

**THE HANDBAG, THE WITCH AND THE BLUE-EYED BLONDS:**

**Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power**

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### **About the project**

The project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power” is executed in terms of the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). It seeks, by challenging and changing the existing stereotypes, to reach a situation when both genders are motivated and enjoy equal opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues important for the whole society. The project partners are the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, the Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

More information can be found at the project website:  
[www.medijuprojekts.lv](http://www.medijuprojekts.lv)

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## 1. Executive Summary

Danish women are well represented in the national parliament, The Folketing, and in the European parliament. Danish women in the political life have obviously become more visible in the public and the media. This survey looks deeper into whether or not the relatively high number of women in politics in Denmark is correspondingly reflected in the media seen from an equality related point of view. The purpose with the survey is thus to examine what part gender plays in the domain between the media, politics and the politicians and to look closer into which gender stereotypes there are in the Danish media when female politicians are referred to. Are the Danish female politicians equal to their male colleagues in this domain? How do the media portray the female politicians? Is the Danish media neutral concerning the gender, when dealing with women in politics – or is stereotyping when dealing with female politicians?

The survey of women in politics and the media in Denmark consists of two parts.

Part I, *From their point of view*, is directed toward Danish female politicians’ experiences of the importance of the gender in a political context as well as a public context. The survey is based on a poll among 76,1 per cent of the female members of the Folketing in March, April and May 2004.

Part II, *From the media’s point of view*, focus on how the female politicians actually appear in the Danish media. The analysis is based partly on concrete examples from the Danish media, where female politicians are presented and on in depth interviews

with seven leading female politicians themselves and two professional media consultants.

In spite of the fact that Denmark has a strong sense of belonging to one of the most leading countries in the world when it comes to gender equality this research indicate that gender still matters – that is when it comes to female politicians. A great amount of the female politicians across the parties, age groups and amount of experience in the Folketing believe that gender does play a role when it comes to distribution of power. A great majority of the female politicians think that men have the upper hand in the Folketing and the power configuration is based on male values.

To that comes the portrayal of women in politics in the media. The majority of the female politicians do not believe they are treated the same way by the media as their male colleagues. The survey of how media represents female politicians done in this research confirms the beliefs of the Danish female politicians. Female politicians are being described in terms which is rarely seen when it concerns male politicians and they seem to be evaluated not only on their performance as credible politicians but also on their performance as “credible” women. Generally gender seems to be relevant only in the case of women in politics – and it can go both ways: Media that focuses on the female attributes and female politicians focusing on their gender in order to get publicity.

## **2. Introduction**

*“Are you going to touch her tits then?” asked the Mrs. as the last thing before I left home on that rainy Monday morning. “Never,” I answered a little too fast. “Never ever. This is modern, strictly professional journalism at top level.” Even though the last bit may have seemed a little exaggerated, it really wasn’t just blather when we finally reached Lene Espersen’s office. Of course it wasn’t. It’s just sort of become the conservative politician’s entrance to the general public. Lene Espersen has become rather identical with her boobs.”*

- Portrait of Lene Espersen in Berlingske Tidende the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2001.

### **2.1. Objective**

This survey takes a deeper look into the domain between the media, politics and the politicians in Denmark. Are the Danish female politicians equal to their male colleagues in this domain? How do the media portray the female politicians? Is the Danish media neutral concerning the gender, when dealing with women in politics – or is stereotyping when dealing with female politicians?

Danish women almost have the European record in politics. In just thirty years, Danish women have taken the Danish parliament, the Folketing, with an intensity resulting in the fact that 38 % of the Danish parliamentarians today are women. Danish women are also rather well represented in the European parliament. At the recent election for the European Parliament the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2004, five women and nine men were elected. 35 % of those running for candidate were women. This is so far the highest number ever of female candidates running for the European Parliament in Denmark. At the same time, Denmark is a country that, in both a European and global connection, boasts of being among the leading countries of the world when equality between the genders is concerned.

Concurrently with this development, Danish women in the political life have obviously become more visible in the public and the media. This survey looks deeper into whether or not the relatively high number of women in politics in Denmark is correspondingly reflected in the media seen from an equality related point of view. The purpose with the survey is thus to examine what part gender plays in the domain between the media, politics and the politicians and to look closer into which gender stereotypes there are in the Danish media when female politicians are referred to.

The survey is a result of a project during EU Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). Here Center for Ligestilling (The Danish Research Centre for Gender Equality) in Denmark in co-operation with partners from three other European countries (Latvia, Italy, Estonia) focuses on gender in politics and the media.

## **2.2 Factual outline: the Danish media and women in politics**

### ***2.2.1 The Danish media***

The Danish media consist of series of private national, regional and local TV and radio channels and two national public service channels, DR and TV2, where TV2 is partly financed by commercials. There are, furthermore, five national daily papers, two national tabloids and series of regional and local newspapers.

### ***2.2.2 Women in politics***

During the last thirty years, Danish women have really gained a foothold in politics. In 1971, only 17 % of the elected members of the Folketing were women. Twice as many women were elected at the general election in 2001. Today, 38 % of the Danish parliamentarians are women.

The development of Danish women's placement at the leading posts in the political regime has also improved during the last thirty years. In 1971, women filled only 11 % of the then government's ministerial offices. Today, women fill 28 % of the ministerial offices in the present government. During recent years, Denmark has had women in prominent ministerial offices, which used to be dominated by men – this could be the post as Minister of Finance, Minister of Economic Affairs and Minister of Justice for example. The Folketing can, furthermore, offer two female leaders of a party among the eight parties represented at Christiansborg.

The committees in the Folketing are, however, very gender classified. 70.6 % of the members of the members of the Socialudvalg (SOU - The Social Welfare Committee) are thus women, while only 13.3 % of the members of the Forsvarsudvalg (FOU – The Defence Committee) are women (see annex).

## **3. Methodology**

The survey of women in politics and the media consists of two parts.

Part I, *From their point of view*, is directed toward Danish female politicians' experiences of the importance of the gender in a political context as well as a public context. When dealing with political decisions, the distribution of political posts or just doing your daily work in the Folketing, is your gender then irrelevant? And are male and female politicians equal concerning publicity in the Danish media? The analysis is based on an anonymous questionnaire among the female members of the Folketing.

Part II, *From the media's point of view*, focus on how the female politicians actually appear in the Danish media. What part does the gender play when the media and the politicians negotiate trustworthiness and portrait the politicians for the voters? Who controls the process of portraying the politician? And do male and female politicians describe themselves – and do reporters describe them – on the same terms?

### **3.1. Part I: From their point of view**

The survey is based on a poll among the female members of the Folketing in March, April and May 2004. The poll was anonymous. 51 out of 61 female members of the Folketing participated in the survey (members from the Faroe islands are not included), i.e. 76.1 per cent – or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the female parliamentarians. 15 politicians did not participate. Some did not give the grounds for this while others were not reachable. Those who gave the grounds for not participating explained that they by principle never took part in surveys or that they simply did not have the time.

A questionnaire containing 30 different statements divided into three main categories was sent to the politicians to relate to. They could choose between “agree”, “partly agree”, “partly disagree” and “disagree” when relating to the statements. “Don't know” was also an option. The reticent answers “partly agree” and “partly disagree” were joined in one category in the analysis.

The various statements were divided into three categories by topic:

The wing of a party

The Folketing (committee meetings, meetings in the Folketing, political debates etc.)

The media and the public

48 politicians participated in the poll by telephone – few of these by a meeting in person. This made it possible for them to be questioned or to answer more thoroughly. Three politicians answered by email – two of these with thorough answers/comments.

All parties are represented in the survey.

Four parties have a participation of 100 %: Enhedslisten (EL), Kristendemokraterne (KD), Det Radikale Venstre (R) og Socialistisk Folkeparti (SF).

Socialdemokratiet: 76.5 %

Det Konservative Folkeparti (K): 75 %

Dansk Folkeparti (DF): 77.8 %

All ages are represented.

20-29 years: 67 %

30-39 years: 100 %

40-49 years: 54 %

50-59 years: 81 %  
60 – years: 71 %<sup>9</sup>

All durations of political careers in the Folketing are represented:

11- years: 67 %  
4-10 years: 85 %  
3 years: 86%

### **3.2. Part II: From the media's point of view**

How do the Danish media present the female politicians – and on what grounds?

These are the basic questions that constitute this part of the survey dealing with women in politics and the media. The analysis is qualitative and is based partly on concrete examples from the Danish media, where female politicians are presented. And partly on in depth interviews with leading female politicians themselves. Two professional media consultants also participate in the survey. They offer an insight into the relationship between the strategy in the media and the politicians. They, furthermore, illustrate the gender's importance concerning stories and images of the female politicians.

The survey uses some quotations from Danish newspapers in order to illustrate how female politicians are presented in the media. The quotations were found on the electronic article database, Infomedia. This database contains articles from Danish daily papers from about 1995 until today. The quotations are from articles of all genres concerning descriptions of female politicians. The articles were found by searching for portraits and interviews of named politicians. They were then read through in order to find descriptions of the politicians.

Examples from Dagbladet Politiken's (a Danish daily paper) coverage of the then government's cabinet reshuffle in 2000 where both male and female new politicians appeared were used. This was done in order to compare the descriptions of the male and female politicians on equal grounds. Furthermore, Politiken was used because it was the only national paper to publish reports of all new minister assignments. There are, furthermore, used two publicised birthdays of respectively a male and a female politician.

When using parts of quotations from newspapers, only one daily paper's coverage of a cabinet reshuffle and two publicised birthdays as illustration, there is a weakness. This weakness is, of course, that the method does not tell how typical these descriptions of female politicians really are. The various elements can in connection, nevertheless, give an idea of the tendencies in the field. The publicised birthdays are, in this connection, an interesting genre to study because these are usually short and factual incisive descriptions of a person and his/her merits.

The female politicians, who participated in the survey by extracts of long interviews, were chosen because of their position in their respectively parties and the types of publicity they have had – including being portrayed as woman and/or a certain type of woman in stead of “just” a politician. Eight female politicians from eight parties participated in an interview. Seven of them are part of the analysis. Those seven are Marianne Jelved (political leader of Det Radikale Venstre (R), former Minister of

Economy), Lene Espersen (Minister of Justice, Det Konservative Folkeparti (K)), Marianne Karlsen (president of Kristendemokraterne (KF)), Pia Kjærsgaard (president of Dansk Folkeparti (DF)), Mariann Fischer-Boel (Commissioner of Agriculture in the European Commission, former Minister of Foodstuffs, Fisheries and Agriculture, Venstre (V)), Anne-Grete Holmsgaard (vice-president of Socialistisk Folkeparti's (SF) parliamentary party) and Pia Gjellerup (president of the Socialdemokrati's (S) parliamentary party and former Minister of Justice and Minister of Finance). The politician not used in the survey was left out because she had no specific experiences with being portrayed in the media based on her gender.

The two professional media consultants participating in the survey were chosen based on their expertise and professional profile. They offer an insight in the relation between the strategies for media and politicians. And they enlighten the importance of the gender concerning stories and images of female politicians.

- Sasha Amarasinha is manager of communication in the international media conglomerate Egmont. Sasha Amarasinha was chosen because of her expertise in storytelling as communication strategy. This is based on the assumption that an important part of both political parties' and individual politicians' strategies for recognition in the public is based on the fact that the media is always interested in the "good story". It is furthermore based on the fact that the interaction between the media and the politicians therefore consists of creating stories. Sasha Amarasinha is furthermore the former media consultant of the media agency Accenture that, among other things, consults managers in the Danish industry.

- Henrik Qvortrup is the editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Se & Hør*. He was chosen because of his long and wide-ranging career within the media. This makes him the obvious representative of the mainstream media in the analysis. Henrik Qvortrup has been a political reporter with Denmark's greatest daily paper *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*. He was personal media consultant – also called spin-doctor – for the present Prime Minister, Anders Fogh, until the last election for the Folketing where Fogh was elected head of state. Henrik Qvortrup was then editor-in-chief of the tabloid *BT* during a time where there in Denmark was, among other things, a cabinet reshuffle in the government of that time; a reshuffle that is used several times in the analysis of how female politicians are portrayed by the media. Today, Henrik Qvortrup is editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Se & Hør*, which is engaged in famous, public people in Denmark, including female leading politicians.

## **4. Part 1: From their point of view**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In connection with women's international campaign on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2004, the Swedish daily paper *Svenska Dagbladet* conducted a survey exploring gender equality in the Swedish parliament the Riksdag. The paper contacted 155 out of the 158 members of the Riksdag and asked them how they experienced gender equality at their workplace. The result was striking. 6 out of 10 female parliamentarians indicated that they had been subject to sexual discrimination during their work at the Riksdag. The female parliamentarians had experienced everything from derogatory or chauvinistic remarks about their appearance from male colleagues to being disregarded in political debates or exclusion from important decision making due to

the reason that these were made by male colleagues outside the workplace. The survey created a stir in Sweden due to the fact that Sweden considers itself as being one of the most progressive countries in the world concerning equality. One of the indicators of this is the fact that 45.3 per cent of the posts in the Riksdag are filled by women.

A corresponding sense of belonging to one of the most leading countries in the world when it comes to gender equality is to be found in Denmark. Despite the lower amount of women in the parliament in Denmark in comparison to Sweden, the former is doing well compared to the rest of EU. In the Folketing (the Danish Parliament) 38 per cent of the posts are filled by women. Does this, however, indicate that gender is no longer of importance in politics? Are Danish male and female parliamentarians equals? When dealing with political decisions, employment of political posts and attending to one's work, is gender no longer relevant?

These questions among others constitute the basis of this survey of female politicians' experiences with working in politics as a woman. The politicians have related to various statements divided into three main categories:

The wing of a party

The Folketing (committee meetings, meetings in the Folketing, political debates etc.)

The media and the public

## **4.2. The Party**

How do the internal relations between men and women work in the political parties in the Folketing? Is gender relevant when dealing with the distribution of posts, pats on the shoulder or conversations during meetings in the group? A great amount of the female politicians do not consider their gender as being in the way in their group. They do, however, experience that gender *does* matter. This particularly applies to cases where posts are internally filled. They indicate that being a woman can in this case be both an advantage and a drawback.

### **4.2.1. Who holds the say?**

Statement: *Men and women have equal amount of influence in the party*

Agree 74.5 %

Partly disagree 17.6 %

Disagree 5.9 %

Don't Know 2.0 %

Total 100 %

The far greater part of the female politicians (74.5 %) agrees with the statement in question. There are, however, exceptions. For various reasons there was found partial disagreement with the statement among the remaining third part of the politicians. Practically all of them belong to the great parties – Venstre and Socialdemokratiet. Furthermore, nearly all of them indicate that there is a way of life in their party, which makes it easier for men to rise within the regime and thereby gain influence:

*“There are probably some male networks.”*

*“Men are superior when it comes to organising themselves in the distribution [of influential posts]. They are better when it comes to rationally evaluating how to position oneself in order to gain as much as possible to their own advantage. It is indeed a question of being elected because the posts are not just ‘distributed’. Men are much more calculating revolving whom to support in order to work one’s way up.”*

*“The male standards and ways of life are of greater importance due to the fact that in a group men are in excess of women. This is not the case when it comes to the rare voting. The discussion is the most determining and here men tend to be more dominating and thereby stronger in opinion. This is because men puff themselves up and talk more [than women].”*

*“It is connected with the person in charge of the promotion of ministers and important spokesmen. I think this is due to an old habit. Men tend to promote men rather than women.”*

#### **4.2.2. Who talks the most?**

Statement: *Men and women talk for an equal amount of time in the group*

Agree 54.9 %

Partly disagree 13.7 %

Disagree 31.4 %

Total 100 %

The female politicians do not see eye-to-eye on who talks the most in their group. A little more than half of the women (54.5 %) agree with the statement in question. Among those who disagree, the one half believes the women do most of the talking and the other half believes it is the men. There is no connection to be seen in the various parties concerning who is believed to talk the most. Considering the connection between the amount of women in the group and the politicians’ answers certain tendencies are to be found. These tendencies could indicate a connection between the amount of talking and the amount of men and women in the group. When belonging to a group with women as the majority there is a greater tendency (65 %) to believe that men and women talk for an equal amount of time. Considering the women who, besides belonging to the above mentioned group, also have many years of experience in the Folketing, the tendency is even more obvious: 100 % of these agree with the statement in question.

#### **4.2.3. Who fills which posts?**

Statement: *Gender does not make a difference in the distributing of posts*

Agree 43.1 %

Partly disagree 41.2 %  
Disagree 15.7 %  
Total 100 %

Is there a connection between gender and the distributing of posts among the parties in the Folketing? 43.1 % believe there is. The rest – more than one half of the female politicians – are divided into two groups. The smallest group distinctly disagree. The ones who agree the most are the women in the age of 50 – 59. About half of those who agree with the statement above belong to this group. These are to be found among most of the parties. Those who do not quite agree are divided into two groups:

- Those who believe that gender play a deliberate part. It is the belief that it is taken into account when distributing posts that some posts are more typical for women while others are more typical for men.

*“We deliberately place women in certain committees which are usually dominated by men, e.g. the finance- and defence committees.”*

*“People concentrate a great deal on a balance between male and female members in the committees. As an example, it is made certain that there are not just men in The Industry Committee and just women in the Social Services Committee – the same way as there are not a majority of Jutlanders in The Transport Committee or teachers in The Education Committee.”*

*“It plays a part on both wings. It depends on what you need to show the world. It may for example sometimes be a necessity that a woman is placed in one of the important posts.”*

- Those who believe that gender play a part resulting in advantages for men only:

*“Men are more inclined to choose a man to succeed another man.”*

*“It works to the men’s advantage. There are still some leftovers from sexual difference. The result is, to a larger extend, that a woman has to know someone who knows someone in order to get her cut. A man automatically trusts another man. You have to work harder.”*

*“It plays a part due to the fact that men are better when it comes to drawing attention to themselves, proclaiming their views and giving their opinion – not necessarily knowing what they are talking about. Women are in general more thoughtful when expressing an opinion. We need to know for sure that we can argument in favour of our opinion. That’s why we lose ground when reaching for the posts with high status.”*

#### **4.2.4. Is the internal criticism the same for men and women?**

Statement: *Men and women experience the same criticism in the group*

Agree 70.6 %

Partly disagree 9.8 %  
Disagree 13.7 %  
Don't know 5.9 %  
Total 100 %

The female politicians basically agree that the criticism in the group is not gender related. 70.6 % of the politicians thus agree with the statement above. Some of those who do not quite agree explain why:

*“In relation to women it seems like people wag their finger at them if they make mistakes whereas men get easier let off.”*

*“There is a tendency to taking a man seriously if he brings forth a serious contribution whereas a woman's contribution of the same quality may very well just be regarded as some 'feminist chit-chat'. If a man talks about something from his home or something personal it is because it is grand and important. If a woman does the same it's because she's a woman.”*

*“Women see things from different angles and raises other issues. And men often react to this by saying: Ok, we've already talked about this. Men may already have discussed certain issues prior to the meeting and are more clarified as the meeting starts.”*

#### **4.2.5. Who gets a pat on the shoulder?**

Statement: *Men and women experience the same praise in the group*

Agree 76.5 %  
Partly disagree 13.7 %  
Disagree 3.9 %  
Don't know 5.9 %  
Total 100 %

In politics there is no praise. That is the explanation given by a great amount of the politicians. They agree that praise for men and women in their group have nothing to do with gender. 76.5 % of the politicians agree with the statement above:

*“It depends on the situation. I see a lot of prejudice confirmed. Women are praised when dealing with emotional issues whereas men for the more hard-liner regarded.”*

*“Yes, women give praise to other women. This is, however, because we pay it careful attention.”*

*“We have different departments, thus the subject of importance differs. The foreign affairs are heavy departments. It is of greater importance and is more often in the spotlight. Therefore, when something succeeds in this department it is more frequently noticed.”*

#### **4.2.6. Is gender a barrier?**

Statement: *I have never experienced my gender as a barrier in the group*

Agree 80.4 %  
Partly disagree 15.6 %  
Disagree 2.0 %  
Don't know 2.0 %  
Total 100 %

Nearly 8 out of 10 (80.4 %) of the female politicians agree with the statement in question.

*"It is almost quite the contrary..."*

*"No, and this was actually very much to my surprise. I had probably expected it to be that way."*

#### **4.3. The Folketing**

How do the female politicians experience the gender's relevance in the parliamentary workplace? Who has the upper hand? How do people address one another? Is there a network considering either the male or female gender?

There is no agreement between the female politicians. There is a great belief that men are more dominating because they are in the majority in the Folketing. Some are also of the opinion that gender only matters concerning one particular group in the Folketing: the middle-aged men. But in general the women agree in one thing in particular. Men have the upper hand.

##### **4.3.1. Who holds the floor?**

Statement: *Men and women spend the same amount of time talking*

Agree 39.2 %  
Partly disagree 31.4 %  
Disagree 25.5 %  
Don't know 3.9 %  
Total 100 %

Less than half (39.2 %) of the female politicians agree with the statement in question concerning the everyday life in the Folketing. Among the 56.9 % who disagree, only two female politicians believe that women do most of the talking. The majority of the politicians then believe that men do most of the talking. This, however, could be due to the fact, as many point out, that men are in the majority in the Folketing. A couple of other explanations are also to be found:

*"Men try to hold and keep the floor."*

*“Men and women talk in different manners. Women cut to the chase - also generally speaking. They do not feel the need to hold their ground using solemn and fancy words.”*

#### **4.3.2. How do politicians address one another?**

Statement: *Men and women are addressed in the same manner*

Agree 51.0 %  
Partly disagree 33.3 %  
Disagree 13.7 %  
Don't know 2.0 %  
Total 100 %

Half of the politicians agree with the statement above. Those who agree the most are the politicians who, disregarding party colour, have been in the Folketing for the shortest period of time, i.e. since the latter election. The more time spent in the Folketing, the greater tendency towards believing that men and women are addressed in different manners.

Scarcely one half (47 %) of the politicians disagree – i.e. those with reservations or those who decidedly disagree. A great amount of these politicians offered more thorough comments to their answers. Many pointed out that elder male colleagues show a tendency towards addressing young female politicians in a patronizing manner. This belief is shared between young and elder female politicians from all wings in the Folketing. Others furthermore pointed out that the manners in the Folketing differ from one committee to another or that men and women have different ways of addressing one another.

*“There may very well still be a tendency towards addressing women as though they cannot quite comprehend the situation. During a disagreement between men and women, men are often under the impression that it is due to the women simply not understanding the situation in stead of just a simple disagreement.”*

*“The far majority address one another in the same manner. There is, however, a tendency among specific men over the age of 50 towards addressing young women in a childish manner. This is the case when women venture to show their face or are given a sufficiently important post. Then the tone becomes a bit patronizing. An example could be: “The XX-party’s very young spokesman”. This is not likely to happen when a young man or a woman above the age of 50 is concerned.”*

*“It very much depends on which committee you’re in. There is a great difference to be found in specific committees’ ways of life. Some may therefore be very much characterized by the male while others are more didactic.”*

*“There may among some men be a tendency towards addressing women in a patronizing manner – the younger women in particular.”*

*“There is a tendency among the elder male ministers to patronize female members of the Folketing – the young women under the age of 40 in particular.*

*“I have never really thought about it. However, one may tend to have a greater respect for men because they often seem more authoritative – even though they are not. It lies in their appearance – the suit and the profound voice.”*

*“There is a great difference in men and women’s ways of addressing each other and others. This is also the case in society in general. In order to solve a problem, women, as an example, address one another from an emotional point of view. This is also the case when addressing some – but not all – men. Most of the time one attends to the cool facts when addressing a man. But when addressing the so-called ‘soft’ men – though I dislike this expression – one tend to appeal to the emotional aspects. I could do that when addressing Bertel Haarder but never Anders Fogh.”*

*“Some men may tend to talk down to young women in particular. These are the men who are not used to take gender in to their consideration, men above the age of 55. They are usually from the right wing. Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil has for example often been called young and petite.”*

#### **4.3.3. Who can you take seriously?**

Statement: *Men and women are taken equally seriously*

Agree 58.8 %

Partly disagree 35.3 %

Disagree 5.9 %

Total 100 %

A great amount of the female politicians believe that both men and women are taken seriously. They point out that being taken seriously in politics has more to do with personal weight, age and one’s field as spokesman than it has to do with gender. One third of the politicians, however, do not agree with the statement above.

*“I have the sense that there are some men who switch off the very minute a woman is talking. One is well aware of it. It can be seen at meetings where a sudden mutter takes place. If you are strong enough you stop talking or say: Please pay attention. Or: The fact that you’re talking while I have the word is disturbing me. But you have to be strong enough in order to do that.”*

*“I believe it depends on one’s status and position.”*

*“Some men tend to distrust points presented by women. It is not taken for granted that they are right. There are, however, exceptions. Birthe Rønne-Hornbech is an example of this; you don’t argue with her.”*

*“It has more to do with the field of politics than gender. People in more important posts are taken seriously. These posts could be in defence, finance and economy.*

*Health outranks social. There is indeed a hierarchy to be found among the various fields of politics. Church politics are at the very bottom.”*

*“If you want to make a point it may sometimes be difficult to get a hearing. You have to try really hard in order to get through. Some have been doing this for 30 years, you know. There are many sciolists here. It is the same thing in the trade. You find a way to manage but you have to figure it out yourself.”*

#### **4.3.4. Who has the upper hand?**

Statement: *Men and women have the same share of power*

Agree 29.4 %

Partly disagree 33.3 %

Disagree 37.3 %

Total 100 %

Disregarding colour of party, a great amount of the female politicians agree in one thing: Men have more power than women in the Folketing. Only one third of the politicians agree with the statement above. 37.3 % entirely disagree. 33.3 % have reservations. None of the female politicians believe women have more power than men.

Why do men have more power? The female politicians have various explanations:

*“Women are more familiar with retail than with power.”*

*“Men are in the majority and that’s why they have more power. It’s sort of a tradition. But I strongly believe that women could gain equal power. I don’t believe there will be any barriers.”*

*“Women do not seek power the same way men do. They deal with the item on the agenda, not the power.”*

*“You have the power you take, I suppose...”*

*“Men are in the majority within most posts. This plays the prominent role everywhere. It does make a difference that the women have a home with children to take care of next to being a member of the Folketing. I think this will always be an issue in spite of equal wages and opportunities. It’s biological, something we are born with.”*

*“I still believe it may have something to do with the fact that men consider this their calling whereas women want to be a part of it and have their say. But those who really have the potential will also have something else. There are more important things in their lives than just politics. That’s why I believe our being in several places had something to do with it.”*

The female politicians were also asked to consider which values the power configuration is based on in the Folketing.

*“Male values. As a woman, you have to play by the rules of the game in order to be of impact.”*

*“The power figuration is based on male values. This is due to a long process. An example of this could be the fact that the head of the ministries are often men. Furthermore, there is a male jargon and male manners which women cannot take part in. “*

*“The Folketing is indeed old-fashioned with a very traditional and paternal management. Considering it a qualification in itself to work the same place for many years is a rarity in the rest of the society. This is, however, not the case in the Folketing. The posts are distributed based on seniority. The person working for the Folketing for the longest period of time will also be the one in the best post. This could be one of the chairmanships or one of the heavy seats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “*

*“In the management men are in the majority. Soft values regarding health and the social will not be prioritised the same way foreign affairs and the war in Iraq are. The war is important. But it is also important whether or not Mrs Hansen will be able to get a new hip.”*

*“There is indeed a male way of life at the very top of the pyramid. It may be the more practical things when dealing with preparations of meetings where a silly thing like family is not taken in consideration. Men are in the majority during debates and in the administrative system. There is only one female head of department whereas the management in the ministries consist of 80 % men. The angles of incidence and the conclusions negotiated are affected by this.”*

#### **4.3.5. What is going on outside the formal space?**

Statement: *There are no informal networks excluding women from decisions and/or discussions*

Agree 52.9 %

Partly disagree 9.8 %

Disagree 31.4 %

Don't know 5.9 %

Total 100 %

In a Swedish poll among the Swedish female parliamentarians it was expressed that informal networks were a huge problem because it excluded the women from the centre of decisions. The Danish female politicians do not, however, agree whether or not there even exist such a thing as informal networks in the Danish parliament. A little more than half (52.1 %) believes there is no such thing. One third (31.4 %) believe there is.

*“Yes, I believe they do exist. It's something like ‘women don't understand these kind of things’. Furthermore, I believe it is more common within the severe values. The*

*best example is actually the traffic mafia – the Jutlandic mafia - and the problems Sonja Mikkelsen had to face as a woman when she became the minister of this department. She’s a good example of this.”*

*“Men meet with a manner which exclude women. If decisions are made at 3 pm at Toga (a wine bar in Copenhagen) women will of course not be present.”*

*“They definitely exist. It is really infuriating. It is particularly the case among those men who have been in the Folketing for many years. It may be acceptable when dealing with the preliminary political negotiations. But this is not the case when a contract needs to be closed quickly. This is often done internally and women – the young women in particular – really have to fight in order to be a part of it. If a deal needs to be closed on the sly it is often said: “I’ll just take care of this with the men”. The young men don’t do it the same way the same way as the older ones. It is a thing of the past. But there is a lot of talking going on in the corridors – it reeks of men. During debates, basically all women have experienced being suddenly left out in the cold while the men work something out. At some point, one is addressed because someone has said: “could you just have a word with her?” It’s as if they can talk to other men more easily.”*

Among those who do not believe there are such things as informal networks excluding women from decisions, several point out that there are, on the other hand, female networks – such as women’s groups – where men are excluded.

*“It is, if anything, the other way around. There is a coffee club for women across the parties deliberately excluding men.”*

*“There are definitely gender specific networks excluding the other sex. It is, however, to be found among both men and women.”*

*“No, I don’t think so. But there are female networks excluding men. In our party, we have the Q-group where men are not allowed. I don’t believe men have something similar – besides the gymnastics club on Thursdays...!”*

#### **4.3.6. Is gender a barrier?**

Statement: *I have never experienced my gender as a barrier in the Folketing*

Agree 80.4 %

Partly disagree 13.7 %

Disagree 5.9 %

Total 100 %

A small amount of the female politicians disagree with the statement above.

*“It has never been a barrier for me. It has more to do with personality and how much you fight back...”*

*“Sometimes gender can be an advantage because it has to be legalized that we are serious when it comes to equality. Due to this, some women may have found a loophole. But men and women do not come with the same history. Women show up prepared three times as much as men. If one also has a network, one is in a strong position – the same position as men.*”

#### **4.4. The media and the public**

Are male and female politicians treated on equal terms by the Danish media? Are they basically just as trustworthy as they are professional? And what part do factors like age or the journalist’s gender play in one’s press coverage?

The far majority of the female politicians do not experience their gender as a barrier relating the media. At the same time, however, a great amount of the politicians believe there is a huge difference in the media’s ways of dealing with male and female politicians – based precisely on the gender in question.

##### **4.4.1. Are politicians treated the same way?**

Statement: *The media treat male and female politicians the same way*

Agree 35.3 %

Partly disagree 23.5 %

Disagree 41.2 %

Total 100 %

The majority of the female politicians do not believe they are treated the same way as their male colleagues.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the politicians do not agree that the media treat male and female politicians the same. 41.2 % completely disagree with the statement in question. 23.5 % have their reservations. One third completely agree with the statement.

*“I truly believe the line of separation lies there. In my opinion, the Folketing and one’s group are the places where one is respected. This is also, among other factors, because one represents some countable mandates. There is a great respect for one another among 179 members. The media, however, are a completely different matter. I really believe they look down on women. You are inevitably a bit denser. You have to prove more than men.”*

*“There is far more focus on the women’s private life, the mother role in particular. Women can, in this way, have some very tough social sanctions because they are at risk of being characterised as bad mothers.”*

*“They care more about female politicians appearance, especially their outfits. At one time, I was at a meeting that was covered by a reporter from JP (i.e. Jyllandsposten, a Danish newspaper). Subsequently, he wrote: “Afterwards, the female member ran away in her sparkling lounge suit and golden locks and red lips” or something like that. It really irritated me. His commenting my appearance was a negative. I was*

*talking for 30 minutes, and the only thing he remembered was the clothes I was wearing.”*

*“When the media criticise women, they give the story a little twist in order to display the woman as a bit crazy or deranged or whatever they can come up with.”*

*“It may sometimes be a bit easier for a male politician about the age of 35 to be accepted as a politician who is knowledgeable than it may be for a corresponding woman. Furthermore, a man in his late 60s may appear as having weight whereas a corresponding woman is just an old lady.”*

*“Female politicians are inquired about completely different things. They are, for example, asked to participate in coverage of their home, their amount of shoes etc. Far more attention is paid to their appearance, family life etc. I have never seen Brian Mikkelsen on a front page sharing how he makes his everyday life function. And he’s the one in the Folketing with the most children.”*

*“I even believe that some men might say the media do not give a fair deal when it comes to women. It is just a bit more interesting to have a young woman in the picture than a man in a grey suit. There are already 500 men in grey suits. The problem is that we are often told: “she gets so much coverage because she’s a woman”. We hear that a lot. It’s not because you are good at what you do, it’s because you’re a woman. It’s the young men that say these kinds of things. And they are not completely mistaken. At an election campaign, female politicians are in the minority. Consequently, a young woman is a greater news item. I hear from all the parties that this annoys the young men.”*

*“Well, old ladies like Birthe Rønn-Hornbæk and I are treated the same way as men are. But these young babes are treated in quite a different manner, you see – with the risk of being slightly ridiculed.”*

Regarding the connection between the politicians’ answers, their amount of publicity in the media and the length of their career in the Folketing, the tendency is not unambiguous. Those who disagree the most in the statement saying that male and female politicians are treated the same by the press belong to the one third of the entire group of politicians who have been most frequently covered by the press in the recent ten years. Half of these politicians thus believe that men and women are treated the same by the media. This, however, should not conclude that the more often one is covered by the press; the more likely one is to believe that men and women are treated differently by the media. This is because 41 % of those with reservations belong to the above-mentioned group. And those who agree the most – i.e. those who believe that men and women are treated the same – are those with the midst of the amount of publicity.

There is neither an unambiguous tendency to be found among the parties. Two parties are with their low amount of women too small in order to detect tendencies within. In the remaining six parties of the Folketing, the opinions among each party are equally apportioned.

#### **4.4.2. Who are given the floor in the media?**

Statement: *Male and female politicians speak for the same amount of time and columnage in the media*

Agree 43.1 %  
Partly disagree 17.6 %  
Disagree 25.5 %  
Don't know 13.8 %  
Total 100 %

Men and women in politics talk for the same amount of time in the media. This is believed by nearly half (43.1 %) of the female politicians. About every fourth (25.5 %) do not agree. They base their opinions on, among other things, the conception of the ideal politician and the journalists' sex:

*"It is still considered that a 'real' politician is a man. Journalists will therefore most typically enquire the men. This is the case unless the spokesman of the field in question is a woman or if the subject of matter has a particularly 'feminine' quality."*

*"Men are, in general, better when it comes to putting themselves in focus."*

*"The majority of the journalists here are men. There is a network between journalists and politicians."*

*"Men may have a tendency towards presenting themselves better in an interview and making their statements seem more important. Women tend to say things like "well, we did this and that..." and may be more modest when presenting themselves. It could be a fence mending that has just come through where a woman may scale down her influence on the case. Men have more driving force."*

#### **4.4.3. Do men and women have to give the same account of themselves?**

Statement: *Men and women have to give the same account of themselves in their political work in order to obtain recognition in the media*

Agree 25.5 %  
Partly disagree 33.3 %  
Disagree 39.2 %  
Don't know 2.0 %  
Total 100 %

Female politicians need to make more of an effort than men do in order to get credit for their political work in the media. This is the belief among nearly three out of four politicians. Only one fourth believe that men and women have to make the same effort. There is no connection between how much one is covered by the media and whether or not one believe men and women have to make the same effort. Female politicians from all groups – the one third most publicized, the one third midst most

publicized and the one third least publicized – strongly believe that women have to make more of an effort than men in order to obtain recognition.

*“It is easier for men because they have placed themselves in fields often covered by the media. It is more exciting to talk to men because they have the upper hand.”*

*“Women need to do twice as well and are still at risk of being, by their voters, characterized by their role as a mother or their appearance and not as a politician.”*

*“Women are from the very beginning considered naïve and shallow. You have to prove that you’ve achieved results whereas men are respected from the very beginning: Well, he is such a skilful feller. They almost have to make mistakes in order to lose prestige in the press.”*

*“Women have to work more. They have to prove something and be more objective in their statements. They have to, for example, avoid saying things like ‘I feel’ and ‘I experience’.”*

*“Women have to do better in order to achieve weight. On the other hand, they may be easier publicized relating things outside politics. Just like Louise Frevert who has coverage and has, for example, been in Weekendavisen (a Danish newspaper) because she takes belly dance lessons. A man would never be in Weekendavisen because he’s a body-builder.”*

*“We live with the prejudice that “It is made easier for you”. Therefore, you have to prove more because you’re a woman – especially in the case of an attractive politician. It is actually easier for a politician not quite as attractive to be acknowledged. Things are easier for her. If you are attractive, you have to spend a lot of time gaining respect. I have, as an example, seen male politicians from my group who, while faced with a skilful female opponent like Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil, cannot find anything else to say to each other than comments on her appearance instead of just acknowledging the fact that she’s a smart politician.”*

#### **4.4.4. What difference do the journalists’ gender make?**

Statement: *There is a difference to be found in male and female reporters’ way of addressing female politicians*

Agree 43.1 %

Partly disagree 17.6 %

Disagree 37.3 %

Don’t know 2.0 %

Total 100 %

The politicians far from agree whether or not the journalists’ genders make any difference when a politician and the press meet. Nearly half (43.1 %) of the female politicians believe there is a difference between meeting male and female journalists. Contrary, a little more than half (54.9 %) of them believe it doesn’t make a difference. Those politicians, who believe it does make a difference, consider it unambiguously

to be quite a positive. This is the case when a female politician is interviewed or contacted by a female journalist.

*“You see more eye to eye. You are on the same page. It’s another kind of confidence.”*

*“There is a gender-related understanding among women. The unspoken is automatically understood.”*

*“When talking to a female journalist, an understanding is very promptly built up. You learn the way of speaking and you quickly see eye to eye – or the opposite. Whereas some of those guys who like to play it a bit tough try to create a distance where they are in the lead all the time.”*

*“It makes a difference between whether you are interviewed by a man or a woman. Women focus more on the emotions: What do you think? How do you see this? Men focus more on the facts in their questions.”*

#### **4.4.5. Do the politicians use the gender themselves?**

Statement: *I have used my gender in the media*

Agree 27.4 %

Partly disagree 11.8 %

Disagree 60.8 %

Total 100 %

A great amount of the politicians (60.8 %) do not believe they themselves have used their gender in the media in order to, for example, get coverage or reach a specific public. A great amount of the women sharply reject using their gender in the media. They, furthermore, point out that it is important to them to be seen as politicians above women.

*“I strongly object to that. I want recognition based on what I do, not my gender.”*

*“I don’t want to manifest that side of myself. I’ve refused several enquiries about this from, among others, Femina and Alt for Damerne (Danish women’s magazines). From my point of view, politics is a job and I hold more respect for people who don’t display their private life in public. I’m sick and tired of people displaying their children, their private life and how they make their coffee. I would never use my gender unless it was in connection to a political debate concerning equality.”*

*“There are people who use their personality and private life a great deal. If they had not been elected in the Folketing they would probably have tried out for the reality show Big Brother instead.”*

More than every fourth woman (27.9 %) has on the contrary used their gender in the media. They have used it in order to get attention:

*“It was based on a wish to promote myself in other types of media which are usually out of my reach. This could, as an example, be an article in Femina about how you manage a career as a woman. That was my way of trying to say: “I’m here. I’m someone you should vote for” in order to reach those who read nothing but these kind of magazines, and never the newspapers.”*

*“Female candidates get more personal votes than the male candidates. Therefore, we have an advantage as a starting point. Of course I’ve made use of this.”*

*“I’ve used my gender when contacting alternative media like Femina and Alt for Damerne. I approach them well aware of their female audience.”*

Colour of party makes no difference in whether or not one has used one’s gender or not in order to get coverage. Age neither plays an important part. Those who disagree the most in the statement in question are politicians in the age of 30-39 and 50-59. Those who have used their gender in the media are, on the contrary, to be found almost evenly in all age groups – yet with a slight majority within the age of 30-49.

#### ***4.4.6. Does it make a difference whether you are young or old?***

Statement: *Age plays a part in the way one is referred to*

Agree 60.8 %

Partly disagree 21.6 %

Disagree 15.6 %

Don’t know 2.0 %

Total 100 %

A great amount of the politicians (60.8 %) believe age and publicity are connected - for both better and for worse. Young women may have the advantage that the media like to see young people. On the other hand, being young can also work against you in proportion to being taken seriously. Likewise, older women may have the advantage of being taken seriously but not considered as interesting as young women by the media.

*“Well, people probably think that if you’re both young and a woman, you’re probably not that bright.”*

*“No, but the way you conceive the publicity does make a difference. The young female politicians take it more personally when experiencing discriminating criticism. You shake it easier off when you’ve been here for a while.”*

*“For women, it makes a difference. It’s the same way, as with clothes – you don’t notice what men are wearing. Consequently, men’s age doesn’t matter. That’s the way it is – the media pay attention to young beautiful women.”*

*“Especially in these days – in these very years – anything under the age of 30 – or definitely 35 – is in focus.”*

*“For the young women, this is a plus value. And you can compensate for this by your intellect and by not looking dull just because you’re older. As a woman, your career becomes incredible dense because you have to make room for both education and children. And at the same time you have to arrive at the top five years earlier than men. It also makes a difference for older women who as an alternative have to pretend to be younger than they are.”*

*“Young women are considered more interesting than older women. However, it is not unambiguous because Marianne Jelved and Ritt Bjerregaard are both extremely hot.”*

*“Being a young woman means you’re less trustworthy. It is connected with the society’s view in general of older female politicians. If a man is a little overweight and his hair is turning grey but he wears a nice suit he is regarded as a noble politician of great importance. It works as a positive. A woman, on the other hand, who does not dye her hair and is a bit overweight is not regarded as positively by the public.”*

*“The young ones get easier off when giving statements which may seem unsubtle. It is accepted to have a bit simplistic or diverging opinions.”*

*“The young ones have to fight against their own age. And it has not changed. You have to be worthy of it. Today, age is more important than gender.”*

There is a difference between the politicians’ age and answers. Those who disagree the most in the statement in question are exclusively women in the age of 50 and above. On the other hand, there is no clear pattern to be seen among those who agree the most in the statement. Here, women in all age groups declare themselves in agreement with the statement. Concerning colour of party and the politicians’ amount of publicity, there is still no direct tendency to be found. Women from both the right, middle and left wing and women who get both much, midst and little publicity all believe that age in some ways matters concerning how one is referred to.

#### **4.4.7. Can men and women behave in the same manner?**

Statement: *A female politician’s behaviour plays a greater part concerning her authenticity than a male politician’s*

Agree 51.0 %  
Partly disagree 15.6 %  
Disagree 31.4 %  
Don’t know 2.0 %  
Total 100 %

The politicians strongly disagree whether or not men and women have the same freedom of action concerning behaviour. Half of the politicians agree with the statement above. Contrary, the other half have their reservations or do not believe that gender makes any difference concerning authenticity.

*“Men have greater latitude. Yes, I strongly believe they do. I don’t think a Jacob Buksti case where one drives 174 km per hour would not have resulted with a couple of days if it concerned a girl. Considering a field as politics of immigration, then I believe a man could get easier away with getting angry, putting his foot down and say: ‘We have to pull ourselves together, I don’t believe this!’. This is the case with Pia Kjærsgaard – it makes one see red and think: ‘Oh, no. Not her again!’ when looking at her. I don’t think it would be this way if she were a man. Men are allowed to be angry and aggressive.”*

*“A male politician can probably go out and get drunk whereas if a female politician did the same people would probably think, ‘shouldn’t she stay at home?’. Men getting blind drunk is probably more acceptable.”*

*“A woman not being serious is consequently not considered trustworthy. You have to be careful not to arrive in a too low cut shirt or too short skirt. It is also more noticed if a woman haven’t had her hair combed or if she swears.”*

*“It is important to find the right balance as a woman. If you smile too much, you flirt and try to attract. If you don’t smile enough, you’re just a sulky cow.”*

*“Try to imagine me in an assembly telling dirty jokes. I believe it would be very badly received. Some men have, in contrast, made this their trademark.”*

*“It’s just the same as it was in school. A woman’s reputation is more easily destroyed than a man’s. For example, demonstrating stamina, being tough and stable will be considered as a negative value for a woman, but a positive value for a man. It is expected of women to behave themselves more than men. You condemn women more for bad behaviour than you do with men.”*

#### **4.4.8. Is gender a barrier in the media?**

Statement: *I have never considered my gender as a barrier in the media and the public*

Agree 66.7 %

Partly disagree 13.7 %

Disagree 19.6 %

Total 100 %

Nearly 7 out of 10 (66.7 %) female politicians disagree with the statement above. Every fifth (19.6 %), on the other hand, agree that their gender has been a barrier.

#### **4.5. Part I: Conclusion**

*The party*

A great amount of the female politicians across the parties, age groups and amount of experience in the Folketing believe that influence, praise and criticism are reasonably

equal apportioned among the genders. A group consisting of one third of the politicians do not, however, believe the genders are equal in their party. They point out that there exists a way of life making it easier for men to rise within the system and thereby gain influence. It is furthermore pointed out that men and women are praised as well as criticised on different grounds.

The female politicians' opinions differ, however, regarding who are distributed the posts in the party. Across parties, age groups and number of years in the Folketing, nearly half of the politicians believe that the gender determines who are designed which posts. Some believe that gender plays a certain part due to the awareness of some posts being typical male while other are female. They believe this is taken into account in order to reassure that there are not only women in The Social Services Committee and men in The Transport Committee. Others believe that gender comes into play when men are distributed the most important posts.

### *The Folketing*

Men have the upper hand in the Folketing and the power configuration is based on male values. This was the opinion of two out of three female politicians disregarding colour of party, age and number of years in the Folketing.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the female politicians believe, however, that the power lies within the formal structures. The remaining one third believe that the power also lies within the informal networks where male politicians make decisions and discuss important matters with no female participants. More than half of the politicians believe that men talk more than women. It is, however, by many pointed out that this is due to the fact that there are more men than women in the Folketing.

It is, furthermore, believed by nearly half of the politicians that men and women are addressed in different manners in the Folketing. Many, disregarding age, experience and party, have experienced middle-aged male politicians addressing young female politicians in a patronizing manner. But the politicians also point out that the communication between men and women depends on which committees you are in.

### *The media and the public*

The majority of the female politicians do not believe they are treated the same way by the media as their male colleagues. Although half of them believe that men and women talk for an equal amount of time in the media, they also believe it is done on different grounds. Half of the politicians believe that the way a female politician behaves plays a greater part concerning her trustworthiness than it does for men. Three out of four believe that female politicians, as opposed to men, have to make more of an effort in order to be acknowledged for their political work in the media. A great amount of the politicians point out that the media seek different things when dealing with male and female politicians. They are more evaluative and interested in appearance and private life when describing female politicians. Men are simultaneously 'just' politicians. In this relation, the journalist's gender can make a difference. Nearly one half believes there is a positive difference to be found between male and female journalists.

When meeting the press, it is a general belief that age is just as important as gender. Young women may have an advantage because the media like seeing young blood. On the other hand, youth can also be in the negative if one wants to be taken

seriously. Older women can, in the same way, have the advantage that their importance is not questioned. They can, however, experience a lack of interest from the media.

## **5. Part 2: From the media's point of view**

### **5.1. Introduction.**

How do the Danish reporters present the female politicians – and on what grounds? These are the basic questions that constitute this part of the survey dealing with women in politics and the media. Politics and political influence concern many other things besides responses, parties and status. It concerns, to the same extent, how you present yourself as a politician to the public. Whether or not you appear as sympathetic, trustworthy and thereby worth trusting and voting for. Furthermore, whether or not you seem just as sympathetic as the competing or opponent politicians. The political search for the voters' sympathy is, indeed, concentrated on the media. Furthermore, gaining access to the media - and have equal possibilities to be presented as sympathetic – function today as an integrated part of the political parties' strategies for success. This was most recently emphasized by Dansk Folkeparti's demand that DR should also invite members of their party to the studio in the best broadcasting time.

This part of the survey will focus on the female politicians and the media. When reporters and the politicians deal with trustworthiness and present the politician to the voters, do gender make a difference? When presenting the politician, who control the process? Furthermore, are men and women depicted – both by the media and themselves – on the same grounds?

### **5.2. Animated images**

The communication between citizens and politicians take indeed place in the media. This is where the politician presents his messages. This is where the politician becomes visible. This is where the politician can win votes. What does it take then in order to gain success through the media? What does the trick within the media? What strategies can a politician use in order to draw attention? In other words: How do you make sure you stand out in a way which makes both the reporters and the voters look in the right direction?

Two professional media consultants present their opinions based on their respectively backgrounds, expertise and approach to the subject in question.

Henrik Qvortrup, the editor-in-chief on the weekly magazine *Se & Hør*, explains the image's significance in Danish politics of today and why he believes female politicians should be aware of their gender. Sascha Amarasinha, manager of communication in the media conglomerate Egmont, explains why presenting oneself and story telling are good strategies concerning strong communication.

#### ***5.2.1 Politics are characters. What difference does image do in politics today?***

Henrik Qvortrup:

“Politics are partly characters. The substantial differences between one party and another are actually blurred today. Consequently, politics become more and more a question of which politicians hold the very qualifications, which we consider make them able to lead the country. Due to this, the way you present yourself as a person makes a great difference. The public not only relates to the politician’s opinions, but also what sort of person the politician is. The politicians are well aware of this. The politicians are very conscious of revealing their other qualities besides from being a politician, because this is important to a great part of the voters. You have to consider that the voters are, in general, not much political aware. The general voter does not read political analyses etc. they relate to who they like and who they trust. That’s why your personality and the way you present yourself matter a great deal.”

### **5.2.2. “Woman with capital W”. About what’s effective within the press**

Women who wishes to insinuate themselves into the media and be successful as politicians have to be women with capital W. This is editor-in-chief Henrik Qvortrup’s opinion. If he himself had to be media consultant for a female politician who wanted to do well, he would advise her to take advantage of her gender.

“Take advantage of being a woman. Try to observe the combination of on one hand being a person of influence just like a man – as men always have been – and at the same time insist that this doesn’t change your femininity. Lene Espersen is actually a good example. She actually plays two parts, which she combines well. The one part is extremely feminine while the other is a person of great power – almost as we all expect a man to be. I guess it is no coincidence that her preferred work clothes is a suit where she knots the tie the way a man would. I believe it fascinates people that a woman is both a woman with capital W and at the same time has the upper hand in a way we’re only used to see with men. If you’re able to combine those two things and they buy it, then you’ve come a long way.”

- *Why is it important to be a woman with capital W?*

“I believe it frightens men when women almost appear as masculine lesbians. It’s as if maintaining your femininity will conciliate people’s attitude towards your power. I believe power combined with femininity is easier accepted.”

- *Can something corresponding be said about men – what they have to do in order to make it easier to stomach their power?*

“The present Prime Minister has been criticized for not combining the person with power with a certain humanity and softness. I guess this is the reason many women dislike him...(..).Most people understand that a leading politician needs to be tough. However, they also like to see this combined with a little bit of softness and not being so hard-nosed – to show a bit of humanity.”

### 5.3. “The thin woman’s cheeks blushed” – do the reporters describe men and women in politics in the same way?

*She usually looks like a million dollars. When Gitte Seeberg glides through the corridors of Christiansborg in her light yellow coat and short skirt, high heels and the blonde ponytail, she lights up the room. This afternoon in the garden in Gl. Holte, however, the style is quite different. The high heels are exchanged for a pair of blue plastic thong sandals and the skirt and coat with shorts and a t-shirt.*

This is the introduction to an article portraying the conservative politician Gitte Seeberg in *Aktuelt* the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1999. But this might as well have been an introduction to a portrait of any other female politician – in any other newspaper. If one looks through portraits or interviews with female politicians in the Danish daily papers from the last couple of years, it quickly proves that descriptions of female politicians’ appearances – i.e. clothes, gaze, hair etc - is used on a large scale in articles with the purpose of telling the public something about the politician’s professional life. From the writing reporter’s point of view, a detailed description of the female politician’s clothes, gaze or gestures could help identifying and visualizing the politician before the reader. From the politician’s point of view, this can, on the other hand, seem very irritating:

“...It makes me wonder, when I’m giving a 45-minutes-long interview to a female reporter from one of the major provincial papers, that the article only deals with the way ‘I’ve been sitting and gathering my hair in the neck in a girlish manner,’ says Mimi Jakobsen (CD) in an article in *Ekstra Bladet* the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1999.

The question is whether or not male and female politicians are subject to the same journalistic presentation principles? Is a male politician’s appearance also used as a symbolic kick-starter when described by the press?

#### 5.3.1 *Commitment versus pearl earrings*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2000 there was one event that eclipsed the agenda within the Danish press.

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the Prime Minister of that time, whose SR-government had been in power for eight years and suffered by a certain metal fatigue, decided to begin a cabinet reshuffle. The Prime Minister gathered five brand new ministers to sit on the posts in his new government. They consisted of two women and three men.

Seen from a gender related perspective, this cabinet reshuffle is very interesting. This is because some of the Danish daily papers’ coverage of the new ministers reveal how differently the reporters, in this situation, chose to describe male and female politicians. Particularly *Dagbladets Politiken*’s coverage of the events reveals striking differences. The paper’s reporters were present when the predecessors delegated the five new ministers their ministry. Each of the five delegations were portrayed by the paper’s reporters and each of the five portraits contain the reporters’ observing description of each new minister:

*“When looking at the man from middle Jutland, Højlands Forsamlingshus comes into my mind. He speaks loud and clear with slight Jutlandic accent. He is, furthermore, strongly involved with the great questions and tendencies concerning politics in society.”*

(Johannes Lebech (R), the new Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs)

*“There is a slight shudder among the crowd as Lotte Bundsgaard enters the hall. She is dressed in a long black dress and a black jacket. Around her neck is a bright scarf in red, yellow and green colours, which brings out her sparkling blue eyes.”*

(Lotte Bundsgaard (S), the new Minister of Housing and Building and Minister for Equal Rights)

*“With his slight indefinable Jylandic accent – he’s from Mors – and a physical social convention using direct eye contact to those he address, he immediately makes a good impression. His sense of humour is also noticeable.”*

(Arne Rolighed (S), the new Minister for Health)

*“The cheeks blush on the thin gawky woman. By appearance, she seems younger than the age of 37 that it says on her birth certificate. Her work clothes on her first day as Minister consist are a Prince of Wales check patterned coat and skirt, a loose light blue shirt and black, simple and moderate high-heeled shoes. Under her loose hanging hair, a couple of pearl earrings dangle.”*

(Anita Bay Bundegaard (R), the new Minister for Development Cooperation)

*“Despite his slightly cautious appearance, Frode Sørensen will, however, not exclude that his portrait eventually will occur within Venstre’s scare campaigns.”*

(Frode Sørensen (S), the new Minister for Taxation)

Politiken’s descriptions of the five ministers are striking. Even though all five ministers are new and inexperienced, there still is a fundamental difference to be found in the way men and women are observed and described. The two women are, roughly speaking, described by their “packaging” – clothes, colours, earrings, shoes, eye colour and hair. The three men are, on the other hand, described by their contents – commitment, humour and political projects.

### **5.3.2. Him: a serious tactician. Her: a hysterical case**

Two publicized birthdays of respectively one male and one female politician from the same party confirm the differences even more. Both politicians – Jeppe Kofod and Pernille Blach Hansen – are Social Democrats. They’re both 30, entered the Folketing in 1998, and they are both in posts of great importance in their party. He is spokesman of foreign politics. She is vice-president in her party.

Their coverage – Politiken the 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2004 - differs widely, however. Both portraits begin with a short presentation of the politician:

*This is one of the Social Demokrati’s few bright, young hopes that pass a milestone – today it is Jeppe Kofod’s 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. He has made a brilliant career since he arrived in the Folketing in 1998.*

*Married with two kids and member of the Folketing for six years. Pernille Blach Hansen (S) acts just as fast as she talks. And things have happened rather quickly since she, to everyone’s surprise, gained more votes than the then Minister for Transport, Bjørn Westh (S), at the general election in 1998.*

Politiken hereafter explains how they made it so far in their careers:

*He gained the strong position in the party as a sort of compromising candidate among the wings, when the posts had to be distributed after Nyrup’s passing. Because Jeppe Kofod has managed to wriggle out of the weary power struggles within the party...(..).He has, at the same time, also had the opportunity to demonstrate himself as spokesman on one of the fields, where The Social Democracy’s politics indeed differs from the government’s politics.*

*She managed to overhaul Bjørn Westh – even though she ran for election in her hometown Kjellerup by Viborg...(..) This was, among other factors, possible because her name had, in these parts, a familiar ring to it. Her father, Bent Hansen, is the county mayor in Viborg. He is known as a follower of Svend Auken. The daughter has followed in her father’s footsteps. This piece of finesse – and of course her*

*political skills - has participated in ensuring her a leading position within the party...(..) In order to ensure the balance between Nyrup and Auken, Pernille Blach Hansen was instead given the post as political spokeswoman.*

Politiken then outlines the political flairs:

*It is thus an earnest Jeppe Kofod who from time to time appears on TV on a daily basis with his knotted tie demanding the basis for the war in Iraq to be examined, account in connection to the Danish captive in Guantánamo and who rejects the idea of an American missile shield on the Thule base.*

*She is indeed quick at repartee and has due to this been brilliant in the hall of the parliament. During debates, her tone of voice is known as always being exceedingly harsh when addressing the government – disregarding the importance of the matter. The importance of the matter – and this is her weakness – fades due to her permanent exasperation. The letters are so to speak never small.*

Despite the fact that both politicians have quickly made it to the top in the Social Democracy and are in leading posts, Jeppe Kofod is already from the very first line presented as one of the *few bright, young hopes* and *spokesman of foreign affairs*. Whereas, Pernille Blach Hansen, who is the vice-president of her party, is presented with the words *Married with two kids and member of the Folketing*. Pernille Blach's status as vice-president in her party is not mentioned until halfway through the article.

Regarding how the two politicians made it to the Folketing and their status in the party, Dagbladet Politiken describes them in complete different ways. They write about Jeppe Kofod that he is *a popular man on his home island, Bornholm* and at the election 2001 therefore became *close to the country's greatest vote catcher*. Pernille Blach Hansen was also a vote catcher among her own small constituency. According to Dagbladet Politiken, this was, however, not that much due to her skills but more due to the fact that *her name had, in these parts, a familiar ring to it. Her father, Bent Hansen, is the county mayor in Viborg.*

The two politicians' status within the party is also described in different ways. Jeppe Kofod's success is described as a result of ingenious tactics regarding the party and his personal competence as a spokesman. Pernille Blach Hansen's success is in the meantime mainly described as a result of her father's connections with Svend Auken and that the latter gave her a leading post in order to secure an internal balance of power. It is furthermore also mentioned that Pernille Blach Hansen has *rather remarkably* managed to maintain her current post.

Finally, the two young politicians' professional appearance and weigh are different. While Jeppe Kofod *seriously* demands accounts and inspections, Pernille Blach Hansen is pert, has a harsh tone of voice and suffers from – if not hysteria – then from *permanent exasperation* and that is disregarding the importance of the matter.

#### **5.4. The dark sister –what tales of female politicians are there in the media?**

Everyone has a story. This was the title of a number of features on DR concerning so-called ordinary people in the summer 2002. You could also sharpen the statement and say: Everyone *is* a story. This was, in any case, one of the ideas behind the strategies

for communication, which have been very popular for the last couple of years in the trade: Storytelling – i.e. the ability to tell stories about people, visions, plans etc. as a way of mediating. The question is whether storytelling also can be used as a tool of understanding when dealing with the portrayal of female politicians in the Danish media.

Sascha Amarasinha, manager of communication in the media conglomerate Egmont, believes so. She believes, that when looking further into the portrayals of female politicians you will find that reporters use descriptions and elements leading back to ancient tales.

“If you start picking some of the tales of female politicians to pieces, you will find some concrete elements comparable to some of the old classic fairytales,” says Sascha Amarasinha.

#### ***5.4.1. To be animated. About storytelling as a strategy for communication***

Sascha Amarasinha:

“Storytelling is about animating things. It’s about changing some of the strategically and often very complicated measures, that you wish to initiate, into something concrete and figurative. In this way, you get into touch with the other side of the brain. This is the side that picks up stories and impressions – all that is non-factual – and makes one able to pass the story on.”

“In organizing communication you time after time experience to present large slides showing points, figures, where to go and how to get there where people actually can’t remember a thing afterwards. But if you tell a story comparing the business’ strategies with a fairytale, sports or something the manager himself has experienced, you can suddenly describe in a much better way. It’s easier to contain the subject-matter and it’s easier to mediate it.”

“Now, people are becoming more conscious of the importance of storytelling. And now we’re approaching what it’s also really about: Presenting yourself. Presenting yourself takes some specific connections, elements or characteristic. These are used in order to make it to the scene or in the crowd.”

#### ***5.4.2. The 100 hawthorn hedges***

According to Sascha Amarasinha, many of the stories about women in Danish politics are about women who, just like those in the classic fairytales, do things “in spite of” or “she is capable of doing both” or “they often have to make sacrifices to reach their goals...”. Women who have to jump 100 hawthorn hedges in order to reach their goals.

This story exists not only in politics. It exists whenever women are powerful. As a former media consultant, Sascha Amarasinha has experienced that, in order to reach the media with a story of female executives, it is best to use the “in spite of” angle: Here we have a female figurehead. How does she manage both a career *and* children?

#### ***Cinderella***

Other characters used in stories about female politicians are seen in various versions. The Cinderella character is an example. Marianne Karlslose, the chairman of

Kristendemokraterne, is a great example of this; the development from a boring, grey Cinderella to a princess.

“Pia Christmas Møller also did it at a time when the Conservatives needed to be in the spotlight again. But in comparison with Kristendemokraterne, it was not likely a coincidence that Marianne Karlmoses transformation took place almost simultaneously with the party’s change of name from Kristelig Folkeparti to Kristendemokraterne. It concerns rebirth or recreation. It has to do with redefining oneself, charm and magic: We’ve waited so long – and here we are now. It is at the same time also a loss of innocence. I.e. a party, which has always appreciated and focused on the values and not the form, suddenly comes to heel and says: Okay, in the world of today, it matters how one appears on the screen – it is those six seconds on TV that counts.”

She believes that The Little Mermaid also applies to Marianne Karlmoses.

“The Little Mermaid who wants something so desperately – in this case it is a political career – but has to sacrifice a piece of herself in order to get it.”

#### *The crown princess*

Both the media and most political parties have tried really hard for the last couple of years to find suitable young women within each party, who immediately would be named crown princesses by the media. There have been several crown princesses at stake within parties as Socialdemokratiet and Det Radikale Venstre. And Sascha Amarasinha finds the entire crown princess tale very significant.

“I believe many of them are extremely calculated. Where is that woman representing half of the population, the contemporary, equality etc. etc.? If there is one woman who can do all this, she will be put in the front line. However, many of the crown princesses that stay there will vanish from the picture again. They don’t get real power. Will they ever be queens? That is yet to be seen. Furthermore, the crown princesses often have an older man from their party by their side: “She is very proficient, but she had also help from my side”. What is quite interesting in this connection is that, at some point, you have to decide, whether or not you are aware of it, if you want to be a part of it or not. You have to decide whether or not you want to play a particular part in the story. If you decide to do so, it will work for your advantage, but not without paying the price, however.”

#### **5.4.3. Images of women**

It is not only old tales and fairytales that are rediscovered in the way the media portrays female politicians. There are also “images” in circulation. These certain images could be called archetypical or clichéd images of women:

##### *The mother*

*She has occasionally been obliged to leave a meeting with the group or a committee early because she had to be at her office at Christiansborg so Cecilie could eat on time. But Eva Kjer Hansen insists: The “girl” has to be nursed – and she wants to work.*

- Portrait of Eva Kjer Hansen in Flensborg Avis the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1997

##### *The Blonde*

*When vice-president of the Socialdemokrati, the blonde and blue-eyed Bundsgaard, talks about politics, she usually does this with bold strokes of the brush.*

- Portrait of Lotte Bundsgaard in Fyens Stifttidende the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2003

*She arrived in the Folketing in 1994, where she formed a blonde and ambitious trio with Lene Espersen and Gitte Seberg.*

- Portrait of Henriette Kjær in *Fyens Stifttidende* the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2004

*The question, which concerns us the most, is whether or not there was anything besides from a complete blankness behind the blonde locks and cerulean eyes. Or did the 50-years-old woman consciously take advantage of her all-year valid summery innocence in order to sneak in less innocent proposals in the Folketing? In other words: Is Inge Dahl-Sørensen stupid or is she out for what she can get?*

*The answer is here now: She is both. But she poses poorly in both roles. When she acts like a fool, she is too calculating. When she is calculating, she is conspicuously stupid.*

- The leading article in *Ekstra Bladet* the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1997

### *The Teacher*

*She is dry as dust in her form of words. She knows the balance of payments, the cultural life, the environmental policies and the DAU-balance inside-out. She is the strict teacher that the flower children's children missed in school. But the world is a strange place; now they can vote for her. There is no reason to believe that Marianne Jelved is any smarter than the other leading politicians, but one gets the feeling that she is, when watching her on TV. Because a woman, who can reason in such an apparent dispassionately manner, has to be motivated by other things – and it is obvious to believe that this is her intellect.”*

- Portrait of Marianne Jelved in *Berlingske Tidende* the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2003.

### *The Iron Lady*

*The editor of the back page remembers Maggie Thatcher in particular. She is the British Iron Lady who went to war against Argentine with a handbag. Almost like our very own Marianne Jelved who directs EU's ring wearing a handbag.*

- *Flensborg Avis* the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2000.

### *The witch*

*“The dark sister”*

- The headline of a portrait of Ulla Dahlerup, *Jyllands-Posten* the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2003

*Ritt Bjerregaard rides on her broomstick to the Brocken, er...Brussels.*

- *Ritzaus Bureau* the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1994

*First we need to get the summer vacation over with. No, first of all we have Midsummer Eve where the witches are sent away to the Brocken. Pia Kjærsgaard has found an association that dares to listen to her speech by the fire. She – and her big mouth! She should probably keep a good distance to the fire...*

- *De Bergske Blade* the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2001

*Denmark's leading home help came under shot and shell last night. She presented, among other things, an election video, which should be without pledges and promises...(..). It is actually pretty boring, except from the part where they show a Midsummer Eve bonfire. This put the associations into action. I think it shows great courage displaying a Midsummer Eve bonfire in a video from Pia Kjærsgaard's party.*

- *Ekstra Bladet* the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2001

### *The Queen of Ice*

*“She has set men's eyes on fire with her exotic appearance. She is a dark-eyed beauty from Ølgod heading straight for the political stars...(..). But it should not be taken for granted that it will be less cold on the top with the present Minister for Education in the lead. In spite of her warm charisma, Margrethe Vestager will continue a tradition of grumbling radical first ladies. This tradition started with Lone Dybkjær's cold kindness and so far reached its climax with Marianne Jelved's acid sulkiness every time things don't go her way. Margrethe Vestager furthermore dislikes being interrupted in her always well-modulated speeches. Then her low Marlene Dietrich-voice changes into a crack of a whip.”*

- Portrait of the then Minister for Education Margrethe Vestager, B.T. the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2001

*When Marianne Jelved tightens her lips and lets the cold snow descend on the table of the meeting like a Mother Winter, everyone knows what is going on: She is very angry. She has said yes – or no. And she means it.*

- B.T. the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1996

#### *The chit*

*“The Social Demokrati’s very young vice-president is at the head of a committee, which, after two years of pondering, has had an adolescent idea: the electoral age should be lowered from 18 to 16...(..) Lotte Bundgaard herself is an example of the fact that youth and lack of experience not always improve upon the power to make decisions. At 27 she became Minister and, at that time, lectured her surroundings in a manner mostly associated with precocious children”*

- B.T. the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2003

*“Mette Frederiksen has sharp opinions on a great many things. They probably need to be polished a bit”*

- The leading article in Politiken the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2004

*“She may be a bit of a youthful goody-goody in a know-all leftist manner. She may skate on thin ice, when she, during the party’s presentation of equality, compares the conditions for American women with the conditions for Saudi Arabian women. And she thinks it is the 1<sup>st</sup> of May every time she opens up her mouth. But you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs..(..).*

- Portrait of Mette Frederiksen (S) in Berlingske Tidende, the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2004

#### *The seductress*

*“She is a sweet girl, fond of the nature like Per Stig. She has horses at her country house, makes her own clothes and has endearing, youthful manners – especially towards men and women older than her...(..). Outside of Christiansborg, Pernille Sams courts many of the great executives. She has lunch, invites them over for exclusive dinners and she demonstrates herself as their advocate for the legislative work...(..) Pernille Sams became well known when she appeared in the Folketing in 1987 after an electoral campaign of an American character. It was a campaign of dimensions never seen before or since.”*

- Portrait of Pernille Sams (K) in Ekstra Bladet the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1997

#### *The old maid*

*“Quite true! She is considered being both a fine leader with things in order and a huge work capacity. But whether or not she can get any backing is the general concern. A bit spiteful, she has been called ‘Mrs Pigalopp’ after a funny character in a children’s book. Some believe that Pia Gjellerup is imbued with sense not far from being colourless and boring. This also concerns her sense of clothes, which has been called distinctly British. Especially pointed out is her knickers always leaving a little intriguing bare piece of white skin by each knee.”*

- Portrait of Pia Gjellerup in Politiken the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1999.

### **5.4.5. Female leading politicians about their ‘own’ images**

Every time the media publish images, descriptions and stories about female politicians, there is quite naturally one person in particular paying attention: the female politician herself. What is her opinion of the way she is portrayed? Does she recognise herself? Or are they far from her self-perception? And how does it really feel to be referred to

Four female leading politicians who, in their own way, have all experienced the media to create images of them have been interviewed about their thoughts concerning “their” images. Some feel anger towards the media while others are satisfied with the way they are referred to.

Lene Espersen (K): about being referred to as one of the three little ducklings, then ‘the talking cleavage’ and finally ‘mother’.

Pia Gjellerup (S): about being matter-of-fact – and what she felt being asked personal questions concerning her private life.

Marianne Jelved (R): about being ‘Denmark’s Iron Lady’.

Pia Kjærsgaard (DF): about being demonised.

### ***Lene Espersen (K):***

#### April, May and June

“When I was elected in the Folketing in 1994 with Henriette Kjær and Gitte Seeberg, I believe many found it amusing that three young women entered the parliamentary party. This is because many voters considered the Konservative Folkeparti as a party with elder men in suits – an industrial party. Young men also entered the party – there suddenly was a great amount of young people in the party – but that was not in the focus. Consequently, there were all these articles in the newspapers giving us pet names because obviously we couldn’t just be called Henriette, Gitte and Lene. We had to be called April, May and June. And that’s where it sort of started – us being in focus like that. I also remember that, during the debates on the opening address and the concluding debates, the television news focused on us being placed on the platform in order to pitching into the government of that time and they thought that was very sharp – that the young ones did it.”

*Did you consider the focus as positive?*

“There are two sides to the matter. It is both positive and negative. When you’re young and completely unknown, it is of course always positive to be in the focus because then you’ll after all be a bit more well-known. The negative part consists in people having a tendency towards lumping us together – “She is one of those three” without really knowing exactly what one represents. I have experienced countless occasions where people couldn’t tell us apart – even though I don’t really think we actually look that much alike. I have experienced a couple of times that they thought I was the one on TV when it really was Gitte. In this way, there are both advantages and disadvantages. The worst thing is that there may be a tendency towards saying that she was only elected because she’s young and a woman. I believe that’s unfair. First of all concerning the voters, but also because I believe it to be very patronising considering that one works just as hard for the political career as anyone else.”

#### The talking cleavage

*“Are you going to touch her tits then?” asked the Mrs. as the last thong before I left home on that rainy Monday morning. “Never,” I answered a little too fast. “Never ever. This is modern, strictly professional journalism at top level.” Even though the last bit may have seemed a little exaggerated, it really wasn’t just blather when we finally reached Lene Espersen’s office. Of course it wasn’t. It’s just*

*sort of become the conservative politician's entrance to the general public. Lene Espersen has become rather identical with her boobs."*

- Portrait of Lene Espersen in Berlingske Tidende the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2001

"Well, I've had pet names like "the talking cleavage" etc..(..)..It is downright male chauvinistic to focus that much on one's outfits. I would be able to understand that it would be crossing the line to walk around in a bikini. But people pay so much attention to one's outfits instead of what you're saying and, in my opinion, it is first of all some of the male reporters that cross the line. The quote you've got from Berlingske Tidende is a very good example of this. I was extremely offended by this. I was really angry. And he knows that. And he couldn't even see that I should be upset about it. He almost believed – I think – that this was some sort of praise."

- *You told him this?*

"Yes. But there are apparently some who believe that the most important thing in the entire world is to feel attractive. And he sort of never understood that the most important thing for me is to be trustworthy in my politics. So I was very upset because he wrote the article in that manner...(..).. I've actually just gotten used to it – and you have to do that professionally. I've gotten used to the fact that some people behave like this."

### Mother

- *But you've also moved further since then – one definitely don't hear much about the talking cleavage in the media any more. You are sort of referred to in a different manner now you've had a child. You have, as an example, been called "Mother of Justice"... How have you experienced the transformation of now being referred to as mother, a round woman...etc?*

"It's not something I've thought about or have been conscious of. I believe the media find it all pretty grey and boring. Therefore, if someone does something just a bit differently, it consequently doesn't take much for the media to find it amusing to follow and describe. Because we were the party in power and Ulla Tørnæs and I were both in an advanced stage of pregnancy it was therefore obvious that we would be in focus because of our relatively short maternity leave and our election manifesto consisted of maternity leave for one year. In this case I decided with Morten (Lene Espersen's media consultant) to say, for the first time rather consciously, that this had to succeed. Being minister is a dream of mine and so is being a mother. Therefore, I have to try and see if I can handle both. I allowed the media to have an insight in how we managed things and how it was organised...(..)..But I primarily want to be known for my politics and that's why I simply say no to all the other things. As far as I'm concerned, it was the case that people might not think I was serious concerning politics. I therefore had to reduce participating in many things."

***Pia Gjellerup (S):***

Factual – but boring

*- Looking back at your career – how will you describe the way you’ve been spoken of in the media?*

Generally speaking, the media has mostly been preoccupied with the subject matter. This is because I’ve insisted that that’s what I’m here for – not to entertain, perform or something like that. But then you have to live with being regarded as boring. I don’t really mind, people are just so surprised but that’s of course a good thing. But boring and in some way I guess it also translates whether you stake at politics or if you manage things – artisan or creator. And it is mistakable to believe that seeing a person on TV for a minute and a half, or even less, will give you a clear impression of what this person really is like. I for one am indeed better served with people listening to what I’ve got to say. That’s basically what I’m there for.

*How does you being considered boring manifest itself?*

It is just written once in a while. Then I experience people being surprised. That’s a nice thing to say.

*You’ve simply met people saying they’ve always thought you were boring?*

No, they didn’t say it as directly as that. It was said in a nicer way. And I really feel rather comfortable with that. I believe men also experience this to some extent. I don’t believe there’s any difference in this case. Apart from the fact that women are in the minority, which means they are more in the spotlight.

### Single and childless

*“Why do you still live at home with your mother and sister instead of getting married and start a family?”*

- Question for Pia Gjellerup in an interview in Ekstra Bladet the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2002

*What do you think of being asked questions like that?*

“Well, I’m not the type who’s usually available for a great amount of private interviews. That’s why I’ve got a more general attitude towards it: I think it’s good to know something about the values I represent, my political goals and the way I work in order to reach my goals. But how I spend my leisure, which people I spend it with and my networks etc has, for me, always been an absolute matter of secondary importance. Not that I have any secrets that the public would find interesting. I am probably just a bit shyer really, when it comes to answering these kinds of questions than I am in general, because then it’s a question of...I mean, this is something one is asked quite often so you have some kind of bromide to use, right? And that’s all it is, because no one can give a meaningful response to the question of why they got married. Why do you have children? Well, there are a number of technical explanations to that!...there is just this bromide; a response from all women who don’t have children. Somehow, it’s just something you have to do. It’s kind of a ritual – the same way as there’s always pictures in a portrait.”

*But what do you feel about this focus on the traditional image of a woman: to be married and children – and then the question: why do you diverge?*

“Now – what do one feel when someone thinks of this as a divergence...well, I know all about it. That’s why it doesn’t surprise me that much. You have to remember that we were also brought up this way. Once again: it’s because you diverge from a pattern, which, by the way, is out of date. I actually don’t diverge from a pattern; I’m an example of a much familiar pattern. We just don’t want to acknowledge it. But it is considered a divergence and it is pointed out to you: “Now, what is this?” – but you yourself also entertain the idea that it is bit different. That is because you have this old-fashioned image of a home with children and a dog etc. So I’m not surprised when I’m asked that question. I’m just a rather conscious type so I’m more prepared for it. Therefore, I’ve also noticed that it’s different for men. But I don’t believe many readers are astonished at what it says about women – and not about men. Just like most people asked this question do not wonder why they are asked – and men don’t wonder why they’re NOT asked..(..).. I’ve tried to prepare friends and acquaintances, whose state of things, e.g. if they’re in the spotlight making them interesting to the public, for being asked these questions. I’ve just witnessed a woman as an example of this. It was a portrait of woman saying twice that she was single with no children. When the young women of today don’t really notice it, it’s actually because they follow the same pattern as I do. There really are a larger number of single women today. And the higher-ranked the education is, the more single women. I believe I’ve heard that there are three times as many single women in the 30s today than there was 30 years ago. That’s a rather drastic alteration. And these will most likely primarily be those women with university training. I know just about more single women of the academic circle in their 30s or mid 40s than I know women who are family mothers, i.e. they are married and have children.”

***Marianne Jelved (R):***

*- How have you experienced the media’s matter of speaking of you? – Regarding the handbag, sort of like a Thatcher-Iron-Lady, or the fact that you’ve been called cold, stiff etc.?*

“I sort of played my part in this image because I liked this one more than the image of the principal with the pointed finger, the pointer etc. I prefer the handbag. It came forward with a twinkle in the eye. It was just something to make fun of. And at the same time, it takes part in saying that you cannot make a fool out of me. There is a certain trustworthiness and stability in this image. It is, after all, an image I’ve made an effort with because I’ve had to look after the crown. During my job as Minister of Economic Affairs, in a time of many international changes affecting our economy and economic politics, it has been important for me to appear as a person capable to be sent out internationally and make the Danish economic policies seem trustworthy. That’s one side of the story. The other is that Det Radikale Venstre enters a government led by the Social Demokrati for more than ten years. The rupture between the two parties was based on economic policies. And now we’re back, we have responsibilities and we have to turn our backs to the Social Demokrati’s economic policies. This, among other things, demands that my base of support and our voters feel a sense of security. Consequently, our image has to be very evident on the economic field because we ourselves have invested in this instead of being Education secretaries as an example. That’s why I don’t regard the image of the handbag as a negative. It supports certain things – things that I want it to support.”

*Regarding someone like Lene Espersen, who has been spoken of as the talking cleavage etc. – what factors gave her this image and you another?*

“One month after my arrival in the Folketing, there was a huge case in Køge concerning poisonous substance and there was a huge pressure on me. I arrived in the Folketing on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September and this happened in October. I hadn’t even been on the platform in the Folketing yet. I could have said that it should be forbidden but I just thought it was wrong. At this point, I decided that, in order to give myself 24 hours a day, I had to be able to answer for what I did. Otherwise, it would be impossible. This has been my rule-of-thumb: I have to be able to vouch for what I do in here. It has to make sense. If not, I won’t waste my time on it. This decision has also had its consequences. It’s what mattered to me; it’s what’s important to me. Now, I’m 60 years old, but the young women entering the Folketing – for example Margrethe Vestager, Elsebeth Gerner and Lene Espersen – their world is completely different from mine. They approach things in a different manner. They may have a different conception of the importance of the line of separation between the person in private and the person in politics. I don’t know. It’s hard for me to tell. But they do indeed present themselves in a different manner than I in the women’s magazines. An example could be that they use themselves in a different way. Once again, you cannot say they’re all the same, but they do use themselves in a different way.”

*- In a way you would never have used yourself?*

“Yes. But don’t mistake me: I believe, concerning the private life, I may be a bit more modest and aloof than others. I don’t know if this is due to my age. But I cannot reject that the younger women more naturally take advantage of their gender than I do, because I’ve never really thought about it. I’ve never taken advantage of my gender. In elementary school, where I was busy being, among other things, the president of the teachers’ council etc., there isn’t this struggle between the genders as there is other places. “

*As for you and your trustworthiness as a minister, has it been important to you to appear as sharp, intelligent and in control of things?*

“Not to be sharp and intelligent. But people had to be able to count on what I said.”

*In this case, did gender make a difference?*

“I don’t believe it did.”

***Pia Kjærsgaard (DF):***

“Well, I have been presented in many strange sort of ways...I doubt any are as often misjudged as politicians are. It is because some – primarily the media – do not agree that I use my power the right way. But here I have to say that I really don’t care about the media’s opinion. I represent the voters and I’m fine with that. I’ve become more

thick-skinned throughout the years. This I have to say regarding to how I felt when I first started.”

*How did you feel then?*

“Well...oh, God, if someone, during my time as candidate for Parliament, had written just one negative word about me in a reader’s letter, it would have been in the centre of my attention. Regarding the things been said about me ever since, I can’t help but smile. But you get used to it and by the end of the day you chose it yourself. You shouldn’t feel sorry for any of us. Quite the contrary – we are where we want to be and we have the status we want to have. That’s the basics.”

*- At the very beginning - where you could be completely rattled if someone wrote something negatively about you – do you remember a concrete example or a situation?*

“I don’t remember who wrote it, but I distinctly remember – during the third election campaign in the Folketing where I was elected – how much I really wanted to be elected and how much I did in order to be elected. Someone had written something negative about me in Berlingske Tidende – and I was completely convinced that I would not be elected because of this. It really wrecked my night’s sleep at that time. I had worked so hard and now this idiot had destroyed it all by writing something. At that time, I didn’t know the conditions or the balance at all. It really didn’t matter but I couldn’t help thinking about it. And I’ve actually thought about since that day. I can’t believe I reacted that way! But this is naturally because I wasn’t at all used to being in the media. And when I think about what’s happened to me since – I’ve been here for nearly 20 years...if I only knew then what I know now...if I’d been able to predict everything that would happen I’m not sure I would have reacted that way. But I’ve never looked back with regret. But it would probably have seemed quite immense had I looked into the future at that time and seen what I had to go through in order to be where I happily am to day.”

*- Did something happen, which made you more thick-skinned?*

“I guess one becomes thick-skinned exactly because it happens unexpected. I mean it’s a good thing that you don’t know what’s around the next corner in this case. Then you take it with you. And I’m extremely stubborn. And I actually believe many women are. Really stubborn. For better and for worse. Sometimes it can be a negative attribute but it can also be very good and positive. And I am very, very stubborn when I’ve got an idea. I believe that’s why I’ve made it so far. I did it because I feel I have a mission. Otherwise I wouldn’t have done it. But also because I’ve thought: Hell, no! I’m not going to bite the dust.”

*- Which bad things did you have to go through?*

“There has been a very, very patronizing manner. There isn’t the thing I haven’t been called. Witch. Excrement. I saw a book with a collection of satiric drawings of me and I thought: No, no, this just can’t be real. This is what happens when things are compressed. But one can handle it because it takes place over such long period of time. It’s tough of course. But I’ve also experienced a great deal of success and have

had many victories and that's what keeps you going if you experience cruel publicity and very perfidious satiric drawings. Otherwise it wouldn't be bearable. But there has indeed...I have no doubt that if I were to weigh which weighed the most, it would be the positive.

"Satire can sometimes be very entertaining and you can't help but laugh because they hit the nail...one probably tends to think: "Well, they really hit the nail on this one..." And then you can acknowledge that and say they did well, they caught the right angle or the right manner of speaking. You have to be able to do that as a politician; you have to be able to laugh and say: That's alright. But it can also go to the opposite. There's a writer who has collected all the very spiteful things like...Roald Als from Politiken. This is just perfidiously... you can really feel the hatred towards you and you think: Come on! It must be a very strange profession to take one's own emotional hatred out on another person like this. It must be a very sad life."

- *About being called a witch etc. – do you believe it has anything to do with your gender?*

"Yes, absolutely. Because what is the counterpart of a witch? If you consider a man. If I really search through my mind, there are of course also plenty of men who have been at the centre of negative attention in the political life. But I can't think of anyone as viciously talked about as I."

- *Is there a tendency towards calling a woman with power a bitch?*

"Yes, sure there is. But it is also sometimes very hard matters we deal with. Regarding Birthe Skaarup from our party for example, people's conception of her is actually corresponding to the person she is. But she is also the president of The Health Committee. There is a great difference in talking about politics concerning foreigners, laws etc. Here you often split the public into two where some then will be demonised – and that's me. And that's because you enter a field that used to be for men only. It used to be men talking about these kinds of things."

## **5.5. Who stages the gender?**

*"She became part of the convention. So did the young Social Democrat Helle Thorning-Schmidt. Together the two Nordic women came up with a plan. Lone Dybkjær wanted to have a say in the introductory chapters about the values of the union...(..)It was the last chance to state that it could be difficult just to be given the floor in the great assembly.*

*"We knew that Giscard d'Estaing had always had an eye for women. Anyone could see that and these kinds of things tend to be rumoured. That's why Helle and I strategically chose to sit in the foreground in the hall. We wanted to be seen. There weren't that many women present and especially not many blonde, blue-eyed women like us. Helle is beautiful and my age is more convenient.*

*The strategy was effective. Giscard d'Estaing had to give Lone Dybkjær the floor. And she used it to have her say in the treaty: equality."*

(Politiken 10.06, portrait of Lone Dybkjær (R))

What is going on when a female politician goes from being a 'gender neutral' professional to female politician with capital F? Who takes the first step – the politician or the media? Is it the media that impute gender to the politician, or is it the

politician who embraces the gender? What good does it do to the politician and the media to emphasize the politician's gender?

**5.5.1. *"I exist. I'm someone you should vote for". Do the politicians themselves take advantage of their gender?***

According to the survey of female members of the Folketing, the majority of the politicians do not believe that they have ever, during their career, used their gender in the media to e.g. get publicity. A great number of the politicians even reject using their gender in the media and emphasize that it is important to them to be regarded as politicians before women. But every fifth woman (21.9 %) has on the other hand taken advantage of their gender in the media. All stated that this was based on getting attention:

*"It was based on a wish to promote myself in other media than I usually have access to. An example could be an article in Femina concerning how a woman can handle a career. This has been my attempt to say: "I exist. I'm someone you should vote for" to those who may only read these magazines and never the news papers."*

**5.5.2. *A diva on glazed paper – why would the media stage the gender?***

Just before the election is launched for the European Parliament 2004, the editor-in-chief on Se & Hør, Henrik Qvortrup had a good idea: why not have a nice series of pictures of the retired Europarliamentarian, Helle Thorning Schmidt, styled as a diva? At that time, Helle Thorning Schmidt is on her way home to Denmark where she ran for election in the Folketing by the next election. She has been called yet another "crown princess" in Socialdemokratiet by reporters – and has even been referred to as a potential candidate for prime minister.

Henrik Qvortrup:

"The point in all this is that she agreed to do it. She knew very well that we were going to make a series of styled pictures of her showing the woman who may be the prime minister some day and how she may look. And Helle Thorning Schmidt is no fool. She is very conscious of the means she takes to use. And she thus accepted to do this."

- *Why was it of interest for you to style her?*

"Because we still work with some old-fashioned perceptions of gender: Well, I'll be damned. This is an attractive woman who can be even more attractive and may be the prime minister some day. How does this add up? The surprising element in this and what makes it a good story is that we make ourselves believe and try to be informed about what may surprise ordinary people. We still believe ordinary people are surprised that an attractive woman can also have ambitions of being the prime minister."

- *Wouldn't it be just as good a story if it were Lykketoft or Fogh who were styled?*

“Yes, it would. I would like to style Anders Fogh. But it wouldn’t be just a good story if it was Jens Rohde who some believe could be prime minister some day.”

- *Why?*

“It depends on how he’s styled. If he were styled to just look even cooler it wouldn’t be a good story. We don’t assume anyone’s surprised that cool men have great ambitions. But it is still an old-fashioned perception that we’re surprised that attractive women who may even have Gucci bags, expensive make-up and high boots with coat and skirt have ambitions to become prime minister. We believe many are surprised by this and that’s why it’s a good story.”

- *Is it expected that a woman is more likely to accept a styling than a man is?*

“Yes. Because I also believe our readers – and thereby the regular voters – are more likely to tolerate that women do these kinds of things. That’s one part of the story. The other part is the surprising effect in this diva – that’s what she looks like in these pictures – does not want to be a cosmetologist or anything else; she wants to be prime minister. It has something to do with the pictures of the world; the classical pictures are being tested. It’s also a token of thinking in grooves. We take advantage of this in journalism.”

### ***5.5.3. “More than two million viewers will be slapped up against the screen”. When the politicians are being advised to use their gender***

There are politicians who do not mind participating in styling, fashion coverage or private portraits with the home and family in the centre. There are politicians who would not dream to do either. And then there are the politicians who would just like to be left alone – but reluctantly accept to go beyond their otherwise fundamental bounds of attention from the media. They do it in order to strengthen their reputation and career.

One of the politicians belongs to the latter group, Mariann Fischer-Boel, a leading politician from the party Venstre and former minister for provisions, agriculture and fisheries.

“I’m probably not as obsessed about the media as I should be. When you are in a ministerial office, you should be ready to participate in every respect and I haven’t done that exactly. That’s something I don’t want to do.”

*What could that be?*

“We’ve had a tremendous discussion now with the royal wedding. And of course there was someone, DR among others, who would like to get a hold on the female ministers to participate in prelates. I said no from the very beginning. This is something I really don’t want to do. And I was then told that was not a clever move. There would be more than two million viewers slapped up against the screen and it may be important that people also thought about something other than cleaning in

abattoirs, the laws of agriculture, fisheries and dioxin when they saw me. And I've had to face the facts."

- *Did they want to follow your preparations with your dress etc.?*

"Yes."

- *From your media consultants' point of view then, do they expect you to be able to use your gender?*

"Yes. You should indeed not turn down a good offer. Because we're always connected with situations where there is a great problem, right? Dioxin in the salmon or, as today, cleaning in the abattoirs. But there are also good stories. Tomorrow we'll be on morning TV with our project concerning healthy and proper food – "food on the move". Projects like these are very good and something people can relate to."

- *Do you think it would have been just as interesting following your preparations had you been a male minister?*

"No, probably not. Or it wasn't. Because he's always dressed in pretty dull clothes with not much fuss about it. No, it's definitely only because they're girls...I don't know who else they've got a hold on. No, but it's so obvious that there is a preference. They would never choose a Minister of Defence. Then it would be a question of how many formations there are – but besides from that there wouldn't be that much variation."

## **5.6. The invisible chalk line. About the balance between acting too feminine or too masculine**

*"While many consider Ritt as roaming the halls of Christiansborg as a smiling scalpel, cynically and consistently chopping her opponents in two disregarding gender, Lotte Bundsgaard is considered a sweet, happy and idealistic girl...(...)...But Lotte Bundsgaard may perhaps be successful concerning the votes because she is nothing like Ritt. Because she is not cynical and masculine in her appearance."*

(Portrait of Lotte Bundsgaard in Fyens Stiftstidende the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2003)

*"Do you ever wear a dress or do you prefer this "revolutionary" look?"*

*"Is sex a great part of your life?"*

*"Are you a lesbian?"*

*"You haven't had any children – why?"*

- Questions for Jette Gottlieb in an interview in B.T. The 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1999

It is important to be woman with capital W in order to be successful as a politician, says Henrik Qvortrup. But can the W be too emphasized? Do the W's differ? And what happens if a politician refuses to use her gender?

The above-mentioned quotes from the Danish press give an idea of how some reporters describe certain female politicians while it appears, read between the lines, what is considered respectively proper and improper for a female politician. The question is how a politician can know where the invisible chalk line is between proper and improper. Anne Grete Holmsgaard considers it a question of being able to be a feminine power-seeker.

Anne Grete Holmsgaard (SF):

“If you are a woman and a power-seeker, you are, on the one hand, in a strong position because you know the game and are absorbed in it. That gives you a stronger position. But there is an invisible chalk line: if you are too masculine it can have a negative effect. And it is completely impossible to determine where this chalk line is. But that’s the peculiar thing with gender in general; you know it’s there, you can see it and feel it immediately. You can also feel it when it’s too much but you just cannot explain when exactly it’s crossed. If we regard Yvonne Herlev Andersen who’s a lesbian; she’s such a competent power-seeker that it almost didn’t harm her but it nearly did. Due to the combination of being a woman, a power-seeker and a lesbian, it is often said: Well, she only accomplished because she’s a lesbian. It’s important then to know the delicate balance between being both feminine, a woman and a power-seeker. The difficult part is to be able to play on all spectres; both what you’re used to and what men are used to – and men only have to play on their own half of the field. Consequently, men are allowed to use their energy more concentrated.”

### ***5.6.1. Angry women are no good***

In 1999, Marianne Karlslose, the president of Kristendemokraterne, crossed the chalk line into the masculine field. This happened when she ran for election for the European Parliament. The party tried to sell her as an “angry, young woman”.

*The characteristic as an angry, young woman – did a PR-firm come up with this?*

“Yes. It was because I’m very temperamental, so in this way it came out of nothing. But it was our PR-firm that came up with the idea of having a surprising element in our campaign because we had a hard time being acknowledged.”

“I was to pose in masculine posture and the media focused on this – the fact that I was a little too masculine. Being angry was a little anti-feminine and this may be what provoked people at that time. There were things I had to write where I at first continued with the “angry” attitude. Then I was outright told I had to be careful not to be too masculine. I had to be a little more sensitive in my manner of speaking. All this was very confusing because I’d just had to play the part as a very angry woman.”

In other words, the campaign concerning the marketing of Marianne Karlslose as an “angry, young woman” did not work. Henrik Qvortrup understands why:

“First of all, she didn’t look anything like what she claimed to be. Furthermore, I don’t believe we want women to be angry. It’s a characteristic we don’t consider particularly feminine. We want them to be proficient and competent with plenty of guts – but not angry. I believe this slogan meant that she didn’t notice the ability of combining professional skills with the feminine. But you’re not feminine if you’re angry.”

Henrik Qvortrup’s idea of combining the feminine, skills and competence in order to secure the correct balance is very subtle in the following two examples of openings to portraits of female politicians. The reporter – a woman – describes figuratively in both

examples the politicians as the perfect balance between the feminine and the masculine:

*“The hand is thin and very feminine but the handshake is as firm as the handshake of a general worker’s.”*

(Portrait of Anne Grete Holmsgaard, *Aktuelt* the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1998)

*“She picks up yet another cigarillos and holds it very feminine in her thin hand – a hand as tenacious as a farm worker’s”*

(Portrait of Mimi Stilling Jakobsen in *Aktuelt* the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1999)

### **5.6.2. One should not look like a stripper**

But the female politicians not only balance on a chalk line between the masculine and the feminine. It can do just as much harm to a female politician’s trustworthiness and thereby career if she is too feminine in her expression.

Henrik Qvortrup has two examples of this:

“If you try to imagine Helle Thorning Schmidt had, at the styling, been so thrilled by the situation that she had agreed to wear something more provocative or even indicated something with striking sexually undertones – an exposed breast for example – then she would have been finished. You can’t take unlimited advantage of your femininity. There is a subtle balance. You cannot determine exactly where the limit is. The politicians just have to have a sure instinct.”

According to Henrik Qvortrup, the Danish Minister of Justice Lene Espersen did not have this sure instinct when she participated in the Danish Crown Prince’s wedding in May 2004. At this occasion she wore a low-necked dress and her hair was curled. Thereby, Lene Espersen had crossed the line.

“Our fashion policeman on *Se & Hør*, Mads Christensen, wrote she looked like Stripper Simone on a bad day. And I actually agree with him. It was, among other things, the odd hair she had chosen. I believe a lot of people out there thought: now she’s really pushing it. Maybe she just wanted to look nice for the wedding but she is actually the Minister of Justice. She just shouldn’t look like a combination of Stripper Simone and Pamela Anderson. And the female politicians are up against this; they are allowed to take advantage of their gender but... at exactly this wedding, she crossed the invisible line.”

When a woman has crossed the line, there is a conviction from the media. An example of this is to be found in an article of a young female politician who has appeared as a model in a catalogue for sports underwear:

*“Height: 177 cm. Weight: 59 kg. Size of bra: 75A. Size: 38/40. The woman behind the figures is the conservative Pernille Weiss-Pedersen (31), Middelfart.”*

- Introduction in an article of Pernille Weiss-Pedersen (K) in *B.T.* the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1999.

## **5.7. It’s a price I’ve paid**

*“Being Minister of Evolution is a job of one’s dream. The Evolution Ministry is the greatest ministry in the world. It involves the entire world. It’s a ministry that makes a difference,” Says the pretty Anita Bay Bundegaard.*

- B.T. the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2000.

*When Margrethe Vestager was appointed minister in March 1998, several papers mentioned that the new minister was young, well educated, female – and pretty*

- Aktuelt the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1999

*Gitte Seeberg, Henriette Kjær and Lene Espersen all entered the Folketing at the same time, 1994. Besides their debut in national policies they had other things in common: their attractive appearances, blonde hair and their youth*

- Berlingske Tidende the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2002

Is being beautiful a quality in politics? It’s likely to believe that, regarding how the media, in some cases like the above mentioned quotes, emphasize the female politicians’ good looks. Concerning the young, female president for Kristendemokraterne, Marianne Karlsrose - her attractive appearance very much became a centre of rotation. This happened after she became president of her party and started a process of renewal in order to make Kristendemokraterne a modern, attractive party. The process of renewal very quickly began to include herself.

### ***5.7.1. The transformation – when Marianne Karlsrose was “renewed”***

Marianne Karlsrose (KD):

“When I became president of the party, I started getting letters, both internal and external, from people having reactions because they thought I looked dreary. They were usually negative.”

It was primarily women – and women from Marianne Karlsrose’s own party – who gave her a hard time because of her appearance. They had all sorts of good tips for refreshing her appearance. But Marianne Karlsrose did not want to be changed.

“I stubbornly insisted that I wanted to be myself and I was satisfied with this. But if you want to prevail as a woman, other things are demanded from you, there are different expectations...(..).. At one point then, I had to say to myself that it was time to figure out what to wear. Because saying: ‘This is no good and that is no good’ can be tiring. And I have to wear something, of course.”

Due to this, Marianne Karlsrose was styled. She got new clothes and started using make-up.

“And that has indeed resulted in responses from the media. There were some reporters who were really staggered at this. This confirmed my suspicion of the importance attached to the appearance because I was much surprised by the massive reaction afterwards...(..)..It’s very difficult for me to get attention from the media because I’m not in the Folketing. And this means my transformation has been of excessively importance in the media – but this is something that will only happen once. Hopefully.”

- *How do you feel about the fact that your appearance has been of this great importance?*

“I’ve come to this point, that this is the game. And I’ve accepted that. I regret that this is the case but I have unfortunately ascertained that it is. And of course it’s nice to get positive response as opposed to the negative. Because many women can be a little – I mean, we tend to wish to meet all the demands in a jobs column before even venture to apply – and when you have an as exposed post as I’ve got then it’s nice to not have to deal with the criticism you more or less simply can eliminate. And that’s what I’ve done..(..).. You get used to it. It’s more because it is so dominating – and you have to keep it up all the time. You have to think about clothes and buy new clothes. But I’ve come to a compromise about representing the ability to be yourself and that you’re valued by what you are and what you do – not by the way you look. That’s a price I’ve paid.”

### **5.8. But is she smart? – “Real” skills versus gender as a political strategy**

Even though good looks are so important in Danish politics that Marianne Karlsmoser had to change her appearance, good looks can also be a drag.

Concerning young female politicians’ careers, the Danish media has in recent years used an angle dealing with roughly speaking their belief that women get their share of the cake too easily – especially if they’re young and beautiful. There also lies in this a hidden criticism of women’s actual political skills and flair: Are they capable of “something” – or are they just there for decoration?

*“Is the Danish 39-year-old Minister for Culture Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen a beauty? Yes. She is. She’s a little exotic in her character with her long, slender neck, her well-proportioned figure, big oval eyes that hold a little political nervousness. She has an easy applicable smile, which is lit up by cultured impertinence. She has a well-kept mane, which is cut loosely and longish – cut precisely as careless that it exactly doesn’t appear as careless. And then there’s the nose. The face’s impressive cape with a bridge of nose as sharp as a scimitar just sharpened. A beauty descended from ancient times. Probably like those women David and Salomon fell for. Thus beautiful. Exotic. But is she smart? Well... The doubt will reign for a while as she rises with the job.”*

(Ekstra Bladet the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1999)

*“It is strange that a “girl” who is like cut out of a treasury of song – young, blonde, pretty and sympathetic – can arouse emotions that strong. As she’s sitting here in her garden in Tisvildeleje where it’s buzzing with sun and summer – and home-made buns – Anita Bay Bundegaard simply isn’t just sweet. She’s also an enlightened and educated person. The question is, is she also a politician?”*

(Berlingske Tidende the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2001)

*“SWEET AND involved – but also a bit naïve...(..)..Henriette Kjær has the heart, there’s no doubt about it, but she lacks demonstrating the results in practise. A sweet smile from a minister in the very best broadcasting time will not help the outcasts and the redundant.”*

(Politiken the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2003)

*“She (Anita Bay Bundegaard) has been so quiet since Poul Nyrup expressed her as his prettiest weapon in the rescue of the government that one can’t help but wonder if it’s just this – the lovely photographs seen from the queen’s gate at Amalienborg could just be photographic manipulation..(..) The new ministers have probably had certain latitude – but there are limits. Even when they’re young and blonde as the Danish song itself.”*

(De Bergske Blade the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2001)

### ***5.8.1. Nyrup's Christmas decorations***

The 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2000 the tabloid BT had a front page, which evoked a response in Denmark. Nyrup's Christmas decorations, it said. The day before, there had been a cabinet reshuffle in the government of that time and five new ministers had arrived. Two of them were young women. The Prime Minister was photographed with the two ministers and a third minister – also a young woman. The day after BT's front page, the paper supplemented with a thorough article:

*“Sex appeal can be used when selling cars, washing powder – and politics. Nyrup is, at this instant, using two young and pretty blondes in order to sell a metal fatigued and rusty government.”*

“That one's a bit rude, I admit that. And the three girls were naturally furious because “here we are being appointed to ministers because we have certain skills and what do the media notice? That it's only because we're women and that's chauvinistic etc. etc.” I understand they were angry,” says Henrik Qvortrup who was editor-in-chief at BT at that time and made this front page.

“But I would like to defend it just a bit. I believed it was the correct analysis of this cabinet reshuffle. The reshuffle *was* about Nyrup feeling the need to prosper. He needed liveliness. It was indeed hardly a coincidence that it was three photogenic, young women who were appointed as ministers. In this sense, the term Christmas decoration was correct. Of course this was part of his considerations. The three women probably had all sorts of professional qualities besides from this but that's another discussion. The purpose of the cabinet reshuffle was to give the voters – not least the female voters – the impression that this was a dynamic government with young women. The cabinet reshuffle was, furthermore, not about the professional. It was about gender and age. And I do understand that the three ministers were furious, I know they were, and I can easily relate to that. But I still believe the headline, however much it was pushed to extremes, was very adequate. Because it was Christmas decoration, it was ornaments. And that's an example of the fact that in politics, being a woman can also be an advantage. Because I don't believe that Anita Bay Bundegaard would have been appointed to this post had she been a man. I believe this happened because she was young and not least a woman. So don't you tell me that being a woman is a drag. Here is an example of it being an advantage. But it could be the case that the media subsequently treated her very severely, and where it all has to be seen in a context that she was woman and thereby maybe a little more naïve and more stupid than others. And this has been the disadvantage. But the fact that she was even appointed minister was connected with her being a woman, I believe.”

Other newspapers also focused on certain appointment of young, female ministers. Generally speaking, all the Danish daily papers (Jyllands-posten, Politiken, Aktuelt, Berlingske Tidende) had articles, in connection with the cabinet reshuffle, which focused on the extreme panoply of younger female ministers. In a great number of the articles it is exactly this *wonder* that is leading and which makes the papers seek experts to explain why the voters suddenly want to see young women at the political leading posts. This is a theme – and thereby a problem – that would be hard to

imagine had the reverse been the case: had two out of the five ministers been young men.

*Now is the time to ask how much two female actors can do for an extremely professional, middle-aged and apparently a bit disillusioned theatrical troupe like the present government. They can do a lot..(..). The effect young women have on middle-aged men (is) not exactly undescribed in the psychological and anthropological literature. The Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen did seem almost frisky this Thursday in the sunshine at Amalienborg Slotsplads where he stuck out his chest and in high spirits declared that we are heading towards brighter days while he proudly posed with the young ministers. Psychologists explain the middle-aged men's fascination of young women with a slowly increasing mortal dread. As a relic from an old natural belief these so-called sugar daddies hope to delay their physical decline by surrounding themselves with tight skin and firm flesh.*

- Jyllands-Posten the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2000.

It is one thing when, according to the media and political observers, a metal fatigued government uses young, photogenic women as a political strategy in order to gain the support from the public. But it is quite another thing when the female politicians themselves use their “advantages” in order to gain a career in politics:

*Some of the things that Helge Adam's three female colleagues were imputed were that they, as Helge Engell's lovely little girls, immediately had good qualities as spokeswomen and preferential treatment in all departments.”*

- Article about Lene Espersen, Gitte Seeberg and Henriette Kjær in BT the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1997

*None in Christiansborg, besides the leader of the conservative party, takes his crown princess seriously. – Can she read?! It doesn't seem like it...(..)...She procured Per Stig Møller a majority in the group management in the warm days in the spring when Per Stig wanted to be the leader of the party after Hans Engell's alcohol collision..(..)...They knew each other well because, among other things, they had had the same secretary for many years at Christiansborg. This little coincidence suddenly transformed into a real Aladdin's lamp in her hands and conjured her ahead to the front row.*

- Portrait of Pernille Sams (K) in Ekstra Bladet the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1997.

## **5.9. Part II: Conclusion**

How do the Danish media portray female politicians – and on which terms?

As the above-mentioned quotes from reporters, politicians and professional people from the media show, the politician's gender does make a difference when commented on by the media – if one is a female politician.

The gender determines which stories a politician can create of oneself in the media – for better and for worse.

### *Advantages and disadvantages*

Female politicians can have positive publicity by virtue of just being women – this could be being followed by a TV-crew while preparing for a royal wedding with hairstyling, choice of dress etc. Or it could be being styled for Se & Hør as a diva and possible future Prime Minister.

Female politicians can also be publicized because they become mothers or have been appointed political leading posts where the media would like a story dealing with “how do you handle both a career and a family”.

All this is a kind of publicity male politicians in general never have or have access to – just because they are men. Even though the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has acted as James Bond in a men's magazine, this is one of the exceptions in stead of an example of the rule that the media find it interesting to style

a man. The same applies to interest of looking further into the family father or the husband who suddenly has been appointed a ministerial post while being a newly fledged father.

The female politicians are aware of the fact that they have this advantage, compared to their male colleagues, based on their gender. Some women choose not to use their gender in order to be publicized a certain way. Others choose to use it well aware of the fact that the media find this female angle very interesting and they use it offensively.

In reverse, the Danish female politicians also experience negative attention and being described by gender specific images and stereotypes, which would be almost inconceivable to their male colleagues. As Lene Espersen (K) says, being young and female in politics has two sides of the coin. It can be very positive for the female politicians to suddenly being noticed just because they are young women. But there is also a dark side. An example of this could be experiencing the prejudice that you were elected only because you are young and female. A prejudice still going strong in the media. This could be seen in some of the newspapers' coverage of the cabinet reshuffle in 2000.

This prejudice – or wonder of why so many younger women have suddenly been appointed ministers or entered the Folketing – is of course an expression that it is a new tendency and this is why media is occupied with it. But at the same time, it also expresses what we consider being a real politician or a real minister. The prototype of a politician is still a man.

#### *Images of women*

As the various chapters of the second part of the survey show, there are examples of the Danish media portraying and staging female politicians as being both witches and insensitive, almost masculine women and – in the other end of the scale – women seducing in order to seize power or naïve girls who will soon have their opinions polished.

Male politicians also have images applied from the media and are at risk of being referred to in a less flattering manner. An example could be the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen being referred to, as a “caveman”. Furthermore, his self-control and him being a perfectionist have been reason for sarcastic remarks. Keld Albrechtsen has been ridiculed because of his knitted sweaters and ‘left-wing image’. Arne Melchior has been referred to as ‘The talking toupee’ – by the same newspaper, Ekstra Bladet that came up with the name ‘the talking cleavage’ for Lene Espersen. There is, however, still a great difference in the images, adjectives and the implied references the media applies to male and female politicians.

This will be illustrated in the following quotes where the female politician is exchanged with a man:

Whether or not the new ministers are ‘real’ politicians:

*As he's sitting here in his garden in Tisvildeleje where it's buzzing with sun and summer – and homemade buns – Frank Jensen simply isn't just sweet. He's also an enlightened and educated person. The question is, is he also a politician?*

About the politicians' appearance:

*...His sense of clothes has been called distinctly British. Especially pointed out is his knickers always leaving a little intriguing bare piece of white skin by each knee."*

Even when it concerns male politicians, who have been exposed by the media due to their sexual excesses or tendencies, it is hard to imagine them being presented in a portraying article concerning their political visions the following way in Berlingske Tidende:

*"Are you going to touch his dick then?" The boyfriend asked as the last thing before I left home on that rainy Monday morning. "Never," I answered a little too fast. "Never ever. This is modern, strictly professional journalism at top level." Even though the last bit may have seemed a little exaggerated, it really wasn't just blather when we finally reached Arne Møller's office. Of course it wasn't. It's just sort of become the conservative politician's entrance to the general public. Arne Møller has become rather identical with his willy."*

#### *Blue-eyed blondes*

Among the chosen quotes from newspapers concerning female politicians, some refer to the female politicians' hair colour – if they are blonde – and combine the blonde hair with the word "blue-eyed". The question is, what implications lie within a description of a certain female politician when, besides her status within the party, it is chosen to mention that she is both "blue-eyed and blonde". People often consider being blonde and blue-eyed as synonymous with being naïve or distinctly stupid. It should not be asserted by this that the Danish media consciously choose to describe certain female politicians as stupid or naïve. But it is still suggestive that reporters often – particularly when it concerns young, female politicians – choose to relate to a familiar prejudice of blonde and blue-eyed women.

This particular reference to the female politicians' eye and hair colour cannot be found on the same terms when male politicians are described. It would, for example, be inconceivable for a reporter to describe three skilful, young male politicians as having characteristics in common as *their nice appearances, the blonde hair and youth or he arrived in the Folketing in 1994, where he formed a blonde and ambitious trio with Jeppe Kofod and Frank Jespersen*. Descriptions of male politicians like these could even be considered as an expression of a Nazi outlook.

#### *The Handbag*

Particular of interest is the media's attention to Marianne Jelved (R) and her characteristic as the Danish Iron Lady with a handbag flourishing around her. The radical politician's handbag has first of all become synonymous with herself. Furthermore, the handbag has become a conception as well as a symbol; a symbol that has been attached to other female politicians afterwards.

On the newspaper database Infomedia one will receive more than 300 results when searching for the words “Marianne Jelved” + “handbag”. Among the articles, there are both portraying articles where Marianne Jelved presents her various handbags and articles from local newspapers proclaiming Marianne Jelved bought her handbag in their very local community. There are, furthermore, articles where the handbag is considered as a sort of demonstration of power or political effectiveness – *she really gave it to the government with her handbag*.

The handbag is here a symbol of both political and female efficiency – not least because Marianne Jelved herself has been conscious of using the handbag-symbol offensively from the very beginning. The situation is quite different concerning another female politician who has also had a great amount of attention from the media due to her handbag. It concerns Helle Thorning-Schmidt (S) who arrived at an electioneering meeting with a handbag from Gucci. In this case, the social democratic Europe-politician clearly transcended the media’s barriers concerning what is allowed for a female politician representing a workers’ party.

*“Damn if you do – damn if you don’t”*

Berit Ås, Norwegian professor in social psychology and former member of the Norwegian parliament the Storting, has drawn up a number of “reigning techniques”, which the majority of a community use in relation to the minorities. One of these is fashionable called: “Damn if you do – damn if you don’t” – or no matter what you do, it will always be wrong.

The same outlook can be transferred to female politicians concerning publicity in the media. As a female politician you are not allowed to use your gender offensively in your political career. If you do, people will just think you were elected “because you are young and a woman”. On the other hand, it will not do if you do not use your gender as expected. An example of this could be having a feminine charisma because then you are at risk of being suspected because of your sexuality or “femininity”.

All the above mentioned quotes, where female politicians are exchanged with male politicians, illustrates that a politician’s gender does make a difference concerning the way a politician is referred to. A female politician’s terms apparently differ from her male colleagues’ in the way that she is constantly related to her gender or she has to relate herself to her gender. This could be being female Minister of Justice and attending a royal ball wearing a too low-necked dress, being a female politician in a workers’ party and arriving at an electioneering meeting with a too posh handbag or being a female politician refusing to wear a dress and then having reporters asking: Are you a lesbian?

As Pia Gjellerup says about being frequently asked why she does not have a husband and children: “... it’s just something you have to do. It’s kind of a ritual – the same way as there’s always pictures in a portrait.”

Anne Grete Holmsgaard (SF) talks similarly about the fact that female politicians cannot just do their job as their male colleagues. They have to play in two fields. They have to concentrate on the game – i.e. working in politics, deal with power etc – and at the same time they have to focus on balancing between the feminine and the masculine in a way men in politics never have to.

## 6. Final conclusion

This survey has examined the domain between the media, politics and the politicians in Denmark from a gender perspective. The main objective was to explore whether Danish female politicians are equal to their male colleagues in this domain and what gender means when women are doing politics and media portray the female politicians. In spite of the fact that Denmark has a strong sense of belonging to one of the most leading countries in the world when it comes to gender equality and the fact that Danish women have advanced significantly during the last 30 years in the sphere of politics this research indicate that gender still matters – that is when it comes to female politicians.

A great amount of the female politicians across the parties, age groups and amount of experience in the Folketing believe that gender as such has been no barrier regarding their political career, but at the same time many of the Danish female politicians believe, that gender does play a role when it comes to distribution of power. A great majority of the female politicians think that men have the upper hand in the Folketing and the power configuration is based on male values.

To that comes the portrayal of women in politics in the media. The majority of the female politicians do not believe they are treated the same way by the media as their male colleagues. They believe that women have to make more of an effort in order to be acknowledged for their political work in the media than men – or simply that media have other interests in female politicians than in their male colleagues.

The survey of how media represents female politicians done in this research confirms the beliefs of the Danish female politicians. In some media reports gender does play a role when media meets politicians. Female politicians are being described in terms which is rarely seen when it concerns male politicians. Reporters pay attention to features concerned with their womanhood – that is for example cloth, hair style, motherhood, family life. Female politicians thus seem to be evaluated not only on their performance as credible politicians but also on their performance as “credible” women. Female politicians who fail to full fill the common images of a credible woman by acting in a “non-feminine” way or a too feminine way will in some cases accordingly be stigmatised by reporters. Generally gender seems to be relevant only in the case of women in politics – and it can go both ways: Media that focuses on the female attributes and female politicians focusing on their gender in order to get publicity.