

Strategies and Results of the Equality-of-the-Sexes Programme in the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation

By Ulla B. Abrahamsson

Danish Summary: I december 1975 opdagede Sverigs Radio (SR) uligheden mellem kvinder og mænd på et seminar om kønsroller. Den undersøgelse, der blev påbegyndt som følge af denne opdagelse, resulterede 2 år efter i en ret så omfangsrig rapport, der gjorde det tydeligt, at spørgsmålet om ligestilling ikke blot ville få indvirkning på personalesammensætning- og politik, men så sandelig også på programindholdet. På grund af strukturændringer i SR blev en egentlig aftale om organisering og start af ligestillingsarbejdet først begyndt i starten af 1980.

Regeringens vedtagelse af lov om ligestilling mellem mænd og kvinder på arbejdsmarkedet blev grundlaget for etableringen af en ligestillingskomite i SR. Mellem 1980-84 lavede komiteen et projekt som blev kaldt "ligestilling på jobbet". Dette projekt gik ud på at alle ansatte skulle bruge en arbejdsdag for i grupper at diskutere ligestillingsproblematikken.

Mens disse projekter stod på opnåede de svenske hovedorganisationer på arbejdsmarkedet en særftale om ligestilling (1982). Hovedpunkterne heri blev til de generelle retningslinier for ligestillingsprojektet og hermed for SR's forskellige selskaber og afdelinger. Den økonomiske krise var imidlertid slået i-

gennem også i ansættelsespolitikken, hvilket selvfølgelig fik indflydelse på den praktiske gennemførelse af ligestillingsarbejdet. Tilbage står så spørgsmålet om ligestilling i forbindelse med selve programindholdet.

I 1983 lavede ligestillingskomiteen en undersøgelse over en uges TV-nyhedsudsendelsers indhold - nationalt såvel som lokalt. Det viste sig at 28% af nyhederne blev reporteret af kvinder. Ligeledes viste det sig, at der var et vist mønster i hvilke stofområder kvindelige og mandlige journalister beskæftigede sig med. Mændene dominerede på det udenlandske nyhedsområde (nationalt) og på industri og handel (lokalt). Kvinder var ligeligt repræsenteret på alle andre områder. Det fremtidige ligestillingsarbejde måtte derfor baseres på, at kvinder dels skulle infiltrere de mands-dominerede områder og dels integrere, hvad vi kalder 'kvinders verden' i nyhederne. Det første er ved at ske, mens det sidste forekommer yderst sjældent.

For at undersøge alle programtyper mht. den lovsikrede ligestilling, bør man betragte programmerne ud fra to indholdsmæssige aspekter: 1) at de giver kvinder og mænd samme opmærksomhed og 2) at de beskriver kvinder og mænd med lige værdighed.

En undersøgelse af fiktionsprogrammer i 1980 og 1985 viste, at der ikke var sket nogen ændringer mht. disse punkter. Programmer og udsendelser reproducerede det 'gamle' kønsrollemønster. Det er vigtigt at skabe kvindeprogrammer for uden vil kvinders selvtillid og selvrespekt stadig forblive ringe. At kvinder ønsker programmer med kvinder i de vigtigste roller bekræftes af en igangværende undersøgelse. Den viser at favoritudsendelserne blandt svenske kvinder er - udover svenske familieunderholdningsudsendelser - serier med kvinder i hovedrollerne (Lace, Jane Eyre, All the Rivers Run, Falcon Crest). Mændene mener sport. Tendenserne observeret blandt kvinderne bekræfter behovet for udsendelser orienteret omkring kvinder.

"Truslen" fra satelitterne må medføre et øget udbud af svenske kvalitetsprogrammer, som kan dæmme op imod udenlandske program-

mer som jo ikke just er kendetegnet ved ligestilling kønnene imellem. Men SR er rustet fordi ligestillingsproblematikken og -resultaterne langsomt men sikkert vinder frem. Men der er stadig meget arbejde tilbage.

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The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation (Sveriges Radio) is a public service company. It is financed by licence fees. The money is pooled in the Broadcasting Fund. Parliament allocates the company's budget from this fund every year.

Broadcasting in Sweden is regulated by two main legislative instruments - the Radio Act and Agreements between the Government of Sweden and the different companies. Sveriges Radio has a group company structure today - it consists of five companies: a parent company and four subsidiaries. The parent company has some administrative responsibilities, but no programme production. The subsidiaries are:

Swedish Radio Company (for nation-wide radio broadcasting)

Swedish Television Company

Swedish Local Radio Company (with 24 local radio stations around the country)

Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (with both radio and television production)

When this story starts, however, there was no company group. Sveriges Radio was one big company - with three radio channels and two television channels.

The discovery

The inequality between women and men was discovered by Sveriges Radio in December of 1975. At that time a seminar on sex-roles was held. This happened in the 12th month of the United Nations International Womens's Year, 5 months after the first international Women's Conference in Mexico.

Mapping and analysis of the problem

Soon after this seminar the Personnel Organisation proposed to inventory the existing situation as regards the distribution between men and women in different duties and at different levels within the Corporation. And soon after that the Union and management agreed on an Equality Project.

The project work was carried out very thoroughly and was completed after two years. The result was a voluminous report, listing 69 concrete proposals. Some of these had been tried out on an experimental basis during the project period. Among the 69 proposals were big and small items. 45 of the proposals dealt with personnel policy and 24 with programme policy. This says something about the basic strategy: An important thing was to develop the resources of the employees. And further: It was taken for granted that changes in the field of personnel policy should have consequences for the programmes. If we could reach a more even distribution of women and men in all professions, this would lead to the promotion of new programme ideas and different ways of making the programmes.

The report from the Equality Project (1) was submitted to the Board of Governors in late 1978. This happened to coincide in time with a fundamental reorganization of the Broadcasting Corporation. The Parliament decided that very year that the company should be divided into five, as I described earlier. It took some time before the new companies had formed and were stabilized in new routines. In late 1979 a new period started which we can call.....

The work is organized and started

In early 1980 an agreement was signed between the local Union and the five Company Managements. One of the basic documents for this was a new law in Sweden: The law on equality between women and men in the labour market.

As a result of the agreement an Equality Committee was formed. The report of the Equality Project and its 69 proposals formed the guidelines for the committee. It should have 10 members - five of them representing the managements and five representing the personnel of the five companies, these latter to be elected by the Union. (All members have a person to replace them, so we are 20 altogether.) The secretary of the committee was employed full time to work only with this type of questions. Special money was put at the disposal of the Committee.

The responsibility for seeing to it that the planned equality work really was done lay in each of the five companies. Therefore, it was suitable also to form Equality Groups in the companies. This was also done. During 1980 and 1981 work started to roll in the Committee and in four of the Company Groups. One company was a bit slow - the fifth group was not formed until 1983.

The Committee started out with a rather extensive training programme - that was - and still is - one of the main tasks. Between 1980 and 1984 more than 700 people participated in the different courses and seminars organized by the Committee. These were of several types; most of them were made specially for women. Most of the money has been spent on the training programme.

An other activity, which developed into something that engaged the Committee and the Groups for several years (1980-1984) was a project called "Equality-at-work". "Equality-at-work" was no ordinary course. The intention was that every employee in this group of companies - with around 6000 employees - should spend one day during working hours to discuss equality and how it applied to their own working group.

About 125 people volunteered and were specially trained to organize and chair the seminars. Often these days ended in some kind of agreement or list of suggestions about how to increase equality in the group or in that particular type of job. These

seminars were a gigantic effort to influence attitudes towards males and females. They aroused a variety of reactions - often very intense reactions. In some cases the organizers faced too difficult a task. But they also fulfilled "a deeply felt need to talk about and solve problems at hand", as it is put in the evaluation report afterwards.

While the "Equality-at-work" days still were going on, the rest of the equality work at Sveriges Radio slid into another phase which we may call

Determination of the goals

These goals were defined in each company separately by the Equality Groups and decided by the Boards of Directors. Just as before, we find two different parts in these documents - one about personnel policy and one about programme policy. Personnel policy may be summarized in six points, and it is easy to see that they are inspired by an agreement between the main organizations on the labour market (The Swedish Employers' Association, the Swedish Trade Unions Confederation and the Negotiating Cartel for Salaried Employees). That central agreement appeared in 1982.

The phrasing varies a little between the companies, but in principle the goals for personnel policy are these:

- to create a positive attitude towards equality between the sexes in the company;
- to give women and men equal opportunities for employment, training, promotion and development at work;
- to work towards an even composition of women and men in different professional and working groups;
- to make it easier for women and men to combine employment and parenthood;
- to achieve equal pay among women and men for jobs of equal value;
- to consider equality in all forms of training programmes.

These goals are formulated in rather general terms, but in fact most of the proposals from the Equality Project fit in under these main headings. The goals for programme policy are not specific at all. That is one reason why I have chosen to talk about programme policy from another angle. I will come back to that in a moment.

The policy declarations were decided upon in a time of economic crisis. The world economy had consequences both directly and indirectly for the broadcasting companies. They were all forced to rationalize. The Television company, for instance, decided to eliminate 500 positions during a period of four years. This, of course, influenced the climate in the companies, not least the relations between management and the Union.

What I have tried to describe so far is the work process, and how very different factors have influenced what happened. Sometimes outside forces help and ease the process. Sometimes they stop it or make it complicated and almost impossible.

- The political climate in the country has been important. The decision to divide the company stopped the process for a while. The law on equality between the sexes in the labour market, on the other hand, and the agreements between the negotiating organizations on the labour market have undoubtedly been helping factors.
- Economic factors brought difficulties. It is not easy to change the composition of the labour force, for instance, in a time when no hiring is permitted.

Now that you have, I hope, a picture of how the Equality work has developed, it is time to ask:

Has the Equality work had any influence on Radio and TV Programmes?

First some words about THE PRINCIPLES: Until 1978 it was uncertain whether the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation could take any stand in the programmes on the issue of equality between wo-

men and men. But that year - 1978 - we got a new Radio Act. The basic rule is - just as it was before - that broadcasting shall be exercised impartially and factually (in observance of extensive freedom of expression and freedom of information). "Impartially" is the key word here. From this general rule about impartiality there are a few exceptions. The broadcasting companies shall "assert the fundamental idea of the democratic constitution, together with the principles of the equality of all human beings and the liberty and dignity of the individual".

(2) "The principles of the equality of all human beings...."

It is clear that one aspect is equality between women and men, Radio and television shall promote that. The program companies have developed this passage of the law in their own Programme Rules. The rules of the Swedish Television Company say that they shall "actively promote" equality in their programme fare. The Swedish Radio Company writes that they shall "strive for" equality.

It seems unquestionable that radio and television not only shall, but also - theoretically at least - have a willingness to take part in changing Sweden into a country where equality between the sexes prevails.

The first thing that happened - already in the seventies - was that the question was raised: What is the programme fare like today? What images do programmes give of women and men? There have been several studies over the years. The examples I will give here are all about television. We do study radio also. And we consider radio just as important. In fact, I have the impression that the most active discussion on programme policy and equality is going on in the Local Radio Company right now. The only women's programme in Sweden today (Radio Ellen) is found in one of the nationwide radio channels.

Can female reporters change the news?

During one week in 1983 we studied the content of news programmes in television, both in nationwide and regional broadcasts.

(3) There were three national news programmes a day and six regions with newscasts of their own. Among other things we found that 28% of the news items were reported by female reporters. There was a certain pattern in what female and male reported about. In the national news ~~the~~ most important subjects - the subjects that were covered first and most often - were dealt with mostly by men. There were, for instance, foreign news, items concerning Sweden in relation to the rest of the world, unemployment and the economic crisis. In the next segment of "important, but not most important issues" female reporters were well represented.

The most important issue in the regional newscasts seemed to be industry and commerce. This, too, was dominated by male reporters. Women were well represented in other subjects on the whole. In connection with this study we discussed if - and in that case how - female reporters will be able to change the programmes. We had two different kinds of expectations.

One expectation is that the female reporters should infiltrate the most male-dominated areas and subjects and do that very successfully. I am talking about foreign affairs, industry and commerce, political commentary, etc. They should describe them to us with knowledge and authority and turn them into subjects that it would be natural for women to take interest in. Women and girls - and men and boys - need to know that there are women with knowledge and authority. Women who appear in responsible functions in TV and radio raise women's self-confidence and status.

The other expectation is that female reporters should integrate what we talk about as "the world of women" into the news. The areas of life, of reality, of society, that concern women in a particularly high degree - and are handled by women most of the time - should be given attention and should be recogni-

zed as natural parts of the world that is described in the news programmes. The subjects that I have in mind are the school, medical care, social issues, family issues, etc. If this happened, more women would also be interviewed in the news programmes - as authorities and experts in their fields. To let the world of women into the news - and other programmes for that matter - should help make women's work visible and recognized. Our first expectation is on its way to becoming reality. There are new female reporters coming in and they get established in the same way as their male colleagues. We now even have female foreign correspondents.

The so-called women's subjects, on the other hand, are very seldom found in the newscasts. We do not think that a l l female reporters want to change the news values or that a l l male reporters are satisfied with things as they are. But it seems unlikely that individual new members of a production group can change the principal values of the group to begin with. New members must establish themselves in the profession and in the group, and to do so they have to adjust to the norms and values held by the majority. But when they have become established and when they are many enough, they can influence the climate of the group. In the long run even change the news values. If they want to.

Programme fare to promote equality - what is that?

To be able to analyze programmes from the point of view of equality I have been forced to try to interpret the Radio Act and the Programme Rules and find out what programme fare that "actively promoted equality" between the sexes would mean in more concrete terms. It is necessary to conceptualize the vision, I think, to make us able to find out how to get closer to it - and eventually reach it. I have been thinking like this:

Traditional sex roles imply a specific division of labour between the sexes. Women's responsibilities and main tasks are of one kind. Men's responsibilities and main tasks are completely

different. Unfortunately, this division of labour is connected to differences in the evaluation of what women are supposed to do and what men are supposed to do, of female and male on the whole.

The role of mass media in the equality effort must be to redefine these values. That means to raise women's status and self-confidence and to liberate men from extreme and unfortunate expectations. - To wipe out contempt of women and the cult of the superman, to express it in a different way.

My conclusion - or suggestion - is that equality of the sexes in the programme fare means two things:

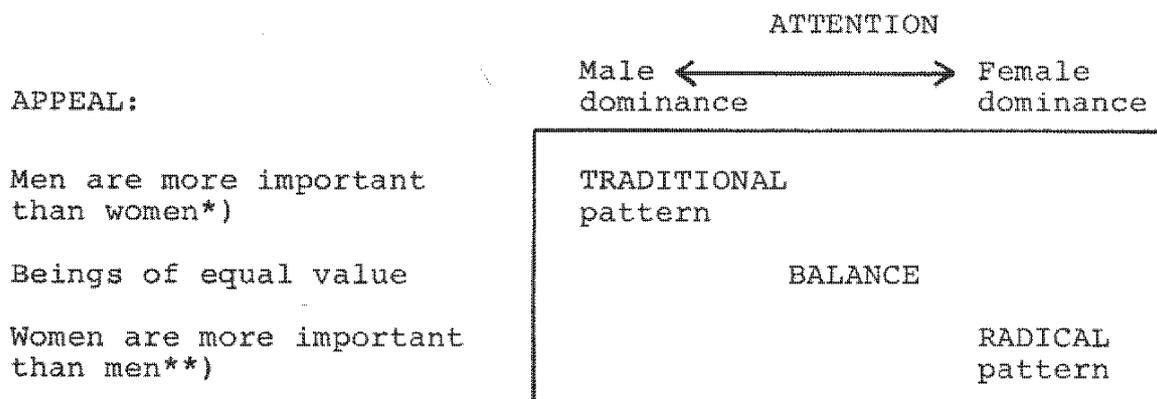
1. to give the same amount of attention to women and men - and
2. to describe women and men as human beings of equal value.

The programme fare should have a balance between female and male. There should be programmes about men and programmes about women, as well as programmes about men and women together. Both women and men should appear in all types of roles, good and bad, active and passive, and so on. In some particular types of programmes this goal is harder to reach than in other types. This is so, for instance, with some factual programmes and news programmes that shall observe and examine the power-holders in society. And it will remain so as long as the power structure in society is sexually biased.

Some subjects are more or less tied to one sex - as long as the cultural patterns drive women and men into different interests and activities as firmly as they do today. Hunting and fishing, for instance, are almost completely male interest. Weaving and sewing are almost completely female activities. The demand for equality should therefore be directed towards the programme fare as a whole, not necessarily towards single programmes.

When I study the attention men and women get in the programmes and how they are described, I do so to uncover values in the programme fare. I assume that what gets attention counts, means

something, is considered interesting and important enough to be there. And I assume that there are values about male and female hidden in the description and appeal of women and men in the stories told. There is a relation between the two aspects in general. Theoretically, the relation looks like this:



*) That is: Men - are subjects of the stories; - carry the substance of the plot and story told; - are active, independent etc; - are described with sympathy and understanding - to a higher degree than women are.

***) The other way around. That is: Women - are subjects ... etc. - to a higher degree than men are.

Fiction in television 1980 and 1985

With this method I have studied fiction programmes in television (4). By "fiction programmes" I mean theatre, film, television series and serials, and cartoons - that is imaginary, dramatized stories. I have compared two periods, 1980 and 1985. For both these periods I used representative samples of programmes, because I wanted to generalize to fiction fare in general. And I compared these two periods to find out whether there had been any change in the output during this time, when a rather vital discussion had been going on about equality.

There had not been any change. When I had judged the programmes according to my scheme. They grouped into three main cate-

gories: those with "traditional sex-role patterns", those that described some sort of balance between male and female, and those with what I call "radical sex-role patterns". The results from both periods were quite alike:

- Balance between women and men appeared during both periods in about one-third of the stories told.
- Radical patterns were very rare.
- Traditional sex-role patterns were absolutely the most common.

Reality	Trad	Balance	Rad
Ideal	Trad	Balance	Rad

From the look of these distributions one might also conclude that this output has hardly contributed to any change of the norms in society from traditional sex roles to equality of the sexes. On the contrary.

The main problem is that fictional programmes with women in leading roles are so few. The other problem is that when the story tells about both women and men, they do not appear as equal human beings. Men often appear more important than women, as you all know.

Do we need women's programmes?

When we find this imbalance time after time in all kinds of output, a certain impatience is spreading among those of us who work actively with the question of equality. Why are there practically no programmes about women? And where does this resistance against programmes about women and for women come from? Is there a contempt for women's culture and women in general? Or is it something else?

We should recollect, however, something we ourselves said in the seventies (some us did): Don't isolate women's issues in special preserves, we said. They must be integrated into the ordinary programmes. Now we have been waiting since the seventies for this integration to take place - and of course we see it sometimes - but not to the extent that we had hoped for.

Therefore, a demand for women's programmes is voiced again. Personally, I see it like this: One way of raising women's self-confidence and status is to make programmes about women and what women actually do and take interest in. Women should not need to be like men to count.

You could also put it like this: Paying attention to the areas that are traditionally considered to be female means lifting them out of a low prestige position. And that is necessary if we want to reach a situation where both women and men are able to choose freely between all areas of life - regardless of what is considered male and female today. And that is a goal.

What programmes do people like to watch?

For the moment I have the impression that interest in what image of the sexes programmes offer is increasing. That happens for a very particular reason: We have started to analyze programme preferences more carefully than before. And we find that there is a difference between women and men.

When we look at the amount of time that women and men watch different types of programmes, we find very small differences. But when we move in close and examine what kinds of programme content attract a majority of one sex more than the other we find a pattern:

Women are attracted more by programmes about "everyday life, the close and every-day problems, the relations between man and women, the relations in the family". Men are attracted more by adventure, action, "tough" sports, etc. "Among the

programmes that men choose to watch more often than women we seldom find relations between men and women, here we find more of brotherhood", says Gunnila Wigren in her report (5).

In a study that I am working on currently I find that if we combine audience figures with data on how much the audience liked what they watched, the difference between the male and the female audiences is even more distinct. Of course there are types of programmes that both women and men watch and like. I have compiled a kind of "Top-of-the-charts" list for 1984-85 for male and female audiences. What they have in common are some light entertainment and comedy programmes. Other popular programmes on the men's list are Benny Hill and apart from that s p o r t s: tennis, skiing, ice-hockey and football and two different regular sport magazines.

On the women's list we find Swedish family entertainment programmes (three of them) and four different fiction series with women in leading parts: Lace (an American production in a style that we sometimes call "the story of my life"). Jane Eyre (a British production about the poor daughter of a vicar and her life as governess and her love). All the Rivers Run (an Australian production about a women artist - a painter - and her love for a man who is captain of a small river steamboat), and Falcon Crest (with several important female roles).

The female audience is gathering around the very few fiction stories a b o u t women. I interpret that as a need for this type of stories among the female audience. A need which is as strong - and just as important to fulfill - as the male audience's need for sports shows.

"The threat from space"

There is still a factor that has relevance for the future of equality in the programmes. That is the satellites and the expansion of cable TV. It is expected that 30-40% of Swedish households will be connected to cable-TV systems by the end of

1988. At present only a few and scattered communities have cable, but satellite programmes attract audiences where they can be watched. And this worries Swedish television, which is preparing to meet the competition.

In a seminar earlier this year the Managing Director of the Swedish Television Company, Sam Nilsson, declared

"... the competition from the foreign channels must be met by an increase in quality of Swedish programme fare - first of all, by increasing the amount of our own theatre and film production. And we have set the relatively modest goal that every second production of fictional fare should be Swedish. I hope and believe, that if we should get the money for such a stepping up of Swedish production, this would also lead to an increase of equality between the sexes in the fictional fare".

Personally, I share that opinion. Swedish production may be influenced and planned in quite an other way than the part of the programme fare that is bought from abroad - provided there is the will, of course. But the satellite channels will be there in the future, and if we look at the total future tv menu, equality will be less than ever. We are in a period of the process now that may be called...

Stragegies and results are reviewed

The Union has made its own study of the situation. The Equality Committee has made a report of what has been done so far (6). Three of the Programme Companies have done surveys, where they have asked every single unit and production group what they have done for equality. The general impression is that as far as personnel policy is concerned we are doing rather well. There is today an awareness of the goals of personnel policy - on the management level as well as among employees.

There are some signs of a change in the personnel structure, although progress is very slow:

- The proportion of female journalists and producers is increasing in spite of the fact that we have had a freeze on hiring new employees for several years. From 34% in 1982 to 36% in 1985.

- The proportion of women in leading positions (managers and supervisors) is not impressive, but it has increased from slightly over 15% in 1982 to slightly over 17% in 1985. Just to mention some examples.

The programme fare has not changed much. One thing that has happened, though, is that we have rather many good female programme leaders and reporters, both in radio and television. Women seem to "dare" more than before. Many companies, communities and organizations started equality work in the seventies. Many gave up after some years when they found that this job took much more patience and time than the participants had expected and imagined.

We are still working. I think for the following reasons:

- We have a stable formal organization.
- We have a full-time employee working with these questions. She has planned and often been responsible for our training courses and seminars. She has taken part in all meetings, and she has been sitting as a "spider-in-the-net" to inform and coordinate. That is invaluable.
- The cooperation between managements and the Union has been a prerequisite for the job as a whole.
- We also feel that we have a special responsibility to go on because the products of our companies are of concern to the community at large.
- The Radio Act is an important factor. Even if it is vaguely written and there have been a lot of difficulties in interpreting it and making it function, it should not be underestimated. That is the platform on which we are building all the programme policy work.

We know now quite a lot about the image of women and men in all sorts of programmes. We have shed some light upon what it would mean to have programmes with equality between the sexes. The attitudes towards equality have had some time to change and stabilize. We are coming out of the economic crisis. And we find

that the audience make choices that are relevant for the issue: Women and men like different types of programme content. It will be impossible to go on as before and cater to one sex much less than the other.

I believe that data about the audience will mean a lot for what is going to happen in the future. Maybe we have found a convincing argument at last.

NOTER

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