

# **MASS MEDIA IN (RE)DISTRIBUTION OF POWER**

**© Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 2004**



*THIS PUBLICATION HAS BEEN PRODUCED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. THE CONTENTS OF THIS PUBLICATION IS THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR AND CAN IN NO WAY BE TAKEN TO REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.*

#### 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)

ISBN 9984-9810-0-2

## **1. Abstract**

The present research has been conducted as part of the project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power”, supported by the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005).

The report gives brief overview of research on gender and media in Estonia, presents theoretical background and methodological points of departure for media analysis from the viewpoint of gender. It also presents findings of two empirical research projects on representation of women politicians in the media in Estonia. On the basis of research’s results the recommendations for (women) politicians, their PR advisors, journalists, media executives and for others interested in that subject are elaborated. The research conducted earlier and within the framework of the project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power” shows that representation of women as well as women politicians in the media in Estonia follows the universal tendencies shown by western feminist media researchers since 1970es. While successfully entering public sphere women politicians like other successful career-orientated women create a disturbance in gender order which traditionally associates women with private sphere.

Representation of women and women politicians among them in the media is gendered and it reproduces the gender order and power relations of the society in a kind of black and white, stereotypical way. Women’s role repertoire in the media content is much more narrow than in real life due to this biased portrayal from patriarchal point of view. Themes belonging to private sphere (home, relations, looks, children, care, empathy) are predominant in representation of women in the media, despite of the genre and type of media issue and despite of the position of the woman in the society. Women are typically represented by group identity: gender, party membership, not by individual characteristics.

Women (politicians) themselves are actively participating in the reproduction of existing gender order, as interviewees, authors and subjects of different media texts. Even outstanding politicians do not question the way they are interviewed or portrayed in the media and thus they are unconsciously following gender patterns based on stereotypes, often showing them in trivial or negative context. It can be argued that women and women politicians are in this sense gender-blind, they do not see the hidden messages and patterns set in the ways of approach that journalists choose when writing about them. The reasons for this gender-blindness can be either conscious choice of following the accepted patterns and gender roles in the society,

with all the constraints they bring along, including the influence on women's political career and public image, or it can be also the result of media illiteracy what concerns about gender point of view.

This project showed that representation of women and woman politicians in the media should be critically and constantly reviewed in different research projects on different media. Results should be introduced to the interested counterparts such as woman politicians, party executives and women NGO-s, journalists and other interested groups. Educational projects and projects targeted to raise media literacy could be developed on the basis of research: how to understand media and cope with it.

## **2.Introduction**

### *Overview of the national research on media and gender*

Critical media research from a gender point of view in the theoretical framework of feminist studies can be traced from the second half of the 1990es in Estonia. The first master degree level research projects were defended in 2000: the master thesis by Raili Põldsaar at the University of Tartu "American Cultural Influence and the Re-Construction of Gender in Recent Estonian Public Discourse" analyzed among else the cover stories of the daily "Postimees" weekend supplement *Arter* from gender viewpoint and research by Barbi Pilvre defended at the Tallinn Pedagogical University was titled "Construction of Gender in the Cover-Column *Persoon* in the Estonian Weekly "Eesti Ekspress" 1992-1999".

Department of Journalism at the University of Tartu has conducted different research projects on female journalists and women's magazines before 2000, but these works did not concentrate on the existing sex-gender system nor critical analyze on women's positions or representation.

Since 2000 several term papers and bachelor theses have been defended at the University of Tartu and some also at the Tallinn Pedagogical University.

The findings of the master thesis by Raili Põldsaar showed that the group identity was stressed in the portrayal of women in "Postimees" *Arter* cover stories. Gender

difference was depicted in the most stereotypical way, concentrating on professional aspects of one's life in case of men and private aspects in case of women.

The outcomes of the master thesis by Barbi Pilvre on the weekly "Eesti Ekspress" cover-column *Persoon* showed that the percentage of women portrayed in this column grew persistently during 1992-1999, raising up to 26%, but being still only 18% as the average of these years. This number follows the universal tendencies traced by major research project on women's media image in the European Union countries in 1999 (*Images of women in the media. Report on existing research in the European Union. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities*).

Content analysis showed that private life, looks and clothing were described more often in women's portrayals than in men's, even in the portrayals of male and female persons on similar social position. No link between the sex of the journalist and the way women were depicted could be found in this work. Female and male journalists seemed to share common cultural codes how women and men "should be depicted"

Later research on Eesti Ekspress *Persoon* by the same author has shown the growing number of women in the 2000ties. The general picture of representing women indicates development to a more balanced depiction, but occasionally one can find very sexist and paternalistic portrayal of young successful women, including young politicians, by middle-aged male journalists. There seems to exist a link between the sex and especially generation of the journalist and the style of describing women: younger women journalists in Eesti Ekspress seem to avoid gender stereotypification. The material is however too small to draw any clear conclusions concerning the sex of the journalist and the way they write about women.

University of Tartu took part in the global gender and media research project GMMP (Global Media Monitoring Project) in 2000. The term paper by Ede Schank at the University of Tartu analyzed the percentage of women as actors and subjects in the press and the findings showed that the percentage of both women writing in the press of Estonia and women depicted was higher than the universal results (around 26-28%) and the numbers resembled more of the Nordic press scene. The reasons of the relatively high numbers were not questioned in this work.

In 2002-2004 students of the University of Tartu under supervision of Barbi Pilvre started a research project on television images of women, "Screening Gender in Estonia", in which the methodology of the international project "Screening Gender", carried out in 6 European countries public broadcast companies 1997-2000 (Finnish

YLE, Swedish SVT, Dutch NOS, Norwegian NOK, German ZDF, Danish Radio) was used. As a result of the Estonian project an analogical toolkit for media practitioners was produced, including a CD-ROM with video material analysis. The content analysis carried out in the framework of the project “Who speaks in Television?” showed that the average number of women speaking on the TV-screen in three Estonian TV-channels was 33% (among them 34% in Estonian public broadcast ETV), which is seemingly comparable to the results of the western countries. However, exploring the background of the numbers in 2002 when the first research was carried out, shows that high number of women speaking on ETV screen could be explained by the commercial profile of the Estonian public broadcast channel until autumn 2002 when advertisement was ceased and the programme-policy changed towards to a more quality-orientated contents. In 2003 the second research was carried out on ETV material and the results showed that along with program of higher quality the percentage of women fell to 27%. The decline could show the link between entertainment programs and women. The more commercial are the contents of the programs, the more women speaking up on TV screen there are.

In comparison with the western research results there appeared a fact that women were also in different roles and functions on ETV screen than in the western, especially Nordic public broadcast companies production. Women speakers appeared more often as announcers (in 2002 research as in 2003 announcers’ function was deceased), ordinary people in *vox populi* programs or entertainers and rarely as news anchors, program hosts or even program guests. It has to be admitted that especially Nordic broadcast companies have carried out special policies in bringing women’s voice and face to more serious programs such as news and debates and this has had obvious results in the television picture.

The age of women appearing on the TV screen was also estimated and Estonian television followed the universal tendencies that women over 50 tend to disappear from the screen unlike men. The older is the one speaking on the screen, the more obvious he is a male. ETV had also a very high result of girls under 19 years of age speaking on the screen in 2002 as there was a popular entertainment programme “Laulukarussell” on the air every day during the period of research.

The time women got to speak on ETV screen was noticeably shorter than e.g. in the Finnish YLE. In ETV women got to speak up twice as less as women in YLE. This

could show that women speak more often in episodes on ETV than in YLE they host programs, read news, etc more often.

The results of the research were introduced to the management of ETV as well as representatives of commercial TV-channels. ETV general director Ilmar Raag admitted that lack of women on ETV screen is a problem but that they have not articulated the problem as a gender question but that they systematically seek for female program hosts and experts who could speak up on the screen. The problem according to Raag's opinion is general lack of women journalists qualified in the serious areas like politics, economy, culture, who could also host programs. The choice of guests on TV and interviewees is however up to reporters and editors who make concrete programs. This leads to the question of journalistic choices which very often unconsciously follow the gender stereotypes: inviting guests according to the understanding what are women's themes and what men's, asking questions with gender bias etc. Concerning ETV there are several qualified female editors and producers on politics, economy and culture but the problem according to the Screening Gender ideology is that they do not show up on the screen but remain invisible. The "truth" about what is going on in the world and in the Estonian society is transmitted to the auditorium mainly by male voice and faces.

Several researches have been carried out on women's magazines and also women journalists working in those at the University of Tartu. Representation of women has been researched upon by analyzing the texts by the concepts of repertoires and other concepts used by discourse analysis. The special role of women's magazines in constructing the normative of femininity and womanhood in a certain culture has been admitted in the western media criticism since 1970es when the uncovering of gender stereotypes in the women's magazines began. This idea has been fruitfully used in Estonian media research. The bachelor thesis by Kristiina Randmaa defended at the University of Tartu in 2002, which compared the popular women's magazine "Eesti Naine" in 1989 and 2000 showed that the journal could be named an ideological tool in the process of nation-building in the early era of the Singing Revolution, quite openly dictating Estonian women how to think and behave in the new context of the revival of the nation. Motherhood and giving birth to new native Estonians was the national priority and female career was given of secondary importance, if not a disturbing factor to women's main task in the new era of the revival of national state.

Soviet womanhood was harshly criticized as also national differences between the Russian speaking community and Estonians were politically incorrectly if not quite vulgarly presented. By 2000 commercial ideologies have replaced the nation-building task and women's magazines resemble more of the western format concentrating on advertisement sales. New ideologies such as consumerism and hedonism were introduced by women magazines, concentrating on selling new products and services of care and well-being to women.

The bachelor thesis by Airi Illison defended at the University of Tartu in 2003 focused on the readership and the master thesis by Epp Väljaots at the University of Tartu (not yet defended) is analyzing the role of the journalists in women's magazines according to Joke Hermes' and Marjorie Ferguson's ideas about the role of women's magazines in women's lives. These works also tried to bring out the positive role of women's magazines' culture in Estonian women's lives, the strength of tradition and the role of conservative understanding about being a woman in Estonian society.

The term paper by Ede Schank at the University of Tartu in 2002 tried to find links between the sex of the journalist and the themes he/she covers in two Estonian major dailies "Eesti Päevaleht" and "Postimees" in 2002. Research showed that around 70% of texts are written by male in both papers (including expert authors and free lancers from outside of the staff). There exists a sharp gender division in themes covered in both newspapers, following the general stereotypical understanding about gender roles and competence. Seemingly the staff of Estonian press includes lots of outstanding female journalists, but deeper analyze shows that this has not much influenced the media content. In 2002 Barbi Pilvre conducted a small-scale research "Does gender matter in the newsroom?" and the findings showed that journalists did not stress the gender aspect in choosing themes and events to cover but stated that very much is up to a certain personality and interest of the journalist. The results of the term paper by Ede Schank showed that there's a contradiction between journalists' understanding of gender question in the newsroom.

The term paper by Helina Lindma in 2003 at the Tallinn Pedagogical University focused on gender and news. The findings showed that genre rules and conventions influence very much gender representation of men and women in the media: the more entertaining-orientated issue, the more scandal-orientated and private-sphere focused is the image of both men and women in the media content. However, news is not a gender-neutral format as Lindma's work also succeeded to show. There exists a

gender difference in the representation of men and women even in the seemingly neutral and “objective” genre of news.

Women politicians as a separate issue has not been focussed in previous research upon gender and media in Estonia. However, both in Põldsaar research on Postimees texts and Pilvre’s research on Eesti Ekspress Persoon portraits of women politicians were included. Women politicians were seen in this material as career-women par excellence. In the portrayal of women politicians the conflict between private-public was clearly expressed: women as traditionally associated with the private sphere enter politics as “the ultimate” public sphere. Media, trying to deal with this disturbance in discursive ways prefers however to focus on the private matters of women politicians and not so much on their public activities. Texts on women politicians in Eesti Ekspress Person tend to focus on looks, body, appearance and performing women’s gender role instead of focussing on those women’s worldview, understanding of hot political topics etc. In this way women politicians were trivialized (Tuchman 1978, see below) in those texts.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *Theoretical background*

Media does not simply reflect the values of society but contribute to the formulation of the position of women in society today. The mass media has established a decisive and fundamental leadership in the production and transmission of patriarchal culture in contemporary society. Mass media is more and more responsible for the construction and consumption of social knowledge. Media represents a key repository of available meanings which people draw on in making sense of their situation. The media shapes and defines attitudes about and towards women from the crudely sexist images of the popular press, through the less overt, but equally significant marginalizing of women by the quality papers, to the careful appropriation of feminist images by advertisers.

Cultural images may not be literally created by men (as the number of women working in the key institutions of culture including media is significant nowadays) but they originate from a culture, which is predominantly male in its orientation. Media presents a very fragmented view of women: women as a mistress, woman as a wife, and woman as a mother.

One has to keep in mind that besides conservative role culture is not a static system -- according to major theoretician of cultural studies Raymond Williams, but a process, which is constantly changing to accommodate emergent alternative and oppositional meanings, values and practices. Understandings of gender are therefore in a constant process of change in the culture and accordingly in mass media.

Early research on mass media shared a concept that media has the direct behavioural effect on the audience. Lazarsfeld and Katz argued however in the 1950es that the power of the media was located within existing structures of social relationship. Therefore we cannot trace very precise causal connections between messages and effects should not dissolve the complex question of power of the media.

Media has occupied a central position in culture in two important ways. Firstly, contact with the various media provides the majority of the population with their dominant leisure activity and secondly, the media constitute a main source of information about and explanation of social and political processes. Media is structured closely to other power institutions and thus help establish an order of priorities about a society's problems and objectives.

The media select items for attention and provide rankings of what is and is not important, they set agenda for public opinion. The way media is choosing topics, structures the dialogue and controls the debate – a process which involves crucial omissions – is a major aspect of it's influence. Many topics are excluded from the media news agenda and others covered massively. Researches in the West since 1970es has shown that news about women traditionally concentrate on aspects of their appearance, sexuality and domestic relations. Classical feminist research on mass media (for example collection of essays "Hearth and Home" ed. by Gaye Tuchman, 1978) has shown that women are pictured as submissive, passive and are portrayed largely in terms of their sexuality or domesticity while men tend to be shown as dominant, active and authoritative. Males outnumber females in prime-time television and mainstream press contents. In TV advertisements women clean, launder and cook while men give orders and advice and eat the meals. As Tuchman's classic statement

goes: women are subject to “symbolic annihilation” through their condemnation, trivialization and absence in the mass media.

Much of the earlier research upon mass media puts forward a reflection hypotheses of the media, that is, the media simply reflect the values of a society and the position of women in that society. More recent research suggest that media images themselves determine what women are like and that women should look more closely the ways media is conditioning and manipulating their attitudes. The media do not simply reflect representations of women available in the culture. On one hand it constructs the marginality of women in the culture and produces definitions. The question of representation is the crucial problem here as it relates to the issue of realism. Already in the end of the 1970es the issue of media realism was discussed from the gender aspect and it was generally argued that representation of gender in the media is a hybrid phenomenon of realism, aesthetic practices and stereotypes.

The production and circulation of media images can be understood better when they are seen in relation to the disposition of power in society. Stereotyping has to be seen in relation to the contestations of power, which it is a symptom. Stereotypes are not just sets of erroneous beliefs that can be changed by presenting and disseminating the “correct information”.

Stereotyping develops around the issue of power. Groups hold stereotypes of other groups with whom there is an actual or possible struggle about dominance and subordination. Stereotypes can encourage the belief that some groups deserve lower status, that their roles are natural and unchanging. The study of stereotypes involves the study of power relations that encourage flourishing of the stereotypes and the disposition of power that maintains stereotypes through the production and circulation of images, narratives and information.

Essential aspect of stereotyping is that stereotypes seem to be natural, especially to those who do the stereotyping. Often stereotyping is accepted, even welcomed by stereotyped groups as a form of self-definition. Powerful stereotyping makes the possibility of alternative self-definitions difficult to imagine, most stereotyping preserves the *status quo*.

Stereotypes are concepts, held by groups, which are constructed and maintained through many different discourses.

Stereotyping is an ongoing process. A single advertisement or a character in a TV program cannot easily be discussed as a stereotype. However, media stereotypes are

always fixed in its particular form and context. Individual images are always part of a process of repetition, not exact repetition but repetition-plus difference. Some of the media images stress the continuity of certain stereotypes, others show in shift. It is crucial to examine the extent and nature of such shifts.

As we all know, besides reinforcing traditional model of femininity, contemporary media is actively constructing the image of the liberated independent woman. The superwoman stereotype that is simultaneously able to develop a career, keep up a happy family and perfect looks is a loved image disseminated by women's magazines nowadays. Western media researchers have argued that particular images of feminism have been already sold to the commercial culture in recent decades. We can trace the presence of such images also in the westernized and commercialized media of East and Central European countries. The assertive, ambitious woman is no longer an oddity but has become a new cultural type in the process of commercialization of the media. Independent woman with her own income has just as much potential for being a profitable consumer as the traditional homemaker, idealized in the East-and Central European media in the beginning of the 1990es, when capitalism was restored. Female sexuality has become big business since then, a new definition of women's sexuality is being produced, including hedonism and attention on one's body, caring and nurturing it.

Thus the new cultural type of the liberated woman that was manufactured to serve the commodity market of a capitalist economy in West was smoothly transmitted to the developing capitalist media industry of the former East. Liberation and independence today includes purchase of appliances, accessories and cosmetics. Advertisements and narratives presenting good life include consumerism and hedonism as forms of liberation and emancipation. It has been argued that this type of new women rather enforce than challenge the traditional gender order of the society.

However, in the majority of cases, for example in the success stories presented in women's magazines, independent modern woman is portrayed as a woman who wants and occasionally achieves equal status with men.

The mass media has helped to set up a new majority/minority paradigm and minority status has shifted away from independent, ambitious women to feminists.

As the contemporary media is heavily influenced by market forces, media researchers in the West have argued that the dissemination of alternative non-commercial images of liberation is severely limited. Mainstream media still tends to represent

independent career women and especially feminists as hostile, aggressive man-eaters who lack the sense of humour and are too ugly to get a man, if not as men in female bodies. These women are represented as standing apart, deviated from the majority of non-aggressive 'normal women' and have acquired a secondary, if not curiosity status in media representations.

Media does not exist apart from the society and should be analyzed in the context of concrete time and space. Available feminist media theories have all been developed in the context of western societies, where women's position and the shifts in the situation of women have been different than in the transitional societies of East- and Central Europe. This notion has been admitted in the researchers community of the transition societies but is not always shared by western feminist community (i.e. collection of conference proceedings "Gender in Transition in Eastern and Central Europe", ed. by Gabriele Jähnert, Jana Gohrich, Daphne Hahn et al. Trafo Verlag, Berlin 2001). Estonian researchers on gender and media are generally conscious about the difficulties one can face when applying western concepts directly to explain the representation of women in the media texts or women's position in media organizations. Although many things are universal in the gender order of different parts of the world, researchers can face phenomena that are seemingly similar but differ if the origin of these phenomena would be considered. Besides that one has to keep in mind the specificity of concrete "national gender order" of certain culture. Division between the public and private has to be considered anew in a certain cultural and historical context.

In state socialism we could speak about women's double burden of compulsory paid and domestic work, which as a context gives different background to the understanding of emancipation and liberation of women in the western sense. For example unrealism of commercial media images of women as housewives, mothers and sex symbols spread in advertisements and women's magazines isn't therefore always perceived as critically by women of transitional societies than by liberal equal rights orientated western women or especially feminists. Motherhood as national project in the beginning of 1990es was not only perceived as a sign of oppression, masculine hegemony and control over women's bodies but also as women's own choice (which does not exclude the possible feminist criticism on the naivety of women's idealistic aspirations 15 years ago). The importance of gender as a category

in understanding the social construction of new national identities in the post-socialist countries is not to be underestimated.

Traditional role models were in the beginning of transition reactivated as protest towards state socialism's forced gender equality. Now in the battle of the sexes for scarce resources, i.e. paid employment traditional male/female dichotomy and cultural patterns based on this have become accepted. Researchers have argued that in transitional societies re-traditionalization of gender order has been taking place. Women can feel that they have lost during the capitalist reforms and rate their possibilities to influence social processes to be marginal. Feminism as another challenge for change or forced reform can in this context be understood as threatening, a foreign-inspired model of organizing gender order. As a result, traditional image of women in the media is not read critically, for the majority of women accept it even if showed the restrictions and simplicity of such role models. Traditional organisation of gender roles in media organisations and uneven distribution of power is not always seen as an obstacle for women's career or felt as constraint to personal development.

However, there is a generation gap in perceptions of women in equal opportunities and possibilities of feminism and towards the role of media in reproducing gender order. Women over 40 seem to be conservative towards the changes feminism could bring along in the society; younger women lack memories of the double-burden of domestic and paid work (or remember of their mothers being tired of uniting career and home-work in the circumstances of state socialism). Uniting career and motherhood is not seen as a feminist project by many younger women but as a model being "natural" in western contemporary world. Capitalist consumer culture forced by the media is not seen as oppression forcing women to decorative and nurturing roles but also as a possibility to make personal choices.

Critical approach towards commercial media content has its limits and it has to be admitted that different readership of one text can be possible – according to contemporary understanding of how the meaning is constructed in media texts. Readers of different backgrounds can make use of media for different purposes: entertainment, easy reading, humour etc. There are other possible approaches besides critical approach to the seemingly one-dimensional media image of women in glossy magazines, soaps etc. However, research could be more critical towards the

construction of femininity in the mainstream media, which claims to be objective and picturing the world “as it is”.

Representation of women politicians in media texts is one of the brightest and most interesting examples of representing career-orientated women in media. In the case of the portrayal of women politicians the understanding of private and public spheres should be considered. As women are traditionally associated with private sphere: home, human relations, family, care, appearance, children and are regarded as having a natural competence for private issues, “life”, the entering of women into public sphere, as politics par excellence is, brings along discursive conflicts or disturbance. Politics as public sphere is associated with men and regarded symbolically masculine, demanding rationality and aggression, which are traditionally regarded as masculine qualities. The disturbance which women politicians bring along in entering media as one of the central institutions of public sphere can most clearly be observed in the objectivist and masculine news discourse, how it deals with women on top political positions (see Halonen, I. K. 1999. *Matka journalismin sukupuolittumisen strategisille alueille*. Tampereen yliopisto, Tampere).

By discursive, textual and visual means the exceptionality of these women and deviance from the masculine norm, which demands men on these high positions, is expressed. The portrayal of women politicians compared to the portrayal of male politicians is gendered and can even in news refer to the looks, family matters or other contextually irrelevant private matters of the woman politicians. Male politicians on top positions hardly ever are questioned about managing family matters and homework besides career, about taking care of appearance or clothing.

However there is some shift in the way men on top positions are pictured in the media. As media content in general is globally moving towards personalization (see Macdonald 2003 “Exploring Media Discourse”, London, Arnold), away from hard issues towards more human interest stories, male politicians can appear also as family men and fathers, especially in entertainment media, society reviews, weekend issues and evening papers. Seeking for popularity through media can be traced also in the case of top male politicians. Still, journalist culture still tends to show more respect towards top male politicians and do not treat them in such a familiar way as women, asking trivial or banal questions.

Journalist practice, moving towards human interest focused journalism, can sometimes even prefer top women as interviewees to their male colleagues, as they

can be asked more personal questions. In this way, journalist culture moving towards personalization gives women politicians more space and voice in the media. However, as women politicians seem to be very easily manipulated by the entertainment-orientated media, the space or time achieved in the media does not always work on behalf of the credibility of those women politicians, even vice versa.

What concerns portrayal of men, it can be problematized in the framework of the latest developments in gender, especially masculinity studies, discussing hegemonic masculinity versus other types of masculinities (see for example Connell, 1995 “Masculinities”, Cambridge, Polity Press). In the case of male politicians represented in the media we can definitely claim that they represent hegemonic masculinity, which has been regarded as a norm in gender order of the western societies. This norm (heterosexual ethnic majority men) can be questioned and it can be asked for example, is there any space for different masculinities in the top of the public sphere and what about media representation of different masculinities such as sexual or ethnic minorities among male politicians. Still, in the context of this project analysis on different masculinities has been regarded of secondary importance or needing a different research framework. The point of departure of the Estonian contributors to this project is that the main question in the framework of the problems of redistribution of power in mass media –at least in the Estonian context-- is the classical “woman question”: how women as a minority in public sphere are represented and what implications this kind of media representation has on the career or access to power of those women politicians.

Ethnicity could however be a special question in the research of media representation of both male and female politicians but what concerns Estonian-language media, it hardly ever covers Russian-speaking politicians’ activities as they have not played a significant role in Estonian top politics.

### *Methods used*

Projects on media analysis from gender point of view in Estonia have used different methods of media research, both quantitative and qualitative. Content analysis has been used in several research projects and also different versions of discourse analysis. In the project “*Screening Gender*” the internationally used content analysis methodology was applied. Several research projects have compiled the original

coding systems (in Barbi Pilvre's research on "Eesti Ekspress" *Persoon* a 10-category analytical tool was used, Helina Lindma has compiled original research tools in her term papers as well as Ede Schank etc). Repertoire analysis has been popular among students in projects using discourse analysis as method.

The two sub-projects conducted in the framework of this research used both content analysis and discourse analysis (repertoire analysis).<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Results of research conducted in the framework of the project "Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power"**

In the framework of the project two research projects were conducted.

1. "Representation of women candidates in the period of European Parliament election".
2. "The portrayals of female politicians in newspaper weekend editions and women magazines".

**4.1.** "Representation of women candidates in the period of European Parliament election" analysed 1246 media texts published since spring 2004, from dailies *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Postimees* and an evening paper *SL Õhtuleht*.

Out of the 1246 texts in 272 women were mentioned as subjects or were the authors of the texts, which makes 22%. In 974 texts men were mentioned which makes accordingly 78%. Of 95 candidates at the elections to the European Parliament 23 were women, which makes 24% (72 were men which makes 76%).

Only 16 of 23 women among the candidates reached media texts during the researched period, which makes 66%. At the same time 90% of male candidates reached media attention during this period.

Research findings thus show that both the representation of women and male candidates in the analyzed media texts were proportionally close to the rate of women/men amongst candidates (24% of candidates were women, 76% men and of texts analysed 22% were on or by women 78% on or by men).

---

<sup>1</sup> For details see Appendix where you can find the coding table used in the content analysis conducted.

At the same time there were big differences between the parties, Centre Party having the best representation of their women candidates in media texts, although the high number was reached due to two prominent figures, Siiri Oviir and Vilja Savisaar. Social-Democratic Party, Reform Party and Res Publica had smaller representation of female candidates in media texts during the period mentioned than the actual percentage of women candidates.

There were no media representations of the candidates of Social-Democratic Labour Party, which indicates the marginal position of the party in Estonian society. Also, representation of women candidates in Estonian language media texts of the Russian Party of Estonia was non-existent but that is more of a result of two separate ethnic communities and media in Estonian society than of any specific discrimination of women.

The percentages of women candidates in studied papers are quite similar. A little bit bigger number from the average 22% in *SL Õhtuleht* – 24% - is basically the same as the general percentage of women amongst the candidates. The orientation of *SL Õhtuleht* as entertaining mainstream evening paper makes the result somewhat expected since the topics that can be defined by such orientation which often favour women to become media subjects. For example, the fact that supermodel Carmen Kass was represented the texts of *SL Õhtuleht* more than any other woman candidate is certainly a proof of this kind of tendency.

In comparison of text types – news, opinion article by another author, article written by the candidate herself and interview in European-special section, it was found that women candidates had the lowest probability to reach the articles on some European-specific subject. Here the (male) leaders of the parties and leading figures were preferred. Probably the editors preferred party top leaders to discuss the concrete “serious” matters of European Union and there are no women among those top figures.

When looking at the news, opinion articles and articles written by the candidates themselves the percentages are again almost similar to the general percentage of women amongst the candidates. However we can see the considerable difference in the Euro-specific material – only 13% of the candidates that reached media texts in

this section were women. Most of the articles of this type were interviews on very abstract and general political topics, which tried to conceptualize rather some ideological aspects of European Union than a concrete problem or question. Since these articles seem to apply discursively for the comparison of general standpoints and views on the world, in this way these can be also seen as a form of political advertisement where the most authoritative voices are usually allowed to speak. These voices belong usually to the candidates who are in top positions in the election lists and fit to the stereotype of “the politician as such” , amongst whom men traditionally make the majority (in Tigasson 2003 research upon the European Parliament election advertising campaign it also came out that male candidates get more possibilities to participate in the discussions and speak up in advertisements during the election period).

*Table 1. Mentioning of different aspects in texts on or by male and female politicians*

<i>N= 1246</i>	<i>Male n=974</i>	<i>Female n=272</i>
Position	498	128
Party	542	158
Private life	65	31
Gender	8	27
Negative aspects	147	50

*Table 2. Different themes in texts on or by male politicians*

*n=974*

Governance	278
EU	219
Scandal	76
Crime and law	52

*Table 3. Different themes in texts on or by female politicians.*

*n=272*

EU	69
Governance	59
Scandal	26
Poverty, social issues	25
Gender issues	16

The six most frequent topics by which both male and female candidates reached the media texts were *European Union, governance, scandal, poverty, social issues, gender issues*.

Both texts on or by men and women candidates have quite similar first three topics – governance, European Union and scandal. European Union as a topic dominated basically in all text types, European-specific article was coded as very specific type of text by both formal and substantial strategies.

Woman candidates figured in the texts on social and gender issues (including poverty for example) and that was also the result of the analysis of texts that women candidates had written themselves. Thus, women themselves actively participate in reproducing the traditional sex-gender system in the media.

Concerning the issue “who speaks in the media”, women candidates were let to speak (were cited) a bit less than male candidates in the texts. Text analysis showed that women candidates were cited 34% of all the 272 cases women candidates reached the texts, but the percentage of men candidates was about 6% bigger, that is 40%.

Woman candidates tend to be depersonalized more than male candidates; they were more often described by characteristics of party membership – that is by collective identity - and not by their individual authority. Women were more often described by the private sphere and gender, which has been found a universal tendency of portraying women of any individual characteristics or social position.

Woman candidates in this material tended to reach media texts in negative context with slightly higher probability, which shows that women’s active presence in public

sphere is reproduced as problematic by the media – finding which is also in accordance with previous research in the West.

The 1246 texts were also briefly analyzed from qualitative point of view, using a category system introduced by Schwartzberg, who found 4 different role types of politicians in political advertising: Mr./Mrs. Everyone, Father of the Nation, Hero, Charmeur. It was found that women politicians in media representation of this period performed most often the role of Mrs. Everyone (found in 48% of 272 texts). That seems again to reproduce the stereotypical image of femininity, of women predominantly belonging to the private sphere, representing empathy and not expertise on some special problem. Women were presented by the role type Mrs. Everyone for which simplicity, empathy, personal value systems, self-sacrifice and demonstration of emotions in problem-solving are characteristic.

Male politicians were most frequently presented by the role type Father of the Nation and Hero, Mr. Everyone was only the third most frequent role type (found in 19% of 974 texts).

The results of this research show that the media representation of woman candidates differs from the one of male candidates in certain aspects, reproducing the traditional gender order and stereotypical images of women (and also of men).

#### **4.2. The portrayals of female politicians in newspaper weekend editions and women magazines**

Qualitative research on 16 portraits of five well-known Estonian woman politicians (Kristiina Ojuland, Ene Ergma, Signe Kivi, Maret Maripuu, Siiri Oviir) in Estonian print media (dailies Postimees/weekend supplement Arter, Eesti Päevaleht, SL Õhtuleht and women's magazines Anne, Stiil and Annabella) from 2000-2004 was conducted to find out how media portrayal is framing feminine gender. The main criterion of choosing those female politicians for analysis was the amount of published articles per politician in this period. Accordingly it was presumed that choosing both weekend issues of dailies and different women's magazines could afford more versatile discussions and give the chance to compare the accents of different media editions.

The research focussed on how weekend editions and women's magazines represent Estonian female politicians. The empirical material was chosen according to the notion that portraits of female politicians are hardly found in media content on weekdays but are frequent in entertainment media such as weekend issues of the dailies and women's magazines.

Repertoire analysis (discourse analysis) that has been previously applied for example by well-known women's magazines researchers Yoke Hermes and Marjorie Ferguson was applied in this research. The main concepts originated for the analyse were *gender*, *cultural stereotype* and *framing gender*.

Media tends to construct dominating and conventional conceptions about society and gender roles in the portraits of female politicians. Moreover, female politicians are perceived to be rather exceptional and their personality, female side and private life are more commonly represented than their social role or professional capacity.

*Politics* was the most frequent discourse in the texts analyzed. It contained eight sub-discourses: *coming into politics*; *sacrifices*; *relations with media*, *opposing the female and male politicians*; *difficulties*; *competence*; *provocative questions*; *opinions of close persons*.

Politics as ultimate public sphere is considered to be men's world or culturally a masculine area; women in this sphere are regarded exceptional. This also appeared in the repertoire, where women although active in politics were opposed to politics as such.

In case of women, media boosts competitive demands of private and public life, contrasting political career to family, home and relations. It is presumed that when a woman is a politician she must have sacrificed her private life because of her social activities.

Mainstream journalism usually draws attention to a female politician, when something extraordinary or scandalous has happened, for example if a woman has made an attempt to forestall her male colleagues, accordingly if she does something unprecedented or, in the contrary if she is connected with some ludicrous blunder.

The research showed that media tends to differentiate men and women, reproducing gender stereotypes: women are more emotional, unstable and tender.

In the texts politics is represented as a very stressful and complicated field for a woman, showing women as victims in the complicated sphere of politics. Media tends to amplify the conflicts of an ambitious woman and tends to doubt about professional competence of a female politician, demonstrating her as reliant, immature and passive. Less attention is paid to the ideas and views of female politician or to aspects that concern her competence, domain or position.

Discourse of *relations* was the second most frequent and included three different sub-discourses: *relationships with partner; relationships with children; relationships with other close persons.*

The *relationship* introductions have a very important place in the interviews and portrays about female politicians. Women are commonly represented in the context of relations. Showing the couples, the following subjects are in focus: *acquaintance, criteria of choosing a partner, weddings and new or failed relationships.* The last two subjects were most common.

Media tends to represent the role of a mother and political career as exclusive spheres illuminating the situation of “abandoned” children and being not very tolerant, when a woman has deflected of the feminine role of being mother and boosting the conflict of mother’s role and career.

In the *personality* discourse there were four different repertoires: *weaknesses; lining up the masculine and feminine qualities; descriptions of close persons; depraved dispositions.*

According to these discourses media focuses on traditionally feminine qualities when a woman has abandoned her regular roles and has become a politician.

Media compares the characteristics and models of behaviour that are perceived to be masculine and feminine, thus media reproduces gender stereotypes. There is a tendency to portray women’s personality but in a strict gendered framing. At the same time men’s social role is usually focussed on in the media texts.

In *domestic* discourse there were four repertoires found: *habitation; meaning of home; housekeeper’s duties; childhood home.*

Media tends to intimate the subjects, representing publicly active women acting in private sphere. When describing a female politician, journalists often raise the issue of house-keeping. This can be interpreted as an excuse: a woman politician has succeeded in the sphere, which is defined masculine, but she is still loyal to feminine standards. Activities that are supposed to be feminine (handicraft, housekeeping, cooking etc) are reverberated even when female politician is abortive in this field.

Four repertoires were distinguished in *education* discourse: *school; academic achievements, knowledge of foreign languages, educational failures.*

According to these repertoires media writes about the education of a female politician when she has academic background or previous career in academy.. Female politician's skills of foreign language are referred to when these are excellent or quite poor. Education and private life are represented by the media as competitive requests.

Discourse of *career* contained three sub-discourses: *earlier career; opposing the earlier career to politics; possible returning.*

All female politicians had a chance to speak about their earlier career. Media tends to contrast earlier career with women's political activity and emphasise their differences.

Discourse of *appearance* consisted of three different sub-discourses: *clothing; body; beauty holds.*

Body has by common notion a very important place in woman's identity and media refers to this even when the woman's occupation is not only "decorative". The research shows that media represents the following appearance codes of female politicians: make-up, hair, hands, nails, legs and decorating the body with clothes and accessories. Media reproduces traditional concepts about female culture, for instance according to media representation it's astonishing when a female politician has not been using feminine beauty holds.

Discourse of *hobbies* was relatively small and contented questions about *sports and books.*

Discourse of *dreams* is spread basically in women magazines where journalists have searched for the meaningful stories in female politician's life that would help to escape from reality. Dreams are usually involved with *home, favourite activity* or such abstract subjects like *freedom* and *love*.

Findings show that the gender-framed personality of a female politician is represented in women's magazines and mainstream journalism, rather than her social role. Media tend to construct and confirm the stereotypes spread in the society, which emphasize that masculine qualities such as ambition, independence, competence, logic, frankness, rationality etc are required to succeed in politics. Although a female politician may have those qualities and a journalist can even perceive it while writing the story about a woman politician, he or she focuses on the anomaly of the woman politician and on qualities that are supposed to be feminine, thus framing gender. These characteristics are gentleness, understanding, empathy, reliance, interest in her appearance and need to be protected.

As to this, media (re)produces a conflict between masculinity and femininity and tends to maintain cultural stereotypes of women's roles and feminine standards. According to personality discourse present in texts female politician does not express her emotions, she seems self-confident, stable, straight, coherent and strong. As women are stereotypically expected to be different, that is to be feminine, stereotypical feminine qualities are stressed such as crying, pique, tenderness, emotionality, sensitivity, weak-edginess, that are attributed to women in complicated situations.

The reconstructing of feminine standards, ideals and confirming gender stereotypes occurred in every discourse. For example, the body and the appearance were very important criteria in identifying female politicians: almost in every article her dressing and care-taking of her body were referred.

Moreover, in portraits of female politicians media tended to reconstruct a common stereotype, a tense connection of a woman active in public with private sphere. Their femininity was reconstructed by discussing relations with other people (husband, children, parents and other important acquaintances) and doing homework. The conflict between private and public sphere occurred in domestic, political and education discourse. The mother's role, relationships, housekeeping were opposed to

education, career and politics. Furthermore, media to exhibit its intolerance when a female politician has abandoned the traditional role of a mother or a housewife, a loving and loyal wife.

The attitude towards female politicians who had no children was rather negative. It was also deplorable when the mother launched into politics while the child was little or needed her most (Estonian expression “raven-mothers”).

It is understandable that women magazines focus on the subjects such as home and relations because women’s magazines are the gender specific genre. However, those repertoires are widely present also in portrayals of women politicians in mainstream journalism, the weekend issues of the dailies. Only the hobbies got less attention in the weekend issues and dreams and cravings were particularized more in women magazines.

However, the political discourse was the most capacious in the weekend issues of dailies.

The main conclusion analyzing the political discourse is that media constructs the conflict between women and politics: texts emphasised women’s incompetence in political sphere either expressing it straight or asking provocative questions; they opposed female politicians to male politicians; they discussed how difficult and full of tensions politics is for a woman; they showed the negative effect that politics has on women’s personal life. According to this, media confirms the understanding that politics is not the right place for women.

In conclusion, in the portraits of female politicians media emphasised the gender by representing female politician stereotypically and acting in traditional gender roles. This can trivialize women’s participation in public discourse and also affect the public opinion and can influence women’s perspectives and attitudes towards participation in public sphere.

Research findings show that female politicians are typically described by characteristics like gentleness, understanding, empathy, reliance, interest in appearance. Although many of the outstanding female politicians have background in law or hard science, these issues are not discussed in the portrays. Focus on relationship and appearance in women’s magazine portrayal can be explained also by genre rules but the same type of women’s portrayal occurs in weekend supplement of dailies, which have stress on entertainment. Conflict between the masculine area of

politics and female subjects is stressed continuously in women's portrayal, framing gender according to stereotypes spread in the society and media practices. Journalistic choices play an active part in the reproductive process and maintaining gender order.

## **5. Conclusions**

The previously existing research and the research conducted specially for this occasion shows that women's media representation including the representation of women's politicians follows universal tendencies shown by western feminist media researchers since 1970-ies. Changes in representation are very slow and media tends to be very rigid in accepting the changing position of women in the society. As a means of power in the hands of often patriarchal minded forces (commercial structures, political ideologies) media plays an active role in reproducing the more conservative traits of the sex-gender system of the society and ignores innovative changes in the society such as women's emancipation. Women's media representation is universally more gendered and it reproduces the gender order and power relations of the society in a kind of black and white, stereotypical way. Women's role repertoire in the media is much narrower than in real life due to this biased portrayal from patriarchal point of view. Themes belonging to private sphere (home, relations, looks, children, care, empathy) are predominant in women's media representation, despite of media genre, type of media issue and despite of concrete woman's position in the society. Women are typically represented by group identity: gender, party membership, not by individual characteristics. Women, including women politicians are often manipulated and consciously misused by the entertainment media, in a way that they sometimes even do not clearly understand the possible side-results of such kind of fame and publicity to their credibility as professionals. Popularity achieved in tabloids can have besides big numbers also backlash effect on voters' choices and maybe this even explains why women voters do not vote for women – as they have been presented as non-specialists, too much “women” (emotional, irrational) to cope with difficult tasks and contradictions in everyday demanding political work and decision process. Politics today is more and more entertaining, but it has its limits as European Parliament elections in Estonia clearly demonstrated.

It has to be admitted that women (politicians) themselves actively participate in the reproduction of existing gender order, as interviewees, as authors and as subjects of different media texts. Even outstanding politicians do not question the way they are

interviewed or portrayed in the media or on what themes they are questioned about, thus they unconsciously follow gender patterns based on stereotypes, often showing them in trivial or even negative context. It can be argued that women and female politicians are in this sense gender-blind, they do not see the hidden messages and patterns, set in the ways journalist approach them and write about them.

The reasons for this gender-blindness can be either conscious choice of following the accepted patterns and gender roles in the society, with all the constraints they bring along, including the influence on women's political career and public image, or it can be also the result of media illiteracy what concerns gender point of view. Many women politicians seem to believe themselves that showing the traditionally feminine qualities in the issues of entertainment media (talking about weight problems or aging, private life, demonstrating clothes, showing bedroom decoration or bathroom interior) strengthen their chances in elections but this can also lead to the opposite results, diminishing their political credibility and having negative effects on the professional image. Here a proper balance should be found by the help of PR specialists with some knowledge on gender issues.

Politics is becoming more and more person-centred and entertaining (personalization of the media); one cannot deny commercialization of politics, practiced either by male or female. Male politicians also use entertainment media to gain popularity among masses but it is necessary to keep in mind that male gender role does not include showing human weakness, for example practicing public confessions about weight problems, aging, clothing choices, therefore male politicians themselves hardly bring up such issues publicly or reject them as attempts to ridicule them as personalities. Following existing patterns of gender representation, journalists accordingly seldom try to trivialize activities of a male politician's by asking about private matters, but concentrate on public issues and serious themes of interest. Women politicians could control the process to an extent if they were more conscious about the gender stereotyping power practiced in media.

## **6. Recommendations**

Representation of women's and woman politicians in media should be critically and continuously reviewed in different research projects on different media.

Resources, both intellectual and financial should be invested to guarantee the continuity of this research and monitoring process. Gender researchers have argued that changes in the society reach media with a delay, thus media is in many ways more conservative than the society around it, what concerns reproduction of gender order. Research could trace the way in which different gendered processes in the society are reproduced in the media (for example participation of women in public life, politics, debates on birth rate and motherhood, childcare issues, wage negotiations of different gender-segregated professions such as nurses etc) and how media issues differ from each other. Research and monitoring will help to point out the concrete media issues and even journalists, who help to spread trivial or even negative image of women or female politicians in the society and show in empirical data how this is done. It does not mean that media should be censored but it is useful to pay journalists' and auditorium's attention to the often unconscious process of producing and consuming media content, in order to bring out the hidden messages of the constant flow of media in our everyday lives. Pointing out negative stereotypes and banalities can diminish the possible harmful impact of biased or framed media representation on different groups in society. Especially power of entertainment media's is often underestimated in the reproduction process of our common sense opinions and understanding of the world. Seemingly innocent images of women politicians in the entertainment media such as women's magazines and weekend supplements of dailies are playing a noticeable role in spreading understanding about women's role in politics and women's life in general.

Female politicians could gain concretely from understanding better how media manipulates their images and learn to control the process of media reproduction of these images. The position of women politicians could improve if their media image becomes more serious and more problem-, not personality-focused. More serious depiction of women's participation in political processes and less stress on their decorative and entertaining functions could be beneficial to female politicians also in elections. Many people including female voters still consider politician's qualities according to their ideas and deeds, not just being a nice and popular person and favourite of "yellow" press (this was clearly demonstrated during the elections of European Parliament).

Research and media monitoring results on gender should be introduced to the interested counterparts such as woman politicians, party executives and women NGO-

s, journalists and other interested parties regularly. Educational projects could be developed on the basis of such research to female politicians: how to understand media and cope with it. Journalists and media and PR professionals could also benefit from the deeper analysis of their everyday work as this is not very often reflected upon.

## Appendix “Coding Table”

Candidate’s name	20	European Union
	21	Media
Candidate’s gender	22	Nation-, ethnicity-related questions
1 Male	23	Scandal
2 Female	24	Other
Edition		
1 Eesti Päevaleht	Mentioning of profession	
2 Postimees	1 yes	
3 SL Õhtuleht	2 no	
Type of article		
1 News	Mentioning of party membership	
2 Opinion	1 yes	
3 Article written by the candidate	2 no	
4 Euro-specific	Mentioning of private life	
Party name		
1 Social Democrats	1 yes	
2 Estonian Centre Party	2 no	
3 Pro Patria Party	Mentioning of gender	
4 Res Publica	1 yes	
5 Estonian People’s Union	2 no	
6 Estonian Social-Democratic Labour Party	Negative picturing	
7 Democrats – Estonian Democratic Party	1 yes	
8 Estonian Reform Party	2 no/difficult to say	
9 Estonian Party of Pensioners	Role type of a politician	
10 Russian Party in Estonia	1 Mr./Mrs Everyone	
11 Individual candidate	2 Father of the Nation	
Turn-taking/citing		
1 yes	3 Hero	
2 no	4 Charmeur	
Main theme		
1 Art, entertainment		
2 Private life		
3 Health		
4 War		
5 Catastrophe, accident		
6 Poverty, social questions		
7 Religion		
8 Economy, business		
9 International		
10 Crime, security, juridical issues		
11 Riots, strikes, demonstrations		
12 Science		
13 Environment		
14 Human rights		
15 Defence		
16 Labour market		
17 Education, care for children		
18 State governance, politics		
19 Sports		