at promoting media literacy and gender awareness through media monitoring and she adds a (from a media studies perspective very ambitious) goal which resembles activist efforts rather than descriptive or interpretive science: “However, its [GMMP’s] over-riding goal is to change media output.” (Gallagher 2005: 12) Gallagher proposes that the project’s authors aim to achieve this goal by convincing media using “hard data – together with concrete examples”, which can reach media professionals “with an immediacy never achieved by theory or abstract argument”. (ibid: 12-13) It is in particular in connection with Margaret Gallagher’s optimistic view on the influence of “individual journalistic decisions” that we should mention the dominant pessimism expressed by her colleagues which reflects Liesbet van Zoonen’s point on the key influence of the production process and the organizational context on the final product. She argues that these factors are much more important than the will of individual authors and “make clear that [...] no individual communicator can be held responsible for the final product.” (van Zoonen 1994: 46)

3. Women working in media – tool of change in media contents?

The presumption that journalists’ individual influence can have a significant impact on changing media contents forms the basis of an approach according to which an increase in the number of women working in media will lead to more balanced and less stereotypical representations of both genders in media, in particular representations that would serve women’s interests.⁸ This proposition links two areas of feminist or gender media research which are otherwise usually explicitly separated from each other: women’s (and men’s) representations in media contents and their position and conditions at work as producers of these contents in media institutions. A number of socio-cultural studies from various countries of the world⁹ belong to the second area of media research and they either reject the presumption of the direct influence of women-producers on media contents or they question it and rephrase the basic research question: Is there a relationship between women’s influence on the production of media contents and women’s representations in these contents?

Marjan de Bruin and Karen Ross suggest that a number of feminist studies work with the premise that as soon as women reach a “critical mass” in newsrooms they will influence news selection and production. In the early or mid-1990s attention shifted to the dynamics of gender and organizational structures as well as practices and their

7 The research was carried out by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), an international non-governmental organization which, according to Gallagher, strives for social change also through the analysis of mediated communication. (Gallagher 2005: 10)

8 Liesbet van Zoonen describes this theoretical tradition in this way: “Other authors point to the immediate producers of media content such as journalists and TV producers and claim that their traditional world views are reflected in media output. [...] According to such views, an increase in the number of female media producers would be instrumental to creating a more balanced media product.” (van Zoonen 1994: 29)

9 Together with a reference to studies from various parts of the world it is, however, necessary to draw attention to the fact that a number of authors consider gender critiques of the media insufficient and that particularly in terms of original empirical data from individual regions or countries. Romy Fröhlich (Fröhlich 2007: 162-171) alludes to the situation in Europe which she believes is very dissatisfactory. A number of European countries still do not have relevant and original data, this applies particularly to southern, central and eastern Europe. Fröhlich points out that even data from other countries are not supported by more sources and tend to be the outcome of work conducted by individual researchers. Even when data is available, she suggests that they often neglect differences between the private and public sectors or they do not cover other topics than gender diversity (e.g. ethnicity, sexual orientation or handicap).

role in the reproduction of gender inequality. This new interpretive perspective shifted researchers' interest from controlling the organizations' end products to understanding organizational processes and the role of discourse in these processes. (de Bruin – Ross 2004: viii)

De Bruin adds that journalists work under the influence of professional values and the requirements of the organization that employs them. When analyzing journalists' influence on production it is thus important to take at least three factors into account: gender, professional standards and the media organization itself. (de Bruin 2004: 1) In a text analyzing the Swedish media market Monika Djerf-Pierre and Monica Löfgren-Nilsson alert to the parallel between the growing numbers of women journalists and significant changes in news. The authors argue that in a number of European countries the feminization of news work probably overlapped with the introduction and/or expansion of commercial television which led to the theory that the feminization of news work was actually caused by commercialization (or rather market oriented journalism). The authors pose a question on origins and consequences which they believe to be traditionally tricky. "Is it true, as van Zoonen (1998a) suggested, that the changing news genre opened up journalism to women, or is it rather that the increasing number of women has changed the forms and content of the news?" (Djerf-Pierre – Löfgren-Nilsson 2004: 80) In the article "Butterflies No More" Rajashri Dasgupta draws attention to the link between the commercial interests of a media organization and the seeming promotion of equal opportunities for women. She provides the example of a research project in which the management of a media organization organized a celebration of the International Women's Day in a luxurious hotel sponsored by a cosmetics company. (Dasgupta in Bhagat 2002: 30) According to Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming women most likely contributed to a significant shift in the news agenda and newsroom culture and their growing numbers in the profession clearly represent a significant challenge to traditional masculine news stories,¹⁰ however, many changes in news values are the result of commercial pressures. The authors explicitly mention that news organizations in Great Britain began hiring increasing numbers of women in response to competition among newspapers, radio stations and television stations for female audiences in the 1970s. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 9-11, 13) Despite a shift in contents towards themes that are understood stereotypically as feminine, the authors insist that newsrooms are still characterized by an understanding of "man as a norm, woman as an interloper structure". (ibid: 123) The authors alert to a new trend in journalism – so-called "new girl writing", which represent the "rise of a whole new feminine, but covertly anti-feminist, journalistic form in the twenty-first century", in which women describe their "own and other women's personal insecurities and vulgar habits, sexual conquests and defeats, and abuses of substances and people" etc.¹¹ The authors think

10 According to the authors women journalists introduce certain topics that were previously not considered part of the media agenda or valuable to journalists, such as research on fertility, sexual education for young people, care for the elderly outside care homes and medical institutions, harassment, abuse of women etc. Some authors see the proof that women change media contents in the fact that women dealing with exactly these topics have won the Pulitzer Prize. (Chambers, Steiner, Fleming 2004: 108)

11 Authors refer to confessional journalism and therapy news which began appearing in the US in the 1990s and which deal most frequently with victims' accounts and bringing their feelings to light, they expose the intimate thoughts of the rich and famous. This new genre is characterized by a shift from facts to emotions and feelings. In cases where feminist thinking changed personal to political uncovering of power structures in gender relationships, confessional journalism and therapy news have exactly the opposite effect: they contribute to the depoliticization of everyday life. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 120-121)

that this trend is fed by commercial pressures that stress female individuality, yet, vehemently support consumerism and the ghettoization of women. Women journalists must still be sexy (for men) and at the same time they must provide other women with space for identification (as educated and hard working women, modern mothers etc.). (ibid: 23) Women often remain outside hard news, away from important political and public topics, in their ghettos they write in a sensational and emotional way while “men get on with the ‘real’ work of ‘hard’ news”. (ibid: 230)

Romy Fröhlich deals with the feminization of journalism comparing the number of female graduates of journalism or communication studies and the number of women who actually work in the profession. She suggests that statistics from a number of European countries show that compared to men, the share of women who graduated from university in fields that are linked to the profession is between 51 and 90%. Women occupy 50% of entry positions in journalism. “When we look at women who have been employed in the profession for at least 10 years, the figure goes down to 21% in Germany and to 34% in the United States”. (Fröhlich 2004: 69) The author considers why journalism represents such an attractive field for women, she quotes van Zoonen according to whom a traditional understanding of femininity (i.e. good looks, interest in other people, caring and empathy) represents what the new market oriented journalism requires. However, she alerts to the fact that these presumptions about “typically male and typically female” characteristics were never satisfactorily verified and that despite the presumption that women successfully (in quantitative terms) entered the field of communications and also despite results in education, in the majority of western industrial societies this field clearly remains a male domain (at least in terms of higher positions). (ibid: 68) In her study “Three Steps Forward and Two Back? Women Journalists in the Western World between Progress, Standstill, and Retreat” Fröhlich suggests: “... the ‘feminization of journalism’ is a myth: While making three steps forward in the 1980s, female journalists throughout the world have taken two steps backward since the mid 1990s.” (Fröhlich 2007: 174) According to her contemporary journalism is characterized by an imbalance between women’s high visibility and their lack of influence in the field. As far as Europe is concerned, Fröhlich suggests that available statistics may appear rather satisfactory. “Forty percent [of women in the field] as an average for Europe doesn’t sound too bad – however, this average figure hides the striking differences between countries.”¹² (Fröhlich 2007: 165-168)

The authors of a study on gender stereotyping in Spanish news alert to the small number of women in media production (11.5 % of news published by women in major Spanish newspapers) and in media contents (women appear as subjects of news in less than 12 %) and mention another possible approach to the relationship between media production and media contents:

Although some studies maintain that changes in media output are only possible (and evident) when a sufficient number of women reach the highest levels of the organizations [...], others consider that there is no correlation between the gender of those who

¹² According to Fröhlich the highest share of women journalists (51%) in Europe is in Finland. She proposes that this is not due to the feminist movement, which is not very significant in Finland, but rather due to a strong and official policy of equality – i.e. state feminism. The worst situation, in terms of the number of women in the journalistic profession, is according to Fröhlich, in Germany and Austria. (Fröhlich 2007: 166)

hold decision-making posts and the types of output, but rather that the decisions on content are based primarily on economic need.

(Gallego – Altés – Cantón – Melús – Soriano 2004: 45)

The findings of a global one-day media monitoring suggest that women as objects of news appear more frequently in news that were produced by women. (Gallagher 2005: 68) Gallagher argues that the role of gender in relation to media contents is not at all clear as the news topic itself “genders” selection, i.e. depending on the topic it is more or less likely that its author or main subject will be a woman (we deal with the assignment of topics on the basis of gender criteria further in this text).

3.1. Not all women in power are our friends...

Although a number of contemporary studies insist that increasing numbers of women working in news (in particular in higher positions) will bring about a change in news contents in favour of women,¹³ enthusiasm about the feminization of this field, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, suppresses theoreticians’ references to empirical findings that suggest that female producers of media contents do not necessarily act in the interests of other women. We could use the metaphor “gender blind women”¹⁴ to describe the first group of presuppositions – arguments or suggestions from this field insinuate that there is not necessarily a relationship between feminine gender (or in this case more precisely biological sex) and gender sensitivity or promotion of equal opportunities for women. Aliza Lavie expects that the work environment (thus also the environment of the newsroom) reproduces patterns of gender relationships that dominate in the society at large and it influences how women perceive themselves, their professional abilities and gender determined discrimination. (Lavie 2004: 119) De Bruin is more explicit in her view that solidarity with women journalists does not normally pay off in higher positions. The under-representation of women in high positions suggests that their mobility is limited, this maintains the dominant image of women’s low status. Thus for women it may not be too advantageous to strongly identify with the female perspective. This can in fact lead to an over identification with traditional male professional values which women use in order to avoid gender tensions. (de Bruin 2004: 7-13) Meyrowitz refers to the possible historical roots of this problem when he alerts to the consequences of long-term segregation of women

13 In the study *Glass Ceiling Two* Colleen Lowe Morna argues: “Although it has been established in various studies that the presence of women in top posts is no guarantee of greater gender balance and awareness in coverage, the majority of respondents from the first study concurred that compared to men, women are more gender conscious in dealing with day to day news events. Other studies (The Gender and Media Baseline Study, 2000; HIV/AIDS and Gender Baseline Study, 2005 and the Global Media Monitoring Project, 2005) have also showed [sic] that women journalists are more likely to consult female sources. Phase one of the study concluded that: a critical mass of women in senior editorial and management positions will lead to changes in newsroom cultures and in how women – and thus society – are represented in the media.” (Morna 2007: 13) Also Chambers, Steiner and Fleming show that according to content analyses of news women journalists more often concentrate on topics related to women’s lives and they tend to use female sources more often. (Chambers – Steiner Fleming 2004: 6) The authors explain the term “critical mass” by referring to a comment by Kay Mills, a former Los Angeles Times reporter, that a single woman at a conference, in a story or elsewhere must blend in with the male majority, two women fight for attention and three women are a critical mass. (ibid: 101) Similarly, June O. Nicholson also finds a certain relationship between the low numbers of women in newsrooms and the lack of female sources in media contents. (Nicholson 2007: 41)

14 E.g. Karen Ross uses this term when she quotes Gillwald and her study from South Africa which found that women “were not only clearly gender blind” but moreover they used their own success in the media industry as an argument that sexism does not represent a problem in this field. (Ross 2004: 146)

in particular in the private sphere.¹⁵ In a text on Spanish media Gallego et al. argue that women are well aware of the contradiction between a desire for professional acclaim and the fact that they are women. They overcome this contradiction by accepting the concept of a professional approach that means informing from a distance and without ideological or personal involvement. So they consider the defence and promotion of female topics a subjective (female) approach and thus an unprofessional one. According to Gallego et al. this relates to a wider understanding of journalistic ethics and values which prevent journalists – regardless of their gender – from promoting gender topics as colleagues would consider them unprofessional. (Gallego et al. 2004: 48-49) Women journalists, argue Gallego et al., go through primary gender socialization (in its course they learn “female” roles) and when they start working in media they go through a secondary “male” socialization process. As a consequence, women to a large extent suppress or reject non-dominant values, i.e. those values which are linked to their primary socialization and which are connected to femininity. Thus not only male journalists but also female ones commonly assess the activities and behaviour of men and women differently and they stereotype these. (ibid: 59)

Similarly, Ross describes women’s “gender blindness” and their “self-deceptive” strategy – a kind of refusal to participate in the life experiences of other women – which she found in her research on newsroom cultures. Women in her research de facto internalized a sexist approach and thought that other women should blame themselves for their subordinate position.¹⁶ (Ross 2004: 146) In her study *Glass Ceiling Two* from the South African media environment Morna arrives at a different conclusion. She argues that there is a correlation between the presence of women in media management and gender equality in newsrooms. (Morna 2007: 4) In her text “Women Journalists: No Big Deal” published in a volume on the status of Indian women journalists Surekha Sule describes her experiences with women journalists whom she asked to fill in a questionnaire dealing with women’s position in Indian media:

Young women journalists, especially in Indian Express, Mumbai, waved away the questionnaire with a contemptuous ‘Oh I have no problem’ or ‘No big deal to be a woman journalist’ or ‘Woman in journalism? Wack! What has being a woman got to do with being in some profession?’
(Sule in Bhagat 2002: 41)

Pamela Bhagat, the editor of the volume, devotes her contribution to the position of women who work as publishers or owners of media enterprises. She argues that in India women enter into this field mainly through family relationships (e.g. inherit the company from their fathers, brothers etc.). The author argues that women publishers improve women’s positions in their organizations and that they hire a new generation of confident young women but at the same time she warns about the difficult situation these women face in managerial positions as they are considered prejudiced. Due to this and also because

15 “Women, notes de Beauvoir, have no history, no religion and no common location to give them a sense of solidarity. [...] Lacking frequent contact with other women, the woman often sees other members of her sex as competitors instead of comrades.” (Meyrowitz 1985: 207)

16 Anne Phillips calls this strategy “domesticated feminism” and describes it as a situation in which women strive for equal opportunities in the existing structures of patriarchal order rather than question these structures. (Phillips in Ross 2004: 146)

women do not tend to be the only ones with decision making power (e.g. they manage the company with their parents) they do not always succeed in employing more women. (Bhagat in *ibid*: 69-71) In another study on India Ammu Joseph argues: "...it is also quite clear that the increasing presence of women in the profession has neither democratized nor feminized the Indian press." (Joseph 2004: 178) In connection with hopes for a change in media representations of women due to women's presence in newsrooms (possibly in higher positions) Ross quotes Marlene Sanders and her thoughts on the finding that some women are simply afraid of connecting their activities to "women's" topics in case they would be labelled feminists or for other reasons (e.g. they lack a sense of solidarity with other women) thus they cannot be particularly helpful to other women: "There is a[nother] problem we don't like to talk about. Not all women in power are our friends." (Sanders in Ross 2004: 158)

Further complications in the causal chain "more women in media – more favourable representations of femininity in contents" are linked to the status of feminized professions. The approach that argues that increasing numbers of women in the profession can also have largely negative consequences is based on the premise that the entry of higher numbers of women into any field decreases the prestige of the given field. Van Zoonen quotes Pamela Creedon who argues that fields such as public relations or advertising are labelled as ghettos of "velvet" or "pink collars" that are ruled by (white) women.¹⁷ Van Zoonen writes the following on the topic of velvet ghettos:

This trend points to the fact that some areas of media production are more easily accessible to women than others. [...] One of the factors explaining why some areas of communication provide more opportunities for women than others is the status of the medium, which can differ from country to country. Radio is a good case in point. In many western countries national radio has lost its audience to television and as a news medium it has been overtaken by television as well. The resulting loss of prestige may have decreased male competition for job openings enabling women to fill the gaps. [...] Another indication of the importance of the medium's status for the employment of women is the fact that local (low prestige) media almost invariably employ more women than national (high prestige) media.

(van Zoonen 1994: 50, cf. Chambers et al. 2004: 93, 124)

Thus an increase in the number of women in media production does not automatically turn into more power or influence for women but, on the contrary, can lead to a decrease in salaries and status of the whole field and thus create so-called "velvet ghettos".¹⁸

17 In a study from 1988 Maurine H. Beasley drew attention to the fact that journalism and related fields could – due to the increasing numbers of women in the profession – become a pink collar ghetto, that is a field with lower salaries than professions that are traditionally dominated by men. She points out the negative impact of the publication of the study on some women in the profession who considered such presumptions an attack against women and a disrespectful act. (Beasley 2007: 24)

18 Differences in the salaries of men and women working in journalism are discussed also by Ross 2004, Johnson 2007, Fröhlich 2007. Fröhlich points out that legislation on equal pay that has been introduced de facto in every European country as well as the USA and Canada does not in itself guarantee actual equality. She argues that employers find it easy to ignore these laws e.g. they use different job descriptions or job titles for men and for women although they conduct the same work. One of the main reasons for the difference in men's and

4. Women as objects of research: Their position in media

4.1. Vertical and horizontal segregation

Whether the studies on women's position in media adopt an optimistic view, arguing that an improvement in their position will lead to improved media contents (improvement as understood by women-feminists) or a sceptical one, in the majority of cases they arrive at the same conclusions as far as the key aspects of the position of women in media are considered from a scientific (or activist) viewpoint. The majority of research-based texts as well as those that revise the state of gender research concentrate on a dichotomy that we could describe by the general distinction of *centre vs. periphery* or the more explicit *hard news vs. soft news*. These and other similar dichotomies are value laden – one component (usually associated with women) is always (from an overall perspective) considered less valuable than the other – and they are linked to horizontal and vertical segregation of women and men in journalism.

In the study *Who Makes the News?*¹⁹ on one day in global news Margaret Gallagher argues that in general men refer more to so-called hard news, i.e. the “more serious” areas in the news spectrum such as politics, government etc. According to the study women cover only 32 % of news in these areas. On the contrary, women are more likely to be present in sections of so-called soft news, such as social or societal topics. The 2005 study, according to Gallagher, confirms the findings of previous Global Media Monitoring Projects conducted since 1995: Female and male journalists tend to report different types of news.

So while women are assigned to the local news beats, their male counterparts are earning kudos – and increasing their career prospects – by reporting the more prestigious national and international stories.

(Gallagher 2005: 64)

When we look for women in media we most likely find them in the “soft” spectrum of news making. Women dominate slightly only in two areas: weather forecasts on television and radio (52 %) and in news on poverty, housing and social issues in more general (52 %). On the day of the media monitoring in 2005 only – 21% of sports reporters were women. (Gallagher 2005: 64-65)

In an article devoted to the Swedish media environment Djerf-Pierre and Löfgren-Nilsson define stereotypically segregated male and female dimensions of journalism, i.e. how “male” and “female” activities are predefined in the profession. The male dimension includes hard news, public sphere, male sources and perspectives, distance and neutrality. The “male” attribute also covers professional ethics, competition and individualism, hierarchy and formal organization. On the other hand, the female dimension is supposed to involve female sources (i.e. women as sources of information) and perspectives, soft news, private sphere and it is characterized by intimacy and empathy,

women's pay, continues Fröhlich, lies in the fact that women make up the majority of staff at entry-level positions and as they gain experience they leave the profession (e.g. journalism). (Fröhlich 2007: 169-171)

19 The Global Media Monitoring Project is based on the methodologically rather problematic quantitative analysis of one day of news in ca. 70 countries of the world. The analysis covers media contents as well as representation of men and women in the role of communicators. Due to the somewhat non standard methodology we consider the findings only indicative.

audience-centredness, tutoring, personal ethics, co-operation and collective responsibility which are more important than individualism and a tendency to horizontal and informal organization. (Djerf-Pierre – Löfgren-Nilsson 2004: 82-83) Other authors also arrive at conclusions that support concepts of gender segregation in media and in particular in news. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 1-7; Morna 2007: 4-16; Gallego et al. 2004: 48-56)

Van Zoonen draws attention to the apparent horizontal segregation of the workforce in media organizations regardless of geographical location and she extends this claim also outside the field of journalism. Men dominate in technical areas while women are over-represented in administration. According to van Zoonen women dominate in those fields that can be understood as an extension of their domestic duties (children's and entertainment programmes, programmes for families and consumers, human interest stories). (van Zoonen 2000: 50) In terms of vertical segregation van Zoonen thinks that it is a common phenomenon in media – even in areas in which women otherwise dominate it is hard to find them in managerial positions. She argues that gender thus continues to be a major determinant of pay. In connection with men's and women's salaries in South African newsrooms in *Glass Ceiling Two* Morna suggests that in South Africa the difference is particularly high between the pay of white men and black women, the latter earn 25% less than the former.²⁰ This is in line with the findings of other authors (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 5; Meyrowitz 1985: 172), who argue that the position of white women and black women is not identical in any case and that women of colour were disadvantaged for a long time because women became visible in a number of positions and only a few noticed that the women involved were basically only the white ones.

Ammu Joseph describes the case of Indian media in terms of the chances of women journalists to be promoted:

However, many female journalists still experience slow and limited progress, if not total stagnation, in their careers. [...] The infamous glass ceiling²¹ may have developed some cracks in a small, although admittedly influential, section of the press, but it has still not been shattered. Elsewhere in the press the ceiling – glass or otherwise – is so far above them that it is not within most women's sights.

(Joseph 2004: 170)

The glass ceiling as one of the basic obstacles to gender equality in newsrooms is mentioned by a number of authors. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004:10; Creedon – Cramer 2007: 277; Nicholson 2007: 37; Malaviya in Bhagat 2002: 13; Akhileshwari in Bhagat

20 The terms "black women/men" and "white women/men" are used by the author.

21 In their book *Women, men and society* Renzetti and Curran explain the term glass ceiling in the following way: "Consequently, although women and men in sex-atypical jobs encounter discrimination, its forms and consequences differ significantly depending on the job holder's sex. Sociologist Christine Williams's (1992, 1995) of men in female-dominated occupations strongly supports this argument. Researchers who have studied women in sex-atypical occupations report that they are usually disadvantaged in hiring and promotions and that they encounter a 'glass ceiling'. The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that limit workers' – typically women workers' and racial and ethnic minority workers' – upward occupational mobility. One of Williams's most intriguing findings is that men in sex-atypical occupations often receive preferential treatment in hiring and, instead of encountering a glass ceiling, ride a glass escalator up the hierarchy of these professions." (Renzetti – Curran 2003: 224)

2002: 24) Chambers, Steiner and Fleming conclude that the ghettoization of women in some areas of journalism and the lack of promotion opportunities led to a situation in which a number of women journalists began developing and using alternative news media to promote women's topics and experiences.²² (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 11) The majority of authors think that gender segregation in news media is linked to the continuing traditional approach to the different roles that men and women play in society. Although the form of these roles can vary according to socio-cultural differences between regions, their underlying characteristics are the same. The dichotomy of public vs. private is almost universal, the public is assigned a masculine character while the private belongs to the sphere of femininity. In their study of Spanish newsrooms Gallego et al. found that women participating in the research did not tend to strive for decision making positions and they often informed the research team about refusing promotion because they attempted to balance work and private life. (Gallego et al. 2004: 55) Bhagat describes the situation of women in Indian newsrooms in a similar way.²³ In the same volume Akhileshwari argues that domestic duties are the main obstacle that Indian women face in their role of media professionals. (Akhileshwari in Bhagat 2002: 26) The authors suggest that women tend to leave work because of domestic duties soon after they get married. Despite that a number of respondents mentioned that their greatest hope lay with the young generation of men who were more gender sensitive. Similarly, Colleen Lowe Mornave in *Glass Ceiling Two* outlines the situation in South Africa and mentions family duties – which are stereotypically assigned to women – as the main reason why women do not hold higher positions in newsrooms. (Morna 2007: 10)

4.2. The masculine character of the newsroom: Sexual harassment and old boys' club

An important aspect that defines the character of women's position in media is whether it is possible to understand women in media as a specific subgroup that is treated differently from men (and that often by other women as well). Research on women's position in news media deals with topics that relate to gender issues in the wider society. The most frequently mentioned aspects of women's position in newsrooms are sexual harassment as a direct form of discrimination against women and relationship dynamics between men and women in newsrooms which tend to have the form of indirect discrimination, respectively gender segregation on the basis of informal ties.

The topic of sexual harassment appears in a number of studies dealing with women's position in news media. Most frequently we find that in their accounts female respondents

22 Other authors (Steeves 2007; Nicholson 2007) explore the potential of Internet journalism in strengthening women journalists' position and they arrive at the conclusion that although the Internet supports women's networks, information sharing and publicity yet the increasing dominance of supranational economies, women's exploitation in advertising, pornography and sex trafficking together with the growing expansion of western consumer culture strengthen the economic dominance of supranational telecommunication and information technologies as well as corporations that do business in these fields which leads to the further widening of information gaps. (Steeves 2007: 201-202) Nicholson openly questions the hopes invested in online journalism as a space for women's growth. "Many women who entered the online newspaper workforce have left, and the top editors of newspaper online operations presently are overwhelmingly male and follow the 'gender hierarchies' of [...] newspaper management." (Nicholson 2007: 42)

23 "In all the dialogue and discussions with women journalists, one common strain was the concern about the threat to stability in their private lives that the profession seemingly poses. In almost all cases, conversation veered to domestic life and wherever there was no problem, women didn't see it as a normal situation but one for which they had to be grateful to the spouse/mother-in-law/parents." (Bhagat in Bhagat 2002: 37)

refer to sexual harassment as a common element of the work environment in newsrooms. The studies analyze the relationships between organizational and economic power in the organization and sexual harassment,²⁴ between sexual harassment and women journalists' productivity²⁵ or between sexual harassment and the nature of relationships in the organization. According to Bhagat women in media organizations are extremely vulnerable because "nobody wants women as colleagues in the first place". In cases of sexual harassment their complaints are usually dismissed on the grounds of "We told you so. This is not a place for women." According to Bhagat the women themselves believe in legal measures, they tend to find excuses for widespread sexual harassment and often blame it on interpersonal dynamics in the workplace or they are afraid to talk about it.²⁶ (Bhagat in Bhagat 2002: 35)

Apart from the clearly discriminatory sexual harassment in newsrooms, women and men participating in research also mention a different problem: keeping women away from decision making positions and at the margins of events in the newsroom through informal ties between the male members of the newsroom and those women who decide to become one of them. Most frequently the authors refer to an "old boys' club" or "old boys' network". (Lavie 2004; Robinson 2004; Mellin-Higgins 2004; Morna 2007; Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004) According to Gertrude J. Robinson, who explored practices in Canadian newsrooms, the field of journalism is dominated by a work culture in which women and members of minority groups are equal participants, however, they have to perceive themselves as "different". Within this non-homogeneous culture a masculine approach to professional conduct gets systematic and long term preferential treatment. (Robinson 2004: 182) The author argues that the newsroom environment is sexist which means that regardless of their abilities men attempt to strengthen their power and superior position in the workplace through a number of symbolic practices – telling jokes, creating a competitive atmosphere, in which there are fights for prestigious (and

24 In her article "Organizational, Professional, and Gender Identities" Marjan de Bruin describes the situation in Caribbean media on the basis of the link between sexual harassment and economic or decision making power in an organization. She argues that in this case sexuality serves as a practice that defines power relations in the newsroom – it separates men from women and keeps women "in their place". According to her, in a highly class stratified society class is another factor that should not be neglected as it does play a role also in gender relationships. Women in de Bruin's research mention that they experience sexual harassment and they resolve this situation by sticking to their professional identity and thus they "keep a distance". However, in doing so they exclude themselves from decision making structures which are dominated by men and thus they further weaken their chances of entering into the organization's higher management. According to de Bruin none of the women really believed that they could reach a higher position at work. (de Bruin 2004: 14)

25 In her research on the position of women in Indian media Pamela Bhagat explored the influence of sexual harassment on professional productivity and self-confidence of women journalists. "During personal interaction sexual harassment emerged as a major concern of most respondents. [...] An interesting finding is that, of those who had experienced sexual harassment, 31.5 per cent said it had 'seriously' undermined their confidence and affected their work, 24 per cent said it had 'mildly' but an alarming 41.3 per cent said it had had 'no affect'. These findings show sexual harassment is part of work culture in media organisations in India but women either do not know how or for a wide variety of reasons, choose not to do anything about it." She found that only 15 % of women who experienced sexual harassment made a formal complaint. (Bhagat in Bhagat 2002: 10-11)

26 This is the reason why in Pamela Bhagat's research more than 40 % of women respondents who were sexually harassed did not do anything about it as they thought that it was not taken seriously at their workplace. More than 22 % were convinced that harassment is an accepted part of work culture and it is tolerated and more than 14 % did not believe that the management would intervene. She adds that the lack of support from women colleagues also plays a role in the secrecy surrounding sexual harassment: "They also speak of 'managing' such experiences/environments rather than dealing with it squarely or seeking redressal within the organisation. 'This is not a compromise but a survival strategy since we should not leave the job'", says S H Savitri, editor of Karmaveera in Bangalore. (Bhagat in Bhagat 2002: 47-49)

thus male) topics and not least the after work “pub culture” which further extends the journalists’ already long work day till the late hours. Only childless women journalists are able to participate in these drinking bouts during which the old boys’ network is formed and maintained. (ibid: 183-184)

In her research on British journalism Margareta Melin-Higgins pays detailed attention to the last aspect, she argues that British journalistic culture combines a number of elements: working class origin, masculinity, banter among men, objectivity, professional conduct and pub culture. Journalistic culture also involves the glorification of unpleasant aspects of journalism – long, respectively unlimited, working hours and stress. (Melin-Higgins 2004: 205-209) She argues that British journalism is characterized by a strict organizational and structural hierarchy, a strong and powerful old boys’ network (its important goal is to survey and regulate entry into journalism), a very traditional view of women and very little support for working mothers. The author thinks that none of this is surprising if we take into account the strong class stratification that characterizes Great Britain. According to her, newsroom culture is simply a reflection of wider social relationships in the country – it is very masculine and sexist. (ibid: 203-204; cf. Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 100)

In the study *Glass Ceiling Two* Coleen Lowe Morna defines the South African newsroom environment on the basis of respondents’ accounts as hostile. She suggests that women are exposed to harassment and pressure, they lack support and men often refuse women in the role of superiors in which they are not taken seriously. Male hegemony dominates in media institutions as well as in the wider society and women often state that they have to be one of the boys in order to keep their position (“unless you are a member of the club, you do not have a chance”). (Morna 2007: 10) Similarly, in her text dealing with the Israeli public service radio, Aliza Lavie argues:

Even when women are at the front line, they still function in a masculine institution, where men set the rules [...] The metaphor of a ‘glass ceiling’ remains appropriate to describe the existing situation, at least in relation to senior editorial positions.

(Lavie 2004: 129-130)

The author claims that women commonly work according to norms and values rooted in the traditional organizational basis according to which journalism was for generations understood as a typically male profession which was de facto closed for women.²⁷ Although women editors are well aware of discrimination practices in the workplace, after a series of disappointments, frustration and combined with the disclosure that men enjoy higher status in the newsroom they discontinued efforts at introducing new approaches in order to avoid confrontations. (ibid: 137) However, Lavie compares public service radio with another radio station – IDF (Israel Defence Forces) – and shows that the position of women journalists has to be researched within the actual context of a given medium. While The Voice of Israel is a station that began broadcasting in a society dominated by extremely masculine values (men were perceived primarily as bread winners and women as housekeepers) and because of the bureaucratic structure of this organization

²⁷ “For decades, the media in Israel have employed unsystematic recruitment processes. [...] As most journalists are men, it was highly likely that employees recommended other male friends, obstructing women’s entry into the profession. Organizational culture grounded in male solidarity supports masculine power.” (ibid: 135-136)

change is very slow, the more recent defence force radio station IDF is far from being characterized by such a degree of discrimination against women or gender segregation. (ibid: 133-134)

Wilson Lowrey's perspective in his article "Gender, Occupational Knowledge, and Control Over Work in the Newspaper Newsroom" on the choice of a masculine perspective, respectively, his effort to explain the continuing masculine character of newsrooms in terms of men's position in the newsrooms and in terms of their needs differs from the others on the same topic. He suggests that gender inequality occurs partly due to a desire – or rather a need – on managers' (who are most frequently men) part to reduce unpredictability in everyday work conduct.²⁸ (Lowrey 2004: 27)

4.3. Non-dichotomous gender and other factors that determine the position and representation of women in media

In her book *Feminist Media Studies* Liesbet van Zoonen links gender and media theories and points out that in transmission communication models gender is understood as a more or less stable – and thus an easy to define – distinction between men and women which should be correctly represented. Supporters of these models also tend to rely more on the presence of women in media as a guarantee of "more correct" representations of the feminine gender in their contents. She argues that such a conceptualization of gender is highly problematic as it denies the dynamic nature of gender, its historical and cultural specificity and contradictory meanings. Van Zoonen aligns herself with an understanding of gender in which "human identity and gender are thought to be socially constructed, in other words products of circumstances, opportunities and limitations."²⁹ (van Zoonen 2000: 31) According to her, the fact that feminisms and gender studies concentrate on an analysis of gender as a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of these does not mean that this approach will lead to the conclusion that gender is the only or most important factor in human relationships and societies. Although she thinks that a number of practices and discourses clearly continue to construct men and women in different ways, she points out that in many social relationships gender (or sex) differences are probably marginal compared to other factors, e.g. ethnicity, sexuality, class etc. (cf. Wackwitz – Rakow 2007: 262) Van Zoonen draws attention to the concept of power that represents – along with gender – another key element in feminist thinking:

[...] power is not a monolithic 'thing' that some groups (men, capitalists, whites) have and others (women, working class, blacks) have

28 According to Lowrey, Kanter terms this behaviour homosocial and suggests that it occurs because men tend to find interactions with women unpredictable and they prefer to avoid them, while supposedly the more reliable and predictable interactions with men are perceived as less problematic and thus more desirable. (Lowrey 2004: 27)

29 Van Zoonen defines gender this way: "Gender can thus be thought of as a particular discourse, that is, a set of overlapping and often contradictory cultural descriptions and prescriptions referring to sexual difference, which arises from and regulates particular economic, social, political, technological and other non-discursive contexts. Gender is inscribed in the subject along with other discourses, such as those of ethnicity, class, and sexuality. [...] Gender should thus be conceived, not as a fixed property of individuals, but as part of an ongoing process by which subjects are constituted, often in paradoxical ways. The identity that emerges is therefore fragmented and dynamic; gender does not determine or exhaust identity. In theory, although hard to imagine in current society, it is even conceivable to be outside gender or to engage in a social practice in which gender discourse is relatively unimportant." (van Zoonen 2000: 33)

not. Society is not constituted by orderly and dichotomous divisions of oppressors and oppressed. As the experience of black feminists has made perfectly clear, one can be subordinated in one relation (of woman vs. man) and dominant in another (of white woman vs. black woman).

(van Zoonen 2000: 4)

Thus the challenge for van Zoonen lies in “theorizing the multiple relations of subordination” and analyzing how individual and collective identities (such as gender and ethnicity) are constituted in these relations. (van Zoonen 2000: 4)

In their article *Gender Typing in the Newsroom* Djerf-Pierre and Löfgren-Nilsson point out that the classic dichotomization in the sense of “female” and “male” journalism does not take into account the possibility of varied femininities and masculinities which demonstrate themselves in the newsrooms as well as in news products. They also wonder how little attention is paid, for example, to hierarchies among women. (Djerf-Pierre – Löfgren-Nilsson 2004: 84-85) The authors suggest that gender analyses of newsrooms should involve a number of levels. The first of these is the structural level and it deals with dichotomization itself, it is often inevitable at this level (i.e. which types of work are conducted by men, which by women etc.). The second level is symbolic and it involves the construction of ideas about gender. The third – analytical – level is a relational level (i.e. interactions among men and women inside an organization). The fourth and fifth levels involve individual identity and organizational identity. Gendered processes, above all those at the first three levels, are interrelated and often result in segregation and hierarchization which we can term the organization’s gender order. The authors argue that there are three interacting factors that contribute to the gender order of a newsroom: 1. combination of social, economic, political and cultural relationships in the existing gender order in various societies and periods of time; 2. journalistic culture in newsrooms; 3. active strategies of individual women and men or their groups that attempt to change or reproduce existing power structures in journalism. (ibid: 101)

In his analysis of professional subgroups Wilson Lowrey concentrated on a comparison of the role of gender and other factors (e.g. specialization, degree of solidarity, experience). He concludes that gender is a very important factor, indeed a more important factor than the majority of others. “This appears to be evidence of discrimination on the basis of gender. Being male holds up as an important explanation for subgroup control even in the face of these rival explanations.” (Lowrey 2004: 27) He suggests that discrimination in newsrooms occurs not only at the level of gender but also in relation to certain groups within the profession (in his research this group included journalists working with graphic and photographic materials). In a text on gender disadvantaging in Indian media Ammu Joseph takes into account the existence of a number of other influences (socioeconomic position, cultural position, individual’s political perspective, socio-cultural environment in which they live and work, the medium’s economy and culture, class, caste, religion, ethnicity), however, she points out that gender continues to play an important role in how women are perceived and how they are treated by others – whether at work or in general. (Joseph 2004: 75) Other authors (Gallagher: 2005; Chambers – Steiner – Fleming: 2004) also mention age as an important factor in discrimination in the newsroom, however, the impact of age is evidently closely linked to gender bias and thus it affects women in particular. Gallagher uses statistical data to conclude that women professionals all over

the world disappear from the television screen as they grow older. "For women in the profession, a youthful appearance is more highly valued than experience." (Gallagher 2005: 18; cf. Panda in Bhagat 2002: 59) According to Bhagat Indian news organizations prefer to employ young women and women journalists complain that as soon as they learn certain skills and gain experiences they are too old or overqualified for the organization. (Bhagat 2002: 8) Apart from biological sex and related prejudices, respondents in her research identified age and marital status as other important factors in discrimination. Chambers, Steiner and Fleming point out that women journalists do not only produce news but they are also often perceived as visually striking objects. Women journalists themselves become news items (particularly through their private lives and all that relates to their "femininity") or they are transformed into attractive objects thanks to their youth and appearance. The authors alert to the fact that the high "visibility" of women journalists (supported by the top management of news organizations, they supposedly respond to curious audiences) is in contrast with their relative invisibility in decision making positions. In terms of the lower average age of women journalists in comparison with male colleagues, the authors hesitate to draw any definite conclusions from this finding. They suggest that the data do not explain whether this difference is caused by a lack of career opportunities for women, lack of support with child rearing, newsroom culture dominated by men or something else. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 1-6)

When comparing texts on Indian, South African, Maghrebi or e.g. even British or Estonian media relating to analyses of women's position in newsrooms we need to take into account the socio-cultural characteristics of individual countries, their history and traditions. According to these studies media organizations to a great degree reproduce the gender patterns dominant in the society at large. Aida Opoku-Mensah explored the replication of traditional social norms in African newsrooms and how these influence power relationships between men and women working in media. The author suggests that some of the women journalists themselves accept as a journalistic norm the prevalent notions about women as occupying the domestic space and fulfilling reproduction roles and defined as the weaker sex that "lacks depth". They, for example, expressed the view that women did not search for information sources as "women do not know anything about difficult topics like economics and technology", or because "referring to women in rural areas, 'they are illiterate'". (Opoku-Mensah 2004: 107) The traditional notion of male authority is reflected in difficulties experienced by women in higher positions who often complain that they find it very difficult to make male members of staff respect their instructions.³⁰ (ibid: 113)

In her study on South African media Morna works not only with the category of gender but also with the factor of race, respectively colour of skin. She suggests that black women occupy the worst positions in media and black men express as little solidarity with them as white men with white women. In terms of the analytical perspective of gender the findings of the research *Glass Ceiling Two* are most significant, according to them top positions in South African news media continue to be occupied by slightly more white women than black men (23 : 22 %) and black men are de facto most hostile to white women who should "get out of the way". (Morna 2007: 10) Chambers, Steiner and Fleming

30 "A woman in a newsroom in Africa will not project herself in the same way [as a man] for fear that she will be viewed as 'too forward' or 'aggressive', and, even 'a loose woman' because she is always in the company of men. These are not viewed as 'acceptable' characteristics or patterns of behaviour for a woman journalist in Africa. So, while a woman may be quite competent and capable in her work, she will not project this openly in a style that suggests 'tough, hard-hitting journalist'." (ibid: 113)

point out the significant link between the gender and ethnic (or race) factors when taking up positions in journalism in the United States or Great Britain. They explain the fact that the majority of journalists who are not white are women by the “two in one” phenomenon – the tendency of media organizations to “gain points” for promoting equal opportunities in two areas at once as the medium not only employs members of ethnic/racial minorities but also women. The authors, however, concede that the dominance of women among non-white journalists can be caused by other factors as well, e.g. female members of minorities tend to graduate from university more frequently or because these women are more attractive to white men.³¹ (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 86)

The authors analyzing the situation in Indian media (on Europe and North America cf. Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 11) stress – apart from the already mentioned aspects – particularly the role of locality (in the case of India the rich centres of English influence vs. poor traditional regions). In *Poorly Paid, Insecure in North East Chhakchhuak* suggests that the north-eastern region is abused by the centre – news organizations use cheap regional workforce, yet regions hardly appear in national print media and as a result people from the regions are alienated and ignored by the rest of society. Chhakchhuak blames all this on the market oriented media policy as the significant difference between the centre and periphery is profitable. (Chhakchhuak in Bhagat 2002: 21) Hence under such circumstances the factor of locality plays a much more significant role than that of gender.

The role of regional, respectively local, specific features are also discussed in Jamal Eddine Naji’s *Profession: Journalisme maghrébin au féminin. Vécu professionnel de la femme journaliste dans les cinq pays du Maghreb* (Profession: Maghrebi female journalism. The professional lives of women journalists in five Maghrebi countries). She stresses in the introduction that it is very difficult to define “Maghrebi journalism” and even more difficult to identify what “Maghrebi female journalism” is. According to Naji the analyzed countries (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Mauritius) all belong to the sphere of Arabic culture and thus share a number of characteristics among themselves as well as with other Arabic countries in terms of religion, government, specific worldviews, including the position of women. A number of “historical shifts” (period of colonization, relationships and exchanges with nearby European societies), however, led to changes in context which were powerful enough to alter social practices related to women in individual countries. “We conclude that gender plays a less significant role than the context of a given country.” (Naji 2006: 6, author’s translation) Naji argues that in the majority of countries it is impossible to separate the field of journalism from the overall issue of women’s position in the countries of Maghreb. The fight for women’s rights acquires different forms, from demands to comply with existing legislation (according to which women are equal to men) to getting to terms with a return to traditions. Due to serious problems affecting journalism in the region,³² gender topics are not addressed separately and women journalists’ approaches tend to be universal (in the sense that although women journalists demand professional equality and equal rights, they do not necessarily frame these demands in opposition to male colleagues). (ibid: 1-17)

31 The authors refer to a “Connie Chung phenomenon”, it describes a situation in which an exotic woman presenter attracts white men and that without threatening the white management. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 87)

32 The author lists as key themes in particular access to information and sources, their transparency, freedom to congregate, economic health of media organizations, transparency and regulation of the advertising market, basic rights of employees in these fields, censorship, freedom of expression, protection from sanctions against journalists etc. (Naji 2006: 15)

The influence of the historical development of a country on women journalists' situation is also illustrated in an article by Barbi Pilvre on the Estonian media market. Her research concentrated on the ambitions, preferences and interests of Estonian women journalists and her findings suggest that a number of them de facto resigned to developing a career and she suggests that this trend has historical roots:

There was also nostalgia in the air at the beginning of 1990s toward the 1930s, when Estonia had its legendary golden age as an independent Estonian Republic. Accordingly, the gender division of those times was romanticized for a while and capitalism and consumer culture in the 1990s brought new possibilities for gender identification. A career seemed to be old-fashioned and somehow Soviet-labelled in this new context because it was an everyday routine since the 1950s that women worked and had careers. Therefore, not to work, to stay home and care for the family was regarded as more Western (and therefore modern), as images of the West were uncritically interpreted from TV soaps and fashion magazines.

(Pilvre 2004: 245)

4.4. The influence of organizational factors on the position and representation of women in news

Van Zoonen (2000: 47-49) suggests that when analyzing conditions of news production we work with nine levels of the hierarchical system of media production which were described by Dimmick and Coit in 1982 in their text "Levels of analysis in mass media decision making". The lowest, ninth level, involves the individual communicator. Higher levels include dyadic communication (8th level), i.e. immediate contact with other individuals; position in formal and informal groups and at communicators' meetings (7th level); organizational dimension of media production – organizational policy, goals, work routines, division of labour, hierarchy (6th level); position of media in the community or on the relevant market (5th level); "supra-organizational" influences – ownership and management structures in media organizations (4th level); organization of the media industry as a whole – vertical and horizontal concentration (3rd level); supranational policies (2nd level); policies of international organizations (1st level). The first and second levels involve the regulation of media industries, communicators' behaviour, contents, advertising etc. All these levels influence the autonomy of the journalistic subject and van Zoonen argues that clearly "there is no such thing as an individual communicator". Journalistic work requires collaboration with colleagues, accommodation of specific needs, routines and traditions within an organization and it is limited by the social, economic and legal background of the media institution. Van Zoonen proposes that it is particularly important for feminist media research to take these levels into account, in particular as there are too many publications on the roles and possibilities of women journalists that presume that women are able to change the process of media production by themselves.

Similarly, de Bruin suggests that when analyzing influences on the outputs by male and female journalists, it is of key importance to take into account at least three factors or variables: gender, professional standards and the (media) organization itself. In media organizations, according to de Bruin, individuals' gender performances (which are not

dichotomous but multiple), so-called “doing gender” or “gendering”, are derived according to the functioning of individuals in organizational structures and practices. (de Bruin 2004: 1) Robinson also alerts to the fact that a professional identity – similarly to a gender identity – is not something that people “possess” but rather something that they “create and change” depending on the social and work environment. (Robinson 2004: 187) She thus suggests that future research needs to focus on those situations and areas in which gender becomes a relevant interpretive factor rather than make general conclusions about female and male journalists working differently. (ibid: 191)

Based on a three-year research project on Spanish newsrooms Gallego et al. arrived at the conclusion that most likely women can hardly change approaches to “women’s issues” in media as a more important factor influencing media contents is a “routine news discourse” that does not take into account gender topics as the different social positions of men and women are not considered worthy or important in news terms. According to Gallego et al. women in news discourse acquire a “minority status” and thus an approach to gender conflicts is derived from approaches to other social groups. Women thus actually become a minority like immigrants, disabled people, young people etc. (Gallego et al. 2004: 60-61)

A number of authors (Djerf-Pierre 2004; Löfgren-Nilsson 2004; Ross 2004; Fröhlich 2004) consider the commercial interests of a medium very influential as a “non-gender” influence on changes in gender relationships in newsrooms. Djerf-Pierre and Löfgren-Nilsson describe the situation in Swedish television stations that introduced more topics traditionally connected to women in their broadcasting in the 1980s and they consequently employed a large number of women journalists due to commercial (competitive) reasons. The newly conceived news programmes were to attract a female audience. The authors argue that without the interest and support of the management most likely no changes would have happened. (Djerf-Pierre – Löfgren-Nilsson 2004: 95-96) The question remains how commercialization will influence the work of women journalists and whether it will benefit female consumers of news. “The risk exists that commercial logic will coincide with the separation of gender, emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities, both human and journalistic.” (ibid: 101) Ross also suggests that the most frequent reason for introducing more “women’s topics” (i.e. topics that – based on gender stereotypes – are supposed to interest women) in broadcasts is the commercial interest of the given medium (the effort to attract more female readers, viewers and listeners). Ross is very sceptical regarding the notion that an increased presence of women in the field will bring about a possible change in women’s position and representation in news:

Gender alone will not make a difference in changing the culture of newsrooms or on the type of news produced. A journalist’s sex is no guarantee that she or he will either embrace sentiments that privilege equality nor hold specific values and beliefs that promote a more equitable and nonoppressive practice: Some men may well be more sympathetic to the ideals (and realities) of inclusion than some women. [...] mass incorporation of women into the dominant (male) newsroom culture makes honorary men of everyone.

(Ross 2004: 157)

Pamela Creedon and Judith Cramer, editors of the volume *Women in Mass Communication*, are even more pessimistic when they contemplate “the very negative future prospects” of a profession that is going through significant systemic change.³³ (Creedon – Cramer 2007: 278)

5. Women journalists’ strategies in newsrooms with masculine culture

Although a number of other factors have been taken into account, the reviewed literature suggests that gender retains its key importance in determining the character of journalistic culture, newsroom environment and news outputs. The authors characterize journalistic culture as masculine, respectively in a cultural understanding as a space for negotiation between the dominant (masculine) culture and oppositional cultures. Melin-Higgins argues that women choose various strategies to cope with the underlying masculine nature of journalistic culture and suggests three groups of these strategies: “female ghetto” or “marionette” denotes tactics that men do not perceive as a threat. These strategies do not question the dominant journalistic culture (women work on soft news or in departments or magazines that are aimed primarily at women, they are de facto placed in ghettos where, Melin-Higgins suggests “they are abandoned to their fate”); “one of the boys” describes a woman who infiltrates the male field and is perceived as a threat (masculine culture deals with this threat in various way – e.g. by labelling these women as aggressive and unfeminine); “one of the girls” is an oppositional tactic that questions the very essence of a journalism defined as masculine and attempts to make it more feminine. However, Melin-Higgins argues that any of these strategies represents a trap. Women journalists are criticized if they want to work in hard news (they are perceived as aggressive, tough, unfeminine), they are equally criticized when they decide to work in soft news (they are then perceived as “incompetent little girls”) – it seems that there is no escape. (Melin-Higgins 2004: 199) She thinks that another strategy is escape when women decide to work as freelancers in order to avoid pressure and sexism in the newsroom. (cf. Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 102 who point out a number of negative sides to freelancing). Melin-Higgins comments that most sadly some women decide to quit a medium or the profession. (ibid: 213-215) She goes on to argue that even men who consider the dominant journalistic culture problematic and try to change it need a lot of personal courage and conviction. (cf. Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 84-85) In her work on women in Indian media Bhagat suggests that their strategy is perseverance which they acquired in the course of years of experience.³⁴ (Bhagat 2002: 12)

An often discussed strategy used by women journalists is reliance on absolute autonomy and professionalism which are based on good education. In her article on the professional lives of Maghrebi female journalists Naji suggests that in the course of interviews women keep returning to a topic in which they invest hopes for promotion: education. Regardless of their country of residence women are convinced that if they develop their professional skills, the whole society that discriminates against them will embrace women’s

33 “[...] rapid changes in technology, increased demands to work longer for the same pay, coupled with eroding family-friendly practices, have made mass communication less and less attractive as a professional occupation for women – and men.” (Creedon – Cramer 2007: 278-279)

34 “They have learned that hard work, a supportive management, and a positive attitude can be keys to success, but they have also learned that within the newsroom, resentment, exclusion and hostility are flip sides of those coins. By and large, women journalists have a positive perspective and believe that advancement opportunities in the industry have improved over the last few years.” (Bhagat 2002: 12)

equality and equality of opportunities. Their aim is to use education to enter all areas of the profession rather than just those that were designated to them and in which they are enclosed as in ghettos. They attempt to prevent all discrimination by professional competences, technical skills and experience. (Naji 2007: 8-9) This “fixation” on education, according to Naji, represents “a clear and almost systematic reliance on technical and professional education as a means of achieving equality and a recognition of one’s abilities and professionalism in the role of a woman journalist, and that regardless of the gender criterion” (ibid: 11, author’s translation). The women’s ambition is to achieve equality with colleagues which, according to Naji, results in an absence of “a serious and constant attempt to organize themselves on the basis of their gender, to create specific communities or syndicates of women journalists.” (ibid, author’s translation) In his article “Gender, Occupational Knowledge, and Control Over Work in the Newspaper Newsroom” Lowrey arrives at the conclusion that although in general the position of women with higher education can be better on the job market, empirical media research suggests that there is no direct link between the quality of education and a higher position at work. There are more women graduates of schools of journalism and communication and according to Lowrey women are in general more active, yet they do not hold positions in the management of newsrooms or media organizations. (Lowrey 2004: 29)³⁵ According to Chambers, Steiner and Fleming the accessibility of higher education for women had a decisive impact on women’s progress in praxis, however, at the same time they alert to the fact that in a number of countries this accessibility is a relatively recent phenomenon, moreover analyses of textbooks and other learning aids suggest that for a long time the shape of journalistic education discouraged women from understanding journalism as a possible career. (Chambers – Steiner – Fleming 2004: 9, 10, 72-74)

In connection with women’s education in the field and the supposed feminization of the field from the 1980s combined with the expansion of the communications sector in western industrialized countries Fröhlich pays attention to an interesting paradox: the quick development of industrial societies into information ones led to a demand for competent educated communicators and information technology experts. Fröhlich argues that these newly created fields provided opportunities mainly for women who began taking up “traditionally male” positions, however, discrimination against women as a group did not weaken at all. In a traditional understanding women are considered better communicators,³⁶ this can be one of the reasons why they find the field of communication attractive,

35 In her article “The Social Construction of Leadership and Its Implications for Women in Mass Communication” Linda Aldoory explores types of leadership and their influence on the position of men and women in top management of (not only media) enterprises. The author points out that research did not uncover significant differences in leadership style that would be attributable to gender. Nonetheless, she adds, male inferiors demonstrate a stronger tendency to questioning the qualities of women superiors. (Aldoory 2007: 249-251)

36 According to Fröhlich earlier psychological approaches were particularly misleading as they uncovered differences in men’s and women’s non-verbal communication skills and contributed to widespread prejudices about skills and e.g. men’s and women’s communication competences. “Gender-specific behaviour is a result of gender-specific socialization as ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ and the different behaviour patterns of men and women (e.g., in the workplace) is also related to the fact that men and women have different social positions in society and their personal interactive and communicative behaviour reflects their socially prescribed status.” (Fröhlich 2004: 71) Fröhlich insists that women’s “exceptional” communication skills are nothing but uses of a certain behaviour and strategies acquired in the course of childhood socialization. She argues that in adulthood this acquired behaviour serves the maintaining of a harmonious atmosphere in the course of communication with the aim of achieving one’s own goals and succeed in the given system. (ibid:72) “Because of gender-role expectations, in our case the expectation that women communicate better, they frequently and increasingly choose those professions that are deemed appropriate for their gender. [...] Interpreting the female boom in the communications sector

this is also confirmed by the fact that they make up the majority of graduates of schools of communication (according to Fröhlich their share varies from 51 to 90 % in various European and north American countries). Despite these achievements in education “this trend has had no significant impact on the number of women actively employed in senior positions in journalism, although, as indicated previously, there are considerable national differences”. (Fröhlich 2004: 68)

6. Conclusion: Too many factors and common challenges

Gender studies of media form part of the highly differentiated field of social sciences and represent an interdisciplinary field in which very different perspectives clash or merge. Key areas of research constitute representations of women and men in media contents and the position and relationships between women and men in media organizations. The causal relationship between these two research areas forms one of the most controversial topics of contemporary gender studies of media. Some theoreticians consider it evident that an increase in the number of women working in media as content producers as well as managers will automatically lead to less stereotypical representations of women (and men) in media contents. They thus concentrate mainly on quantitative analyses of the gender composition of newsrooms and other areas of media production as well as an analysis of media contents. In line with the frequently activist approach of feminist and gender research they demand equal representation of women and men at all levels of media institutions and that both in vertical (work hierarchy) as well as horizontal (e.g. themes within news) structures.

However, within gender studies of media we find an approach that refuses such a simple causality and points out that an increase in the number of women producers does not necessarily lead to a change in media contents for a variety of reasons and a number of empirical studies indeed support this hypothesis. The authors of these studies alert mainly to the low influence – or even the de facto non-existence – of individual communicators and they explore a number of other factors that influence the gender aspect of media contents apart from the gender of their producers or the gender constitution of the institution in which they are produced. These factors involve a medium’s commercial interests, its culture, organizational and production context and routines, age, race (respectively skin colour), socio-economic position, ethnicity, religion, cultural position or political views of content producers, socio-cultural environment (locality) in which they live and work, historical experience and traditions of the given locality or country. Those who refuse the optimistic visions about the change in media contents as a consequence of equal numbers of women and men as content producers argue that the essence of gender is non-dichotomous (i.e. there is no single masculinity or femininity but a whole range of male and female characteristics and their combinations) and that feminine gender (respectively female biological sex) does not automatically reproduce gender sensitivity or a desire and need to promote women’s rights. The approach which understands newsrooms as masculine fortresses run on the basis of informal relationships between men and those women who accept their rules has also been influential. According to this scientific perspective the defenders of the fortress make avail of a large number of procedures and strategies to keep potential intruders (particularly women with a feminine perspective) in segregated ghettos.

as resulting from equal opportunities in the sector is to continue to believe in a myth.” (ibid: 72-73)

Current studies dealing with the position of women and men in newsrooms provide a range of stimuli and inspiration for further research. As a start we could acquire basic statistical data on the numbers of women in newsrooms, in their departments as well as in decision making and managerial positions, their earnings in comparison with those of men or average age, however, these are missing in a number of countries (e.g. also in the Czech Republic). If we tried to arrive at conclusions regarding media contents only on the basis of these data, we would ignore a large area of gender studies on media which suggests that this approach is unproductive. Qualitative research that respects the actual personal experiences of women and men working in newsrooms (and their own interpretations of their experiences) and takes into account individual factors that relate to given persons and to organizations they work for as well as the wider social context will be less exact and generalizeable – in the sense of the classic scientific paradigm. It will, however, very likely be also less speculative and can result in interesting information about a number of gender-related aspects of journalistic work, some of which – as studies from socio-culturally varied areas suggest – are almost universal. It is unlikely that such data will enable conclusions on the nature of media contents and it will not allow us to construct any parallels between findings from these two areas. Nonetheless, they will provide a background for a scientific understanding of the gendered character of the researched media market, of prevalent trends and – in line with the activist tradition of gender studies and feminist approaches – of possibilities or, on the contrary, obstacles to change.

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