Gender stereotyping in the production of the news

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1. Introduction

During the past thirty years many research projects have been conducted to determine how the media have dealt with gender, especially the female gender. The progressive introduction of women in the working world and the weakening of certain patterns of behaviour as exclusive of a single gender have stirred the consciences of male and female researchers to determine how this trend has been reflected by the mass media. The many studies conducted on this subject have demonstrated the limited consideration by the media of structural changes such as that described.

It is true that the number of women on the editorial staff of newspapers and television and radio stations has increased notably in recent years. It is also true that the contents produced by the editorial staff reflect an image of women that is different from that which prevailed thirty years ago. Both changes, in the editorial staff itself as well as the contents, suggest two lines of work which have been used to approach the empirical studies of gender and mass communication. There is a group of research projects concerned with measuring the gradual integration of women in the production structures of the media, as well as a significant volume of studies on content that are oriented towards pointing out that women are underrepresented in this symbolic area and portrayed with a stereotyped representation.

These lines of research are clearly based on a critical perspective. In the background of such research, one finds the action groups, collectives, associations, etc. related to the feminist movement, which use the conclusions of the projects as arguments to support their claims before official bodies, communications businessmen and professional associations. Our motivation in this research project is not very different from that shown up until now, although perhaps it would be necessary to add a certain indignation before the lack of sensitivity of the Spanish media towards the complaints that have been made on the way in which women are represented in the media. These complaints clash repeatedly with a professionalism that uses conventionalisms and insuperable tautologies as a shield. We have also observed that this virtually infallible approach of the profession convinces some colleagues who are journalists, who often reproduce and justify these actions, at a time in which the presence of women on the editorial staff of newspapers in our country is increasing.

All of this leads us to seek arguments behind the contents of the newspapers. It is not a matter of continuing further along the path already travelled, since we believe in the prospective strength of the analysis of contents performed up until now, but rather of adopting a new perspective. We would like to adopt the position of researcher in order to have another point of view, even if this means also changing the subject of the study (from the contents to the organisations). We also seek to arouse this change, in accordance with the results of the research, in order to renew the arguments that they legitimate in terms of gender differences and so that they can be used to denounce discriminatory representations in the media.

2. From stereotypes to stereotyping
The subjects first considered in the research on gender and communication dealt with the stereotyped representation of women in the media and its effects on the audience. The representation of women as wives, mothers, housewives, sexual objects, etc. becomes objective when it is based on the use of the analysis of content as the main instrument of research in the subject of gender and communication.

Following the initial euphoria in the application of the analysis of contents, which “revealed” to the researchers a more or less stable repertoire of stereotypes used by the media to label women, a certain scepticism appeared. It was verified that the stereotypes established are not immutable, nor are all of the contents interpreted as stereotypes by different receptors. As stated by Denis McQuail, the analysis of contents proposes an interpretation which is not the same as that of the person who emits the message, nor the text itself, nor the actual reader; it is a fourth construction.

In our judgement, this is the scenario in which the true power of the analysis of traditional contents in the research on gender and journalism becomes evident: the study of the underrepresentation of women in the news (Bach, 1999). In Spain, the women represent 34% of the active population. There are 27.9% female businessmen without employees and 16.5% female businessmen with employees; 54.8% of the students in the long-cycle careers are women and 63.9% of those in the short-cycle careers. Women hold 42% of the jobs in the public administration. Nevertheless, the authorship of texts by women in the major publications of the Spanish press does not surpass 11.5%, and the mentions of women in the pages of these same newspapers accounts for less than 12% (Gallego, 1998).

Besides the quantitative research projects, some studies of qualitative importance have also appeared in Spain, which manage to penetrate in the latent gender structures of the media discourse based on fairly complex critical analyses (Fagoaga, 1993; Bach, 1999). These not only record the underrepresentation mentioned previously, but also the importance of this phenomenon since it is located within the communicative process itself (Fagoaga, 1993), and illustrated with a case study (Bach, 1999).

**Production**

Production can be seen as a process of coding meaning (Van Zoonen, 1994) which has a collective nature in the editorial staffs of the media. Shoemaker and Reese have classified the different spheres that "influence" the production of contents in the media as: personal level (why the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the professionals are not completely stifled by the organisations where they work); level of routines (how some standardised working procedures are established rather than others); organisational level (where the structures and objectives of the companies impose some limitations on production); level of "extra-media" influences (exercised by the official institutions, the competition, the audiences, the sources, the advertisers and technology); and the ideological level (understood as a symbolic mechanism that serves as an integrating and cohesive force in the society) (Shoemaker and Reese, 1994).

The research on journalistic production in general has granted little attention to gender issues. Most of the research in this field focuses on the figures and the situation of women who work at the newspaper, or the radio and television stations. In this sense, the line of work consists of showing the limited presence of women on the editorial staffs (Gallego y del Río, 1993; Lünenborg, 1996; Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 1997). For
example, in Finland there are more women journalists than male journalists in the media organisations. Nevertheless, women still have limited participation in jobs which involve creativity and responsibility. Another example is a study conducted on the major press in nine European countries, which shows that although women represent 27% of the editorial staff, they only account for 12% of the executive level staff (Lünenborg, 1996).

Although some contributions maintain that the changes in the contents of the media are evident only when a sufficient number of women reach the highest levels of the organisations (Ortega, Fagoaga et al., 1993), others consider that there is no correlation between the gender of those who hold the decision-making posts and the types of contents, but rather that the decisions on contents are based primarily on economic needs (Baehr, 1996).

The feminist studies have focused on the position, experiences and point of view of individual communicators. Van Zoonen defines several different levels of the gender structure in the production of media: work (Gallagher, 1980; van Zoonen, 1988; Creedon 1989), organisational (Smith, 1976; Farley, 1978) and professional routines and habits. The gender structure is expressed in specific posts, tasks, experiences, values, etc. of the female communicators. Moreover, the author questions whether this gender structures affects the coding process and how this occurs. We agree that it is not suitable to approach the debate only in terms of whether a larger number of female journalists would “improve” the contents.

This debate on the quotas of participation by women in the news organisations serves as the background for our research project, which is based on the premise that the gender of those who make decisions on the media contents is another factor in the final nature of these, but not the sole nor the most important factor. The project is also based on the assumption that the male gender is the dominant gender in the production of news by the general news press in Spain, and that the professional culture which has developed as a result is due to the stereotypes which are often used by the press in the representation of women. In this context, we believe that a close look at the production process (especially oriented towards gender issues) should be used to point out the existence of mechanisms of gender stereotyping. The object of this project is to identify these mechanisms of professional “common sense” and to analyse them so that they can be transformed.

3. Design of the research

The aim of the research was to consider the problems of journalism and the relation between news and gender from within the news organisations themselves. Therefore, we not only adopted a different stance, but also a different perspective. Based on the starting points mentioned above, our project was oriented towards conducting socio-critical research using a method that tends to not be intrusive. We consider that this type of approach requires an understanding (verstehen) approach to the values and meanings of the group studied; a scrupulous respect for the context; and a reflexive and critical position by the researcher.

Therefore, we considered that it was suitable to resort to the method of observation of the participants as the main instrument of data collection. As a parallel process, we also conducted several formal and informal interviews with members of the different organisations studied, and combined this data with the previous information (Bericat, 1998). With a team of four persons, we were able to be ambitious in the spectrum of the organisations to be studied. Each of the researchers was responsible
for witnessing the work conducted at a newspaper (La Vanguardia, El País, El Periódico de Catalunya, Avui) and there was also an observer at a news agency (Agencia Efe). As regards the selection of the newspapers mentioned it must be pointed out that the team considered several issues. First of all, the status of the publication as a major newspaper in Spain (with the exception of Avui, which is limited to the area of Catalonia). Secondly, the economic limitations of the project prevented us from studying more than one newspaper based outside of Barcelona, such as ABC and El Mundo.

Unlike the objections stated by other researchers (van Dijk, 1990), there were hardly any problems in gaining access to the media studied. The strategy of approaching the newspapers was designed so that it would lead to “synergies”. In our opinion, gaining access to the newspaper that we considered to be the most hermetic, La Vanguardia, would lead to the acceptance of the others. With the help of several professor colleagues who are also on the permanent staff of this newspaper, we were able to arrange an interview with the director of the newspaper who agreed to collaborate in the project. Subsequently, with the approval of La Vanguardia, the head of the research team sent a letter to the directors of the rest of the media describing the project and requesting a personal interview, that was granted in each case.

The field work was performed between June 1998 and May 1999. During this period there were 124 effective working days in the media. It is important to point out that we agreed to begin the research at the same time for one week in order to consider the problems detected on a joint basis and foresee possible future contingencies. Besides this initial preparatory period, we agreed to pay special attention to the decisions made at different levels (from the writers to the editorial board) and the professional routines in some of the sections that we considered to be the most important (society, politics, culture and economy). Other than that, the rest of the field work was conducted on an individual basis. Each researcher planned her own calendar of visits to the editorial staff, interviewed and spoke with the members of the organisation considered to be suitable and observed with a certain amount of attention those areas that were considered to be relevant based on our subject of study.

If, as often occurs in the study of this type of organisations, we were subject to restrictions of access to some areas or documents, we do not consider that this changed the results obtained in any case. Another characteristic of the field work has been the “mask” with which we have developed our relations with the members of the editorial staff. Therefore, although the leading members of each organisation were aware of all of the details of our subject of study, the rest were only informed of our interest in the process of production of news in general, without special mention of gender.

Based on the data collected, each researcher exchanged her field notes with the other members of the team to comment on the problems, findings and all sorts of incidents. At this point it must be mentioned that all of the researchers agreed that the field work was a process that involved more than simply collecting data, but rather in fact could be considered as a “life experience”.

Subsequently, each of the researchers prepared a monographic report based on a model designed by the team to achieve formal uniformity. Nevertheless, this did not extend to the contents, since each newspaper has a specific structure, history and operation. This common framework was to be used for the analysis of the data collected within the following limits: methodological particularities; context (historical background, geographical area and demographic characteristics, social environment);
areas of interest in the production of news (general description of the production process, description of editorial boards, description of sections and development of news), and partial conclusions.

Faced with the usual frequent criticism of lack of rigour with which the positivists assault qualitative research, we decided on credibility and triangulation as the major criteria for the validity of the data collected. As regards the first criteria, the ongoing observation of the work conducted within the context of the newspapers mentioned, as well as the meetings held on a regular basis by the different researchers throughout the field work as a control, we were able to grant sufficient credibility to the data obtained beyond the specific contingencies. Moreover, the triangulation of the data (Denzin, 1978) in five different contexts allowed us to achieve a high degree of validity for the joint results obtained.

Finally, for the research team, the validity of the data represents an important asset for future actions. Although our work is not based on the typical design of research for action, one of the original aims of the project was to develop recommendations which, if necessary, could serve as an orientation for the news organisations and the groups of journalists. Therefore, we consider the reliability of presentation of the data collected supports this undertaking.

4. Results

In reviewing the reports from each of the newspapers observed, one finds a multiple reality in which, apart from the organisational similarities, the differences between the environments, climates and values lead to the need to be cautious at the time of arriving at results which give the impression that they represent a homogeneous whole. Each newspaper has developed in a specific socio-historical context and with human capital that provide a model of the dominant social relations, a profile. We find ourselves, for example, before a hundred year old newspaper, a publication that has become a reference for the profession, another newspaper with popular success and, finally, a model of everyday nationalist press. As regards the news agency, it involves an office established at the end of the Civil War that has evolved from the controlled, censored communication that prevailed during the Franco era to the more tolerant environment of the democratic period. Therefore, from the historical point of view, three of the newspapers (El País, El Periódico de Catalunya and Avui) began their operations in a socio-political context marked by the Spanish political transition towards a stable democracy and by the tough social negotiation of the new spaces of freedom that this transition placed in the hands of the citizens.

These historical circumstances play a role in determining the publishing projects of each of the newspapers and affect the series of values that each journalist assimilates in order to fit into the journalist organisation as well as the image that their usual audience forms of this. This history is inherited and includes routine practices that are not questioned, which influence the attitudes and behaviour of the journalists, validate the existing production structures and, moreover, make it more difficult to implement possible transformations or changes.

Along with the aforementioned historical peculiarities, each publication presents an immediate reality that is shaped by an organisational order that is quite different in each case. Three of the newspapers studied (El País, La Vanguardia and El Periódico de Catalunya) have some of the largest editorial staffs in Spain, along with a couple of other leading publications with nationwide circulation. They are complex organisational
structures with a wide range of different intermediate professional categories and posts between the executive director, the director, and the writing staff. There is an organisation structure with a maze of section heads, head writers, area coordinators, subdividers and assistant directors implemented by publication based on their publishing interests and practices, as a form of recognition or disdain towards their journalists, or simply in accordance with historical inertia and growth.

Within this order, in all of the publications studied the presence of gender is distributed based on similar patterns. In all cases the female journalists represent 20-40% of the editorial staff, whereas their presence in the aforementioned maze depends on the power of the post, in an inversely proportional relationship. The figures compiled in our project simply reaffirm the data in this matter already reported by previous studies in Spain and other European countries.

This situation represents a context in which the male presence is dominant in the decisive areas for the production of news and for the definition of the publishing line of each publication. The female gender is localized on the periphery and in positions such as the weekend editions (El País), the publishing, photography and computer graphics sections (La Vanguardia), acting in a subordinate manner as secretaries or assistants to the section heads (El Periódico de Catalunya), or documentation and correspondents (Avui), where they usually finally reach the height of their professional career. A larger percentage of women also work in the Society, Culture and Entertainment sections, in comparison to the more male-dominated Sports, Politics or Economy sections. We have observed that this situation is not experienced as a sign of discrimination in any of the newspapers because there are not any "women’s networks " (Melin-Higgins and Djerf Pierre, 1998), as these are referred to by some researchers, in which new strategies could be developed to influence, change or establish a different sort of operational dynamics. Many of the journalists observed overcome this contradictory existence (that of the legitimate desire for professional recognition “in spite of the fact that they are women”) by denying in some sense that they belong to a gender and adopting the strategy of “being one of them” (Melin-Higgins y Djerf Pierre, 1998). This operation involves the interiorising different assumptions: one of these is precisely that a publication which reflects the course of events in the public sphere fails to take into account half of the population based on the principle of division between public/masculine and private/feminine; considering that the professional approach is to inform from a distance, avoiding ideological or personal involvement; the objective approach is to always inform from the perspective of the masculine gender and the subjective approach is to be a woman and defend women’s subjects; the most important aspect of the reality is the subjects about which information is being offered and not one of the many possible perspectives regarding a certain event, including that which we refer to as gender perspective; and finally, those who deal with tough news issues do so because they are considered to be good professionals.

Along with this series of values shared by the dominant professional culture in the newspapers studied, there are also some particular aspects which distinguish each of the publications, such as the sense of social responsibility associated with working for a major newspaper such as El País; a policy of laissez faire, laissez passer which prevails in La Vanguardia and leads to valuing comfort, individualism and limited interest for joint projects; an industrial concept of the production of news which attempts to attract the attention of buyers (El Periódico de Catalunya); and an attitude of ideological cohesion that makes it possible to understand the resistant spirit of
nationalism with which of the contents of the *Avui* newspaper are emphasised. In the case of the EFE Press Agency office, the hierarchical centrality leads to an ideological and professional subordination, as well as constant questioning of the importance of each story as news based on the geographic point of view. These assumptions and professional and organisational values stifle the professional autonomy and independence of the male as well as the female journalists when subjects related to women arise and there is a possibility of granting a gender perspective to the news.

*The production process*

All of the newspapers studies are based on a series of general factors which influence the preparation of the product: the space set aside for news is organised based on the advertising; the reality reported on is adapted to their own fragmentation in terms of information; more time and attention is dedicated to how the news is transmitted rather than to the contents of what is reported; and the selection of news is based on a model of professional culture. In some publications the political alignment (*El País, Avui*) is considered to be significant, whereas in others it seems that business objectives (*La Vanguardia, El Periódico de Catalunya*) or productivity (Agencia EFE) are more important, although this does not release them from an ideological bias.

In all of the publications factors such as the stable news channels and the work conducted by the competitive media play a key role in the production process. In the first case, our observations indicate that the press agencies and the press offices of companies and institutions supply many of the contents of the newspapers. Nevertheless, as can be verified on a daily basis in the EFE Agency, the origin of such contents is not always attributed to the proper source. These sources package the information provided so that it can be easily understood by the media and is difficult to question. In the second case, each newspaper looks at their neighbours out of the corner of their eye in order to offer the public contents which do not “clash” with those offered by the others. In all of the editorial staffs, the stories known as “own subjects” are highly valued because of the distinction these grant them before the audience, and the professionalism they are associated with. Most of these subjects arise from the information provided by a series of personal sources which the journalists have, that are complemented by and compared with other stable news channels in which they finally become exemplary contents of professionalism and signs of distinction within the profession. The “own subjects” are usually the result of a suitable relationship between the professional autonomy of the journalists and the logic of the publication, and much of the contents with a gender perspective are usually finally introduced through this exceptional channel.

At this point it is worthwhile to present some typologies that have arisen from the research in order to approach the quantitative study of the daily news forecasts, which we will refer to further on, which have been shown to also be useful in the analysis of the field notes for each newspaper. Briefly, we distinguish between contents without gender, those in which gender is present, which include a gender component, and with a gender perspective in referring to: news in which there are no references to gender; there are references to the male or female gender (such as proper names, common names, male or female, masculine generic, etc.); the subjects with a gender component are those in which usually there are strong gender connotations and the position of men and women is conditioned by belonging to one gender rather than another; and, finally, the subjects with a gender perspective are those which approach the subjects in
comparative terms considering the male as well as the female gender. Having said this, it is clear that we consider that the gender representations published daily by the newspapers and the agency studied are not only a problem related to the female journalists, and whether or not they hold important posts on the editorial staff. In order to understand gender stereotyping in the editorial staff we have taken into account the consideration granted to gender subjects within the editorial staffs, among the directors and the professionals, including men as well as women. We have observed, based on the initiative of professionals of both sexes, subjects with gender reference, or even with a gender perspective and component, according to our terminology, may or may not be introduced.

Every morning the observers in three of the four newspapers (La Vanguardia, El Periódico de Catalunya y El País) had access to what is known as the “forecast sheet”, a list of subjects organised by sections, which may be published the following day as news. Each section proposes its forecast of subjects to the Editorial Board for comments and acceptance. As of this point, some subjects may be eliminated and, therefore, not published. It is also possible to introduce changes in the way some information is to be dealt with, etc. In this game of inclusion and exclusion of news, the forecast sheets are the board on which the daily match is played. Regardless of whether or not gender-related subjects come to enter the match, they are always situated in the grey area of the diffuse border between inclusion and exclusion. When they do appear in the forecasts, the gender subjects are proposed before the Editorial Board.

Based on the quantitative analysis of the forecasts, we will highlight the general results regarding the degree of fulfilment of such forecasts and especially the classification of subjects based on gender issues. The index of fulfilment of these forecast is a slightly over 71%. In other words, 29% of the news published each day can be attributed to unforeseen events or last minute urgencies. In absolute figures, this means that of the 4,541 items included on the forecast sheets of the three newspapers during the periods studied, in fact 3,237 of these items were published. This data confirms the importance of the news forecasts in defining the agenda of the media and, by extension, the relevance of studying them. The way in which gender is dealt with in the forecasts must be described in greater detail. Nearly half of the subjects included in the forecast (42.8%) completely lack any reference to gender, 47.6% are associated with males and only 4.9% refer to females. The subjects with a gender component included in the forecasts represent 1.5% of the total items, whereas those with a gender perspective account for 0.6% of the forecast. In spite of the limited presence of such items, the latter seem to have gained a firm foothold in the editorial staff if one considers that they are the type of news item included in the forecast that is most frequently accepted in the production process: 83% of them were published, in comparison to 66% of the subjects with a gender component. Finally, it must be pointed out that the news forecasts of the newspapers in which the female presence is detected are located entirely in a specific group of sections: Communications-People, Culture, Entertainment and Society. The production system of the EFE Agency has also allowed their forecasts to be studied from the quantitative point of view, compared with the unforeseen stories that are included daily based on the meetings. Therefore, of the 1,423 news stories analysed, only 27.70% were included in the forecast, and the remaining 72.3% are news texts based on unforeseen events, unannounced actions and statements. This data adjusts to the expectations that a news agency should fulfil. In the forecast (52.1%) as well as the unforeseen (57.1%) news, most of the information
includes references to gender, although the male gender is mentioned in 80% of the cases, whereas the references to females account for 8.2%. In the other categories, they also have a testimonial value: 3.1% for the news that includes a sex and gender component, and 2.5% for those stories approached with a gender perspective.

During the meetings held prior to the field work as well as during the work itself and thereafter, when analysing the results, the Editorial Boards have been granted special attention in our research. The analysis of the results compiled in this scenario which is so highly emblematic of journalism reaffirm their importance for the study of gender and journalistic production. In spite of the different representations of the editorial boards presented in each of the publications studied (“state of confusion”, hierarchical representations, exhibition of prestige or instances of control) and their diverse configuration, they represent a point of inflexion in the entire process of journalistic production. In all of the editorial staffs studied it was observed that the boards had the symbolic value of representing the power as the leading members of the organisation, besides the practical value of filtering of contents. In both versions of this ritual held daily in all of the newspapers it is repeatedly observed that the dominant point of view in the media is male, regardless of how many women are on the editorial staff. Observing the dynamics of the participation on the boards one arrives at the conclusion that the directors usually tend towards absolutism due to the variety of roles held (exercising as moderator, giving opinions, establishing conclusions, instructing others, or imposing criteria), although each of the directors observed uses such roles with more or less authoritarianism. The members of the editorial staffs accredited to attend the meetings are already familiar with the ritual and adapt their participation and the contents of their news proposals to the circumstances by actions such as agreements between the head writers not to mention certain issues, so that the contents will not be debated and no fissures will be evident in their sections nor among them (El País), or relativizing the drama of the news with comments on trivial events that serve as a counterpoint to the drama, to aspects which are not understandable, not shared, or external (such as the news on the law of abortion or the aggressions against and ill-treatment of women in La Vanguardia), or the mechanical reading of the contents with a brief explanation of these (El Periódico de Catalunya), or simply limiting the participation as much as possible and therefore excluding many of the subjects to be published from the debate, and the journalistic dignity the board grants to many of the subjects to be published (Avui).

This review of how gender is divided in the contents of the different news sections confirms that the everyday practice of Spanish newspapers is to concentrate the subjects with female presence in the Society, Culture, Entertainment and People sections, in a further demonstration of the personal strategy which involves shifting these subjects from the sections considered to be tough, important and necessary. The consideration of soft contents, which some authors have presented only as a series of requirements regarding contents (van Zoonen, 1988), is also a powerful tool of stereotyping that occurs in all sections of the newspapers. In other words, the news may become tougher or softer depending on what suits one’s fancy. In the first case, depersonalisation, institutionalisation and politicisation, as well as factuality and immediacy are the key elements, whereas the second procedure is performed by the personalisation or interest for persons, groups or social activities, thematisation and timeliness. The contents with tough profiles are concentrated in sections such as politics or economics, whereas those with soft profiles usually end up in society or culture. In the daily practice there are few cases in which the journalists recognise
stereotyping processes, and when they are asked about the focus given to some of the news in which the female gender is ignored, they appeal to the partiality of the sources of general information, general interest (which does not take into account the gender differences) or simply that “the reality is already established when it comes to them”. Therefore, although each section presents certain organisational peculiarities, specific forms of relating to the sources and specific values when judging the news that differentiates them from one another, in the editorial staff as a whole the degree of toughness of the subjects to be dealt with is a key organisational principle.

Nevertheless, there are practices and scenarios that lead to contents in which the gender stereotypes are not so evident. Some journalists avoid the issue of stereotyping by introducing corrections during the preparation of the news or selecting other information in which more attention is granted to the discriminated gender. In the Avui newspaper, for example, this is known as being more “sensitive” towards some subjects and it is considered that women are more sensitive towards gender subjects (confusing the abstract concept of gender with the female). In La Vanguardia, although most of the journalists state that they write for an undefined audience, the heads of the Books Supplement act based on the highly documented principle that the cultural consumption index of women is higher than that of men. This is the only newspaper supplement in which the characteristics of the audience are taken into account, where it is considered that there are men and women behind this concept, and each of them have different behaviours. In El Periódico de Catalunya a neutral reader is considered, an undifferentiated audience. Finally, in El País, the assistant director for the Sunday newspaper promoted a page with the heading “Women”, which was able to “normalise” the introduction of news, subjects, interviews and information on the female gender, but which finally has been short-lived.

5. Our findings

We must say that among the proposals of our research was not to discover if men and women give the information a different gender treatment. That is an interesting point of view, but it wasn’t our objective. Nevertheless, we noticed that the newsrooms are frequented by men and women in a different proportion. I.e. women are 40% of the Agency EFE and the newspaper Avui. They represent the 27% in El Periódico and La Vanguardia, and the 28% in El País.

If we speak of women with staff responsibilities this percentages fall to the 33% in the Agency, the 22% in El País, and the 11,9 in El Periódico and 11% in La Vanguardia.

We realised, too, that not only there are more men in the newsrooms, they have a stronger presence. Even if women have staff responsibilities, they appear when they have to solve technical things and then, they disappear. They do not stay in the corridors, nor in little groups.

We can confirm there is a journalist culture in the newsrooms, understanding this concept in the sense that journalists share some values, ideas, believes, behaviour, and so on (Melin-Higgins and Djerf- Pierre, 1998) that does not include a gender dimension. Because journalists don’t know what is an informative gender dimension they treat some events related to women in an intuitive way: some times by excess, some times by default; for example, when the introduce some old fashioned and insistent stereotypes: the iron lady, the black widow, the beautiful mermaid an so on.
The mechanisms

As many authors have pointed out (Bunge, 1972) mechanisms are normally unknown, and we can only try to understand the logical process in which they remain hidden. We have situated these mechanisms in four dimensions: a) the organisational structure of information b) the journalistic culture, c) the influence of social and cultural context, d) individual idiosyncrasy.

a) the influence of the organisational structure in the information

This level affects our study object in the sense that each journalist has to find his/her own role in the hierarchical structure of the media. They have to look for their place and one way to be well considered is not to be inconvenient. They have to propose interesting subjects that can be able to be accepted by the superiors. Most of the subjects related to women or with a gender dimension come from the surroundings and they are not relevant topics. So, journalists have to be very sure of these subjects before presenting them to the editorial meeting. They have to prepare their topics extremely well before presenting them to the editorial meeting. We believe that an obvious activity of the editorial meeting is to provide a forum through which to play out the power struggles among the staff.

b) Mechanisms Based on Professional Culture

The most important aspects in this dimension are:

a) There are some sections that merit greater professional consideration than others. Politics, International and Economy are considered to be ‘hard’ sections, whereas Society and Culture are considered ‘soft’. Some journalists consider that making the news ‘harder’ is precisely what their job entails. The task of transferring the information from the periphery of the ‘soft’ sections to the front page or to the central role of the ‘hard’ sections is the daily aspiration of many members of the editorial staff.

b) During our observation sessions, we realised that these newspapers consider other media to be of key importance. This self-referential impulse acts as a circular flow that perpetuates a static journalistic culture. It is a mechanism that not only provides the confirmation of self-importance but also significantly reduces the number of subjects or events considered to be newsworthy.

c) A key foundation that supports the ‘culture’ of journalism is the belief that news production is not based on ideology. Rather, it is seen as an objective reflection of an external reality that is somehow given, and the journalist merely transmits this reality. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning clashes with the explicit recognition of the limits
experienced by journalists when undertaking their own job. In order to enjoy a certain amount of freedom, one first must internalise the model and style of the newspaper one works for, that is, assimilate its ideology and philosophy. Therefore, it seems that there are some ideologies considered to be legitimate, acceptable and defensible – for example, we can find a nationalistic newspaper in the media market which is seen as unproblematic – as well as perspectives which should be rejected because they are apparently considered unacceptable and distorting – such as feminism. Journalists prefer to give the information a political interpretation instead of observe the problem through the conflicting relationship between the sexes. For example, in our observation sessions, we were able to identify how the subject of abortion was more frequently considered from a political perspective (votes cast on such issues, reactions of different parties to the extension of the fourth condition of abortion, etc.) than as a problem that arises due to differences between the social positions held by men and women within the context of a tense relationship between the sexes.

d) A key element in the nexus of beliefs and assumptions that journalist culture is based on, is the idea that there is no specific profile that characterizes the audience. It seems that neither women nor men consider that the reader has specific characteristics, forms part of a specific geographical, political and/or cultural milieu nor (of course) is a person of a certain sex who has been socialised into a gender role. "I never consider whether the readers are men or women", they say.

\[c) \text{Mechanism due to Social and Cultural Context}\]

The mechanisms deriving from the socio-cultural context are:

a) Our society forms part of a context that we could refer to as androcentric or male-centred (Bourdieu, 2000). Therefore, in the field of journalism we find that women have been included in a professional culture that is dominated by a masculine world view (van Zoonen, 1994; Melin-Higgins, 2001). In the newsroom, the most important events to cover (in fact, almost all the events covered) take place in the public sphere and there is a radical separation of rationality from emotionality, as if human behaviour could be guided by rationality alone.

Many professional women with statements such as "First of all, I am a professional". In other words, they attempt to avoid belonging to a gender, or they believe that the constellation of values with which they were brought up and educated does not influence the work they perform: instead they have accepted the values of the dominant gender. On the other hand, men find it difficult to accept the need to incorporate the values seen as belonging to ‘women’ such as: rendering important the interrelationship between public and private life; the recognition of the relevance of the emotional part of human subjects and trying to establish a balance with their rational part; their interest in people, their capacity to feel empathy, and so on. This is because they are not familiar with them, do not share them and, from their view, these values appear to lack prestige in the same way as the entire constellation of female values lacks prestige in the society. They find that dealing with subjects which involve different gender situations and aspects that are extremely foreign to them are uncomfortable, disturbing, bothersome and confusing. At
times they introduce humorous elements in order to come to terms with such items, or evade them by claiming that they are redundant, as in "we already said that yesterday, or a few days ago, etc." At other times both male and female professionals avoid proposing these subjects so as not to be labelled as "feminists".

b) The members of the newsroom transfer to their professional daily routine, stereotypes and behaviour patterns that belong or come from an androcentric socio-cultural context. Therefore, in their daily negotiation with current affairs, they judge actions and behaviour of men and women differently and stereotype them. They consider male activities such as political negotiation, economic achievements, sporting success, as the more serious and relevant ones, while female activities are undervalued. We find a paradigmatic example in the report of most female sports, which are systematically ignored by the media. As far as women are concerned, the description of their physical appearance is frequently mentioned when they move beyond the private dimension they usually occupy, into the public gaze. Another example of this is the familiar, domestic treatment granted to women by journalistic discourse, in comparison to the social status associated with men.

c) It seems that newsrooms are using the model of minority status which is found more widely in society, as their framework for understanding and reporting on difference, rather than acknowledging the gender-related contradictions that can be found at all levels of social relations. Therefore, the approach to gender conflicts is similar to that granted to other groups and women become another "minority group", like immigrants, people with disabilities, young people and so on.

d) The influence of personal/individual idiosyncrasy

Finally, there are the mechanisms which we believe can be attributed to the personal characteristics of individual journalists in the transmission of gender stereotypes:

a) On several occasions we observed how personal involvement with a particular issue was the factor that led to the disclosure of certain events in journalistic discourse. This may be a journalist who observes the endless construction work on his or her street, who repeatedly arrives late for work due to heavy traffic, has a problem at his or her daughter's school, or is overwhelmed by the passivity of the administration towards a claim being made. Moreover, a feeling of guilt for an action, a feeling that one has in a relationship with a colleague, or a problem with others may lead to the consideration of such a subject as news. In order to do this, the situation must be generalised to a broader context, where his or her specific experience is replaced by the testimonies offered by other sources which allow it to be considered professionally acceptable for the individual journalist as well as for the senior staff who must give approval.

Thus, since the editorial staff do not usually have a definite position nor a clear concept regarding gender subjects, the mechanisms through which it is most likely that a male or female journalist can introduce subjects or themes with a gender perspective occur on the individual level.

b) There is also a mechanism similar to that described above which is based more on a social belief or concern than a personal problem. In such situations, the journalists are allowed to disclose their social concerns in accordance with their own personal values as long as they comply with the assumptions that form the basis of the journalistic profession.
(objective reality, distance from the facts, non-recognition of ideological preferences) and remain within those boundaries. This mechanism allows the different social groups (and the sources, in general) to identify the professionals who are most likely to portray their claims or problems. This is a possible point of entry for gender-related subjects or themes that would otherwise not be given coverage.

6. Conclusion

All these factors form a dense pattern whereby it is difficult to distinguish the causes and the consequences of each of these factors affecting the production of the news discourse.

The first conclusion we can offer is our verification that the routine discourse, as we know it today, is a discourse that does not consider gender dimension in its assumptions and approach.

Therefore, no interpretation is made of the different social positions held by men and women in society since this is not deemed newsworthy or important. This question exists in the general environment of the newsroom as well as in the minds of women and men. It remains as a non-explicit ideological subtext which is uncomfortable and difficult to place. The journalistic treatment of gender issues follows a pattern which ranges from completely denying or asserting indifference to gender through to acknowledging its existence and allowing gendered themes to be included in sections where it is possible to show and/or express concern for gender. Due to the relative invisibility of gender - in some cases, it is more a denial than a lack of knowledge, in others it is contempt, or indifference - gender issues are approached intuitively, by approximation, based on the impulses or inclinations of each member of the newsroom and the degree of boldness or cleverness of the professionals in discovering new areas of news which are under- or un-explored. The different positions adopted by the sampled newspapers regarding gender issues are almost always implicit rather than overt and none of the approaches is exclusive to a specific form of media: all of them may include a variety of stances, or even contradictory approaches in the same issue of the newspaper, since there is no overall position for the newspaper, nor guidelines on such subject, nor even awareness of whether or not such positioning is possible.

Nevertheless, our aim here is that of encouraging reflection on the existence of gender, the differences due to this fact, and the subsequent adoption of a progressive approach to subjects with a gender perspective, which would be the professional expression of the recognition of gender difference. Adopting a gender perspective does not necessarily suggest ‘feminist’ journalism (which would be the politico-ideological expression of gender difference), but rather journalism based on the evidence of the difference due to gender and granting a meaning and a place in the news discourse to this difference, which it lacks at present.

The inclusion of a gender perspective may be applied to ‘hard’ information as well as soft information, to international subjects and sports, as well as to the cultural and political spheres. This recognition would eliminate the development observed in other countries where female journalists tend to cover soft topics, whereas male journalists dominate hard sections (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 1997; van Zoonen, 1994). Accepting the differences
between women and men and formulating a journalistic discourse based on difference is not easy: nor is it easy to accept that gender differences continue to exist, regardless of the extent to which the evolution of society and education have accommodated women and men’s perspectives equally. However, the recognition of gender difference and the professional practice to which it leads - the inclusion of a gender perspective - would make visible the presence of women in different social environments and, as a result, make them feel represented in a discourse which, with a few exceptions, currently excludes them.

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