

Maria Jacobson

YOUNG PEOPLE AND GENDERED MEDIA MESSAGES

**The International
Clearinghouse
on Children, Youth
and Media**

NORDICOM

Göteborg University 2005

**The International
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Youth and Media, at**

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**THE CLEARINGHOUSE
IS LOCATED AT NORDICOM**

Nordicom is an organ of co-operation between the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The overriding goal and purpose is to make the media and communication efforts undertaken in the Nordic countries known, both throughout and far beyond our part of the world.

Nordicom uses a variety of channels – newsletters, journals, books, databases – to reach researchers, students, decisionmakers, media practitioners, journalists, teachers and interested members of the general public.

Nordicom works to establish and strengthen links between the Nordic research community and colleagues in all parts of the world, both by means of unilateral flows and by linking individual researchers, research groups and institutions.

Nordicom also documents media trends in the Nordic countries. The joint Nordic information addresses users in Europe and further afield. The production of comparative media statistics forms the core of this service.

Nordicom is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media

A UNESCO INITIATIVE 1997

In 1997, the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), Göteborg University Sweden, began establishment of the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, financed by the Swedish government and UNESCO. The overall point of departure for the Clearinghouse's efforts with respect to children, youth and media is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of the Clearinghouse is to increase awareness and knowledge about children, youth and media, thereby providing a basis for relevant policy-making, contributing to a constructive public debate, and enhancing children's and young people's media literacy and media competence. Moreover, it is hoped that the Clearinghouse's work will stimulate further research on children, youth and media.

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media informs various groups of users – researchers, policy-makers, media professionals, voluntary organisations, teachers, students and interested individuals – about

- research on children, young people and media, with special attention to media violence
- research and practices regarding media education and children's/young people's participation in the media
- measures, activities and research concerning children's and young people's media environment.

Fundamental to the work of the Clearinghouse is the creation of a global *network*. The Clearinghouse publishes a *yearbook* and a *newsletter*. Several *bibliographies* and a worldwide *register of organisations* concerned with children and media have been compiled. This and other information is available on the Clearinghouse's *web site*: www.nordicom.gu.se/clearinghouse.html

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Foreword

In this report, the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media directs its attention to gendered media messages. One important aspect of media research involves studying media with a focus on gender. This is also a frequently occurring issue in societal debates around the world. The point of departure is that society (family, religion, school, etc.) constructs 'the feminine' and 'the masculine', thereby keeping women and men separate and attributing men greater worth. In this process, media not only reflect reality, but also contribute to the construction of hegemonic gender definitions that often appear to be self-evident. The contribution of media to the maintenance of this gender order is particularly important to study, considering the situation of children and young people, who have constant access to today's extensive media output through a multitude of different channels. In this regard, we find reason to remind readers of articles 13 and 19 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The present report attempts to account for what is going on in the field of gender and media in a broad sense. The main focus is on news content and popular mainstream media primarily targeted at children and young people. Included are studies and reports from different disciplines, as media issues also attract scholars outside traditional media and communications research. Data from media watch and media literacy organizations also form part of the basic material.

Awareness is often followed by an urge to work for change, which is why a few tools for improvement are presented: guidelines from the International Federation of Journalists: "Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children"; and a compilation of guidelines for gender-sensitive reporting collected from the UNESCO site.

The report has been prepared by freelance journalist Maria Jacobson. As a reporter and writer, she works with various assignments concerning gender, media and the criminal justice system. Along with a group of media professionals, she started a media watch NGO in Sweden 1992, of which she is currently chairperson.

It is our hope that this report will help to clarify the debate on gendered media messages and inspire further reflection upon and studies in the area.

Göteborg in February 2005

Ulla Carlsson

Gender Glossary

Sex = biological; we are born female or male

Gender = socially constructed; we learn our gender identity – how to be women or men

Femininity = set of concepts and expectations concerning how a woman should behave

Masculinity = set of concepts and expectations concerning how a man should behave

Gender roles = the activities and behaviours that society considers appropriate for girls, boys, women and men. Cultural traditions, moral codes, the economy and politics are factors that determine what is appropriate

Gender stereotyping = making assumptions about a person only on the basis of gender. Generally stereotyping in the media context follows patterns of power by diminishing those with little power and influence in society. Usually this stereotyping emanates from misconceptions and prejudice. Racism and sexism are extreme forms of stereotyping

Sexist images = contemptuous and degrading depictions

Gender discriminatory images = can be both stereotypical and sexist

Gender power structure = how formal and informal power is distributed between men and women in a society

Gender equality = equal distribution of formal and informal power between men and women

Sexualization = when everyday situations such as eating and washing hair are charged with sexual meaning in the media

Pornophication = references to pornography in mainstream media imagery and language

Media roar, media buzz = the mix of all textual and visual messages from all media genres.¹

Introduction

A recent South African baseline study reveals that children are very rarely used as news subjects. Only six per cent of the monitored 22,000 news items from 36 different media contained children. Furthermore, when children do feature in the news, they are most often represented as victims, especially girls. This pattern of under-representation and stereotypical depictions is not only typical of South Africa, but also of the global situation. Overall, in the media at large, children are seldom presented as individuals or subjects. More frequently, we can see children in advertising representing different consumer culture values.

Therefore, when the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media now focus on gender messages in mass media content, it is appropriate to remind readers about The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains four basic principles concerning political decision-making that affects children. First, the Convention stipulates that such decisions should be made with the best interest of the child as a primary consideration.² Children's own opinions should be heard.³ Not only their survival, but also their development should be ensured.⁴ Finally, there should be no discrimination between children; each child should be able to enjoy his or her rights.⁵

Article 13 stipulates the right to freedom of expression, and Article 17 recognizes the important function performed by the mass media, ensuring that the child has access to information from a diversity of sources.

While children are treated as a minority in media content, it is well known that children are major media users. Continuing with the South African example, findings show that over 50 per cent of children aged 8 to 15 years watch TV every day. Daily viewing time averaged two hours among those 60 per cent that had daily access, according to *Outlooks on Children and Media* (von Feilitzen & Bucht 2001). The same report shows that 95 per cent of households in Chile have a TV, and 83 per cent of children under the age of 13 watch TV every day. Children in Sweden watch 10,000 hours of TV between the ages of 3 and 17 years. According to a recent study from the Swedish National Institute of Public Health, this is the same amount of time spent in elementary school. However, media use is linked to accessibility. Let us not forget that only a minority of the world's population has access to the media roar 24 hours a day. Internet access is growing, but for instance on the African continent only one person in 130 has a personal computer. Eight per cent have a television set (Jensen 2002). Thus, when we speak about gender messages from the media, not all children and young persons are getting them.

Yet for many children, media culture is one of the most significant sources of the gender messages to which they are exposed. They see that boys are more represented than girls, and that men are shown more frequently than women. Since the 1960s, women's movements have dealt with under-representation, sexist and biased images of females in media as an aspect of gender discrimination at large. Feminist scholars were among the first to take an interest in the field of gender and media. Both scholars and women activists made the connection between real gender inequality and imbalance in gender representation in the media landscape. The media are identified as significant distributors of gender representations and gender power patterns. Research on under-representation and stereotypical images of females has been done in many parts of the world, and the pattern is similar around the globe: Media content is male dominated and women are continuously reduced, both in their numbers and in the significance of their roles. Not surprisingly, girls are discriminated against both as children and as members of the female gender.

In 2005 it is ten years since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, took place, which is why it is appropriate in this report to also refer to the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action from 1995.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, recognized media as one of twelve key areas in the work for women's rights. It concluded that global communications are dominated by stereotyped and demeaning images of girls and women, and that there is a lack of women in decision-making positions in the mass media.

However, the media were also recognized as constituting a vehicle for the advancement of women and gender equality, by portraying women and men in a non-stereotypical, diverse and balanced manner and by respecting the dignity and worth of each human being.⁶

A growing awareness of the symbolic representation of people has been observed outside the feminist agenda. From the perspective of democracy, the issue of fair, dignified media representation has been raised in many parts of the world. Furthermore, there is concern about the consequences of media depictions and exposure of biased content.

The Present Report

The present report attempts to survey activities in the field of gender and media in a broad sense. It describes gender patterns in media content. The main focus is on news content and popular mainstream media primarily targeted at children and young persons. Included are studies and reports from different disciplines, as media issues also attract scholars outside traditional media and communications research. Furthermore, documents from media watch and media literacy

organizations are used, as these are usually produced in cooperation with professional researchers.

The report also touches upon the subject of media impact on gender roles and behaviour.

Finally, awareness is often followed by an urge to work for change, which is why a few tools for improvement are presented: guidelines from the International Federation of Journalists; Child Rights and the Media, Putting Children in the right; and a compilation of guidelines for gender-sensitive reporting collected from the UNESCO site.

In a call for new research and studies of content, use and impact, an e-mail message was sent to a number of media watch and media literacy organizations around the world and to specific researchers from different disciplines who work with gender and media. The response was overwhelming, and I am most grateful for the generosity of a number of scholars and media activists who sent new texts and works in progress.

Sexist songs

Music and music videos are genres in which degrading and sexist messages are used frequently. Here is a short lyric sample in Jamaican Patois, from “Nuff Gal” (Many Girls), performed by the internationally popular dancehall artist Beenie Man:

*Well now I want unoo listen and understand
I man a flex like King Solomon, gal a wash
mi foot, gal a wash mi hand, gal a brush mi
teeth when mi just done nyam, gal a tear off
Mi root ina mi bed dem want land
Women a walk, woman a cry fi di wickedest slam
Woman a sey that dem only want di long maga man
Just to give them de style and whole heap a pattern
Dean Frazer, come solo di song*

English translation from Patois: Well now I want you all to listen and understand/I am a man who is as cool as King Solomon, with women washing my feet, women washing /my hand, women brushing my teeth after I have just had a meal, women grabbing at/my crotch, they want to get into my bed/ Women walking, begging to get the best ride they have ever had/Women saying that they only want the tall, skinny man/Just to give them the right moves and a whole lot extra/ Dean Frazer, come and round off the song.⁷

Gender, Sexuality and Consumer Culture

Sexuality as a Consumer Force

The media industry and media content are global in many ways, also regarding gender messages. Two significant themes linked to gender expressions go hand in hand: consumerism and sexuality often turned into sexism and sexualization or hyper-sexuality. Sexuality may be defined as an urge or instinct to demand the desired object and to have the goal to conquer it. It is not too far-fetched to draw a parallel to the emotional desire to consume. In a consumer culture, this desire is defined as an urge to shop when one's basic needs are fulfilled. Professional market strategists have been successful in linking the two together. When we see sexuality depicted, it is often in the context of marketing and advertising.

Language from popular media and music interplay with youth cultures, which is why gendered words like "bitch", "slut" and "pro" (professional) have become common both in reality and in media contexts. This has contributed to the discourse of a "sexualized climate" in societies, together with the general belief that sexual content, ranging from verbal innuendo to sexual intercourse, has increased in the media, a view held also by the youth audience. They consider sexual media content an important educational source, along with peers, parents and sex education in school. According to one U.S. study (Brown, 2002), sexual content was depicted in slightly more than half of the television programs in 1997 to 1998. One year later, the rate was two thirds. This indicates a rapid increase, but the tendency has been ongoing for at least two decades.

The citizen can meet sexualization in many shapes. In the Scandinavian countries, the concept "pornophication of public space" has been established to describe how pornography is influential in fashion, advertising, entertainment, media, including Internet, and language.

Sexual and gender messages reinforce each other in an intriguing manner. Both gender and sexuality are depicted in a clichéd way. The stereotypical media concept of sexuality is built around the female as the object of desire and the male as active chooser of object, however lacking he may be in relationship skills. Gender is simplified to hyper-masculinity and -femininity. Hyper-masculinity has reached a multimillion-viewer audience of boys and men through professional wrestling on television; one of many examples of the merging of sports, entertainment, beauty, fashion and media industries. Hyper-femininity is distributed throughout the world through advertising of beauty products for multinational brands. Young women's magazines are published widely, faithful to strict formats

and with few local changes. "Elle" and "Cosmopolitan" are such globally franchised brands, published and read in over 40 countries, according to their web sites.

Consumer culture is the core paradigm in Western culture and highly celebrated in newer market capitalist economies such as post-Soviet Eastern Europe and Russia and post-Mao China. Consumerism works as a vehicle into modernity and is closely tied to the construction of femininity and masculinity. In China, media censorship is implemented and, for instance, a large control apparatus filters electronic messages. However, ads that stereotype images of young women are frequent and contribute to a commercial gender ideology. There is widespread fear that global media and advertising may erase national values and cultures, merging them into an all-Western, homogenized culture. This fear may be exaggerated, according to some scholars. For instance, in the Chinese transition from the post-Mao media culture to a commercial media situation, advertisers stress traditional Chinese femininity ideals. Shyness, humbleness, husband and family oriented messages appear along with messages about Western beauty ideals, which in turn have led to a great demand for cosmetic surgery on eyelids, for instance.⁸

The televised reality show Big Brother is an example of globalized media formats. It originated in the Netherlands and has been aired in most European countries as well as in Argentina, Australia, South Africa and the US. Computer games such as "Counter Strike" and "Sims" are popular in many countries on all continents. Some of the computer games have attracted considerable attention from the adult world due to their violent content; at the same time, one of the gender messages is that girls and women, too, can be action heroes.

However, when we speak about globalization, it is important to remember that in many countries media accessibility, especially TV, the Internet and computers, is an urban phenomenon and depends on access to electricity. Still, it is estimated that there are about 250 television sets per thousand inhabitants in the world (von Feilitzen & Carlsson 2002). Generally, boys have access to more media and use electronic media more. But in India and Tunisia, for example, this is not the case. Girls have different kinds of social restrictions that keep them indoors, which leads to higher media use at home. Boys, on the other hand, more often go to the cinema (Agraval & Ben Slama 2000).

Gender Segregation as a Market Strategy

Segregation fits well within the market discourse of segmentation, and new groups of consumers are chiselled out regularly. The "tween" group, between child and teenager, has come forward in recent years as a new target group, with special tween products in fashion and media. It is commonly acknowledged that material possessions and brands are identity markers, defining social groups, class, race and gender. However, the British study *Constructing the Digital Tween, Market discourse and girl's interests* by Rebekah Willet suggests that young girls might

not accept the market discourse that easily and that they seem reluctant to identify themselves as tweens.

The same study describes how the soap opera *Eastenders* (BBC) and its website, popular with all ages and sexes, includes mature topics such as rape, teenage pregnancy, HIV/aids and prostitution. In this context, the tweens were not primarily defined as a market target but as serious viewers (Willet 2004).

Young people may experience conflicting or contradictory feelings when exposed to media. At the same time, they may be sophisticated consumers of advertising and yet feel unable to escape it, as media analyst Margaret Gallagher points out in *Gender Setting, New agendas for media monitoring and advocacy* (Gallagher 2001).

In a Canadian study, tween girls reported enjoying shows like “Ally McBeal”, “Friends” and “Dawsons Creek” as well as reading magazines such as “Seventeen” and “People.” The girls spent a significant amount of their time engaging in media consumption (Media Watch 2000).

The audience does not always behave like media producers intend for them to behave. *Big Brother* is targeted primarily at 19- to 39-year-olds. But the show was enormously popular also in the 6- to 13-year bracket in Germany, as Maya Götz at the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television found in her research on the significance of soaps in the lives of children and youth (Götz 2001). The pre-teens used it as a model, or staging, of everyday life. German girls, age 10 to 15 years, described their passion for popular soap operas as an addiction. The soaps function as a mix of pleasure, information, emotional resonance, a tool for creating a self-image and above all as an ingredient in everyday life, almost as a life companion or a friend.

It is known that children enjoy adverts, especially on TV, both those for children's and adult products. Often they learn jingles and slogans from ads. Adverts for children's products, such as toys, food, snacks and sweets, are if possible more gender-segregated than other media content. The typical ad for girls' products is colour coded in pink and other pastel colours, while ads for boys' products are coloured using dark nuances. The environment in which girls are supposed to stage their play is quite realistic: the home, the beauty parlour, a shop. Boys, however, are expected to move about in unrealistic environments such as outer space or medieval castles with their guns, swords and vehicles. The keywords for boys are action, competition, fast and cool, while the keywords in girls' ads are cute, soft and wonderful (Brembeck & Johansson 1996).

Gender Representation in News and Popular Media

Visibility as an Asset

Over the years, visibility has grown in importance. Media culture is accused of maintaining the phenomenon of narcissism by stressing continuous improvement of the self, in general, and the appearance, in particular. Being seen or mirrored appears to be important both on individual and on structural levels. Media theorists as well as psychologists include media as a given contributor, among others, to the formation of gender identity as a young person. The wish to be looked at by a wider audience becomes manifest when teenagers put out images of themselves on Internet sites, where viewers can vote and comment on the pictures.

Being a media personality, such as a talk show host, soap opera actor, reality TV participant, making music or being a centrefold in men's magazines, seems to be an attractive career choice. The demand for young women in the entertainment industry has created the phenomenon of "bimbo-schools" for instance in Italy, where Scuola per Veline in Frattamaggiore⁹ holds courses for young people in order to populate television shows, primarily run by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's media corporation Mediaset. According to news articles in USA Today and Women's Feature Service, the school has been criticized, as it is partly financed by the European Union and its activities are contrary to the EU strategy on gender equality.

On the structural level, visibility is an asset when it comes to reaching policy makers and delivering a message to society, but also in creating role models for young people. Social representation in decision-making on different levels is considered important for ensuring democracy, equality and human rights. This concept is also applicable to media representation. Different groups in society feel marginalized by the media as well as socially, culturally and politically. The notion that only the elite has media admittance is still true for news, but this is being challenged as other strata or groups of society, for instance women, demand media space. This demand is met in part by the entertainment media, where "ordinary people" can now become celebrities by participating in reality-shows, followed by extensive reporting about the shows in the tabloids and magazines. In a way, one could say that celebrity as a construction is undergoing democratization.¹⁰

Gender Representation in News

Children have difficulties in demanding media space and are heavily under-represented in many genres. On the UNICEF site *Voices of Youth*, children express the importance of fair representation in the media. They react to stereotyping; for instance children from African countries dislike the iconized image of the starving child.

A recent study of 22,000 news items in 36 different media outlets in South Africa showed that children are not a key element on the news agenda. Only six per cent of all monitored news items contained children. One child commented on this lack of representation: "In this newspaper you see more information about cell phones. There is only one (item) about children."

Out of the six per cent coverage, boys were depicted in 56 per cent and girls in 44 per cent, an unusually high representation for girls, as compared to previous research. But when we look closer at the topics in which girls and boys appear, it is obvious that the reporting follows gender stereotypical lines. Boys appear more in sports-related stories and girls as victims of abuse. The same study also looked at the adult sources used in items about children. Thirty-five per cent were women and 65 per cent men, a fairly good result, compared to the general representation of female sources. In a survey of news items in twelve countries in Southern Africa conducted in 2002, women constituted only 17 per cent of news sources. However, according to the South African survey, female adult sources are generally mothers or members of the NGO sector, while male sources are policy makers, members of law enforcement or experts. The low rate of child representation in news media is much the same throughout the world. A yearly study of Swedish newspapers concludes that children appear in seven to 15 per cent of the news stories.¹¹

The idea of "youth" in the news has gender implications, according to an Australian study. Although many young women are high achievers or rebels, just as young men are, they are rarely included in the youth category. Instead, they are labelled as a girl or a daughter. Young women are predominantly constructed as passive and vulnerable, and young men as violent and criminal (Sercombe 1996).

The evidence for female under-representation in news media is overwhelming from all parts of the world. The global average of women as news subjects is 18 per cent (Spears, Seydegar, Gallagher 2000). Most of them appear in so-called soft news, while about ten per cent are included in political news content.

"Gender inequality in the media is not "only a women's issue", but a question of discrimination and therefore a human rights issue." The quote comes from a Pakistani delegate to the South Asian regional conference on gender and media in Kathmandu, Nepal in June 2004. Not only are women very few in Pakistani news, when they are mentioned it is often in abusive, judgmental and sexist ways. Women can be described as intellectually inferior or in terms of immorality. The scholars at this conference expressed that while women are making progress in the South Asian region, this is not reported in the news.

In the 25,110 news stories from twelve countries in the southern region of Africa, women appeared most frequently as sex workers and beauty pageant participants, followed by homemakers. Men appeared for the most part in politics and sports. Gender-specific news items accounted for two per cent of the stories, and half of these were on gender violence. The study discusses this under-representation:

A frequently asked question is: Is this not just the way things are? If women are the majority of beauty contestants surely it makes sense that they will constitute the majority of those interviewed on the subject? The first weakness of this argument is that the topic is not just of interest to women (more men than women go to beauty pageants). Second, there is no straightforward relationship between the extent to which women are represented or active in a topic area, and the extent to which they are accessed as sources. A good example of this is in the political arena. Women constitute an average of 18 percent of the members of parliament in the region. Yet women constituted only eight percent of the sources in the politician occupation category. What is particularly shocking in this table is that countries that have the highest representation of women in parliament also had some of the lowest proportions of women politicians being accessed as news sources. South Africa, for example, has 31 percent women in parliament and a similar proportion in cabinet. Yet women constituted only eight percent of the politicians quoted in the media monitored. (Gender and media baseline survey 2003)

In Sweden, sometimes referred to as one of the most gender equality oriented countries in the world, the numbers are not much different. The male dominance in news is around 70 to 75 per cent.¹²

Gender Representation in Children's Programmes

The pattern of male dominance is also obvious in many children's programmes. In Germany, 1,396 programme hours on nine television channels showed that ten per cent of the central characters were female, while 64 per cent were male. In 26 per cent of the cases, the male and female figures shared the main role. In the non-fiction programmes, the portion of female presenters was six per cent. Female interviewees were also a minority in those programmes (Götz 2001).

A Swedish study of animated children's TV programmes found nearly the same result. Half of the programmes were populated only by male figures. The other half had a mix of both genders, but only a very small proportion had a female central figure (von Feilitzen 2004).

Japanese Manga is growing in popularity around the world. The number of female authors and characters has been increasing over the years. But female

Manga writers still continue to interact with the medium in a marginalized way. One result is that the female figures tend to bear the signs of traditional female stereotypes (Ruh 2001).

In the world of computer games, it is hard to find anything other than white male figures. A study of 1,716 game figures conducted by the organization Children Now showed that 84 per cent were male.

Media Femininity Stresses Appearance and Sex

Stereotyping as a Power Mechanism

Stereotyping is oversimplification based on a certain pattern. It can also be defined as mental images that we use to interpret and understand the world. An additional definition refers to organized concepts and significant characteristics linked to a certain group. Gender stereotyping entails our shared ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman. It includes information about appearance, attitudes, interests, behaviour, psychological characteristics, relationships and occupation. Generally stereotyping in the media context follows patterns of power by diminishing those with little power and influence in society. Stereotypes usually emanate from misconceptions and prejudice. Racism and sexism are extreme forms of stereotyping.¹³

Stereotyping of femininity is organized around a few themes, namely appearance, sexuality, relationships and traditional gender roles, like care taking and housekeeping. A distinct difference is evident between depictions of masculinity vs. femininity in terms of activity vs. passivity, power vs. powerlessness, public vs. private, and professional vs. domestic, respectively.

There is a major emphasis on the female appearance and being sexually attractive in the media. Beauty messages start early with toys and clothes and subsequently with ads for beauty products aimed at children. Small girls are expected to take an interest in fashion and hairstyles through dolls and other toys. In media aimed at pre-teens and teens, a shift can be observed in how appearance is presented in the media. It now becomes more of a problem that needs solutions. Skin, weight, wrinkles, facial and body parts are potential areas for correction. Gendered media messages are delivered in different styles and modes. Many are not verbalized, but symbolic images, charged with gender codes and markers: colours, body language, facial expression, looks, camera angles, attributes and activities, to mention just a few (Jacobson 2004).

However, scholars and media activists have long been occupied with the representation of women and femininity, while media representation of men and masculinity has only more recently become a subject of interest.

Tradition Versus Modernity

There are and have been political implications of the commercial gender ideology, which to most scholars appears to be gender conservative rather than chal-

lenging. After the Second World War, issues about women's appearances became a political controversy in some left-wing and working-class communities in the US. Should working-class women who made the extra dollars on the assembly line during the war spend their money on cosmetics and fashion? Women's magazines and adverts argued in a tempting manner that beauty was now available for all, not only for the rich. But was it acceptable for women to adopt the bourgeois idea of beauty? Did they in fact make a class journey when adopting a glamorous beauty standard set by movie stars (Hansen & Reed 1986)?

Many scholars agree that the media constitute a vehicle into modernity, usually defined by Western values such as individualism, the ability to consume and by middle-class ideas. Advertising, magazines and entertainment media carry lifestyle messages both explicitly and implicitly. Femininity has largely become the symbol of modernity. The young female body is, in many cases and countries, an arena for a symbolic battle between Westernization, modernity and traditional values. An East-West dichotomy is shaped with stereotypes of the bold Western women and the humble Oriental woman, for example in China (Johansson 2001). Tradition and modernity may be in conflict in reality – but in the global corporate media landscape, they appear just to be different kinds of segments, or lifestyles. In Western countries, the battleground is still young women's bodies, but the battle rather focuses on who has control over these bodies. It is argued by, for instance, Slovenian scholars that disciplining and regulating the female body are customs in almost any society and that the media has willingly contributed to the continuation of such practices (Hrzenjak 2002).

Dichotomies are suitable in the media dramaturgy. Winner and loser, perpetrator and victim, black and white, the beauty and the beast are popular opposites, constantly recreated. Gender dichotomies fit well into this system, and femininity and masculinity, to a great extent, are made complete opposites.

Beauty – a Core Feature

Beauty work is presented in the media as one way to transform into a powerful independent woman. When explicit language is used in young women's magazines and ads, the keywords are sometimes taken from liberating, emancipatory rhetoric – words such as “daring”, “bold”, “freedom”, “rights” and “free choice”. However, feminist scholars argue that these definitions of liberation entail symbolic control over women's bodies, and instead “The Beauty” is a dominant female stereotype that fits into traditional femininity, where disciplining the body is included. “The Beauty” is not only a common female stereotype; it has also become normative for the idea of how to be a “real woman”. “The Beauty” comprises certain femininity values, such as youth. Youth has long been celebrated in media culture. In fact, media give a clear signal that aging and older people, especially women, are not desirable. A study of television programmes in six

northern European countries showed that only four per cent of people seen in prime time were 65+. The Global Media Monitoring Project confirms this figure for 2000. News media in 70 countries on all continents were screened in terms of gender representation. Generally people over 65 are under-represented, but within that age bracket there were twice as many men as women (Gallagher 2002).

Over the years, the “youthful” has become more and more girlish. The Lolita-theme,¹⁴ popular in the porn scene, became mainstream in the West during the 1990s. Interestingly a similar development occurred earlier in Japan, where “kawaii” (cute) dominated popular culture in the 1980s. Japanese cute stands for childlike, adorable, innocent, simple, gentle and vulnerable (Kinsella 1997). In the US and Europe, this trend has two branches: one more politicized feminist Riot Girl version and one commercial “feminist light” Girl Power version. A trend during the 1990s involves images of grown women looking like small girls, e.g. baby dolls, and small girls looking more mature than their age. During the 2000s, the Girl Power concept in the US and Europe is becoming more sexualized with clear references to pornography. There are numerous types of advice on how to look youthful in the media; cosmetics, creams and surgery are big business.

The same applies to feminine skin. It is, according to the media, supposed to be fair, smooth and hairless. The razor blade, originally a masculine attribute, is now also a feminine fetish. The general media message is that facial and body hair must be removed. If armpits and lower legs were the target ten years ago, now the genital area is the main target, so that girls and young women can wear thongs and bikinis. This skin ideal is often connected with the Western contemporary beauty standard, but has long been a class and beauty marker in South and East Asia as well as among the European aristocracy (Johansson 1998). Tanned and rough skin was, accordingly, a sign of the hard labour performed by the working and farming classes. When outdoor activities became popular in Europe and North America, tanned skin was suddenly included in the beauty standard.

Beauty Becomes a Matter of Technology

There are many skin whitening and skin preservation products advertised as well as written about in the editorial sections of magazines, in so-called covert advertising. Covert ads promote a product, but are presented in a journalistic style (Hrzenjak 2002). Skin preservation is presented in different language modes. Threats from the environment and nature, e.g., wind, dry air, sun and age, are popular themes. The solutions are described in pseudo-scientific language.

Body size is one of the media obsessions. The message about thinness has long been exclusively for females, and the normative female must be fit. But lately men are also required to think about their body composition. An examination of messages sent to adolescent girls in a wide range of media genres concluded

that approximately 36 per cent of women are portrayed as thin or very thin, while the same applies to about eight per cent of men (Signorelli 1997).

Messages about thinness and other beauty ideals are delivered in a pseudo-intimate style in magazines for young women, copying a chatty “girlie-friendly” tone. But underlying these messages is an instruction for women to watch their bodies as men would. “Men act, women appear” John Berger stated in *Ways of Seeing*.

Evidently, the media idea of perfected femininity can be attained through various technical methods. The female bust is a strong erotic signal and breast size is made into a product of universal modernity. Size itself is not enough: The breasts must not hang, but be perky. Magazines and ads offer a wide range of products to make breasts larger, from brassieres to creams and cosmetic surgery. In China, the bust enhancer is a popular product and targeted to teenage girls. It is a cup with a pump one puts over the breast to massage it and make it larger (Johansson 1998).

Eyes and gaze constitute, of course, an important instrument for communication. The feminine eye usually looks into the camera, to give the impression of eyes meeting. The gaze is at the same time inviting, seductive and empty. There can be a clear “come-on-look” or a more innocent gaze. It is preferable that the female eye be large and Caucasian in style. This has increased the demand for blepharoplasty – known as Asian eyelid surgery – both in Asia and Asian communities around the world.¹⁵ Large eyes are also significant in Japanese Manga and in some computer games as well as in the popular Brats dolls for children.

It is almost mandatory that women smile when appearing in images. Generally a smiling face is an icon in imagery, but media females also smile when smiling is inappropriate. The perfect smile even has white teeth, and generous smooth lips are preferable in women. One often sees women with semi-open mouths, which is an erotic signal (Jacobson 2004).

Being an Object of Desire – a Goal of Femininity

As mentioned previously, there are indications that sexualization and sexual content have increased in various genres in the media. This increase might partly depend on the growing commercial media sector all over the world. In Cambodia and Korea, for instance, the emergence of highly sexualized imagery is considered culturally intrusive and shocking (Gallagher 2002).

Sexual content may take many forms. Sexualization – when ordinary situations are charged with sexual meaning – is common in advertising and entertainment, as is pornification – situations or attributes with references to violent pornography. An Israeli study of ads in mainstream media identifies five major sexually violent themes: fragmentation, bondage, forced contact, symbolic violence and potential violence (Lemish 1998).

According to a scientific review of sexual content in different genres in the US conducted by Monique L Ward (2003), the most common type of sexual content in

primetime programmes and in situation comedies, sit-coms, is verbal suggestiveness or innuendo. The same study establishes that 44 to 76 per cent of music videos contain sexual imagery. In the media, it is primarily females who are defined in sexual terms. There is a great difference in the degree to which women's and men's bodies are sexualized. Across many TV genres, a common finding is that females are depicted as sexual objects more often than are males. In music videos, for example, females are presented in provocative and revealing clothes more frequently than males are. The portrayals of attraction are stereotyped and signal a gender power order based on male action and female passivity. Female sexuality is presented as exhibitionistic and nymphomaniacal and is used to sell various products.

According to Ward's review of sexual content in magazines (many of them international), one of the most dominant themes was to present oneself as sexually desirable, thereby gaining the attention of men. Analyses indicated that girls and young women are repeatedly encouraged to look and dress in specific ways and to use certain products in order to be more attractive and desirable to men.

A second and related theme in magazines was the notion that working on relationships is the exclusive domain of women.

A third prominent theme reported across these analyses is an emphasis on differences in the sexual nature of women and men. The dichotomy established is typically one of female allure, passivity and responsibility versus male sexual aggressiveness.

Women's sexuality is portrayed with little emphasis on women's sexual desires and appetites, but with a strong emphasis on their need to be cautious and discrete. Thus, traditional sexual roles are strongly supported by mainstream magazines, with women emerging as romantic, sexual objects and victims, and men as lecherous sexual agents for whom love and romance are secondary.

In a Swedish dissertation from 2004, which consisted of a quantitative gender study of 2,000 movies (mainly U.S. produced) offered during a period of one year on the Swedish market, a selection of female stereotypes primarily involving sexual performance was the most common role for women (Lindell 2004). The Madonna-whore dichotomy frequently appears in depicting females as objects of desire. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth seldom find themselves represented in mainstream media. The media portray what some scholars call compulsory heterosexuality (Brown 2002).

When the Desired Becomes Destructive

The media have been accused of glorifying anorectic beauty ideals and behaviour, especially in content targeted to girls and young women. In mainstream media culture, dieting is presented in a positive manner, while anorexia and other eating disorders are reported on as serious diagnoses. Some argue that this creates a sort of double standard. A rather new phenomenon is the pro-ana and pro-mia

communities and chat rooms on the Internet. Here eating disorders are presented as lifestyle choices rather than illnesses. Tips about purging, vomiting and starving are delivered in much the same way as magazines report on beauty and dieting. Images of very thin and starved young women are put into galleries. Some Internet distributors have gatekeepers and security routines, much the same as for violent pornography, but they are easy to pass through. For instance, entering the Pro-Ana Suicide Society with a false name and address is easy.

Depression is frequent among women in many parts of the world. Psychiatric researchers in Australia, therefore, investigated what two popular women's magazines have to say about the condition, because, for many women, magazines are major sources of information on health issues (Gattuzo & Young 2004). Like much else in women's magazines, depression is presented as the individual's responsibility. Contrary to current depression literacy, magazines also emphasize self-management techniques rather than professional help. Depression-management is fitted into the neo-liberal idea of responsible selfhood and lacks analysis of the cultural, social or gender-based reasons for depression, the authors argue.

Subordinated Roles

To summarize the positions of females in the media, five principles from the Japanese experience presented by Anne Cooper-Chen in *Mass Communication in Japan*, 1997 are useful:

- Females and males are evaluated differently. With regard to language, use of the noun form alone suggests the standard, meaning male, while the added adjective "female" or "woman" suggests something different. For example, Margaret Thatcher was not a prime minister, but a "women prime minister."
- Females are objects. The camera's perspective is usually male. Glamorous women are often depicted, while handsome men seldom are. In the media, women are evaluated from a man's point of view.
- Females are subordinate. The standard news story style uses a man's full name but only a woman's first name. Another sign of subordination is the portrayal of females as victims in various media genres.
- A woman's ability is low. Media sometimes use expressions such as "even a woman can do it" (it's so easy) and "not even a man can do it" (it's that hard).
- A woman's place is in the home. In commercial films, a woman's role is often in the house, where she is shown washing dishes, taking care of children and helping with the man's work.

The gender messages offered to younger generations by the media may look very discouraging and negative. But not all agree that the media serve only as a preserving force in society. One British scholar argues:

Twenty or thirty years ago, analysis of popular media often told researchers that mainstream culture was a backwards-looking force, resistant to social change and trying to push people back into traditional categories. Today, it seems more appropriate to emphasise that, within limits, the mass media is a force for change. The traditional view of a woman as a housewife or low-status worker has been kick-boxed out of the picture by the feisty, successful 'girl power' icons. Meanwhile the masculine ideals of absolute toughness, stubborn self-reliance and emotional silence have been shaken by a new emphasis on men's emotions, need for advice, and the problems of masculinity. Although gender categories have not been shattered, these alternative ideas and images have at least created space for a greater diversity of identities. (Gauntlett 2002)

Indeed, there is no doubt that changes are occurring, but not by themselves. There is ethical pressure within the media industry and demands from citizens worldwide, forming counter-forces that to some extent challenge commercial forces and traditional ways of depicting gender.

Media Masculinity Stresses Aggression and Power

Male Beauty – a New Trend

Perhaps one of the more obvious signs of change, at least on a superficial level, is the idea of male beauty. Of course good looks have been an asset for men in the media context – but there has also been a generosity in definitions of male good looks. Advertisements and lifestyle magazines for men strongly promote boys and men's actions in front of the mirror – a traditional domain of girls and women. Smooth skin and hairlessness is also a fashion for teen boys and young men. Articles about cosmetic surgery offer men ideas about how to sculpt their bodies. It is paradoxical that at the same time as men's bodies are undergoing symbolic feminization, it is into the very classic male ideal, known from antiquity, they are supposed to transform (Dotson 1999).

It has been discussed whether this trend is influenced by the homosexual imagery culture, where men are clear objects of desire. But it is also known that men as a commercial segment have been worked on for many years, as men's buying power is greater than women's. It will be interesting to follow developments and see whether male beauty is becoming a standard or norm in defining masculinity in the media context, just as beauty is a norm in the construction of femininity.

Body, Sexuality and Behaviour

The stereotyping of masculinity follows specific themes such as coolness, aggression and violence, potency, force, competition, success and power. Scholars of masculinity note that, in the West, the muscular male is hardly needed in real life any more, as industrial work is in decline. But in the media, disciplining of the male body is strongly promoted, both in lifestyle magazines and by the muscular imagery in various genres like sports, movies, computer games and of course professional wrestling – called performing of hyper-masculinity by some. Professional wrestling is described more like a drama or show than sports. In an academic paper on the phenomenon, wrestling is criticized for reifying male-privileging ideologies (Stroud 2000). Wrestling seems to be much more overt and extreme in its construction of the patriarchal gender hierarchy than are more “conventional” sports. Two critical observations are made in terms of gender: first, maleness is constructed as oppositional to anything related to the feminine, and

second, women themselves are included in the activity as participants in light of their sexual characteristics. In this respect, modern wrestling has more of a female presence in the ring than ever before, but this is a presence situated in a hostile and sexually skewed environment.

Objects of Desire Surround Masculinity

Exclusive brands are part of the male lifestyle quite common in ads and magazines directed at men as well as in music videos. With the latest electronic equipment, watches, cars, jewellery, shoes and clothes, a super-capitalist masculinity is being constructed. The Jamaican dancehall culture is one example of contexts in which these attributes are significant, both on the media scene and in reality, as Donna P Hope writes in her article *The British- Link -Up Crew: Consumption Masquerading as Masculinity in the Dancehall* in *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2004.

On the media scene, females often become decorations as part of the masculinity outfit. Females are often used in back-up roles in depicting masculinity. In music videos, a common theme is a group of women dancing around the male lead singer. In films, vulnerable women back up the strong man.

In her article, Hope discusses the British Link-Up Crew – a group of men involved in promoting music and parties in Jamaica. The group is very popular both in Jamaica and among the Diaspora – but is also involved in serious drug and gun crimes:

Drawing on the patriarchal propensity to use the feminine Other as a site of masculine advancement and upliftment, the women who operate in this space act as symbolic canvasses upon which men display the signifiers of their wealth and status. The few female consorts who gain access to this space are young, beautiful, sexy and costumed in revealing and expensive ensembles from some Parisian designer complete with a king's ransom of jewellery, accessories and elaborate hairstyles. While this elaborate costuming and display of the female form predominates within the wider dancehall space the few women who occasionally occupy this masculine space are overtly presented and paraded by their male partners as an elaborate feminine extension of their masculine aura. Great pains are taken to ensure that these women remain within the immediate confines of the space occupied by the British Link-Up Crew at any dancehall event. Her every move, from the staged entrance of her group, through the elaborate posturing and contained self-presentation and final grand exit from the dancehall event are carefully guided and guarded by the paternalistic attentions of her male partner and his peers. These women, while engaged in the wider space of the dancehall, are effectively confined and contained within the ambit of this group, and act as one of the many factors that confer status and power on these men in the dancehall. (Hope 2004)

One can also interpret the sexist and misogynist lyrics in dancehall and hip-hop music as using female gender to strengthen masculinity. To Ridiculing, degrading and diminishing are master suppression techniques (Ås 1982).

Lack of Relationship Skills

Male sexuality is commonly depicted as aggressive, urgent, insatiable and relentless – and above all heterosexual (Ward 2003). The “natural” virility and sexual appetite of men is a prominent theme of magazine and tabloid articles, and men are characterized as being in a constant state of sexual desire and readiness. Young men are frequently portrayed in women’s magazines as lacking relationship skills, as incapable of expressing themselves verbally or emotionally, and as inept, incompetent, unaware and, at times, uncivilized in their manners. The assumption is that men need to be taught about emotional intimacy and about romantic relationships, and that women are expected to serve as their tutors and therapists.

In depictions of sexuality, the focus is generally on the female body – but filtered through the male idea of female sexuality. In Ward’s review of sexual content, there is an analysis of the prevalence of sexual harassment in primetime programming on television (Ward 2003). Of the 81 analysed episodes, 84 per cent contained at least one incident of sexual harassment, with an average of 3.4 incidents per programme.

The most frequent acts were sexist comments, in which a wide variety of words were used to describe women, e.g., broad, bimbo, dumbass, chick, toots, fox, babe and blonde.

The next most frequent occurrences were verbal sexual comments. These typically focused on women’s bodies or body parts, especially on their breasts.

The third most common category was body language and generally involved adolescent boys or men leering at women or girls. In total, the authors report that approximately 78 per cent of the harassment focused on demeaning terms for women or on the sexualization of their bodies.

Reality TV has lately become more focused on sexuality and sexual actions, which becomes a problem from a gender equality point of view, as Maya Götz argues in her examination of the significance of Big Brother in children’s lives. In the depiction of female participants, the images more frequently lapse into sexist relegation. While the male figures are eroticized and shown for their abilities, female characters are devaluated as sexual objects and portrayed as sneaky. Here the format of gender stereotypes and gender hierarchies is reinforced, and the boys in the audience take this up. (Götz 2001)

Different degrees of nudity of both sexes appear frequently in many genres. Males are often portrayed in so-called heroic nudity and females in posing nudity. Both positions have roots in ancient gender ideals. The heroic position emanates from sculptures based on the classic Greek male body ideal. Also the posing nudity

position comes from the classic era, and the Venus de Milo statue is a well-known example. The heroic pose implies powerfulness and self-confidence, while the female pose expresses awareness and consciousness of the observer (Jacobson 2004).

In the past few years, the male sex object has appeared in adverts and in mainstream media. Thus far, little research has been done on this topic, but a Swedish examination of a series of ads with young men from the international brand Calvin Klein points out that the male sex object is placed in traditional female positions: quite passive, eyes meeting the viewers, semi-nude and in sexualized poses (Fahlström 2002). It is unclear whether these images are supposed to attract men, women or both – which in itself is norm-breaking, as media rarely step outside the heterosexual script. An intriguing question is: if men also become objects of desire in the mainstream media culture, will this result in the democratization of the gaze? Will a female objectifying gaze develop?

Destruction and Construction

Within the media context, masculine power is often constructed using aggressiveness of all kinds, from verbal and body language to more explicit violent actions. It would be hard to quantify all media content with male aggression as a component. However, a content examination of 518 music videos gives a hint of its commonness. The study concluded that 80 per cent of the male main characters were associated with aggression. Females and males were equally represented among the victims (Rich et al. 1999). Aggression is not always interpreted as a negative feature, but also as a force in challenging class hierarchies. Jamaican dancehall music culture is an example of how a marginalized group of people can gain power and success through mediated communication (Hope 2004). Like hip-hop, its parallel movement from US inner cities, dancehall music is spreading globally. A string of popular and famous artists from Jamaica are performing a kind of underdog anger rather than aggressiveness.

Within the mainstream media, winners and losers is an often-used dichotomy. The media have long preferred to define competition as a masculine trait. Already in ads for toys it is a dominant theme, and it is repeated over and over in sports, computer games and in the “higher status” game of movies, soaps and reality shows. But in recent years, it is also permitted for girls and women to compete, for example in reality shows such as *Big Brother*.

The media have been accused of glorifying violence and violent acts; in much the same way as they have been criticized for celebrating anorectic behaviour. Both behaviours are destructive and “forbidden,” but at the same time the massive amount of media that communicate these behaviours can be interpreted as normative. For anyone who would like to know more about this topic, the Inter-

national Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media has produced a number of publications focussed on media violence.

Superior but Sometimes Inhuman

There is no doubt that masculinity is depicted as superior to femininity. This is revealed in many ways: over-representation in news and in the roles men perform in news, but also in various ways in popular mainstream culture. However, the stereotyping of masculinity cannot be evaluated as entirely positive. It is true that in the media space men are given a wider range of expressions, but many of them appear inhuman.

Gendered Use of Media

Some Factors Influencing Media Intake

Gender, race, age, social and cultural background and environment have an impact on media use.

There is no strict boundary between content watched by adults or children. Internet has effectively erased all borders; not surprisingly boys watch pornography created for men, according to a Nielsen Netratings (*Flödet* 38/04).

Media contents are largely gender segregated and targeted. Girls and women choose softer music and more relation-oriented television programmes, movies and magazines. Boys and men prefer action and adventure, heavier rock and rap (Brown 2002). Computer games are usually thought of as boys and men's entertainment, but this is changing, as reported in the game magazine *Edge: The girl issue* #121. According to a reference poll, 45 per cent of U.S. game players are female.

Teenage girls favour media that include strong positive female characters and are also offered them. But along with this, they are also exposed to limited stereotyped gender portrayals (Signorelli 1997). African American youth watch TV at an average of five hours a day, while Anglo American youth watch three hours. African Americans prefer programmes with Black casts and music with Black artists. Two recent US studies found that African American young women dismissed images of White women as unimportant for them. Moreover, they did not depend as heavily on media images for instruction in femininity as did Anglo American young women (Ward, Merriwether, Caruthers & Schooler 2004). German girls, age 10 to 15 years, described their passion for popular soap operas as an addiction. The soaps function as a mix of pleasure, information, emotional resonance, a tool for creating a self-image and above all as an ingredient in everyday life, almost as a life companion or a friend (Götz 2001).

Some Scandinavian studies have looked at how girls and boys regard violent and pornographic content. A Swedish survey of young girls as a movie audience concluded that girls aged 16 to 20 years watch violent movies at almost the same rate as boys, including pornographic and rape scenes. However the girls did not accept the link between sex and violence, and when they listed their own favourites, *Titanic* and *Show Me Love* (Fucking Åmål) were at the top of the list (Stigbrand & Stolpe 2000). A Norwegian study *Nettsvermere* by Bjørnstad and Ellingsen (2003) shows that some boys use media violence and pornography as a rite of initiation, and as proof of their coolness. A research project on young male heroinists in Sweden showed that media culture played a significant role in

staging their sub-culture. For instance, movies such as *Scarface*, *Menace II Society* and *Boyz N the Hood* were used as inspiration for a group of young male heroin addicts in creating a limitless, dramatic and “fast” life.

On a political-economical level, gendered messages are definitely entangled with consumerist behaviour. In that sense, mainstream gendered messages become instruments for directing buying power. On the political-activist level, the impact of gendered messages is also significant – there is a counter-culture including media watch organizations, ad busting, media literacy and independent paper and net publishing. This counter-culture delivers critique that may serve to vitalize mainstream media culture.

It seems as if there is more resistance within girls’ worlds than boys’ worlds. That might be because girls are taught from an early age to be observant of their bodies and appearances, not only by media but also through cultural rules and tradition. Girls’ critique and their demands to redefine femininity into a more “real girl” within mainstream magazines, for example, are often regarded as problematic (Milkie 2002). At the same time, editors agree that the depictions of femininity are too narrow; they want to change them, but are unable to. Two reasons for this are reported; ties to advertisers are one. But the blame is also returned to the girls themselves for taking the images and messages too seriously.

When asked, youth, and adults too for that matter, generally dismiss the idea that they themselves are negatively affected by media messages and imagery. But at the same time, they are worried that others may be more vulnerable to media content: like younger or older peers, or their own children – a quite common example of the third person effect (Berglie 2004).

Children Not Victims of Exposure

Most scholars agree that media exposure has an impact in forming values and behaviours in the user. However, they differ in their opinions about how great that impact is and whether it is negative or positive. Gender stereotyping and gender discrimination as power structures exist in many situations, organizations and societies and are not created by media alone, though media might reinforce gender imbalance rather than gender equality. In that sense, media could be described as normative.

Children and youth are not looked upon as passive “victims” of exposure. On the contrary, in most approaches viewers are believed to construct meaning from the content presented based on their existing worldviews, schemas and personal experiences – a notion that focuses on selective effects due to individual differences (Ward 2002).

Consequently, any given content must be integrated with viewers already existing perspectives, including input from other sources, such as peers and family, and is likely to mean different things to different people. It is also now as-

sumed that connections between media exposure and viewers' social attitudes are bi-directional. While media content may influence viewers, it is the viewers who actively select and are drawn to specific content.

Girls and Gendered Behaviour

Empirical attempts to address how media content is affecting girls have typically taken one of three approaches.¹⁶

One approach examines the impact of TV's gender role portrayals, testing whether frequent exposure to stereotypical images of women brings about more traditional gender role beliefs and/or constrains young viewers' preferences and aspirations.

A second approach looks at the media's impact on body satisfaction and eating disorders. Here, the expectation is that exposure to and identification with idealized thinness will decrease body satisfaction and encourage disordered eating.

The third category of literature investigates how the media's portrayal of sexual relationships shapes young viewers' sexual attitudes and behaviours.

A quite recent attempt to synthesize findings from these three domains has been done in the US. *Gendered Media Messages* accounts for the domain that concentrates on gender roles, gender behaviour and attitudes.

How does repeated exposure to the media's stereotypical images affect girls' beliefs about gender? Over the past 30 years, dozens of research projects have attempted to answer this question, resulting in a substantial body of work containing more than 42 published studies. Previous descriptive overviews focused mainly on the contributions of television, concluding that moderate to weak links exist between TV exposure and gender stereotyping. The goal is to extend this research by examining the impact of TV and magazine content; by including samples of children, teens, and students; and by looking at multiple gender role outcomes. Drawing on a recent study of this field, the discussion is concentrated to four gender-role outcomes.

Impact on Gender Role Stereotyping

The largest set of studies in this area examines the media's impact on people's gender stereotyping and flexibility. Here, the concern is that if the media present female characters with only a limited range of attributes, skills, and abilities, viewers will develop equally limited assumptions about the sexes. Drawing from the premises of cultivation theory, findings from correlation data validate these concerns.

First, frequent TV viewing is associated with holding more stereotypical associations about masculine and feminine activities, traits and occupations.

Second, greater exposure to specific genres is associated with viewers' assumptions about the distribution of real-world roles. More specifically, greater exposure to action/adventure programmes is associated with lower estimates of the numbers of professional women; conversely, greater exposure to soap operas is associated with higher estimates of the numbers of housewives and female professionals.

Third, significant associations have been reported between regular exposure to educational TV or to programs with non-traditional characters and greater flexibility.

Finally, results from experimental studies support these surveys. Laboratory exposure to images of the sexes in stereotypical roles appears to reinforce girls' gender stereotyping, while exposure to non-traditional images or to verbal critiques of traditional images appears to reduce it. Brief exposure to stereotypic content has also been found to prime sex-biased evaluations of women and men encountered subsequently. Because null to minimal results have been reported in other studies, these connections are by no means absolute. However, it does appear as if media use may be associated with holding more stereotypical views about who men and women are and what they typically do.

Impact on Gender Role Attitudes

A second group of studies examines the media's impact on children's attitudes towards gender, focusing on their beliefs about the appropriateness of women's place in the domestic and work arenas, and the competencies of each sex. Survey data linking heavier TV use with more sexist attitudes have produced many significant outcomes, although some report results only for girls, or specific genres. Exposure to non-traditional models is related to greater acceptance of non-traditional roles, as well.

Mixed findings emerge from experimental work in which participants are exposed to stereotypical, neutral, or counter-stereotypical media stimuli, and are then surveyed concerning their gender-role beliefs. The hypothesized outcomes have emerged in some instances, with those exposed to traditional images reporting more sexist attitudes, and those exposed to egalitarian stimuli reporting less sexist attitudes. Yet the literature also reports one null result and two counter effects using the same paradigms. Causal connections between media use and viewers' gender role attitudes are therefore unconfirmed and await further study of possible mediating factors.

Impact on Viewers' Preferences for Stereotypical Activities and Occupations

In addition to shaping students' attitudes and assumptions about the sexes, might media use also play a role in guiding viewers' own preferences? Findings here are mixed. In one study, frequent viewers expressed stronger preferences for

traditional activities and occupations than did infrequent viewers, but another reported null results. When the traditionality of the viewing diet is examined, significant correlations emerge. Additionally, findings from experimental work support these connections. Laboratory exposure to non-traditional images has been found to highlight the importance of achievement in women's aspirations, to increase girls' preferences for stereotypically masculine jobs, and to heighten children's interest in non-traditional hobbies and activities.

Similarly, experimental exposure to traditional models has been linked with for example less interest in political participation and careers and a stronger preference for girls' toys. Thus, the limited number of findings in this area suggests that girls' interest in specific activities and the range of possibilities to which they are exposed may influence careers.

Influence on Gender-related Behaviour

Because gender roles do not easily translate into an observable set of behaviours, studying the media's influence on gender-related behaviour has been difficult.

One approach has been to examine whether children more consistently imitate the actions of same-sex or gender-traditional media models, making the same toy and activity selections that they demonstrate. Results are mixed, with some findings supporting this notion, but others countering it. Follow-up research demonstrates that characteristics of the model and the child affect the degree of the exposure's impact, for example, indicating that children are more likely to avoid cross-sex behaviour if they have reached higher levels of gender constancy. Exposure to non-traditional models has also been found to enhance young women's self-confidence and independent judgments, as assessed in experimental tasks.

A second approach has examined whether frequent TV viewing is associated with performing more stereotypical chores around the house. Results indicate no links between these two factors. It can be argued, however, that this may not be a true test of the impact of TV exposure on behaviour, because chore selection is not always within a child's control. Perhaps future studies of this issue could focus on behaviours that are more voluntary, such as the games children play regularly.

A third approach has found that experimental exposure to gender-stereotypic commercials leads to lower performance on a math test and to avoidance of math test items in favour of verbal items. These provocative findings provide an indication of the various ways in which exposure to stereotypical content may shape girls' actual behaviour.

What Do Kids Say?

- 69 per cent of girls – and 40 per cent of boys – say they have at some time wanted to look like some character(s) in television (Signorelli 1997).
- A majority of children say there are enough good role models today for girls in television (52 per cent of girls and 53 per cent of boys), however, a significant percentage – 44 per cent of girls and 36 per cent boys – say there are too few. As girls get older they are less likely to think there are enough good role models for girls in television: 46 per cent of 16- to 17-year-old girls say there are enough as compared to 56 per cent of 10- to 12-year-old girls (Signorelli 1997).
- Most children say women are shown as “equal” to men on television. Almost the same percentages say that girls and boys are equal (Signorelli 1997).
- 61 per cent of girls and 53 per cent of boys say the female characters they see on television are thinner than women in real life, but that male characters on television are about the same weight as the men in real life (Signorelli 1997).
- Older girls – 71 per cent of girls ages 16-17 – are more likely to think female television characters are thinner than women they know in real life than are younger girls – 51 per cent of girls ages 10-12 (Signorelli 1997).
- Kids notice an emphasis on attractiveness, especially for women and girls, in television shows: 57 per cent of girls and 59 per cent of boys say the female characters in the television shows they watch are “better looking” than the women and girls they know in real life (Signorelli 1997).
- Girls in Sweden, interviewed as a movie audience, believed that real violence towards women was much more common than it actually is. Half of the interviewees thought that 100 women died in 1998 due to murder or violence from men. The correct number was 40. They also found it easier to identify with the victim in a movie than with the perpetrator (Stigbrand & Stolpe 2000).
- A British research project concerning young people, sex and the media gives a rather positive view of children as highly critical consumers of sexual content and advice from the media (Buckingham & Bragg 2004).
- In an international study of media’s role in influencing children’s make-believe worlds conducted in Germany, Israel, South Korea and the US, gender differences were observed. Traces from media were less evident in girls’ make-believe worlds, while the boys’ make-believe worlds had clear references to current media content such as action-adventure films and computer games, where male figures were the heroes (Götz 2003).

Negotiating Gender Roles

Media messages may be conservative and sexist when it comes to gendered content – but this evidently also creates space for negotiating gender roles, several reports conclude. A Canadian examination of teen's views on gender related content by Scheur and Murrey, in cooperation with Media Watch Canada, gives positive signals (Media Watch 2004). In extensive discussions, teens often used a gender-oriented or feminist frame of analysis in their comments on or critique of media messages that discriminate against, sexualize or stereotype women. It seems, though, that teens are at a crossroad; they are aware of a feminist interpretation, but in certain social contexts they lapse back into a conservative patriarchal interpretive style, due to competing media discourses. The teens were very good at finding and decoding explicit sexism and sexualization, but failed to recognize more subtle types of sexism and racism, such as under-representation and other systematic discriminatory structures.

Among performers in the media's music scene, men are still predominant. For instance, the term dancehall deejay/artiste signifies a young, dark-skinned, Afro-Jamaican male with strong connections to the ghettos of Kingston and St. Andrew who is conspicuously dressed in expensive, brand name clothing, jewellery and shoes and driving an expensive, late-model brand name car, Donna Hope writes. Negating the politically correct, culturally "appropriate" and Eurocentric bias towards British English, these men spread their lyrics in the Jamaican vernacular, Patois, which is heavily laced with the slang of the Kingston ghettos and peppered with the language of the urban inner cities of North America. However, this underdog challenge of Jamaican elite masculinity also gives space for a female counter figure. The persona 'ICI'¹⁷ occupies a subordinate position in the race/class/colour/gender hierarchy operating in the Eurocentric framework of the society. It signifies a dark-skinned, overweight, Afro-Jamaican woman dressed in tight, revealing and garish clothes with large amounts of gold jewellery and elaborate hairstyles that negate the traditional conventions of Eurocentric beauty that exists in Jamaica.

This image of un-femininity is considered obscene, loud and vulgar, as most ICIs present themselves in a forceful and volcanic eruption of loud voices, commanding postures and crass statements that are considered "unladylike". Many ICIs operate in the space of the dancehall as independent women who have attained significant economic wealth through their own small-scale trading enterprise and who are able to flaunt and display their bodies in the erotic postures that have become popularized as one domain of female empowerment in the

dancehall. However, their chief economic activities remain basic to the production of their identity as ICIs, with their dancehall activities as a secondary component.

In the American hip-hop culture, Black female performers are changing the traditional depiction of Black women in music videos, Rana Emerson reports in *Where's my girls at? Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos 2002*. Emerson's analysis of videos by artists Mary J. Blige, Missy Elliot, Da Brat and others reveals that, while Black women's sexuality is still strongly emphasized, it is more on the women's terms, depicted as pleasure for the female and not entirely for the male gaze: a kind of reclaiming of sexual expression through the body. Also, the lyrics target both a female and a male audience equally.

In digital games, or computer games, depictions of gender have created a wider space for female figures, Marie Lowrie writes in *Everything is Possible Strategy Book in Media Criticism* (Jacobson 2004). The female characters are active and often heroes. There is no difference in performance between the genders. The game themes are often traditionally masculine, such as competition, war and sports, but applicable also to women as subjects in the games. At the same time, sexualization of the female body has the same expression as in pornography and advertising. The women are generally young and thin with long legs and big breasts. Their faces, however, look like those of young girls. These girl-women are usually found in the Manga imagery. The clothes are impractical, minimal and sexually provocative. One of the genres in the computer games is adjacent to fantasy-art, where women are depicted as a mix of Amazon warriors and pinup models.

The male characters are typically "the Warrior" and "the Sports" male. "The Warrior" looks much like a professional wrestler on TV, athletic and with great muscles. He is partly nude, revealing scars and tattoos, attributes that stress hyper-masculinity. "The Sports" figures are more reality based, the contesteer can play her or his favourite sports person. In the Sims, sometimes referred to as the most popular and played game in the world, there are extensive possibilities to break gender limitations.

An interview study of game players of both genders age 6 to 12 years showed that girls tend to be more gender bending, leaning towards the high status position of male characters (Johansson 1999). Games for boys were generally considered gender neutral and attracted both girls and boys, while boys who liked to play girls' games were considered ridiculous.

Raising Awareness

Media monitoring is an effective way of raising awareness about both gender and media issues. There is rich evidence of this from Women's media watch organizations globally – an NGO sector that works with media literacy for children and lobbies the media industry and policy makers.

A comprehensive book about media monitoring and advocacy is *Gender Setting, New agendas for media monitoring and advocacy* by Margaret Gallagher. She reports about the current global media situation as well as successful, constructive projects aiming for change. In many countries, from Nepal to Southern Africa, Jamaica, The Czech Republic, Slovenia and many, many more, impressive and persistent work for gender equality in media content is in progress.

The Yearbook 2003 – *Promote or Protect? Perspectives on Media Literacy and Media Regulations* – from the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, edited by Ulla Carlsson and Cecilia von Feilitzen is also highly recommended. The Yearbook discusses a number of media literacy examples and whether regulations of any kind are the right way to go to achieve fair media content and protect children.

For anyone in the media industry, but maybe especially for journalists, gender and child sensitivity could be defined as a sign of quality. Guidelines for gender-sensitive reporting and sensitive child reporting are found in the appendix. They can also be downloaded.¹⁸

Finally, media activism brings people together. On one day in February 2005, the world's media will come under scrutiny when hundreds of people in 100 countries monitor gender portrayal and representation in the news on television, radio and in newspapers. This third Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) will be organized by the Women's Programme of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).¹⁹

Concluding Words

The mainstream media messages on femininity usually stress appearance, sexuality and nurturing, while masculinity themes are about power, action and aggression. This applies to the content of all kinds of mainstream media genres, aimed at both children and adults. Gender portrayals tend to not vary a great deal in terms of theme over time or around the world. The daily recreation of patterns that magnify boys and men and diminish girls and women can be described as system errors of the same kind as the imbalance in gender power that still dominates the world. A crossfire is useful as a metaphor to describe the situation: arguments for gender equality and girls and women's rights are under heavy counter-fire by gender traditional messages from the media.

It appears to be a paradox that media content called news is mediating traditional gender values and that make believe content rather reinforces old gender concepts instead of creating new ones.

A common critique is that there is a strong commercial interest in maintaining a conservative gender ideology. Commercialism and femininity are closely tied together – the question is whether the objectification of the female body is a commercial expression or the fundament for commercialism?

The issue of sexualization is hot in many countries. It reinforces the idea of girls and women as commodities. The phenomenon is being debated from a moral, religious standpoint as well as from a feminist, gender equality angle. It is also a matter of different societies' views on sexuality in general and women's sexuality in particular. One argument in the debate on sexualized images is that also boys and men are being depicted as sex objects. This is true, but the amount of sexualized male images in no way nears the amount of such female images. This raises the question of whether gender equality would be attained if both women and men were depicted as sex objects and, if it were attained, would this state of affairs be preferable? A counter argument is: if women and men were equally violent some kind of gender equality might be gained. But would this be preferable?

Another argument against sexualized images is that they can be seen as tools for control of women's bodies and sexuality. In that case, they need to be addressed the same way as sexualized violence against women.

Imagery of girls and women is often put into conflict with freedom of speech and freedom of the press. But without interference from these core values, there are already existing methods and strategies for extending these values to also include women. As awareness and knowledge about gender equality and gender power grows, a demand to challenge old concepts of gender is rising in society,

including the media. The good news is that there are no formal obstacles to giving fair space to women and children in the media and to providing ethical portrayals within the existing media landscape. Current guidelines, ethics and agendas can be modernized. As mentioned previously, media watch and media literacy have become tools to handle mainstream gender messages, in schools or other environments where media is considered a significant socializer. After all, children and youth enjoy media and are future producers of media as well as viewers, readers and players.

At the time this report is being concluded, an alarming report from UNICEF in late December 2004 reveals that children's rights are heavily violated. Violence, hunger and poverty are reality for the majority of children in the world. Knowing this, media imagery appears to be a trivial issue. But, on the contrary, media can serve as a vehicle for the advancement of children's rights and status by portraying them in a non-stereotypical, diverse and balanced manner and by respecting the dignity and worth of each human being.

Notes

1. Extracts from *Does gender really matter?* Women's Media Watch, Jamaica 2002 and *Everything is Possible, A Strategy Book in Media Criticism* 2004
2. Article 3
3. Article 13
4. Article 6
5. Article 2
6. Full text on www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/
7. Translation from Patoi to English: Michelle Ghans Miller, The Faculty of English Incorporated
8. Johansson 2001, Engström 2004, WeNews 2004
9. Background to the "veline" phenomenon in the reference list: Seghetti
10. The section "Visibility as an asset" is based on theory and discussion from numerous sources such as Seghetti 2004, Holmes 2004, Allt är Möjligt 2004, Gallagher 2001, 2002 UN Platform for action 1995, as well as interviews with media watch organizations in different countries and discussions between myself and youth over the past five years.
11. Media Monitoring Project 2004, Gender and media baseline survey 2003, Andersson Odén 2004.
12. For more on women and men in news, refer to Spears, Seydegart, Gallagher 2001, Ahmar 2004, Gender and Media Baseline Survey 2003, Andersson Odén 2003, 2004
13. Definitions of stereotyping: Michel 1986, Hvitfelt 1989, Golombok & Fivush 1994
14. From *Lolita*, a novel by Vladimir Nabokov, 1955
15. *WeNews* 040815 & Johansson, 2001.
16. The section Girls and gendered behaviour is quoted from Ward & Harrison 2004 with minor language adjustments
17. Short for Informal Commercial Importers
18. Gender sensitive reporting:
http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=19220&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
Putting children in the right: <http://www.ifj.org/>
19. Global Media Monitoring Project: <http://www.wacc.org.uk/modules.php?name=News&file=categories&op=newindex&catid=7>

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Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children

These guidelines were first adopted in draft by journalists organisations from 70 countries at the world's first international consultative conference on journalism and child rights held in Recife, Brazil, on May 2nd 1998. After regional conferences and workshops they were finally adopted at the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in Seoul in 2001. The guidelines were presented by the IFJ at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Exploitation of Children held at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001.

Preamble

Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is a key element in any media strategy for improving the quality of reporting concerning human rights and society. The daily challenge to journalists and media organisations is particularly felt in coverage of children and their rights.

Although the human rights of children have only recently been defined in international law, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child is already so widely supported that it will shortly become the first universal law of humankind.

To do their job of informing the public effectively, journalists must be fully aware of the need to protect children and to enhance their rights without in any way damaging freedom of expression or interfering with the fabric of journalistic independence. Journalists must also be provided with training to achieve high ethical standards.

The following guidelines for journalists have been drawn up by the International Federation of Journalists on the basis of an extensive survey of codes of conduct and standards already in force across the world. The purpose is to raise media awareness of children's rights issues and to stimulate debate among media professionals about the value of a common approach which will reinforce journalistic standards and contribute to the protections and enhancement of children's rights.

Principles

All journalists and media professionals have a duty to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards and should promote within the industry the widest possible dissemination of information about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for the exercise of independent journalism.

Media organisations should regard violation of the rights of children and issues related to children's safety, privacy, security, their education, health and social welfare and all forms of exploitation as important questions for investigations and public debate. Children have an absolute right to privacy, the only exceptions being those explicitly set out in these guidelines.

Journalistic activity which touches on the lives and welfare of children should always be carried out with appreciation of the vulnerable situation of children.

The following statement was also endorsed at the Recife Media and Child Rights Conference:

'The IFJ is deeply concerned at the creation of paedophile Internet sites and the fact that certain media publish or broadcast classified advertisements promoting child prostitution.

The IFJ calls on its member unions to:

- intervene with media owners over the publication or broadcasting of these advertisements;
- to campaign with public authorities for the elimination of these sites and advertisements.'

Guidelines

Journalists and media organisations shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs and, in particular, they shall

1. **strive** for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;
2. **avoid** programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;
3. **avoid** the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;
4. **consider** carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children and shall minimise harm to children;
5. **guard** against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;
6. **give** children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind;
7. **ensure** independent verification of information provided by children and take special care to ensure that verification takes place without putting child informants at risk;
8. **avoid** the use of sexualised images of children;
9. **use** fair, open and straight forward methods for obtaining pictures and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of children or a responsible adult, guardian or carer;
10. **verify** the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children.
11. **not** make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.

Journalists should put to critical examination the reports submitted and the claims made by Governments on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their respective countries.

Media should not consider and report the conditions of children only as events but should continuously report the process likely to lead or leading to the occurrence of these events.

Recommendations for raising awareness of child rights

Media professionals need to develop strategies that strengthen the role of media in providing information on all aspects of children's rights. The following recommendations are designed to raise awareness about the importance of the rights of children.

1 Training for journalists and media education

- a) Ethical questions should have a higher profile in journalists' training, particularly with regard to standards of conduct in reporting issues affecting children.
- b) Materials outlining the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for media as well as examples of good practice within media can form the basis of training courses and manuals for journalists and other media professionals.

2 Creating conditions for professional journalism

- a) Governments and authorities should work with media and other civil society groups to create a legal and cultural framework for professional

journalism, including freedom of information legislation and respect for independent journalism.;

b) Media professionals should recognise that freedom of expression must go hand in hand with other fundamental human rights, including freedom from exploitation and intimidation. They should give careful consideration to the facts when weighing up the relative merits of the different claims, and not allow themselves to be swayed by commercial or political considerations;

c) Dialogue between media organisations, journalists and programme makers and relevant groups within civil society should be supported to highlight problems and concerns and give better understanding of the needs of journalists and media when reporting children's issues.

d) National NGOs should consider compiling a directory of reliable experts on the rights of children and related topics, to be distributed to media. Such information could also be accessible on computer data banks.

3 Codes of Conduct and self regulation

a) Codes of conduct and reporting guidelines can be useful in demonstrating that something needs to be done. Such codes are weapons in the hands of journalists and campaigners who can use them to take up issues with editors, publishers and broadcasters.

b) Specific guidelines on child rights reporting, such as those adopted by the IFJ, should be drawn up by professional associations to accompany their general ethical codes.

c) Journalists and programme makers have a duty to increase public awareness of the violation of children's rights. However, reporting needs to be carried out with enormous care. In particular, media should adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct when reporting on the rights of children.

d) They should avoid, or challenge, the myths and stereotypes that surround children, particularly those from developing countries. For instance, the myth that parents in developing countries do not value their children; that girls are inferior to boys; that children are drawn into crime through their own fault; or that child labour and sex tourism alleviate poverty for the victim, or the host nation.

e) Journalists should never publish details that put vulnerable children at risk. Journalists should take particular care not to reveal information that damages the dignity of children, and avoid identifying them, while at the same time should tell their stories in a compelling and newsworthy way.

4 The need for newsroom debate

a) A constructive and supportive debate should be encouraged between media professionals, about reporting of children's rights and media images of children. Such dialogue should take place between media managements, editorial departments and marketing sections.

b) Media editors and managers should implement — and make explicit— a policy which makes clear their opposition to biased and sensationalist coverage of children, and their support for high ethical standards among journalists and programme makers. This could be done through the elaboration, in consultation with media professionals, of guidelines, which should be seriously implemented and monitored.

c) Media organisations should consider appointing specialist 'children's correspondents', with responsibility for covering all aspects of children's lives. Specific training to help journalists to express children's points of view. This might include: child growth and development, child abuse, risk factors, children's sexual terminology, the law, interviewing techniques, communication with children, etc.

d) New means of giving children access to the media, as 'sources' or commentators, should be investigated. Children should know that information or opinions offered in confidence would be protected as such.

5 Children, media and the community

a) Children, from primary school upwards, should undergo media literacy training, to help them understand and decode the messages they receive from both programmes and advertising, so as to become critical and well-informed media consumers.

Appendix 2.

Gender Sensitive Reporting

The UNESCO site *Women Make the News* offers a compilation of gender sensitive tips. In this appendix you find an extract from the whole article which can be downloaded from: http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14372&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING

For the media to accurately mirror our societies, to produce coverage that is complete and diverse, it is critical that the news reflect the world as seen through the eyes of women as well as men.

Women should be involved at all levels of media organisations, including as reporters and decision-makers. But simply having more women in a newsroom is not enough to guarantee gender-sensitive reporting.

The nature of news, the choices made about what is newsworthy and the way the story is reported must change too. Women need to be used more as the sources and subjects of stories. They need to be interviewed as commentators and experts.

Women are interested in, concerned with and write about things that men are interested in. It's important for both not to be isolated in gender-based ghettos and to avoid any separation on gender lines in terms of who writes about what.

PICTURE MALE REPORTING ON “SOFT ISSUE” ... FEMALE WAR CORRESPONDENT

All journalists, both female and male, can play a role in changing attitudes to women and gender-based stereotypes.

You can make a choice. You can make a difference. This article sets out to provide you with some guidelines on how to become a gender-sensitive reporter.

Gender-sensitive reporting.

One of the first things journalists are taught is that each story must answer the questions: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW. The same device can be applied for practicing gender-sensitive journalism.

WHO? The reporting journalist.

WHAT? Needs to be more aware of gender issues and to incorporate this awareness into the way work is approached.

WHERE? At the workplace, in the editorial department where decisions are taken about stories to be covered, on the beat where information is gathered.

WHEN? All the time.

WHY? Because professionalism, equity and good sense demand it.

HOW? Through being aware of the language used, being open-minded and fair, and through careful selection of the stories and the sources.

Another set of questions to help journalists and editors keep diverse perspectives, including gender-sensitive ones, in their stories comes from the Poynter Institute of Journalism in the United States.

WHO? Who's missing from the story?

WHAT? What's the context of the story?

WHERE? Where can we go for more information?

WHEN? When do we use racial or ethnic identification?

WHY? Why are we including or excluding certain information?

HOW?

- ☐ Read publications, watch television / cable TV, listen to radio owned by or oriented towards diverse groups.
- ☐ Contact organisations that represent diverse groups. Your own company may have its own versions of these groups as well.
- ☐ Ask everyone you meet who they respect as knowledgeable people in their communities.
- ☐ Seek out unofficial leaders.
- ☐ Create a list of people you can turn to in diverse communities who represent different perspectives within the groups.
- ☐ Visit on-line sites, communities, and businesses different from your own.
- ☐ Remain in regular contact with people on your diversity list. Meet them for coffee, tea, breakfast, or lunch in their communities.

Detecting and avoiding gender-insensitive reporting.

This is a guideline to questions you should be asking yourself when reading or listening to reports.

Who are the sources of the reports?

- ❓ How many sources are government and corporate officials?
- ❓ How many belong to the progressive, public interest groups?
- ❓ How many sources are women?
- ❓ How many sources are from minority groups?

From whose point of view is the news reported?

- ❓ In whose interest does the report serve?
- ❓ Does this interest coincide with that of the government?
- ❓ Does it coincide with that of the corporate world?
- ❓ Is the report in the public's interest? Which public?

Are there double standards in the news report?

- ❓ Are there contradictory double standard? For example, single fathers sympathized with for their circumstances, while single mothers are said to "deserve" the hardship.

Are stereotypes used in the news report?

- ❓ How is one group portrayed in the story?
- ❓ Is this group always associated with certain characteristics?

Is loaded language used?

- ❓ Is the language objective enough to not sway public opinion?
- ❓ Is the language objective enough so readers can form their own opinions?

Is the report contextualised?

- ❓ Is the story put in context so readers can form their own opinions?

Does the graphics used match the content?

- ❓ Do the images and illustrations used contradict the content?
- ❓ Do they lead readers to understand the story content differently?

But gender-sensitive journalism is not only about things like sources and context. It's also about the language we use in writing our stories.

Language is a dynamic and socially-informed tool. To be truly equal, women must be seen and heard to be equal. This means eliminating language that misrepresents, excludes or offends women.

Careful use of language and images in the media will give a more accurate reflection of your audience or readership, and this can positively affect people's consciousness over time.

The media can be proactive in changing perceptions about people in a society by using new terms regularly, or explaining why a term has become negative and not acceptable to a group of people.

Here are some quick examples:

Use neutral terms that favour neither sex and more accurately reflect the purpose of a gathering or a meeting. For example, rather than "ladies and gentlemen" use "colleagues, delegates".

Avoid using feminine suffixes that reinforce the notion that generic nouns are male, while female nouns are different. For example, use manager, executor, for both women and men.

Avoid words or phrases that make assumptions about gender. For example, an invitation to an event that invites both "conference delegates and their wives".

Avoid words and phrases that make assumptions about how women think or look or how men and women behave.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation developed these guidelines to make sure that the language used by on-air personnel treats men and women equally:

When referring to men and women, make sure they're addressed in the same manner. For example, instead of saying "Mr Smith and Mary Jones" refer to them as "John Smith and Mary Jones" (using both of their first names) or "Mr Smith and Ms/Miss Jones" (using titles, rather than names).

Describe a woman as her own person, and not in relationship to someone else. Instead of saying "Mary Smith, who is married to John Smith", say "Mary Smith, who is a writer".

Use parallel language to refer to men and women. Don't say "Men and ladies" or "Men and girls". Instead, say "Men and Women" or "Ladies and gentlemen".

Avoid patronizing terms. Don't use terms like "the little lady" or "better half" when you are referring to someone's spouse, or wife.

Use the word feminist, instead of “women’s libber”.

Use terms that can include both sexes: the Chair, Chairperson, rather than the Chairman. Human achievements rather than man’s achievements.

Use plural forms or neutral words to avoid assumptions about a person’s sex. Examples: Doctors bill their patients, instead of, a doctor bills his patients. People like their comfort, instead of, a man like his comfort.

Replace gender-specific words with gender-neutral words. (However, some people are more comfortable with traditional titles, so if a woman wishes to be called Chairman, rather than Chairperson, use the term that she prefers.)

After the 1995 Beijing Conference, UNESCO published its *Guidelines on Gender-neutral Language*. The following is a selection of language tips from the document.

The entire handbook can be downloaded from UNESCO’s Women and Gender Equality site: http://www.unesco.org/women/index_en.htm

As you go through the list, see if you can think of the equivalent gender-neutral terms in your own language.

Avoid using “man” as a generic noun

The English language tends to use “man” as a generic noun. It is as if men represent the whole human race.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage
Man, mankind	People, humanity, human beings, humankind, the human species, the human race, we, ourselves, men and women, homo sapiens, one, the public, society, the self, human nature
Manpower	Staff, labour, work force, employees, personnel, workers, human resources, human power, human energy
Man-hour	Person-hour, work-hour
Brotherhood	Human fellowships, human kinship, solidarity
Founding fathers	Founders



Develop a terminology for your language.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage

Avoid using “he” as a generic pronoun

Unless the gender of the subject is known and is relevant to the context, avoid using “he” as a generic pronoun.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage
The <u>student</u> is going back to school today. <u>He</u> will continue to learn a lot.	The <u>students</u> are going back to school today. <u>They</u> will continue to learn a lot.



Develop a terminology for your language.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage

Avoid associating men and women with certain professions

It's common to associate men and women with certain professions. Try to use gender-neutral terms to name these professions.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage
Anchorman	Anchor
Businessman	Business manager, executive, head of firm, agent, representative
Businessmen	business community, business people
Cameraman	Photographer, camera operator
Camerasmen	Camera crew
Chairman	Chairperson, chair, president, presiding officer
Cleaning lady	Cleaner, housekeeper
Craftsman	Craftsperson
Delivery boy	Messenger
Fireman	Fire-fighter; (<i>plural</i>) fire crew, fire brigade
Housewife	Homemaker, consumer, customer, shopper
Maid	Domestic worker
Manpower	Workforce
Policeman	Police officer; (<i>plural</i>) police
Salesman / girl	Shop assistant, sales assistant, shop worker; (<i>plural</i>) sales staff
Spokesman	Representative, spokesperson
Steward / stewardess	Flight attendant; (<i>plural</i>) cabin crew
Waiter, waitress	Server
Watchman	Security Guard
Women doctor; male nurse	Doctor; nurse
Workmen's compensation	Worker's compensation

Unless the gender of that person is known and is relevant to the context, avoid identifying the gender.

 Develop a terminology for your language.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage

Avoid gender stereotyping, avoid seeing women as possessions

- Do not assume conventional kind of gender relations.
- Alternate the word order in phrases that include both sexes so that neither women nor men always go first, to avoid giving the impression that women are after-thoughts.
- Identify women as individuals, persons in their own right, rather than as someone's wife, mother, grandmother or widow, unless it is appropriate given the specific context.
- Avoid seeing women as possessions by naming them in reference to their husbands or fathers.
- Avoid calling women "girls".

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage
John and Mary both have full-time jobs. <u>He helps her</u> with the housework.	John and Mary both have full-time jobs. <u>They</u> share the housework. Or <u>Mary and John</u> both have full-time jobs; <u>they</u> share the housework.
Research scientists often neglect their <u>wives and children</u> .	Research scientists often neglect their <u>families</u> .
Men and girls	Men and women; women and men
Man and wife	Husband and wife; wife and husband
Better half	Wife, spouse
Mr Smith and his wife, Mary.	Mr John Smith and his spouse, Ms Mary Smith. Or John Smith and his spouse, Mary Smith. Or John and his wife, Mary.

 Develop a terminology for your language.

Gender-insensitive language usage	Gender-sensitive language usage

Further reading on gender-sensitive language:

IPS Gender and Development Glossary published by IPS-Inter Press Service.
CBC Gender Guidelines published by Media Awareness Network
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/gov/cbc/cbcgend.htm>

Now try the following exercises, referring back to the previous pages.

 Exercise 1 – Learning to do gender-sensitive reporting

A wire-services agency releases an exclusive photo of the world's most expensive sports car, surrounded by models in hot pants and halter-tops. As the sports sub-editor, would you:

- Use the story without the picture?
- Use the story with the picture?

WHO?	No one seems to be missing if the picture is not used.
WHAT?	The news report is about the car, not the models. The readers may want to see the car but this is not the main function of the sports section.
WHERE?	To get more information from the car manufacturer and the opinions of professional sportspersons.
WHEN?	Not relevant.
WHY?	Including information about the functions of the car is relevant as these interest the readers of sports section. Excluding the pictures may disappoint those who want to see the car but will promote gender-sensitive journalism.

Who are the sources of the reports? News agency.
 For who is news reported? Should be for readers, not the car manufacturer.
 Are there double standards in the report? Not applicable.
 Is there stereotyping? If use the photo, then stereotype women as sexual objects.
 Is loaded language used? Not applicable.
 Is the report contextualised? Should include more information about the sports car and how it's related to sports.
 Does the graphics used match the content? If the report is about the car, then using the picture may not match the content.

⇒⇒ **DECISION:** The content will focus on the functions of the car and how it is related to sports. If it is possible, get a photo of the car without the models. If this is not possible, don't use the photo.

 Exercise 2 – Making a difference in reporting news

The following are two real cases found in newspapers.
If you were the reporter, how would you make the stories gender-sensitive?

 Case 1

Context: A South Korean football referee, on an exchange programme with another Asian country, had just begun officiating in the men's league matches, when she drew attention from local newspapers and television. She has International Federation of Football Associations (Fifa) accreditation and was voted Asia's best referee by the Asian Football Confederation.

- Two stories in four days
- Headline of the first story: *I can fit in, says women ref*
- Content of the first story: Women ref in action
- Headline of the second story: *No lipstick for the woman in black*
- Content of the second story: An interview with the women ref

Story 1

INTRODUCTION ... she was gaining confidence after officiating at a quarter-final match, her second since her arrival.

Implies she had no confidence in her ability

Paragraph 2 ... contradicted the reporter's assumption: the referee was quoted as saying she did not face any problems and that the players regarded her the same as a male referee.

Paragraphs 7&8 ... included a local ex-Fifa referee's endorsement of her competence and charisma in handling players.

This shows her self-assessment was not acceptable until a man confirmed.

Photograph ... showed her standing over an injured player, signaling for a stretcher to be brought onto the field.

Male referees are shown in authoritative positions such as booking or sending off a player.

Story 2

INTRODUCTION ... made the pointed observation that this was "not your typical referee because she's a woman in what is largely a man's game" and because she is "actually rather good at what she does".

From the reporter's own point of view

STORY within the story. Immediate references were made to her gender, competence and if emotions came to play in her decision-making. She was called a "lass", her age was revealed, her record as a national football player was reviewed only in passing, and she was asked to compare men's and women's games.

She said women's games are more difficult to officiate, but there was no explanation. Her assertion that men "tend to be a tad nicer" was reported. The reporter evaluated her ability to make tough decisions on the field.

In the journalist's mind, her ability was in doubt, so he felt he had to reason it out for himself and the readers.

He wrote: "A question that must be at the back of everyone's mind and (which) was itching to be asked was if she wears make-up while officiating matches." She replied it was against the rules, which any competent sports reporter should have known. **She said she uses moisturizer, like male referees.**

There was no mention of lipstick, but it appeared in the headline.

PHOTO ... showed her conducting the toss at the start of the game, for the teams to pick their starting position.

A "man in black" would not have been photographed performing this inconsequential routine.

How would you make a difference?

Who are the sources of the reports?
What other sources will you include?

From whose point of view is the news reported?
What other points of view will you include?

Are there double standards in the news report?
How will you avoid this?

Is there stereotyping in the news report?
How will you avoid this?

Is loaded language used?
What kind of language will you use?

Is the report contextualized?
What would you do to give a fuller context?

Does the graphics used match the content?
What kind of graphics will you be looking for?

 Case 2

Journalists spend a lot of time learning to write headlines. To draw attention, shocking or unusual information is often used. While the gender of women is often highlighted in the headline, the gender of men is seldom mentioned. Consider the following two headlines and suggest how you can make a difference.

Mentally ill woman gets six months for slashing German

The person was a hair salon worker who had injured a tourist with a meat chopper. She had tendered a medical report in court, attesting to the fact that she suffers from schizophrenia and had undergone psychiatric treatment for seven years. She did not have legal representation in court.

 My headline:

Mental patient pleads guilty to murdering mum, two nieces

The person was a mental patient (occupation not stated) who was confirmed fit to stand trial. If found guilty, he would face the death sentence. He said he did not want a lawyer, including a court-appointed one. However, the High Court judge said: "Based on his background as a mental patient, the court will appoint a lawyer for him to advise him and to help him understand better."

 My headline:

Books on children, young people and media

Clearinghouse Yearbooks

Cecilia von Feilitzen (Eds): *Young People, Soap Operas and Reality TV. Yearbook 2004.*

Cecilia von Feilitzen & Ulla Carlsson (Eds): *Promote or Protect? Perspectives on Media Literacy and Media Regulations. Yearbook 2003.*

Cecilia von Feilitzen & Ulla Carlsson (Eds): *Children, Young People and Media Globalisation. Yearbook 2002.*

Cecilia von Feilitzen & Catharina Bucht: *Outlooks on Children and Media. Child Rights, Media Trends, Media Research, Media Literacy, Child Participation, Declarations. Yearbook 2001.*

Cecilia von Feilitzen & Ulla Carlsson (Eds): *Children in the New Media Landscape. Games, Pornography, Perceptions. Yearbook 2000.*

The yearbook 2000 comes with a bibliography: *Research on Video and Computer Games. A Selection.* Compiled by Johan Cronström.

Cecilia von Feilitzen & Ulla Carlsson (Eds): *Children and Media. Image, Education, Participation. Yearbook 1999.*

Ulla Carlsson & Cecilia von Feilitzen (Eds): *Children and Media Violence. Yearbook 1998.*

Other publications

Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen & Jonas Heide Smith: *Playing With Fire. How Do Computer Games Influence the Player?* Nordicom, Göteborg University, 2004.

Ingegerd Rydin (Ed.): *Media Fascinations. Perspectives on Young People's Meaning Making.* Nordicom, Göteborg University, 2003.

Cecilia von Feilitzen: *Influences of Media Violence. A Brief Research Summary.* International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, 2001.

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