



## **Women and Journalists First**

**A challenge to media professionals  
to realise democracy in practice,  
quality in journalism and an end  
to gender stereotyping**

# **Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)**

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to realise democracy in practice,  
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to gender stereotyping**

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Gender equality and human dignity department

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Journalists, editors,

This is a call to arms, a strong plea to re-think current habits and procedures in making quality news. Like all professionals you will abhor outright sexism and racism, and you know that discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour or sexuality is against the law. Are you aware of the very low percentages of women interviewed and shown as experts? Are you aware of the limited repertoire of questions asked of men, with anything to do with relationships and emotions considered to be out of their jurisdiction?

As news makers you uphold the necessary means for societies to be democratic. Without fair, unbiased and open news, there is no pluriform public space, we lack basic factual knowledge to form opinions honestly or to make decisions that regard all of us in a just and honourable way. Public news provisions are under pressure. The logic of the marketplace imposes near impossible goals to achieve. Realising strong news items that grab news consumers' attention in less than no time that are also well-researched and thought-through, is no mean feat to achieve. The policy question before us may therefore be whether public journalism should compete at all on the terms set by commercial logic? Whether it should not re-think its founding goals and serve society by being its critical fourth power and a pillar of democracy on its own terms?

If, as a journalist or an editor you feel that all journalism, whether public or for profit, should be society's independent critical voice, this challenge presents you with an opportunity to prove that. Please review the facts and arguments before you, and decide how you might end the practice of *implicitly* (dis)qualifying groups in society by, possibly unwittingly, stereotyping them in gendered ways. To this end this text will discuss the strengths of journalism (all of which offer good stepping stones towards gender-aware reporting and journalism) and present some tools in the last section. It is neither a handbook nor an academic exposé. Please read it as a plea from concerned citizens who greatly value your work. If you read this text as a concerned citizen, it will hopefully inspire you to expect quality from journalism, and, indeed, to insist on quality journalism - a journalism that combats all stereotyping.

*Recommendation 1799 (2007) on the image of women in advertising* and *Recommendation 1555 (2002) on the image of women in the media* of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the older Committee of Ministers' *Recommendation No. R (84) 17 (1984) on the need to establish equality between women and men in media production and in media publications* support and ground this challenge to journalists. Both the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers underline the critical importance of the media in democratic society, and the simple fact that equality between men and women is nothing less than a litmus test for the realisation of true and mature democracy throughout European countries.



## Table of content

Introduction .....	7
<b>Facts</b>	
<b>Fair portrayal needs to be fought for</b>	
Fact 1: taken-for-granted notions are dangerous .....	9
Fact 2: stereotyping is a form of power play .....	12
Fact 3: public journalism needs a wake-up call right now .....	14
Fact 4: women’s rights have become political collateral in populist politics .....	14
Fact 5: pornification is a disciplinary system .....	15
Fact 6: although some stereotyping is sexist, stereotyping is not the same as sexism, it is systematic misrepresentation .....	17
Fact 7: it’s a girl! The media are surprised when women do something well .....	17
<b>Strengths</b>	
<b>Tackling gender stereotyping by strengthening accountable journalism</b>	
1st Strength: journalists are nosy .....	19
2nd Strength: when journalists are open-minded and inquisitive men and women of the world .....	21
3rd Strength: Journalism is a reflexive profession .....	22
4th Strength: Journalism has an array of formats to tackle and rewrite gender stereotyping .....	24
5th Strength: the professional award .....	25
<b>Tools</b>	
<b>Combating gender stereotyping</b>	
Tool #1: Expert databases: women experts are not so difficult to find .....	27
Tool #2 Handy websites for those teaching journalists (or journalists teaching themselves .....	27
Tool #3: More good (and bad) practice examples .....	28
Tool #4: Mantras (for DIY purposes) .....	30
Tool 4.1 Stereotyping is a habit, gender is a construct .....	30
Tool 4.2 Why there will always be stereotypes .....	31
<b>References</b> .....	33
<b>List of abbreviations and acronyms in this text</b> .....	34



## Introduction

**Gender stereotyping** – preconceived ideas whereby males and females are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Sex stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of boys and girls, women and men, as well as their educational experiences and life opportunities

This is not a handbook. The probability of journalists reading a handbook written by an outsider is virtually nil. Therefore, for journalists and media professionals, this is an invitation to re-think professional practice when it comes to the representation of women and men, especially in terms of gender stereotyping. For all other readers this paper provides arguments, insights and examples of what gender stereotyping is, and how to combat it.

*European Convention of Human Rights, Article 14: Prohibition of discrimination*

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

The Council of Europe is deeply concerned about human rights and freedom of discrimination, including on the basis of sex.

In various recommendations, both the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers have called for an end to practices of gender inequality in the media and in media production. Gender stereotyping, however, is one of the ways in which discrimination on the basis of sex to this day continues. This needs to stop as it bars especially women from enjoying their full rights as European citizens. Men too, although perhaps to a lesser extent, are limited in their options and choices in life because of gender stereotyping.

Gender-stereotyping as the systematic attribution of particular traits and competences to men and to women qualifies or disqualifies them e.g. for public roles or demanding jobs. In the case of women the practice of gender stereotyping still suggests that women belong in the home as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) continues to make clear. Likewise men who want to be a nurse or a primary school teacher will find that stereotypical imagery in the media will make such a choice difficult to explain and execute. Gender stereotyping is a discriminatory practice.

In this challenge to re-think and to combat stereotyping, facts, strengths and tools are presented to renew journalistic professionalism. The **facts** underline the need to do away with gender stereotyping. They show how gender stereotyping depends on a set of social and cultural circumstances and how it is often done unwittingly as part of the hasty routine of news work. The **strengths** make clear how gender stereotyping will be a thing of the past if and when journalists do their jobs well. Journalism as a profession in fact has all it needs to stop using stereotypes. Gender awareness does not require more than doing journalism well. The **tools**, last but not least, are primarily for those who train starting journalists. They also strengthen the case against “lazy journalism”: for example, women experts *can* be found. By paying attention to gender differences, journalists can discover fresh angles to all the staple components of the news agenda, such as sexual assault, politics, violence. Combating gender stereotypes is much more than an issue concerning (a small group of) women, it goes to the heart of realising democracy in and via news and public debate.



## How to use this text

This challenge means to provoke its readers and make her or him think about the huge range of ways in which media professionals and media users allow gender stereotyping to continue. Often they will seem innocent or forgivable. Often stereotypes are not used with the intent to discriminate against others. Therefore the text includes strong examples and evidence gathered in different countries. These examples and suggestions are, however, only a selection. There is a range of civil initiatives e.g. to build databases of women experts, of tool kits for media literacy and for diversification of gendered images. Other examples will make clear that combating gender stereotyping is nothing more or less than journalism taking itself utterly seriously. This includes the strength of character to periodically review work routines and to accept that when mistakes are made, they need to be learnt from.

Although from time to time written in a stern and unforgiving tone of voice, this document or manual does not mean to tell journalists how to do their job. Freedom of the press, after all, is as basic a right as the right not to be discriminated against. There are suggestions however where and how journalism might realise its strength in combating gender stereotyping. General readers might be able to use these e.g. in civic initiatives to combat gender stereotyping.

The table of contents is the shortest summary of the argument presented here. Great care has been taken to include many links and references for the reader to form her or his own opinion about the examples and arguments presented. The links are included in the running text rather than in footnotes to allow for fast checking via electronic versions of this document. For the benefit of the reader of the paper version the links have been placed at the end of text paragraphs as much as possible.

Although this “call to arms” has a single author, she could not have produced this text on her own. She wishes to especially thank Margaret Gallagher for her insightful comments and for coming up with apt and strong examples that she gathered in her impressive research work for a.o. Unesco, the Council of Europe and the Global Media Monitoring Project. Her expertise when it comes to questions of gender and the media is unsurpassed. Thanks also to Bissera Zankova, PhD, and Emir Povlakic both members of the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services, CDMC) and Greta Gober for helpful comments and suggestions, which have made this is a much better text than it would otherwise have been. The Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) and its network needs to be thanked for collecting some of the great examples included here. The spirit of engagement and solidarity in which the Committee works is truly inspiring.

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## Part I: Facts

### Fact 1: Taken-for-granted notions are dangerous

Plan (formerly called Foster Parents Plan) is a global child welfare NGO. Plan International's *Because I am a girl* 2010 research report (<http://plan-international.org/girls/resources/digital-and-urban-frontiers-2010.php>) shows that investment in girls and women has a multiplier effect that benefits entire communities – including boys and men. Yet when aid or investment is intended to benefit the community as a whole, stereotyped attitudes and priorities mean that girls and women often lose out. Plan urges us to understand that realising equal chances and opportunities for girls and women is in the best interest of societies as a whole. In Europe as much as elsewhere this remains a challenge. In law, women and men have equal rights. In everyday life women are paid less than men for the same work, have less chance to be appointed on the basis of the same curriculum vitae, are less visible in public positions when they hold them, have a far greater chance of being sexually assaulted and to be judged for their (lack of) youth, looks and sexual availability. We are aware of some of these facts but tend to hope that things are not “all that bad”, or that they are improving. Such taken-for-granted notions are dangerous. They impede public debate, and do not encourage journalists to take these issues further. Do let us take a closer look.

#### *Bare facts*

- Women in the EU earn on average 18% less than men – a gap that has scarcely narrowed over the last 15 years and in some countries has even grown.  
(Equal pay for women – not yet. Anti-discrimination and equal opportunities 05/03/2010, [http://ec.europa.eu/news/employment/100305\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/news/employment/100305_en.htm)).
- Job applicants perceived as male, have a better chance of being hired for the job than women who send in the exact same CV. “Both women and men were more likely to vote to hire a male job applicant than a female job applicant with an identical record”.  
(“The impact of gender on the review of the curricula vitae of job applicants and tenure candidates. A national empirical study” by Rhea E. Steinpreis; Katie A. Anders; Dawn Ritzke in *Sex Roles*; Oct 1999; 41, 7/8, p. 509).

“Only 24% of news subjects (people in the news) are female”.

Key findings Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 (<http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>).

News stories portray a world in which men outnumber women in almost all occupational categories, the highest disparity being in the professions. The proportion of female news subjects identified, represented or portrayed as workers or professionals over the past 10 years has risen in some categories. However, women outnumber men in only two: news subjects presented as homemakers (72%) and those presented as students (54%). The picture seen through the news becomes one of a world where women are virtually invisible as active participants in work outside the home.

Globally, the European region does less well than its self-image suggests: 26% of news subjects in Europe were women (which compares well to the global percentage: 24%, but is lower than in Latin America and North America – 29% and 28% respectively). The global average for stories where issues of gender equality or inequality were raised was 6%, but only 3% in Europe – well behind the Caribbean, Latin America and North America. Only 4% of stories in the European news clearly challenged gender stereotypes, compared with 9% in North America and 13% in Latin America.

Source: *Who makes the news?* Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 (<http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>), see the European regional report on the WACC website (<http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/restricted/regional/Europe.pdf>).

According to the Mediacentar Sarajevo, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia are under-represented, as elsewhere, while men dominate the newspapers. Women are associated with entertainment and the private sphere, and are marginalised in the news. They feature in stories on the later pages and on so-called “soft issues”. Women rarely have the central role in an article, and are rarely its main source of information. Female voices rarely represent a voice of authority or expertise; they are kept in the background and remain more passive in contrast to men. This diminishes female authority and competence.

Adla Isanovic (2006) *Media discourse as a male domain. Gender representation in the daily newspapers of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia*. Sarajevo: Mediacentar [http://www.media.ba/mcsonline/files/shared/sterotyping\\_adla\\_isanovic.pdf](http://www.media.ba/mcsonline/files/shared/sterotyping_adla_isanovic.pdf)

Sociological research shows men taking on very little of domestic work when both partners work. At best, they “help out” by doing close-ended tasks, they avoid open-ended chores, and do not do any monitoring of household or childcare work at all unless their partners are ill or otherwise incapacitated. In practice this means they will shop when given a list, or pick up children when asked to. They do little to organize, plan or manage the wide array of tasks that need to be done to make a household run smoothly.

See Jan Windebank (2001) “*Domestic Labour and Parenting Work in different Welfare States*” in *Work Employment Society* 2001, 15: 269-290.

An estimated 91% of rape and sexual assault victims in the United States were female, and nearly 99% of the offenders were male. European statistics tell us that 12% to 15% of European women over 16 suffer domestic abuse in a relationship – many continue to suffer physical and sexual violence from former partners even after the break-up. A Nordic countries study shows that 42 % of all women in Iceland have experienced some sort of violence after the age of 16.

List of available studies and reports (Council of Europe), source for European statistics:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/resources/StudiesReports\\_en.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/resources/StudiesReports_en.asp#TopOfPage)

European general statistics:  
[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.coe.int%2Ft%2Fd%2Fdg2%2Fequality%2Fdomesticviolencecampaign%2Fsource%2FBriefViolenceCampaign\\_en.doc](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.coe.int%2Ft%2Fd%2Fdg2%2Fequality%2Fdomesticviolencecampaign%2Fsource%2FBriefViolenceCampaign_en.doc) -

Nordic Countries:  
[http://nikk.no/Major+problem+of+male+violence+against+women+in+the+West+Nordic+Region.b7C\\_wlfK4j.ips](http://nikk.no/Major+problem+of+male+violence+against+women+in+the+West+Nordic+Region.b7C_wlfK4j.ips)

World Health Organisation on violence against women  
<http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/en/index.html>

USA study quoted:  
Greenfield, Sex Offenses and Offenders. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 1997

In 2011, Poland introduced a quote which, for the first time, required political parties to include 30 % of women in their lists of candidates for Parliamentary elections (October 2011). Journalists saw this as an opportunity to organise a game, inviting readers to vote for the most beautiful candidate for the Sejm (the lower house of Polish Parliament). "We invite you to participate in our poll. Together we will choose a lady who deserves to be called the most beautiful candidate to the Sejm of Malopolska! Voting runs until 6 October 2011. Results will be published the next day, ie 7 October. Let's have some fun!" The article appeared on the "current events" page, and was mainly a spread of head shots of the women candidates, plus the rating they were given. (<http://krakow.naszemiasto.pl/artykul/1092947,najpiekniejsza-kandydatka-do-sejmu-z-malopolski-glosujemy,galeria,id,t,tm.html#f885ce45588f1835,1,3,8>)

Research in Flanders, Belgium, in the autumn of 2011, showed that a parliamentarian who wants to be known via the media had better be a man. The top 20 of Flemish parliamentarians shown and quoted in the news, contained only one woman's name. Yet 42 percent of the Flemish parliamentarians are women. Parliamentarian Elisabeth Meuleman (Green Party, Groen!) notes that women politicians neither have the positions nor work on subjects that journalists and editors find interesting. These subjects include education and social welfare. <http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikels/2011/11/23/journalist-zoekt-vrouw>

Shockingly, neither journalists nor editors seem very upset by these figures and examples. Although authoritative research, facts and figures will be published regularly by news media, they are "old news", they appear on the backside of Important News pages. These figures do have news value though, as they belie the commonly held assumption that the world is changing for the better. They mock current neo-liberal ideology that we are the architects of our own lives, that the choice is ours. It is not. Implicitly we accept that rights by law do not mean much. Old habits die hard, and so on. If men get away with doing less than an equal share of household chores, and no one really tells them off for it, good for them! If women are raped more often than men, well they might want to pay attention to how they dress or which route they take home. And to begrudge us the pleasure of looking at an attractive woman on television, or mark the coming of more women into parliament with a bit of a joke, that is surely a bit mean-spirited?

Behind the possible lack of news value in nagging questions on gender emancipation-on-hold, there is another issue. The women who do appear in media coverage are more than twice as likely as men to be portrayed in the news as victims (GMMP 2010, p. 15). On average the women who are shown are younger than men (e.g. on television women were 54% of news subjects in the age group 19-34, cf 24% overall: GMMP 2010, p.14). It is hardly exaggerated to state that "helpless" and "cute" make women more interesting media subjects. Readers and media professionals alike know that this is the case, it is commented on from time to time, e.g. when protesting the near-anorectic figures of top models. A number of women's magazines have adapted policies on diversity of body shapes. All in all, as professionals and as citizens, we don't do much at all. We seem to have a thousand excuses for the imperatives of commercial media culture and a very low threshold for accepting the sizes and shapes of human bodies in a broad age range. Media producers in any case, are convinced that such is the case. The perfect body politics of media production are bad news in itself. In a media culture that uses entertainment codes to bring news, such politics are widespread and ultimately a risk for democracy, as they will exclude the lesser endowed. While in themselves perfect body requirements are not specific to either sex, they combine rather well with gender stereotyping and tend to strengthen biased notions of what women and men are like and what could and should be expected of them.

Ultimately, not recognising practices of gender stereotyping for the power play they are, is to deny entire groups access to public fora. It is to deny them authority in specific fields of knowledge and practice. It is to deny democratic rights by discriminating on the basis of looks. This way lies corruption of democratic values and the end of quality journalism. Awareness of gender stereotyping of women and men goes to the heart of strong professionalism and independent news production. For stereotyping involves going by taken-for-granted assumptions and "common knowledge", while quality journalism does exactly the opposite. It knows that face value is always deceptive and needs to be looked at more closely.

## **Fact 2: Stereotyping is a form of power play**

News workers should continue to pride themselves on taking nothing for granted, on insisting on strong legitimisation and explanation, most of all where “common sense” is concerned. Examples of news reporting from war zones show how going by taken-for-granted stereotypes delayed the discovery of mass rape of women in former Yugoslavia.

Penny Marshall, a reporter for British Independent Television News (ITN) covered the war in former Yugoslavia. She asked men in the Omarska and Trnopolje camps whether they had been tortured and only later learned of the enormous number of women who had been raped. Conditioned to go for the male source, she had not expected women to have anything to add, let alone a strong and different story (Gallagher, 1995). Locally, it was known that women were victims of sexual abuse. The fact that men too had been raped came as the greater shock. Rape as an act of war today is on our mental map. In 1998 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established by the United Nations made landmark decisions defining rape as a crime of genocide under international law. Furthermore, in 2008 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 which states that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide”.

Everyday stereotyping contributes to skewed notions of what is “normal” and acceptable. It serves as a reminder of “correct” behaviour or preferable body shape for those who are stereotyped. It also serves as an excuse not to take the civil liberties and rights by law too seriously of those who, according to stereotypes, should be “seen but not heard”. It forces women and girls into roles they might not have chosen freely or to spend energy fighting preconceptions of who they are. Likewise, men are affected by stereotyping in the choices they can make as individuals and as professionals. We may want to accept that we live in a corporate commercial culture that dictates that youth and beauty are mandatory and that sexual availability is of crucial importance. We may want to accept that an older newsreader will have her face and hair “done” in order to keep her job, as was the case with the American newsreader in the example below. We may want to accept that we live in a distorted, glossified and paint-brushed media world. By law, journalists like all of us, are still required to accept and uphold the equal rights of women and men, and the right not be discriminated against.

As long as there is a free press and public broadcasting, there is a democratic requirement for its journalists to do justice to women and men as truly free individuals and to understand how stereotyping undermines the preconditions for democratic opinion formation and pluriformity in the public sphere. Of course commercial news programmes are held to uphold the same constitutional rights. Often, however, commercial channels choose not to air news as such but prefer to broadcast mixed formats which are primarily intended to be entertaining. While these may well be critical or innovative, they do not have an obligation by law, or self-imposed duty to serve democracy and equality.



Greta Van Susteren -- Before



Greta Van Susteren -- After

### Beauty Before Brains

When well-respected news-show host Greta Van Susteren moved from CNN to Fox in early 2002, she not only had a makeover; she surgically altered her face to appear younger and more “beautiful.” When her new show, *On the Record*, premiered, her hair was perfectly coiffed and she sat behind a table so viewers could see her short skirt and legs.

Robin Gerber notes that, “Before her surgery, Van Susteren had been an increasingly visible beacon projecting the hope that women had made progress. You believed that she had made it in television because she was so darn smart, clearly the best legal analyst on the air.” However, her surgery symbolizes what many analysts have argued for decades: that the way a woman looks is far more important than what she has to say. Gerber concludes that Van Susteren “has become a painful reminder of women’s inequality... Being smart, smarter, smartest isn’t enough. By trying to become just another pretty face, Van Susteren instead became another cultural casualty.”

From: ([http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women\\_and\\_girls/women\\_coverage.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_coverage.cfm)).

To address stereotyping is not (just) a matter of increasing media literacy, important though that is (see “tools, tool #2”), or of better training of young professionals in journalism. It is a matter of recalibrating common sense assumptions in the professional field. It is a matter of courage: do media professionals in the public domain have the guts to look at the media content they are responsible for as a whole? Do they have the guts to accept their collective responsibility as democracy’s “fourth power” and to query taken-for-granted codes and conventions in order for those codes to ultimately be broken and rewritten? Is this a group of professionals that dares to take itself seriously? Is this a group of professionals that understands how gender stereotyping is lazy and easy?



### Women’s voices for change newsbrief (November 2011)

**Doing more than protest:** When management at Britain’s Channel 5 asked Selina Scott, 57, if she’d be available to cover for anchor Natasha Kaplinsky’s maternity leave, she said yes and marked her calendar. When instead the channel tapped Isla Traquair aged 28 and Matt Barbet aged 32, Scott did more than complain. She hired a lawyer: “The Channel and the director of programmes for Five, Bob Gale, have stated that they deny this claim and will defend themselves against it,” reports the Daily Mail. Emily Bell, at the Guardian UK, calls Scott’s

lawsuit an important step forward:

The temptation to hire in one’s own image for most managers is as irresistible as it is subliminal – which is why there are a lot of opinionated women working in digital management at the Guardian, and why we all need targets to remind us to look beyond the mirror.

On screen, any number of unconventional-looking ageing blokes (Jeremy Clarkson, Jonathan Ross, Chris Moyles, Alan Sugar, Adrian Chiles, Jeremy Paxman, Simon Cowell, Piers Morgan) are paid at a top rate for the talent they possess beyond their appearance. For women it is an altogether different story – appearance and age are clearly factors in choosing female presenters in a way that they aren’t for men. The media should be deeply concerned about this un-diversity – not because it represents moral turpitude on our part, but because it represents bloody awful business sense.

On: <http://womensvoicesforchange.org/news-brief-selina-scott-sues-tv-channel-for-ageism-heart-attack-recovery-via-the-gym-at-41-kimberly-pi-jpgerce-doesnt-cry.htm>, found November 2011

### **Fact 3: Public journalism needs a wake-up call right now**

If gender stereotyping is such an old and established practice and if it does seem to change a little for the better, why address it now? Global Media Monitoring Reports have been published every 5 years since 1995 when just 17% of news subjects were women, climbing to 24% in 2010. We established that the news value of this is apparently negligible. The same can be said for the fact that stereotyping keeps everyone who is not white, male and middle-class from gaining positions of power and prestige. It is a broadly shared insight that gender stereotyping is one of the faces of gender discrimination, part of a much more far-ranging system of checks and balances that work against significant numbers of women gaining social and political power. A cynic would conclude that society, the economy and the arts are doing well enough without calling on the possible talents of 50 % of the European population – which of course is not the case at all. The waste of talent as a result of traditionalist stereotypes is a total shame. The purpose of this wake-up call, however, is not to make a special plea on behalf of women. It is about showing how gender stereotyping is a litmus test for the quality of (public) journalism. Combating gender stereotyping will strengthen democracy.

It is clear that public journalism is in trouble. Quality journalism is facing declining readerships in newspapers, public service television is losing viewers in younger age groups; new forms of news consumption are developing with much space for short web-based items. Some claim that so-called citizen journalism, also, will threaten professional news making (Keen, 2007). Then, there is the increase in corporate news making via press releases written by PR personnel trained to make life easy on journalists. "What is under threat is independent *reporting* that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs." (Downie and Schudson, 2009, [http://www.cjr.org/reconstruction/the\\_reconstruction\\_of\\_american.php?page=all](http://www.cjr.org/reconstruction/the_reconstruction_of_american.php?page=all)).

As institutional source, PR and other corporate communication officials, have brand integrity to offer as security, which is almost always understood as strong enough to use these press releases as they are. Currently in the Netherlands, there are around five public relations officers employed for every journalist (Prenger, Van Vree a.o., 2010). With commercial and corporate culture this strong, with consumerism and self-generated news by users via social media and other platforms a new force to reckon with, there is a clear need for professional journalism to distinguish itself by being accountable, by knowingly taking up its role in representative democracy. Gender awareness is a strong tool to do so. It increases professional reflexivity. It makes clear what it means to be curious as to what exactly is taken for granted and to show audiences and informants the respect they are due by not accepting common sense stereotypes or using them against non-dominant groups in society.

The Plan International report quoted above offers the very best reason to insist on "women and girls first" in helping communities in need in the global South. Such aid will benefit the entire community, whereas "general" measures tend not to reach them. While this begs the question of what "general" means in these cases, the message is clear. Girls tend to stand last in line. They eat after their fathers, brothers or mothers, and if there is nothing left, well, bad luck. Girls are unlikely to get food and schooling unless these are already or also available to boys. In a comparable if not entirely similar way, journalists hold a critical position. When journalists show that gender awareness is worth their time, others will fall in line: whether they are co-workers, professionals in PR and advertising or ordinary citizens. Journalists do influence both the agenda of public debate and the frames that are used. With another, slightly lame metaphor: young women and journalists are to representative democracy what canaries were for mineworkers: when they died, the mineworkers were warned about deathly and explosive mine gasses. When the canaries – read women and journalists – do well, all of our chances of survival are that much better.

### **Fact 4: Women's rights have become political collateral in populist politics**

A very different and certainly not the least argument to reflect on and raise gender-awareness *now* is that the position of women has recently been re-politicised by right-wing populist parties. The Danish People's Party, the Dansk Folkeparti and the Dutch Freedom Party, the PVV, e.g. use the headscarf as a symbol of women's oppression. These parties promote a "women-as-victim" discourse that does not do

justice to the resilience and strength of actual women and girls. In the case of gender stereotyping too, it is not only women and girls who are its victims but society as a whole. Democracy is at stake here, and the right to be taken seriously. Gender stereotyping is a form of discrimination and the right not to be discriminated against is a human right, upheld by the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

### **Human rights and prohibition of discrimination**

#### *European Convention of Human Rights*

#### Article 14

#### Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

([http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/ENG\\_CONV.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/ENG_CONV.pdf))

#### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

#### Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

#### Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

#### Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

(<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=eng>)

### **Fact 5: Pornification is a disciplinary system**

“Victim” is not a very useful term, as the preceding section has shown. It suggests an overall vulnerability and weakness of the “victim” which does not come close to actual reality. Moreover, when it comes to gender stereotyping, both women and men are “victims”. The standards for images of bodies in media entertainment and advertising clearly favor youth and a well-shaped body and so does a sizable part of the press. More than that, the media appear to insist more and more on the sexiness of those in key roles as presenters or performers. This is part of what media scholars and critics have dubbed “pornification”. Following their argument, we cannot expect gender stereotyping to become less prominent, as pornography depends on clearly defined opposite roles. In a review for the British Home Office Linda Papadopoulos (2010) speaks of an increasingly sexualized culture with hypersexualisation and hypermasculinization a daily challenge for girls and boys. “Hot” and “sexy” are standards to which they feel they must live up to.

Commercial media culture took up sexual liberation with a vengeance, and has twisted it beyond feminist recognition. Sexual liberation was *one* goal of second-wave feminism, along with e.g. economic independence. Commercial media have since “spun” being sexy and public display of sexuality and nakedness as freedom and empowerment. It may well be just that for some. It is difficult to believe, however, that all women and men continually crave showing themselves to be sexual beings. Pornification extends older practices of using semi-naked women’s bodies to make e.g. television programmes more attractive to watch and ties them into a rhetoric of empowerment – empowerment of the bikini-clad girls who seldom have a speaking part. Thus, it is possible to watch Italian family game shows that have women as “assistants”



to the host parading around in attire more suited for a sex club. It is also possible to think that women's rights are benefited by using pornographic images when politics is the subject discussed, as is the case in Serbian tabloids, according to Ivana Kronja (2006). Or to take the "make-over" reality programmes that insist on implants for bigger breasts and for more impressive musculature on upper arms, breast, bellies and buttocks (the one for women, the other for men) as moving television shows that allow the rebuilt women and men "to come into their strength". If we like, we can watch their late night shock-doc cousins extend enlargement procedures to the male sexual organ, and understand it as information. The spam email that invites all of those with an online presence to at least consider whether we might need such an operation, we can, if we like, simply discard as a nuisance rather than as a symptom of pornification as a new public standard.

Women's genitals meanwhile have to be brought in line with the paint-brushed prude imagery of *Playboy* magazine. Photo-shopped soft-porn sanitized reality provides the code for acceptable female sexual organs today. Here it is not about size, but about "neatness". While world health organisations fight female genital mutilation, women with the budget to do so, ironically, have their vaginas and labia tightened and "rejuvenated". Dutch documentary filmmaker Sunny Bergman documents this in her film "Beperkt houdbaar" (literally: *With a limited sell-by date*, the website, still active, also goes by: *The people versus the sex industry*, VPRO, 2007, [www.beperkthoudbaar.info](http://www.beperkthoudbaar.info)), and comments on Western pornified media culture in "The sunny side of sex" (VPRO, 2011) by showing alternative cultural appreciation of bodily forms. These issues are also taken up in the Italian documentary "Il Corpo delle donne" (*The Body of Women*), made in 2009 by Lorella Zanardo. It has been hugely successful among women's groups in Italy, and has been translated into many languages. In 2010 Zanardo published a book with the same title. There is also a "Corpo delle donne" blog (<http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/>) where, inter alia, the documentary can be seen.

Body shape, weight and youthfulness are issues of discipline and normalisation. While excess weight would clearly seem a social health issue which does involve considerable economic cost, it is part of a range of commercial and disciplinary practices that have spread into public media culture. "Fat" and "flab" are seen as clear signs of laziness and lack of purpose (Bordo, 2003), youth a quality that is achieved rather than a temporary state. European societies judge by looks, and use any deviation from an impossible standard to symbolically punish those who challenge the status quo. To be more specific: while all politicians will get their share of satire which uses their faces or their bodies to make fun of them, women politicians in positions of power have to count on regularly being reduced to their bodies, in a more sexualised manner than male politicians (cf van Zoonen 2006). The only answer to pornification and to the commercialisation of sexuality and gender is to question the assumptions that undergird it, to see it for the disciplinary system that it is. Implicitly, unwitting gender stereotyping is a part of it.

"Female Chauvinist Pigs"

*This bawdy world of boobs and gams shows how far we've left to go. In the new raunch culture, the freedom for women to be sexually provocative has usurped genuine liberation*, by Ariel Levy in *The Guardian*, Friday 17 February 2006 .

... Women's liberation and empowerment are terms feminists started using to talk about casting off the limitations imposed upon women and to demand equality. We have perverted these words. The freedom to be sexually provocative or promiscuous is not enough freedom; it is not the only «women's issue» worth paying attention to. And we are not even free in the sexual arena. We have simply adopted a new norm, a new role to play: lusty, busty exhibitionist. There are other choices. If we really are going to be sexually liberated, we need to make room for a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire. We need to allow ourselves the freedom to figure out what we want from sex, instead of mimicking whatever popular culture promotes as sexy. That would be sexual liberation.

If we believed that we were sexy and funny and competent and smart, we would not need to be like strippers or like men or like anyone other than our own specific, individual selves. That won't be easy, but the rewards would be the very things "Female Chauvinist Pigs" want so badly, the things women deserve: freedom and power. Ariel Levy is a contributing editor for *New York magazine* and the author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture*.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/feb/17/gender.comment>)

Levy comments come from the United States. The same argument has been made by European commentators. Rosalind Gill makes similar points in

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2449/1/Postfeminist\\_media\\_culture\\_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2449/1/Postfeminist_media_culture_(LSERO).pdf);

as does Angela McRobbie in "The Aftermath of Feminism" (2009). For a more journalistic perspective, there is Natasha Walter's 2010 book "Living Dolls: the Return of Sexism" (see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jan/25/natasha-walter-feminism-sexism-return>).

### **Fact 6: Although some stereotyping is sexist, stereotyping is not the same as sexism, it is systematic misrepresentation**

Stereotyping is easy, it accords with widely held expectations. The use of stereotypes is a daily practice. Stereotyping is *not* the occasional use of a sexist format or image. It is *not* that one joke. Stereotyping is *not* something men do to women. The majority of media workers do it, men and women. Stereotyping is the systematic and consistent attribution of particular characteristics to a particular group or the systematic denial of particular qualities. Stereotyping works in favour of powerful groups but may also be used as a counter strategy by groups that have less power or are marginal, often via jokes and humor. Stereotyping in all those cases denies individual members of groups the right to behave as they would choose, it sanctions individuals for stepping out of line, or simply for holding a position of influence, as in well-known mother-in-law jokes. The "abnormality" of holding an influential political position as a woman, apparently is nothing less than a taunt to some, an upsetting of what is felt to be the "natural" order of things. The natural order would have women at home, and men "out there" in the public world. As such stereotyping curtails the rights of individuals to be who they want to be.

Some of the best known examples of stereotyping are of women: women reduced to being either or not sexually available; women denied their professional stature by interviewing them in their home environment; women asked about their view "as a woman" rather than as an expert. Men too are stereotyped, however, and in as easily damaging ways. A professional sportsman ending a career to take care of a family? How odd is that? The audiovisual toolkit *Screening Gender* (produced by Public Broadcasting Organizations YLE, NOS, NRK, SVT, ZDF and DR, 2000) includes this particular example in a section of the kit called "Are we there yet". At the end of a cycle race, senior Dutch sports journalist Jean Nelissen interviews the winner, Rudi Kemna. Does he have any plans to join the professionals? No, replies the cyclist. He is a "househusband: I do the housekeeping and a bit of cycling". "So you do the cooking? (...) And house cleaning as well?" Nelissen asks in astonishment. Back in the studio, the programme anchor jokes gently that his veteran colleague is "hearing for the first time that men also cook and clean".

In this case, the interviewer of the professional sportsman was berated with light irony immediately after the item by the presenter of the program. Mostly however, stereotyping is woven into news routines, and is never questioned. Such unquestioning acceptance of standards and taken-for-granted images helps maintain an unequal status quo.

### **Fact 7: It's a girl! Journalists report surprise when women do something**

Half a century ago, in the wake of second wave feminism, it made sense to publish "the first woman to ...." articles and documentaries. Pioneer doctors, pilots, ministers turned out to have been there for longer than stereotypical images allowed. Since then, it makes less and less sense to comment on the fact that it is a woman who is taking up a particular profession, function or achieving spectacular results.



“Miss Germany!” exclaimed the front page headline of Germany’s mass circulation tabloid Bild (in English) when Angela Merkel became the first woman chancellor in Germany in November 2005. “It’s a Girl” (“Es ist ein Mädchen”) announced the left-leaning *Die Tageszeitung*. A curious way to signal the accession of a major new leader on the European and indeed the world stage. (In: *Portraying Politics: A Toolkit on Gender and Television*, 2006, p. 5).

Clearly it depends on context whether paying attention to women doing something well, is a good or a bad thing. Clearly it also matters in what way gender sensitivity is expressed. For readers it is interesting to know when a chief executive officer, the highest boss or CEO, is a woman, given that they are still a minority. Strong journalism could of course find more subtle ways to introduce this fact, rather than speak of a female CEO. Using a first and last name or an accompanying picture would do an adequate job. Likewise, in sports, it is often completely superfluous to tag on “women” to a type of sports. To do so, can only serve the management of expectations. It is women’s football, oh well, in that case, it can’t be much anyway. Or: for women’s football it was really very good. The golden rule in news reporting is not to go for a cheap shot or an easy association but to save comments on gender for where it really matters beyond common sense beliefs and stereotypes.

## Part II: Strengths

### Tackling gender stereotyping by strengthening accountable journalism

#### *1st Strength: Journalists are nosy*

Journalism is a free profession: no one needs a certificate or a degree to be a journalist. This befits the freedom of expression. Aware of its possible societal ramifications, journalism is also one of the best self-regulated professions in the world. The International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) Declaration of Principles (on the conduct of journalists, also known as the Code of Bordeaux) was developed in the 1950s and locally updated since, among other reasons to allow for new media types and formats. It states that accountable journalism in a pluriform media sphere is of the utmost importance to democratic societies. Such societies will be unable to function without a well-informed citizenry and the free exchange of ideas. In open societies journalists have the right of freedom of news gathering and the responsibility to report the news in a truthful, independent, fair, open and disinterested manner.

#### **Status of Journalists and journalism ethics: IFJ principles**

*1.2 The IFJ believes that democracy depends upon the extension of freedom of expression and social justice world-wide. The IFJ insists that democracy depends upon an understanding of the special and particular role of the media in democratic society.*

#### **IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists**

7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.

International Federation of Journalists (<http://www.ifj.org/en/articles/status-of-journalists-and-journalism-ethics-ifj-principles>), 05 May 2003

(See: <http://www.villamedia.nl/dossiers/journalistieke-codes/code-voor-de-journalistiek/>, and other codes).

The quality of journalism is not in its freedom to gather information but in its insatiable curiosity and its instinctive distrust of first impressions. Journalism is defined by its will to know, its self-aware watch-dog instinct. Left to its own devices, all power will, after all, corrupt. Curiosity therefore, is journalism's great strength. Curiosity will drive the good journalist not to make do with easy answers but to consciously delve deeper. "Facts" after all are not always facts.

Facts can be less solid than they should be. Academic research regularly tells us that what we considered to be true, turns out to be slightly different. Media professionals, like lay people, will have to make do with the best possible version of a "fact" available. That includes understanding the basis for a fact: statistical evidence for instance points to outcomes and differences between men and women "on average". Statistical facts therefore do not say anything about an individual, they relate to what are called "populations". In that sense it is entirely true that women, on average, are less strong than men. Calling women "the weaker sex" however has a far broader range of connotations. These connotations have nothing to do with "facts" but with the ways in which such a fact can be used, and is used to exclude or control women, or steer them towards particular social positions.

### **A much-favoured myth**

Archeologists have reason to doubt the going stereotype of prehistoric man. He may not have been the adventurous hunter we like to take him for. On the contrary, new evidence suggests that prehistoric woman travelled and hunted. The idea of prehistoric man as Supermacho stuck with 20th century archeologists however and has become a favorite myth in explaining male and female behavior. A new technique of strontium-based dating of archeological remains showed that early females tended to roam while the men stayed put.

### **Early Human Dads Stayed at Home While Females Roamed**

By Jennifer Viegas (Wed Jun 1, 2011 01:00), *Discovery News*

Males within two human ancestral species that existed roughly 2.7 to 1.7 million years ago were stay-at-home fellows, while females of these same species traveled, according to a new *Nature* paper. The finding not only suggests that homebody males today may have a genetic predisposition for their lifestyle choice, but that certain female dispersal patterns among humans may mirror those of chimpanzees and bonobos. These two other primates also have stay-put males and traveling females.

"In any primate society, the females, the males, or some of both must eventually leave their birth community and join or form other communities," lead author Sandi Copeland, an adjunct professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Colorado at Boulder, told Discovery News. "One important reason for this is to prevent inbreeding." For the study, Copeland and her team analyzed 19 teeth from both *Australopithecus africanus* and *Paranthropus robustus* individuals. These early human relatives lived at different time periods, but in two adjacent South African cave systems: Sterkfontein and Swartkans.

The researchers used a technique known as laser ablation, which zaps the teeth with lasers, measuring isotope ratios of the metallic element strontium. Unique strontium signals are tied to specific geological substrates, such as granite and sandstone, and therefore "strontium isotope ratios are a direct reflection of the foods these hominids ate, which in turn are a reflection of the local geology," Copeland explained. The strontium "signatures" lock into the molars of humans probably when they are about 8 or 9 years old. The measurements revealed males tended to not stray far from home. The majority of the females, on the other hand, had moved from the place where they were born.

Copeland said, "It is possible that female hominins chose to leave their natal groups in order to mate with unrelated males, an indirect result of the males in their natal group choosing not to leave." But, she added, "We cannot exclude the possibility that female hominins did not move of their own free will, as abduction of females is known to occur in modern humans, rarely in chimpanzees, and often in *Hamadryas* baboons."

Chimpanzees have actually been observed taking females away from their home communities and attacking them if they resist leaving. Whether or not this occurred among the early human relatives remains unclear. The findings, however, suggest that our ancestors did not live as gorillas do today, with males traveling and females staying put and living in harems. The fact that early human ancestral males did not travel, however, does not mean that they helped to raise children. Chimpanzees, which exhibit the same dispersal patterns, have males that stay at home but yet "don't participate in childcare," Copeland says.

Another possible implication is that two-legged walking emerged in humans for reasons other than improved locomotion. "If one interprets our results as indicating that male australopiths rarely moved long distances, then one is left to wonder if the need for energetic efficiency was sufficient to drive the origins of bipedalism," co-author Matt Sponheimer explained.

Margaret Schoeninger, a University of California at San Diego anthropologist, authored a commentary in *Nature* about the new findings. Schoeninger echoed Copeland's reasoning for why females dispersed, saying "it eliminates the potential genetic problems that can appear due to inbreeding." Based on the new research, and prior determinations, she told Discovery News that we now know the australopithecines lived within small ranges, were relatively stationary (with perhaps even the traveling females not moving very far away) and that they "lived in areas with lots of large predators"

Speaking of *A. africanus*, whose most famous representative is Ethiopian “Lucy,” she said, “This is one weird ape-like primate,” mentioning that many questions remain about it, such as if it sat to eat. Sponheimer agrees that important questions remain. “This study is one example of how we can sometimes, if we are lucky, coax old bones and teeth to relinquish a few of their secrets,” he said. “And I don’t doubt that we are getting better and better and getting more from less and less, but I think we have a long road before us. Much about our forebears continues to be resolutely mysterious.”

*Discovery News – Early Human Dads Stayed at Home While Females Roamed (June, 2011)*

While Discovery News found other experts in the field to comment on these findings, the Daily Mail clearly felt it had material for a comic interlude by introducing another set of stereotypes:

**Women have called the shots at home for millions of years, scientists claim**

By Paul Harris and Fiona Macrae, *Daily Mail*, Last updated at 10:03 PM on 1st June 2011

“Alpha cavewomen” roamed the plains while slothful men folk stayed at home, according to a study. Scientists may finally have confirmed what every woman from Raquel Welch to Wilma Flintstone has always suspected. Even back in prehistoric times, the female of the species was very much the boss.

A study has found evidence of “alpha cavewomen” roaming the plains and calling the shots while the men folk slobbered at home. The discovery could put paid to the belief that cavemen were the aggressive, violent go-getters in the relationship between the sexes. It also raises the intriguing possibility that Fred Flintstone, the eternally henpecked half of the cartoon partnership with Wilma, might actually have mirrored life on Earth all those centuries ago. And that Raquel Welch, the doeskin-bikini-clad heroine of *One Million Years BC*, could have got her movie portrayal spot on.

Alpha cavewoman appears to have travelled far wider than her male counterpart, the research showed. She might even have been the one who went out clubbing, so to speak – reversing the popular conception that it was the bloke who bashed the girl on the head and dragged her home by the hair. But something seems to have happened to the evolution of the species after those times between 1.7million and 2.4million years ago. A couple more millennia would have to pass before female independence re-emerged with the bra-burning liberation of the Swinging Sixties.

The findings, detailed in the journal *Nature*, were made by Oxford University researchers and an international team of scientists. Using lasers and advanced technology, they analysed enamel from fossilised teeth found in cave systems a mile apart in South Africa. “Finding new ways to make old bones speak” was how one of the team described it. Oxford professor Julia Lee-Thorp said the difference between males and females was “completely unexpected”. Her team measured the strontium isotope ratios in canine and third molar teeth – which are formed by about the age of eight – in 11 *Paranthropus robustus* individuals from the Swartkrans cave, as well as in teeth from eight *Australopithecus africanus* individuals from the nearby Sterkfontein cave, about 50 kilometres north-west of Johannesburg.

*Daily Mail (UK) – Women have called the shots at home for millions of years.*

Both news items are about the work of Sandi Copeland and research findings published in *Nature* 474 (pp 76-78) on June 1, 2011.

*2nd Strength: When journalists are open-minded and inquisitive men and women of the world*

Respect has become an empty term. Everybody claims they deserve to be respected. If anything it is a power-term, a threat. Respect is important though in combating gender and other stereotypes in a more old-fashioned way. From a position of open-mindedness, there is an assertion of the right to make one’s choices as an individual, to be who you are rather than to be measured to standards others set. From such a position of “openness”, there is the possibility to allow others more room. Such a right to self-definition sounds easier to execute than it is. In today’s multicultural, globalised societies, the “urban” code of not fully looking at others (or to be seen looking at other people) in public places, limits both curiosity and respect. In everyday life it is not unusual to make do with quick threat assessments: can I sit on this seat in

the bus or are there scary people about? We often avoid making contact. Stereotypes are apart of "urban survival". They allow for the conviction that we know at a glance what someone else is about.

Good journalism is about knowing this is not true, about daring to make contact, about not showing prejudice and preconceived notions in order to keep open the option that things might be different from what they seem. Good journalism has little to do with hasty judgment calls. On the contrary, good journalism requires open-mindedness. Journalists need to be receptive or observant rather than blinkered. All journalism requires the assumption that research and checking sources are always necessary. After all, going back to why we need strong public journalism now, there are many media professionals working on the other side of the fence. Public relations and advertising prefer citizens and consumers do not check up, they like to suggest we can trust whatever is claimed. Journalism does the opposite: it does not engage in either naïve trust or distrust, it checks and it offers proof of those checks. After all if the assumption is discarded that interests do not always align, that fact-checking and investigation are what make a democracy robust and able to take a blow. Without the assumption that open-mindedness and sheer nosiness matter, journalism serves no purpose.

Anil Ramdas (Dutch journalist and cultural critic): "Racism is lack of good manners. I am not interested in whether or not other people let go of their prejudices as long as it does not influence their behaviour." (Personal communication).

### *3rd Strength: Journalism is a reflexive profession*

In most professions giving and receiving peer feedback is an uncommon thing to happen. Pressures of workload or of work culture-uneasiness prevent it from happening. Journalism has a much better track record. It has strong national federations and unions that publish magazines and websites. Issues to do with gender and sexism feature there, as does the issue of (unwitting) stereotyping. The Belgian professional journal *Journalist* started a series on gender roles in November 2010 and inquired amongst other things into gender-specific magazine publishing. It also provided a list of suggestions on how to find women experts. The Dutch Villamedia website had an article for discussion on its community page on the subject of sexual violence in refugee camps and the politics of gender (September 2011). The incorporated journalism weekly *De Journalist* sees gender stereotyping as a relevant issue and will have articles about it, if not very frequently.

All sexism depends on stereotypes, but not all stereotypes are necessarily sexist. The point is important to make because combating gender stereotypes is not the same as battling sexism. In the end professionals have a right to personal opinions which may be sexist. They do not have the right to present these opinions via (negative) stereotypes of others, as this will be discriminatory. While the need to combat sexism is undisputed, understanding the need to combat gender stereotyping requires stronger professional self-reflexivity and scrutiny of taken-for-granted notions and everyday routines. Federations of journalists are clearly aware of this as the example above shows. Citizens in their role as news consumers can only hope that news professionals will do their utmost to avoid both stereotyping and sexism. News professionals themselves may, regrettably, also be on the receiving end of sexism and stereotyping. In Great Britain women bloggers have called for a stop to "hateful" trolling (violent online insults) by misogynist men. As a reflexive profession, journalism has its task cut out to find the right way to moderate exchanges on their web sites. The British *Guardian's* "Comment is Free" web forum is a case in point.

In 2008, *The Guardian* decided to ban its reader Jane da Vall from its "Comment is free" webforum. *The Guardian* felt she had gone too far. On [womensviewsonnews.org](http://www.womensviewsonnews.org) (a web community), she writes "I find myself torn between outrage at the decision, appreciation of its irony and a certain thrill at being declared too offensive to be let loose in the cesspit that is *The Guardian's* Comment is Free. I have made the charge before that "Comment is Free" is a publicity machine for the men's rights lobby, to which *The Guardian's* readers' editor Chris Elliott, responded that women must "battle through any perceived misogyny" if they want to be heard." (<http://www.womensviewsonnews.org/2011/08/woman-baiting-continues-unchecked-on-guardians-comment-is-free/>)

Possibly Da Vall was out of line with her comments. The *Guardian's* readers' editor Elliott sounds rather harsh in any case. Battling through "perceived misogyny" clearly is no mean feat to achieve for professional

women columnists. While journalism works towards the exchange of views and opinions and provides debaters with information and interpretation on any of the range of subjects from culture to economy and politics that concern society as a whole, it will possibly have to redefine how to do this in the world of immediate response. Far from the open and democratic space the internet could certainly be, it is first and foremost a domain that requires very little self-restraint for those inclined to foul mouth others. Given this state of affairs journalism has taken on the difficult task to not only be a reflexive profession but to insist on self-reflexive behaviour by everybody posting messages on journalistic webfora and websites. "Citizen journalism" and the need for a gender-sensitive "netiquette" (rules of proper behaviour for the net) need to be high on journalism's to-do list. The banning of the possibility to leave any comment anonymously is one of the steps already taken (e.g. by the Dutch paper *de Volkskrant*. All those commenting or contributing to an online debate need to make a profile. Although this can be entirely fictive, this measure does appear to work as an effective "time out").

### **Anonymous trolls regularly threaten female writers with rape**

by Vanessa Thorpe and Richard Rogers, Sunday November 6 2011, in The Observer

Crude insults, aggressive threats and unstinting ridicule: it's business as usual in the world of website news commentary at least for the women who regularly contribute to the national debate. The frequency of the violent online invective or "trolling" levelled at female commentators and columnists is now causing some of the best known names in journalism to hesitate before publishing their opinions. As a result, women writers across the political spectrum are joining to call for a stop to the largely anonymous name-calling.

The columnist Laurie Penny, who writes for the Guardian, New Statesman and Independent, has decided to reveal the amount of abuse she receives in an effort to persuade online discussion forums to police threatening comments more effectively.

[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/laurie-penny> title="]

### **Women bloggers call for a stop to "hateful" trolling by misogynist men**

"I believe the time for silence is over," Penny wrote on Friday, detailing a series of anonymous attacks on her appearance, her past and her family. The writer sees this new epidemic of misogynist abuse as tapping an old vein in British public life. Irrelevant personal attacks on women writers and thinkers go back at least to the late 18th century, she says. "The implication that a woman must be sexually appealing to be taken seriously as a thinker did not start with the internet: it's a charge that has been used to shame and dismiss women's ideas since long before Mary Wollstonecraft was called "a hyena in petticoats". The net, however, makes it easier for boys in lonely bedrooms to become bullies."

[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog+books/mary-wollstonecraft> title="]

The cause has been taken up by New Statesman writer Helen Lewis-Hasteley, who invited other women to share their experience. "I wanted to have several writers addressing the issue at the same time because these threats are frightening but they are also embarrassing," she told the Observer. "I know many people will say that every commentator on the internet gets abuse, but what really came through to me when I was looking at this was the modus operandi of the attackers, which was to use the rape threat."

[<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/helen-lewis-hasteley/2011/11/comments-rape-abuse-women>]

Caroline Farrow, a blogger for Catholic Voices, points out she has nothing in common with writers such as Laurie Penny except her gender, but is subject to the same violent abuse. The wife of a vicar and "quite orthodox", Farrow decided to write under her own name and photograph to take responsibility for her views. "But the downside is that for some men this seems to make you a legitimate sexual target. I get at least five sexually threatening emails a day." One of the least obscene recent messages read: "You're gonna scream when you get yours. Fucking slag. Butter wouldn't fucking melt, and you'll cry rape when you get what you've asked for. Bitch."

[<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Catholic-Voices/225450737506346?sk=wall&filter=12> title="]

Linda Grant, who wrote a regular column for the Guardian in the late 1990s, has stopped writing online because of the unpleasant reaction. "I have given it up as a dead loss. In the past, the worst letters were filtered out before they reached me and crucially they were not anonymous," said Grant. "What struck me forcibly about the new online world were the violence of three kinds of attitude: islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and misogyny. And it was the misogyny that surprised me the most. British national newspapers have done little, if anything, to protect their women writers from violent hate-speech."



The author and feminist writer Natasha Walter has also been deterred. "It's one of the reasons why I'm less happy to do as much journalism as I used to, because I do feel really uncomfortable with the tone of the debate," she said. "Under the cloak of anonymity people feel they can express anything, but I didn't realise there were so many people reading my journalism who felt so strongly and personally antagonistic towards feminism and female writers." [[http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/natashawalter" title="](http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/natashawalter)]

Lanre Bakare, who monitors the comments on the Guardian's Comment is Free website, said he was constantly looking out for attacks on female commentators on any subject. "It can be on European finance and there will still be some snide anti-woman remarks, but there are certain subjects, like abortion or domestic violence, which bring out trolls and then it becomes really unpleasant. Of course, if anyone is found making threats of sexual violence they are banned from the site instantly." [[http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/lanre-bakare" title="](http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/lanre-bakare)]

Lewis-Hasteley has also been surprised by some of the reaction to the growing campaign to protect women writers from this verbal abuse. "Someone asked me if I didn't realise that I wasn't really going to be raped. But the threat of sexual violence is an attack in itself, and some commentators have their Facebook pages searched, and their home addresses tracked. It's a real feeling of being hunted by these people." Susie Orbach, a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst and writer, said: "The threat of sexual violence is a violence itself, it's a complete violation and it's meant to shut the people up. It's hateful and it raises the question, what do these men, or the people who are doing this, find so threatening? Is it that they feel attacked in their own masculinity and therefore sexuality in this violent form becomes the way that they establish a means to cover up their fragility by bringing their own vulnerability onto these women?"

"If you set women up as sexual objects which society has, no matter what we are doing, that makes women into objects rather than human beings and what you create is a situation in which women who then stand up and make arguments about things, terrify these men who have no access to real women and so they beat them up in the terms in which they've been offered by society, which has nothing to do with the content of what they are saying. Women are supposed to be sexual objects, we're still not supposed to be thinking, feeling, complex human beings. It is due to the continual representation of women as just beauties, the attempt to reduce women to a surface on which we project sexuality. So we're not real people.

"The deeper question is the disenfranchisement of men who find themselves in such depraved circumstances that all they can do is expel the fury that's inside of them on to women. The reaction these men are having shows they are very, very threatened by something and that threat is to their masculinity.

"With sexual violence, what the victim is receiving is the self-hatred of the individual who is expressing that pain and upset that is inside of them in a very explosive manner. Rape is different to the threat of rape but nevertheless it's a very, very serious and threatening experience."

In: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/05/women-bloggers-hateful-trolling>

#### *4th Strength: Journalism has an array of formats to tackle and re-write gender stereotyping*

Changing pressures on the newspaper, the coming of web-based news and entertainment-based news programmes have all contributed to a wider repertoire for journalistic comment and interpretation. The personal voice of the columnist is one such form that is found more often today. It is not restricted by the code of objectivity and as such a perfect means to tackle or re-write gender stereotyping. In doing so, it is, however, bound to another rule: columns in newspapers and on news websites are a means to attract audiences. They are a revenue-driven format. Not surprisingly, they therefore use humour, speculation and interpretive reconstruction far more than "regular" news reporting. The use of humor presents both an opportunity and a threat when it comes to gender stereotyping. It can be used to strengthen gender-stereotypical regimes of interpretation, and it can be used to upset them.

Jokes are a mechanism for expressing cultural anxieties. Sometimes this is very clear, as in racist jokes, sometimes it is less so and it requires e.g. ethnological or cultural research to lay bare what jokes are about. A particularity of the joke is that it depends on who tells it, and where: they can be funny and show awareness of the history of a group and its system(s) of (mis)representation, or they may be down-right insulting, and are either very uncouth or racist or sexist. Apparently it is not the joke itself that is problematic, but the relation it makes with cultural and historical prejudice. When made by an "insider", a joke is a form of self-reflexivity. When made by an outsider the same joke can be a painful reminder

to group members that they do not and cannot belong. It excludes them. From a media professional point of view jokes that play on gender or other stereotypes need to be understood as a double-edged sword: while they may be acceptable under some circumstances, in public news fora they will reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes rather than change them.

From time to time newspapers will allow humour to dictate the choice for items, as in the *Daily Mail's* stay-at-home dad item, or in short articles that play on stereotypes in a tongue-in-cheek way. While attractive as a change from the seriousness of most news, such items require an exceedingly careful hand to not to be both sexist and stereotyping. The *Telegraph* extract included below shows how difficult the distinction between stereotyping, sexism and humour can be. It reports on research that seems to *overturn* the "dumb blonde" stereotype. But the comment from the president of the International Blondes Association, included in the report actually *reverts* to the stereotype. However intended, the news item does put gender stereotyping on the agenda.

#### **Blondes paid more than other women**

*They have a reputation for being long on looks and short on intelligence but blondes are actually paid more than other women.*

By Nick Collins, 4:34PM BST 04 Apr 2010, *the Telegraph*

Blonde-haired women, who are often stereotyped as carefree and ditsy, earn seven per cent more than women with hair of other colours, researchers claim. And in addition to their preferential pay packets blondes also marry wealthier men, who earn an average of six per cent more than the husbands of other women. A study in the journal *Economics Letters* reported that having blonde hair boosts pay by £1,600 a year for a woman earning £22,000 a year – the average salary in Britain.

Researchers at the University of Queensland, who surveyed 13,000 women, said that the difference in pay remained the same even when other factors such as height, weight and education were removed. They could not explain why blonde-haired women enjoy more financial success, but said no other hair colour produced similar results. Dr David Johnston, who led the study, said: "Blonde women are often depicted as being more attractive than other women, but also less intelligent." "But it seems the association between blondes and beauty dominates any perception that they have low intelligence.

"This could explain why the 'blondeness effect' is evident in the marriage market." Olga Uskova, president of the International Blondes Association, told the *Mail on Sunday*: "Blondes have wealthier husbands because we are more fun and outgoing, and men are more attracted to us." "We also do better in the workplace because when we make a mistake we can say, "Oh, sorry about that, it's because I'm blonde" and get away with it." (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/7552146/Blondes-paid-more-than-other-women.html>, uploaded 4 April 2010).

#### *5th Strength: The professional award (useful for good and especially for bad practical examples)*

Journalism likes awards. They make for interesting and easy news (when others do the awarding). (Most of) the research will be done and a statement for the press will have been prepared. Awards can be accompanied by funny videos or ads, as in an equal payday video showing women of a certain age using power tools in bikinis, bathing suits and sexy underwear. The idea is to have viewers reflect on their own stereotypical notions of who is best suited to do what kind of work.

(Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_aubcM-vls](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_aubcM-vls))

Website: <http://www.equalpayday.be/NL/index.aspx?Id=Nieuws>).

Other such alternative awards target privacy invasion, such as, in the Netherlands, the yearly "Big Brother Award" for the company, institution or government agency that has most invaded citizens' privacy, and other breaches of civic liberties. Another example is the Belgian "Auwch award". It is a "painful prize for sexist talk or behaviour". The AUWCH (Ouch!) Award rewards persons or organisations who "brace the glass ceiling, reject quota laws, keep women's salaries low and inequality high".

<http://www.auwchaward.be/vrouwen/raad.aspx>

Likewise, awards for media products are a good way of attracting attention: the examples of what is to be awarded are already in the public space and can be considered part of collective cultural heritage.

Awards for journalism are sufficiently well-known, there are also a number of “alternative” awards that target e.g. sexism in the media or that reward those who have opened up debate about the equality between women and men. (See box below)

In Switzerland, a women and media prize:

En outre, la conférence romande des bureaux de l'égalité a instauré, en collaboration avec divers partenaires médiatiques, un prix femmes et médias, destiné à récompenser les journalistes qui, dans un souci d'éthique professionnelle, font avancer le débat sur l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes. Il est possible de consulter les travaux récompensés sur le site <http://www.egalite.ch/femmes-medias.html>

### Part III: Tools

#### **(Includes examples, resources, fully resourced toolkits and a further discussion of central concepts used in the discussion of gender stereotyping in journalism).**

Please note: the listings of tools in this section serve as examples, it is not exhaustive. There will be data bases, teaching materials and good/bad practice examples throughout Europe.

#### **Tool #1: Expert databases: women experts are not so difficult to find**

The complaint is often made that women experts are so difficult to find. In a world in which men are appointed more easily than women to top positions, that sounds true enough. However, women can be found. For most European countries moreover there are expert databases online, which can be consulted to find names of women. Below are a couple of examples.

Belgium: [www.expertendatabank.be](http://www.expertendatabank.be)

This database exclusively contains experts from minority groups (women, LGBT people, people with disabilities, people from foreign origin). With this project the Flemish Government wants to enhance their visibility in the media in a non-stereotypical context. Journalists and programme makers can consult the database as a tool to find experts in all kind of fields, from soil science to heart transplantation.

Switzerland: [www.femdat.ch](http://www.femdat.ch)

Femdat is a comprehensive Swiss database of women scientists and experts from various professions. <http://www.femdat.ch/C14/C1/femdaten/default.aspx>

France: <http://voxfemina.asso.fr>.

Vox Femina is a tool to find new experts, to bring new perspectives to a story and to make women more visible.

USA: [www.shesource.org](http://www.shesource.org)

SheSource is an online braintrust of female experts on diverse topics designed to serve journalists, producers and bookers who need female guests and sources. SheSource includes spokeswomen from a variety of backgrounds, representing demographic and ethnic diversity as well as expertise in areas, ranging from security, the economy, and politics to law, peacekeeping, humanitarian crisis, and more. SheSource is a programme of the Women's Media Center and was co-founded by The Women's Funding Network, The White House Project and Fenton Communications to foster a more representative public discourse by increasing the number of women whose opinions are reflected in the news media.

Worldwide: [www.huntalternatives.org](http://www.huntalternatives.org) for women peace experts at [http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/78\\_directory\\_of\\_women\\_experts.cfm](http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/78_directory_of_women_experts.cfm)

#### **Tool #2 Handy websites for those teaching journalists (or journalists teaching themselves)**

Just as databases are available online, there is a wide variety of teaching and learning materials for those who wish to be instructed or find tips, e.g. on how to write about sexual assault. More general information and examples are included in media-literacy programmes online.

*On: gender-based violence*

- Reporting gender-based violence. Inter Press Service (Africa), 2009, [www.ipsnews.net/africa](http://www.ipsnews.net/africa)

- Britain: “Tackling Violence against Women and Girls: a guide to good practice communication”: to support and inform government communication in the area of violence against women and girls. [http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/tools\\_to\\_engage\\_and\\_influence/violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_girls/default.aspx](http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/tools_to_engage_and_influence/violence_against_women_and_girls/default.aspx)
- Spain: “Gender-based violence treatment in the Media: a handbook prepared by the Spanish Institute for Women and Public Radio and Television (RTVE)”

*On: Gender mainstreaming and media literacy*

- Women and Media in the Euromed Regio. Training manual (for journalists who wish to learn the basic elements and tools required for balanced treatment of women in the media). Part of the Euromed Gender equality programme. Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Europemed Region (2008-2011).

In partnership with Media Smart, a not-for-profit organisation, the British government launched a learning package for teachers to help children understand how the media can alter images to make them unrealistic, as well as the impact of these images on self esteem. This media literacy tool helps young people critically appraise and gain more realistic perceptions of the images they see. It explores how and why idealised images in advertising and the media are used to construct particular messages.

More information about the launch: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/media-smart>

More information about the campaign: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-government/body-confidence/>

More information about Media Smart and to download the learning package: <http://www.medi-smart.org.uk/resources-body-image.php>

- The Canadian Media Awareness Network offers handy examples and explanations for those teaching journalists or others about media stereotyping <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/>
- **Screening Gender:** an audio-visual training toolkit produced in 2000 by six European public service broadcasting organisations: NOS (Netherlands), NRK (Norway), SVT (Sweden), YLE (Finland), ZDF (Germany) and DR (Denmark). It contains a variety of tools designed to provide insight into gender and gender portrayal on television. Although copies of the video material are no longer available, the text can be downloaded in English, French and Arabic from <http://www.euromed-news.org/en/News/Screening-Gender-toolkit-%21>
- **Portraying Politics:** A Toolkit on Gender and Television: produced in 2006 by a consortium of European public broadcasters and journalism organisations. The toolkit challenges journalists and programme-makers to reflect on the way they currently do things, and to think creatively about new possibilities. The video material is no longer available, but the text can be downloaded in English and German from <http://www.portrayingpolitics.net/>

**Tool #3: Good (and bad) practice examples**

Various good (and bad) practice examples are included in Part I “Facts” and Part II “Strengths”. Good practice examples include critical webfora that empower those who feel disenfranchised by current journalistic practice. Also empowering are dedicated prizes that tackle gender stereotyping. Less easy to find but important to note are individual media productions that combat stereotypes. “Show, don’t tell’ is what makes for instance Sunny Bergman’s documentaries (discussed above) a strong tool. Gay liberation activists have other strong examples that can be used for the purpose of combating gender stereotypes (see e.g. [http://www.glbtc.com/arts/film\\_actors\\_gay,4.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/film_actors_gay,4.html)). The *Celluloid Closet* (USA, dir. Rob Epstein, Jeffrey Friedman, 1995) is the famous documentary that surveys the various Hollywood screen depictions of homosexuals and the attitudes behind them throughout the history of North American film.

A selection of good examples:

- *In Britain:* Women's Views on News at [www.womensviewsonnews.org](http://www.womensviewsonnews.org) (see above). This is in itself a good example of critical news consumption. Quite a few of the issues discussed constitute typical "bad practice" examples. Instructive to read.
- *In Belgium:* G- magazine at [www.g-magazine.be](http://www.g-magazine.be) and [www.facebook.com/gendermagazine](http://www.facebook.com/gendermagazine). This magazine aims to eradicate stereotypical mindsets about men and women. Its first edition was published in September 2011 and focused on education.
- *Technoladies:* Event on 25 May 2011 on female role models in the technological sector. Portraits of these "technoladies" and the message of the event were distributed via different channels, including the internet. The event itself consisted of showing these portraits, inviting international female role models were and organising technology workshops.  
<http://www.agoria.be/s/p.exe/WService=WWW/webextra/prg/izContentWeb?FAction=Home&newsid=76460&sessionid=1&vApplication=technoladies>
- *Czech Republic:* counter-examples of gender-sensitive reporting *Tah dámou* ("Move by a queen"). *Tah dámou* is a TV programme run by Czech Television. It is a talk-show with two (female) commentators and one or two (female) guests who gloss current issues of Czech society. It is focused on presenting women's voices and opinions in the male-dominated world of politics, economy and TV news. The last few episodes dealt with such topics as sexual education in schools, the role of women in Arabic culture, current social unrest or corruption.  
<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10315089302-tah-damou/>.
- *Netherlands: De Volkskrant: math is not a question of the right genes.*

A Dutch example in the Science section of *de Volkskrant* (14 December 2011, p. 13) a national newspaper, is a report by Maarten Keulemans, based on a recent publication of research in Notices of the American Mathematical Society. Researchers show that the equality between men and women in a given country (50 were included in the study) determines how well girls do in maths. Interestingly, in more emancipated countries both girls and boys do better. The Czech Republic is an example of a country in which girls do better. Both girls and boys do well in Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany.

Unfortunately there are many more bad examples than good ones. Gender stereotyping is not only the strong suit of advertising, although the strongest examples come from commercial campaigns. They can also be found in one's daily newspaper (the following example).

Advertisement for festivities marking a national holiday in Estonia (Mid-summer solstice and Victory Day)

Adverts on bill-boards posted across the country and on the internet announced the 2011 festivities marking a national holiday in Estonia used the image of the breasts of a woman wearing a white tank-top (below). The slogan read "Even better in wet weather". A very angry citizen could not find out who was responsible for what was felt to be an abuse of national heritage.



An article in *El Siglo* in Spain dated 2 June 2008 described the plight of a large number of female American soldiers who, while serving in Iraq, experienced sexual harassment and assault by their colleagues. While

the article itself treats the subject appropriately, the headline reads “When women are warriors in Iraq”, thereby alluding to a famous song about “women as warriors” in the sense that they are troublemakers. This headline trivialises the violence suffered by women soldiers and minimises its consequences. It also prevents any critical engagement with the subject.

**Cuando las chicas son guerreras en Iraq**, by Miguel Ángel Aguilar. In *El Siglo* (online), 2 June 2008



Source: Cuando las chicas son guerreras en Iraq – Aguilar; [www.elsiglodeeuropa.es/siglo/.../790Aguilar.html](http://www.elsiglodeeuropa.es/siglo/.../790Aguilar.html) -

**Tool # 4 Mantras (for DIY purposes)**

*Tool 4.1 Stereotyping is a habit, gender is a construct*

All media and communications professionals ideally are aware how and when they use stereotypes. In reality, gender stereotyping is so ingrained in our minds that it continues to be seen as acceptable, and maybe even as courteous or as showing respect. The first step away from the habit of stereotyping is to understand that gender is a construct. The Council of Europe defines “gender” as “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men” (Article 3 (c) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, CETS No.210).

Gender can be usefully thought of as a WHEN, rather than a what. After all, gender does not depend on particular features or bodily characteristics, it depends on how and when those characteristics are made into an issue. Gender seen that way is a situational characteristic. The lack of resources and rights, for example, will put many sex workers in what is associated with a traditionally feminine position. Construction work, whether done by women or men, invites a different set of associative meanings. Individuals, moreover, should have a choice in when they want to present themselves in a highly feminine or masculine way. Only in a limited number of professional occupations strong gender divides are an asset. Mostly they are not. Gender neutrality is often the best choice professionally. Using gender characteristics should be an option, it should never be a must. Nor should femininity be the mandatory option for women, and masculinity the only option for men.

Gender stereotyping works most strongly in tandem with social and cultural divisions of space and time, to limit women’s options. By relegating women to the domains of emotions, caretaking and the home, the public sphere without much reflection can be assigned to men. In today’s world that is a ridiculous

state of affairs. Clearly older divisions such as the one between the private and the public sphere no longer hold true in the way they did half a century ago.

#### *Tool 4.2 Why there will always be stereotypes*

It is highly probable that there will always be stereotypes. These can be and are challenged. In practices of daily use, moreover, stereotypes are often multi-layered. It depends on the cultural repertoires of those exchanging them whether they are felt to be hurtful and discriminatory or not. They can be “just a joke” or not taken seriously at all (Hermes, 2010). In discussion of the current debate and widespread assumption that “sexualization victimises women and girls”, Duits and van Zoonen (“Coming to terms with sexualization”, 2011) argue that the way in which women and girls have responded from very different backgrounds and have managed to resist and negotiate sexualized culture, needs to be taken into account. What is at stake in this document is something else: it challenges unaware stereotyping by media professionals in the public domain. It suggests that the first step in demolishing unwanted stereotypes is to recognise and critique them.

Stereotypes are part of the shorthand ways in which we evaluate and exchange with one another about the world around us. Using stereotypes to reinforce unequal power relations is detrimental to democratic engagement and democratic values. In daily life, however, there has to be some space for stereotypes. In a fast-changing world, this can be reassuring – as long as we recognise that these shorthand ways of understanding groups, events and relations are only a crude summary of more complex realities.

Recognising stereotypes for what they are is important because they are part of how power relations in society are established and maintained. Most media and communication professionals are not especially out to start a revolution or to challenge the status quo – although these do exist. A strong feminist stance may feel about as stereotypical and unjustified as a strong sexist or racist point of view. All the more reason for media and communication professionals and for journalists to be aware of how social power relations are reproduced implicitly and unintentionally in all types of media content, whether journalism or entertainment. Consequently, careless generalizations are inadmissible. All generalisations require thought, careful research and compelling evidence. Media professionals do more than recycle common sense notions, even when reporting on everyday life talk.

In the interest of fair and balanced reporting and portrayal, media professionals need to be able to recognize stereotyping as unwarranted generalisation and to use their professional tools and work methods to show their readers and viewers where and how stereotypes are used. This is not to say that media professionals have a duty to act as political activists. They do have a collective professional duty to help ascertain and maintain the democratic standards European states stand for. That includes allowing for satire, for political discussion and the expression of the widest possible range of viewpoints that do not actively or intentionally discriminate against others. The only thing that is not allowed is lazy journalism.





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**List of abbreviations and acronyms**

CDEG	Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men
CDMC	Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoE	Council of Europe
DIY	Do-it-yourself
GMMP	Global Media Monitoring Project
ITN	Independent Television network (in Britain)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PhD	Philosophical doctor (highest academic degree)
PR	Public relations
UN	United Nations
Unesco	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VPRO	former abbreviation now a name of one of the Dutch public broadcasting associations



