



Swedish database opens up for global studies on gender equality in media

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An international research group coordinated from Gothenburg has this year laid the groundwork for a new, unique database for comparative studies on gender and journalism. The group's objective is to put the lack of gender equality in the news reporting in a larger perspective.

Several studies have in the last 20 years pointed to the unequal gender distribution in media organisations, their news content and people's access to and use of media. However, as the studies have been carried out in isolation from each other, it has been difficult to retrieve and use the data. By making it possible to carry out advanced analyses of very large amounts of data, the research group is hoping that the underrepresentation of women in the news media will attract attention at a broader level.

'I got the idea for the project when I was asked to write an article in *Feminist Media Studies* in 2011, where a number of researchers were given the opportunity to discuss ideas for feminist media research in the future. Media research offers a vast amount of descriptive and comparative data on gender equality in media organisations, in the content and regarding the access to and use of media. But nobody has ever had an opportunity to merge all of this information and use it to systematically

explore the structures and mechanisms that contribute to or block the development of gender equality at a global level,' says project director Monika Djerf Pierre, professor at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMG), University of Gothenburg.

Quality, causes and consequences of gender equality in media

The researchers involved in the project carry out systematic, quantitative studies of the quality of gender equality in media with respect to the content, media organisations and use of media in different countries. They also look at what causes different countries to exhibit different degrees of gender equality in media, and at the impact of gender equality in media on democracy and society overall. The comparisons are made at country level and are based on the merging of various data on gender equality in the media and country-specific cultural and structural characteristics.

'If a country has a high level of gender equality in media, what does it mean in terms of increased human wellbeing and status in areas such as health, economic growth and corruption? And how do we achieve gender equality in our media? Our ambition is to include all variables that can potentially help explain the variations that exist among countries,' says Mathias Färdigh, media researcher at JMG and the project's database director.'

Starting with three international studies



'Creating an opportunity to use all the data that has been accumulated within the GMMP project over the last 20 years feels fantastic! Hopefully, it will lead to better knowledge about the media and gender equality and therefore to faster change' says Sarah Macharia from the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), which coordinates GMMP.

In a first step, the research group has merged data from three large studies from the research field of media and gender equality. One is the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), an ongoing international study launched in 1995 that every five years explores how often and in what ways men and women are included in news texts and pictures. With 114 participating countries in 2015, GMMP is the world's largest and longest spanning study of its kind.

Another study has assessed women in leading positions in 99 different media organisations in the EU and is carried out on behalf of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) 2012–2013. One additional study on the status of women in the news media, carried out for the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) 2011, is also included in the project.

In the database, the studies are combined with general democracy and gender equality statistics collected from EIGE and the Quality of Government (QoG) institute at the University of Gothenburg, as well as within the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. Add to this a number of qualitative media studies that the researchers in the group also have been involved in publishing on the project website.

‘The project will hopefully make studies on media and gender equality more accessible and more used, and we also hope it will make more people realise the importance of studying the relevance of the media in relation to the weaknesses in gender equality we see around the world,’ says Maria Edström, media researcher at JMG and Sweden’s GMMP coordinator.

Hoping for broad impact

The database will be easy to use and openly available. Hopefully, researchers from all types of fields will utilise the data, which is suitable for both quantitative and qualitative research.

‘Future researchers will be able to use the data in an entirely different way than we can today; they will be able to suggest relationships and causes of the way things are. By matching these variables with variables in other fields outside media research that also contain gender aspects, like research on attitudes, socioeconomic conditions or violence against women, it will be possible to draw clearer conclusions. We will also be able to compare different time series,’ says Karen Ross, media researcher at Newcastle University and co-director of the EIGE study.

Contextualisation yields trust

By creating a better understanding of how the gender equality in and through the media is connected to the development of society, the researchers hope that journalists and media companies will take the statistics more seriously than in the past and help promote change from within. They also hope to be able to give authorities and organisations more specific guidelines in the future.

‘The research field focusing on the media and gender equality lacks both status and sufficient funding. This database leads to stronger trust in the field and better utilisation of our resources. We will also be able to give more precise recommendations to authorities and media companies based on the new analyses,’ says William Bird, director of Media Monitoring Africa, which is tasked with analysing the data material for GMMP.

The project is the first of its kind and is funded by the Swedish Research Council over the period 2015–2020. The members of the research groups are from Italy, Canada, the UK, Sweden, South Africa and USA.

The research group held its first meeting in July in Sweden.

Top, from left:

Claudia Padovani, University of Padova, Italy

Karen Ross, Newcastle University, Great Britain

Mathias Färdigh, JMG, Gothenburg

William Bird, Media Monitoring Africa, South Africa

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