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Hanne Løngreen  
Birgitte Tufte  
Else Fabricius Jensen  
Vibeke Pedersen

Hanne Løngreen og Vibeke Pedersen, Center for Massekommunikation, Københavns Universitet.  
Else Fabricius Jensen, Institut for sociologi, Københavns Universitet.  
Birgitte Tufte, Danmarks Lærerhøjskole.

# Introduction

This issue of MedieKultur consists of a series of articles written on the basis of papers presented at the Nordic/International Conference about Women and Electronic Mass Media in April 1986, at the Center for Mass Communication in the University of Copenhagen.

The Conference was the first international research conference where feminist media researchers coming from USA, Canada and several European countries and representing various research traditions got together to discuss the aims and methods of feminist media research, as well as the issue of how women should respond to current developments within mass media.

Cables, satellites and the legislation concerning TV-2 (a second public service TV channel) which was passed recently will create an entirely new situation for Danish media. Commercialization and internationalization of media will have a great impact on cultural politics in general - not least for women. With this conference we also wanted to enter into this discussion.

Within media research, there is a movement from quantitative methods to qualitative methods within both institutional, textual and audience analysis. We felt it was important at this stage, to explore the relevance of the different methods that have been utilized within feminist media research - that is to say on one hand sociological forms of measurement and on the other hand psychoanalytical and semiological forms of interpretation and not least confront them with each other.

A more practical reason for having a conference at this time, was our discovery at a IAMCR-meeting (The International Association of Mass Communication Researchers) in Prag in 1984 that there were quite a few women in SMID (Danish Association of Media Researches) who wanted to do some work together. Over the years many of us had participated in and had organized women's groups during seminars held by the Nordic media research organisations and IAMCR and we wished to continue this work.

As guest speakers we invited women media researchers from countries where the media situation has over a longer period of time been similar to the situation we can expect in the Nordic countries in the near future, that is from Italy, France, Great Britain, United States and Canada. Other guest speakers came from Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

The Conference aimed to involve researchers from all the Nordic countries. The participants came from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark and included researchers, students within mass media and women's research, journalists and other media workers, mostly women. However, a small group of male media researchers also participated.

Themes treated during the Conference were: The role of feminist women in media research and the development of media research on the following issues: the depiction of women; women as consumers of electronic mass media and finally the position of women in media institutions.

Baehr and Robinson both discuss the relationship of post-war American media research to women. Here, women are either rendered invisible, in that female patterns of consumption differing from male are not touched upon, that is to say, gender is regarded as an irrelevant variable, or female patterns of consumption are described in a sexist or static manner. Thus the feminine is described as it appears, and no causal explanations are attempted.

Robinson mentions Betty Friedan as the pioneer in feminist media research, which commenced at the same time as the second feminist wave in the 1960ties. Baehr, Robinson and Kaplan all emphasize the important development from a bourgeois, sociological media research, to a research that takes the media product as a symbolic, textual universe that constructs the feminine in specific ways into consideration. The difficulties in sociological analysis arise from the fact that it is often based on head-counting, which does not consider how women are depicted and often regards the depiction of women as a direct reflection of reality. The advantages of a sociological content analysis, however, lie in being representative and in its usefulness for putting pressure on political agencies.

Kaplan introduces a distinction in feminist research between an essentialist and an anti-essentialist approach. Essentialist philosophy considers the feminine as something essentially different from the masculine, while anti-essentialist philosophy considers the feminine a cultural and aesthetic construction.

Brunsdon emphasizes a departure from an abstract ideological critique of the picture of women in the media, to an appreciation of women's genres and an interest in women's pleasure in watching TV. It is clear from the various examples of program analysis represented here, that their objectives are very different. Abrahamson who works for the Equality Committee of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, has undertaken very broad and representative studies into the representation of women and men in Swedish programming, for instance in news programs in the course of a week, and compared the results over several years.

The strength of this kind of research lies in its usefulness in political argument. It can, for instance, be used to demonstrate that the development towards a more equitable representation, which everybody thinks is automatically taking place, actually is not happening. However, to explain why the programs and sex roles are as they are, we must on the whole undertake other kinds of research.

Pedersen attempts to uncover why women are rendered invisible and shown as objects in the Danish literary magazine, Bazar, and how the representation of women is connected to the aesthetic form of the program. However, women are not regarded as the passive objects of the male gaze and TV aesthetics, but as having an albeit limited sphere of action wherein they can exert their subjectivity/individuality.

Kaplan analyses a Madonna music video as an illustration of how TV constructs the feminine. The ambiguity in the narrative mode of post-moderne television also implies an ambiguity in the representation of gender. Sex roles are not static but are constantly reconstructed. Kaplan goes as far as asking whether this playing with sex roles means that sex is no longer a structuring factor in society, in the same way as before.

The general trend towards an integration of program analysis with audience analysis is most apparent in Mattelart's analysis of the South American soap operas, the telenovellas. Mattelart's article can also be seen as an example of the trend in feminist media research towards a reevaluation of women's genres, which have previously been very depreciatively viewed. Mattelart is concerned with women's pleasure in watching soaps, telenovellas and other series. She contends that the rhythm of the telenovellas is "feminine", that is, in accordance with the nature of women and their social life. Mattelart is open to seeing telenovellas as both an essentialist trap for women, and as a space wherein the utopia of an other life style can be formulated. And it is her opinion that this dualism is characteristic of the culture industry as a whole.

In recent media research, there is no sharp division between textual analysis and reception analysis because textual analysis often looks for the text's implicit reader. However, some forms of audience analysis have a tendency to forget the text or the media product, which can lead to a static or almost sexist conceptualization of the feminine and the masculine.

Brunsdon refers to various English investigations of viewing behavior and preferences, among others David Morley's work, which demonstrate that the man of the house more or less decides what is to be seen on TV. Women only insist on watching a few favorite programs, such as soaps and generally prefer peace and quiet to insisting upon their own wishes. Men prefer factual programs, news, current affairs and sports, while women prefer fictional programs and series. This pattern is traditional in the extreme, and wholly reinforces our sex role clichés. This kind of analysis must of course be elaborated, in order not to perpetuate the stereotypes of men and women.

Brunsdon uses this research as a point of departure for some reflections upon the ambivalence of women's pleasures. Women's genres are not highly estimated by either men nor women. This means that women are ashamed of their desires both in relation to themselves and their husbands and families. This naturally implies that the women's pleasure in watching women's programs is highly ambivalent.

It is interesting to imagine a combination of the kind of studies conducted by Morley with the kind of content analysis across several program types conducted by Abrahamsson. If television programming in general can be said to be constructed predominantly for the male viewer then television as such also contributes to the construction of the stereotype pattern that Morley's studies uncover, and then it certainly is not a Law of Nature that women only insist on watching soaps and entertainment. Perhaps women do not feel that there are very many other programs that appeal to them.

Morley's investigation is innovative and interesting. However, in this context we shall use it to clarify what feminist media research is: A question that was posed several times during the Conference. The answer generally given, was that it is not possible to determine whether feminist media research has its own methods. What is more characteristic of feminist media research is the questions asked. In this example it is necessary

to question Morley further, to go beyond the static outlook on women. In her investigation of the overall media use of men and women, Lund takes a look at one of the myths in this respect: namely that women are mainly interested in television entertainment and weeklies while men prefer television news and newspapers. Through her questionnaires Lund demonstrates that women are simply not getting the information they want in newspapers, but that they have to look to a range of different media, in order to satisfy their need for information about the daily life of women.

Through questionnaires and observation Tufte and Jensen have also uncovered very stereotypical sex role patterns among children and adolescents in their TV and video consumption. Tufte argues that the sex variable is more significant than the class variable. The empirical results are explained on the basis of a psychological and sociological analysis of youth culture, especially concerning girls' culture, an area that is coming into focus after years of concentrating on the more spectacular boys' culture. Jensen also demonstrates the ambivalence in the consumption of media by girls. On one hand, girls use the media to become independent individuals and to create a distance to their mothers, on the other hand, women in the media are still depicted within the framework of the male ideal of femininity.

It is interesting to read the contributions in this issue by Jensen and Kaplan in conjunction. The conflict described by Jensen between the young girls' need for independence and their dependence on male pictures of women, is also a structuring factor in the media products offered to young girls, as Kaplan shows in her analysis of the Madonna music video. There are also ambiguities in the representation of women in the media.

The position of women in media production is an important aspect because more women behind the screen probably is one of the pre-conditions for a broader representation of women on the screen.

Abrahamsson's article describes the work for equal opportunity within the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. This work consists in both personnel management and attempts to raise the awareness within the institution about program content. Gallagher's article is a summary of the report she prepared for the EEC about women's employment and influence in various European TV networks. She refutes the myth that the development within the media is going in the right direction - that more and more women are getting influential jobs. She points out, however, that it is possible for women to exploit the commitment of the public service television to playing a progressive part in societal development. It is also possible that national TV stations can be induced to employ more women during the present circumstances, where they feel insecure about the threat represented by commercial television.

At the Conference Baehr also discussed her own experience as a member of the feminist production company Broadside, that produced programs for Britain's Channel 4. But as she did not want to publish her findings yet, we will here briefly tell about the initiative, because we got the impression during the Conference that this could be a source of inspiration for Danish women in regard to Denmark's forthcoming TV-2.

Broadside was a feminist production company that started in 1981 for the purpose of producing programs for Channel 4. Most programs for Channel 4 are bought or commissioned from independent production companies, as is to be the case with Danish TV2. It is part of Channel 4's aim to encourage experimentation and innovation in television programming and to represent the interests of groups which have not been taken into account by the existing TV channels. This was one of the backgrounds to the feminist initiative. Another was the tradition in England for feminist criticism of the television and film industry.

Broadside, together with another women's production company, succeeded in securing a weekly prime-time current affairs



broadcast every Wednesday night. Some of the programs produced by the group were specifically concerned with women's issues - abortion, women in prison, secretaries, etc - and some were about political issues in general, covered from a women's point of view, however. One of these programs was shown during the conference. The program was about the war in the Falkland Islands. A group of families whose husband/fathers had been in the war was followed for a year. The programs demonstrated the impact of the war on English families - that is to say, the point of view was how women experienced the war. As a result of the long shooting schedule, we witnessed a process where women grew stronger in the course of being confronted with new problems. This program was a good example of women's journalism and female aesthetics.

Channel 4 did not renew their contract with Broadside for the current affairs production. This has also been the case for other women's production companies. It has been very difficult to secure the broadcasting time necessary for developing a feminist mode of presentation. Here we shall not dwell upon the problems involved for a feminist production company producing for a television. We simply want to point out, that this is a possibility along side the traditional struggle for equal opportunity.

Generally, the Conference demonstrated that media research is incomplete without a gender-specific point of view, because the representation of the feminine and sexual segregation of the viewers are basic features of mass media. As for the future development of television we can probably expect a greater sexual segregation of the viewers, implying more programs specifically for a female audience. This has always been the case in countries with commercial television, but a relatively rare occurrence in countries with public service television. We can then expect a greater numerical representation of women on TV, but as the Conference demonstrated, this does not automatically imply more space for a women's point of view.

The analyses of media jobs and programming demonstrate that the passage of time does not in itself create more space for women. In relation to research, the Conference clearly demonstrated, that in the long run, it is necessary to combine the various traditions within media research to be able to understand and influence the interplay of women and media. We hope that the publication of these articles will be read as a contribution toward this end.

A very concrete result of the conference has been the formation of a group consisting of female journalists, media workers and media researchers in Denmark. This group is currently working on two fronts: 1) getting a fair representation of women in the administration of Danish TV-2, 2) and establishing the conditions for a women's production company that can offer TV programs which comply with women's needs. Thus, the conference has also worked as a source of inspiration and as a basis for new initiatives by women outside the media research community.

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Hanns Løngreen, Birgitte Tufte, Else F. Jensen og Vibeke Pedersen.