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Gender inequality in the media sector

Els Rommes

Radboud University Nijmegen

In this paper the situation in the Netherlands concerning the positions women hold in the media sector and how this relates to the position of women in the Dutch labour market will be assessed. Subsequently, the existing research on the numbers of women and the ways they are depicted in the media is discussed. The section on policy debate, discusses the position and policies of the Dutch government and other actors on gender inequalities in the media, including relevant good practice examples. The final sections concludes, which policies and initiatives could be interesting to transfer.

1. Equal opportunities in the media sector

The position of women in the media sector is relevant for several reasons. Having a position on the labour market provides women with the option of financial independence and underusing women's labour potential is a waste of valuable resources. Working in the media sector additionally allows women to influence who is how presented in the media, either when women hold decision making positions and/or when these media women become visible as figures of authority themselves (i.e. anchorwoman, presenter, journalist).

The percentage of financially independent women in the Netherlands is presently only 48,4% (amongst men this is 73,8%).¹ This is relatively low for several reasons. Firstly the percentage of women that holds a paid position is 71%, which is less than the number of men. More importantly, the 'Dutch model' in which women work part-time is very popular. The majority (58%) of Dutch families with children uses the 1½ earnings model, in which usually the man works fulltime and women work part-time which they combine with caring responsibilities.² Consequently, almost three quarters of the working women in the Netherlands hold a part-time position (only 1/5th of men), even at the start of the career before they have started a family.³ The European Commission has recommended the Dutch government to increase the working hours of women, so far, they have been unsuccessful.

In addition, women also hold lower paid positions than men. Women fill only 26% of managerial positions in the Netherlands.⁴ This percentage differs depending on the sector: in November 2015, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science wrote in a Letter to the Parliament that the public sector had 31% female representation on boards and in supervisory functions, while the private sector still lagged far behind (almost half that number).⁵ Last but not least, even in equivalent positions, women earn 32% less than men do in the Netherlands.⁶

Moving to the specific numbers for the Dutch media industry: the gender pay gap for the subsector "information and communication" was slightly lower than in other

¹ CBS 2016

² Ministerie OCW, "De verschillen tussen", 2017

³ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrouwenemancipatie/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/03/29/emancipatienota-2018-2021>

⁴ WEF Global Gender Gap 10/2016

⁵ Diversity Team, 2016

⁶ https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/2_Research/2_Research_directory/Research_projects/Women_in_media_culture/FINAL_Report_Women_in_arts_and_culture.pdf

sectors, but still 15.2% in 2014.⁷ A look at the proportion of women in decision-making positions and on boards of the four biggest Dutch media organisations shows that also in the media sector women are underrepresented in the highest levels in decision-making positions and are lower than the percentage of women in those position in the EU countries in general: in the Netherlands about 20% are women, whereas it is 30% for the EU-27 countries.⁸ Interestingly, the publicly funded media organisations seem to do worse (in 2013) in this respect than the privately funded. The number of chief editors of newspapers and magazines is at 20% also very low.⁹ All in all, almost all managers who are responsible for hiring new staff, are still men, as other researchers also found in the past.¹⁰

The low number of women in decision-making positions in the media is the case even when the numbers of women interested in the media industry is increasing. Particularly amongst students 'Journalism and Information', the number of women has risen: presently about 68% of all students are women, which is comparable with the percentage of women students in journalism and information in Europe.¹¹ Interestingly, the number of women working in media industry has not risen proportionately; in 2009 35% of the staff working in the media industry were women, which was almost the same as in 1999.¹² One partial explanation, which was also mentioned in the discussion paper on France is the tendency that people working in media industry do so in free-lance, self-employed positions. In the information and communication sector the self-employment share among women was 16% in 2016.¹³

2. Gender inequality in the media content

As written above, the share of women and their power in the media industry will likely influence the way in which women are presented in the media, e.g. whether they are shown in stereotypical ways (e.g. as care taker or technologist), whether they are sexualised or e.g. displayed as victims of violence. The number of women working in media, will also likely influence the number of women depicted in the media, either indirectly as women may influence who is depicted, but also directly, as women working in the media are also more likely to be visible themselves (ie as journalist).

According to the 'Monitor Representatie 2010', the number of women on Dutch public television in 2010 was 37,4% and 39,9% for commercial television.¹⁴ More recent statistics show even a slightly lower percentage of women on Dutch television: 35,4% in 2015.¹⁵ Similarly, in a recent EIGE study on the depiction of women in non-fiction prime-time television programmes, we found a percentage of

⁷ https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/2_Research/2_Research_directory/Research_projects/Women_in_media_culture/FINAL_Report_Women_in_arts_and_culture.pdf

⁸ Table 1, EIGE (2013) Report Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States: Women and the Media – advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organisations.

⁹ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

¹⁰ Fischer, Rojahn, & Struyk, 2002

¹¹ Eurostat

¹² <https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/aan-vrouwen-geen-gebrek-maar>

¹³ https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/2_Research/2_Research_directory/Research_projects/Women_in_media_culture/FINAL_Report_Women_in_arts_and_culture.pdf

¹⁴ Kijk- en Luisteronderzoek, 2010

¹⁵ Bouyeure, 2015

34% of women in 2013.¹⁶ To summarise, it is clear that women are largely underrepresented on Dutch television and that these numbers do not seem to change much over the years.

Women are particularly underrepresented in specific age categories and in specific roles. In Dutch fiction, for instance, women are –over- represented in the age category between 19-29, whereas men have a large majority in fiction in the age categories of 30-64.¹⁷ In non-fiction, there are large differences in kinds of programmes. Sport, news or debate programmes have a lower percentage of women than e.g. children- and youth programmes, fiction and amusement programmes.¹⁸ Women are also particularly underrepresented in roles like presenter, reporter, expert or voice-over.¹⁹ According to the Dutch government, media makers are unaware of these figures: more than half of media producers think that 20 to 40% of the experts depicted are women, whereas this is only 12%.²⁰ Women are, on the other hand, overrepresented as entertainment show candidate or as experiential expert.²¹

In a large scale Dutch study on the representation of men and women as scientists or technologists in media aiming at youth, including cartoons, children books, magazines and television series aiming at youth, we showed that although there has been a rise in the percentage of women in these roles in the past 30 years, the percentage of women was no more than 20%.²² Similarly, stereotypes about men and women are common currency in magazines, films, series, music and advertising, where their role is often little more than being pretty and playful, or worse, as sex objects. Hence, an issue of ongoing concern is the influence of the entrenched ideal of beauty and the sexualisation of women in the media, particularly on the body image and sexuality of young girls.²³ This stereotypical depiction may be at its worst in television commercials, Dutch company Unilever found that women are shown as ‘professional’ in only 3% of commercials, and as ‘intelligent’ in only 2%. In virtually all commercials they are shown in stereotypical places (e.g. at home, as caretaker), and this has hardly changed in the last 30 years.²⁴ All in all, women, and particularly older women are largely underrepresented. In those cases when women are visible, they are hardly depicted in powerful, competent, professional roles, or in other positions that would break the existing gender stereotypes.

3. Policy debate

With an overall score of 5.5 (out of a total of 16 points), the EIGE barometer (Gender Equality Index) ranks the Netherlands well below the EU-28 average of 8.4. As this score reflects a government’s commitment to achieving overall gender equality, the official Dutch commitment to gender mainstreaming ranks relatively low

¹⁶ Rommes, E. & Podesta, L. (2016). Depicting the Dutch: Sex Inequalities on Non-Fiction Television Programmes and Their Explanations. In: K. Ross & C. Padovani (Eds.), pp. 136-144

¹⁷ Emons, Wester, & Scheepers, 2010; Koeman, Peeters, & D’Haenens 2007

¹⁸ Koeman, Peeters, & D’Haenens 2007; NPO, 2008

¹⁹ NPO, 2010

²⁰ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/>

²¹ Sterk and van Dijk 2003

²² Rommes, Gorp, Delwel, & Emons, 2010

²³ <https://www.hollandalumni.nl/medias/editor/files/gender-equality-in-the-netherlands.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/editie/nl/artikel/524666/vrouw-reclame-nog-vaak-achter-het-aanrecht-sinds-1980-nauwelijks-iets>

in the scale.²⁵ In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is responsible for emancipation and equality, including equality on the labour market and the way women are presented in the media. The Ministry states that it aims at increasing the percentage of women that are financially independent by increasing the number of working women and the number of hours women work.²⁶ Moreover, in 2017, the government agreed to maintain the statutory goal for 5000 companies to reach a number of at least 30% women in the board of directors and in the advisory board until 2020, as they felt this to be an effective measure.²⁷ If companies do not succeed, they are obliged to either comply or explain in their yearly report what they have done to reach this percentage. To further support these measures to get women into higher positions, the Ministry of OCS also optimised the “women in leadership” database, which it considers to be a “good practice” for the Dutch context.²⁸ As far as I know or could find out, no actions are taken to increase in particular the numbers of women (in top positions) in the media.

The numbers and ways in which women are represented in the media are considered as very important by the Dutch government. In her policy documents and letters to the Parliament, the Dutch Minister of OCW states that ‘the image of women in the media has an important influence on gender norms. The government is concerned that women are not visible enough in the media, but also that, when they are, they are subject to gender stereotyping’.²⁹ By preventing stereotyping in the media, the Dutch government aims to ‘enlarge the freedom of everyone (...) stimulate equal treatment, reduce societal problems like bullying, unequal distribution of labour and care, LGBTI phobia and violence in dependency relationships’.³⁰ Despite this extensive recount of consequences of stereotyping in the media, the government also is aware of the ‘constitutional freedom of expression and the press’ and so urges the media to be aware of their responsibility, but aims to take measures only through ‘self-regulation’ by the media, which OCW will support when needed. In this way, the Dutch government states it fulfils the recommendations by the CEDAW (Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women) committee, which monitors the progress on the UN women Convention.

The Minister states she will take two actions. The first one is to study how the representation of women (and LGBTI persons) in the media can structurally be monitored.³¹ The second, larger, action is an example of the government supporting self-regulation by the media industry. In an agreement, (‘prestatie-overeenkomst 2017-2020’) between the Dutch public media (NPO) and the Ministry OCW, the NPO has promised a more equal representation of women on television and radio.³² Moreover, a similar initiative is taken by a women’s organisation (Women Inc) in which NPO, an important media company (VICE – amongst other responsible for advertisements) and the main commercial broadcaster (RTL) in the Netherlands will

²⁵ EIGE “Gender Mainstreaming”, 2017

²⁶ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrouwenemancipatie/nieuws/2018/03/29/emancipatie-in-theorie-voor-elkaar-nu-de-praktijk-nog>

²⁷ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2017/03/02/5000-bedrijven-aan-de-lat-voor-30-streefcijfer-vrouwen-aan-top>

²⁸ Top Vrouwen Boardroom Empowerment, <https://www.topvrouwen.nl>

²⁹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/03/29/emancipatienota-2018-2021/1336594+Kamerbrief+-+Emancipatienota+2018+-+2021+-+Principes+in+praktijk.pdf>

³⁰ ibid

³¹ ibid

³² <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/23/npo-en-rtl-samen-voor-meer-diversiteit-13642671-a1578346>

cooperate to get more diversity on television. This two year project entitled 'Beeldvorming in the Media' is supported by the Ministry of OCW with 150.000 euros.³³ This project aims to increase the number of female experts by facilitating the matchmaking process among its editorial staff and relevant women in key positions in all sectors. Shortlisted female candidates go through a "speed dating" process by visiting the editorial floors and holding short interviews with programme editors. In addition, some candidates participate in screen tests, panel discussions, or interviews and learn the tools of the media performance trade – whether in the role of expert, panel discussant or opinion maker.³⁴ Through this mutual exchange, women experts not only increase their skills, editorial staff also extend their network to include more women and this approach aims to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and ideas, which ultimately can lead to improved content and reporting structures.³⁵

Similar initiatives are the platform and website Zij Spreekt ('She Speaks'), which is a speakers agency furnishing female experts for conferences and media appearances; and the initiative 'VIDM' (vaker in de media), which operates two websites: the first one (vidm.nl) connects journalists with suitable women experts, while the other (vakerindemedia.nl) serves as an entry point for women experts to enter the database of experts, which VIDM uses to deliver them as experts to the media arena, and through which they also provide training to these women experts.³⁶ Last but not least, the 'Stichting Vrouw & Media' is a network of women professionals working in the media industry, that organises meetings, promotes gender awareness and pushes for equal pay and improved advancement opportunities for women in journalism, including offering training and mentorship options.³⁷

4. Transferability aspects

Unfortunately, there are not many good examples for the Netherlands to share. Possibly interesting could be the meetings organised by and for professional (women) journalists and (women) experts to improve their competences. The disadvantage is that this approach perpetuates the belief that individual women are the cause and solution for gendered inequalities in the media, rather than the system itself. Additionally, the initiative(s) to present databases with women experts to journalists might be interesting, but so far does not seem to have been very effective.

There are several elements of the French way of dealing with gender inequalities in the media that could be of interest to the Netherlands. Having an independent institution like the High Audiovisual Council with the assignment and regulatory powers to monitor (or even better: have media organisations themselves monitor) and regulate the 'fair representation of women and men' seems more promising than only 'facilitating self-regulation', as this so far has not been successful in the Netherlands. Interestingly, it seems France does not see such governmental regulation as an impingement of freedom of speech and freedom of media regulations, as the Dutch Government does. Additionally, this could give individuals

³³ ibid

³⁴ https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/2_Research/2_Research_directory/Research_projects/Women_in_media_culture/FINAL_Report_Women_in_arts_and_culture.pdf

³⁵ https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/2_Research/2_Research_directory/Research_projects/Women_in_media_culture/FINAL_Report_Women_in_arts_and_culture.pdf

³⁶ EIGE, "Training Media Savvy", 2017.

³⁷ <https://vrouwenmedia.com>

and e.g. women's organisations a platform to complain against specifically offensive or unequal presentations of women in the media. In the Netherlands, there are very limited ways in which complaints can be given: a monthly women's magazine ('Opzij') regularly nominates a bad example of sexism (often in the media) and in very bad cases, individuals can complain about sexism in the media to the 'Raad voor Journalistiek' (council for journalism), which is however not independent, nor does it have strong regulatory power.

Involving the youth in a 'contest about sexism in the media' in France sounds like a promising initiative, particularly as it serves a dual purpose of not just monitoring and debunking, but also of teaching youth a critical attitude towards the media. The specific attention of the French for 'feminising the language' and for gendered violence in the media is interesting, as well as the attention for gender equality in commercials, as we found that these seem to be amongst the worst in terms of repeating stereotypes. It is promising that the Dutch government has encouraged the WomenInc initiative to include a major media organisation which is partially responsible for commercials. The power given to the WomenInc initiative is, however, virtually non-existent, nor is it clear what will be the consequence for Dutch media organisations if they do not confirm to their own agreement to improve the equality in the presentation of women in the media. The proposed 'conditionality of public funding' would also be a strong measure that could work in the Netherlands, as public broadcasters are (partially) sponsored by the Dutch state and they generally perform worse than many of the commercial broadcasters. Finally, an important recommendation for the Dutch would be to, like the French already do and as is required of firms about the number of women in top positions, monitor on a regular basis how men and women are represented in the Netherlands. Additionally, it would be interesting for the Netherlands as well as other countries, to include research on how/why these presentations are still as gendered as they are. Earlier research indicated that many people, including decision makers in media organisations, tend to think the media is merely a mirror of society, hence that they are not responsible for the inequalities depicted in the media.³⁸

³⁸ Rommes, E. & Podesta, L. (2016). Depicting the Dutch: Sex Inequalities on Non-Fiction Television Programmes and Their Explanations. In: K. Ross & C. Padovani (Eds.), pp. 136-144.