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## Media Production and the Encoding of Gender

It was argued in the previous chapter that media production can be seen as a process of 'encoding' meaning in media texts. In the context of gender and media studies, the relevant question therefore is how gender discourse is encoded in media texts, what contradictions and tensions in the production process give rise to particular discourses and how amenable the production process is to innovation and change. Given the various kinds of media output and the many tensions in the production process, one might argue that the major questions raised in this chapter could only be answered for each particular case in its particular historical and cultural circumstances. In part, it is the aim of this chapter to underscore just that argument, and to counter the view of media institutions as ideological molochs producing univocal sexist, capitalist and patriarchal content. By reviewing and evaluating existing research on women working in the media industries, I shall map the gendered structure of media production at the micro, meso and macro level, expressed in particular positions, tasks, experiences, values, rewards and appreciation of female communicators. The subsequent question is then whether, and how, this gendered structure affects the encoding process, an issue which has often been limited to the question of whether an increase in the number of female journalists (or producers, script writers, editors etc.) would lead to an improvement of media content. I shall finally discuss the inadequacies of phrasing the question like this – ignoring the organization and social context and assuming a universal definition of gender. In order to illustrate and clarify the complexities and tensions involved in media production, I shall begin with a discussion of Julia d'Acci's fascinating analysis of the production of the popular 1980s American police series *Cagney and Lacey*, which dealt with the work and private lives of two female New York cops (d'Acci, 1987).

### **Production, encoding and negotiation: *Cagney and Lacey***

Originally, *Cagney and Lacey* was meant to be a feature film. Its creators – the writers Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday, and Barney Rosenzweig, executive producer for an American production company – were inspired by a book about the portrayal of women in Hollywood films from the early

days until the present (Haskell, 1987). Never, it seemed had a pair of female buddies like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid featured in a mainstream movie. Avedon, Corday and Rosenzweig came up with an idea for a film, to be called 'Freeze', involving a complete role reversal of both cops and 'robbers'. Two female cops, Chris Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey – whose friendship was unconsciously moulded on the friendship of the two writers – were to uncover the existence of a brothel with male prostitutes visited by women customers, headed by the 'Godmother'. The development of the idea indicates the different factors which contributed to the final proposal: on a social level the emphasis on role reversal can be deduced to the impact of liberal feminism; both writers were personally involved in the women's movement and anxious to incorporate their experience in their work. Moreover, they drew from their personal friendship for character development. Apart from his support for the women's movement, Rosenzweig saw an opportunity to produce a professionally innovative film, since female buddies had never before been seen.

However, not one motion picture studio wanted to put the script into production because the characters were seen as not feminine, soft or sexy enough. Some six years later, in 1980, Rosenzweig tried again with a rewritten script, but this time he went to the television networks. CBS decided to take it as a made-for-TV movie, but demanded that Cagney and Lacey be played by 'two sexy young actresses'. Rosenzweig managed to maintain his original choice for actress Tyne Daly to play the Lacey character who lives in a family situation with two children and her husband Harvey Lacey, an irregularly employed construction worker. The Cagney character, single and independent was to be played by the network's choice Loretta Swit – a major character in the popular series *MASH* – to whom CBS had a commitment for a made-for-TV movie.

Even before it was transmitted in October 1981, Cagney and Lacey attracted considerable attention from the press who recognized the novelty of a TV-movie focusing on women's work in an uncommon job, their mutual friendship and their independence. The feminist magazine *Ms* urged its readers to write to CBS and demand a weekly series, while *Ms* editors themselves lobbied the board of CBS. When the movie scored way above the average CBS programme rating and reached a 42 per cent share of the audience, CBS decided to pursue the series idea. In this second phase, it can be seen how new influences came to bear on the production of *Cagney and Lacey*. The network's choice of 'sexy young actresses' must have been inspired by its own tradition of women's representation and by an unwarranted view of audience preferences. Moreover, CBS had a promise to keep towards Loretta Swit. Rosenzweig's refusal obviously had to do with professional norms of realistic casting, while the feminist lobby seemed to have doubts about the willingness of CBS to pursue a feminist venture, a distrust which proved painfully correct in the years to come.

As it turned out, CBS was not happy after all and decided to cancel the

series after only two episodes. Rosenzweig's heavy lobbying kept *Cagney and Lacey* on the air, but its existence was hardly secure. It was the Cagney character which made the network particularly uncomfortable. Being a single, career-minded and tough urban cop, Chris Cagney undermined any traditional notion of femininity. As d'Acci (1987: 214) notes: 'The evidence points to an extreme discomfort on the part of the network with "woman" represented as non-glamorous, feminist, sexually active and working class and single.' Although the early ratings suggested otherwise, CBS was afraid the audience would find the two women too unfeminine, too feminist and too lesbian. Thus the original angle of the series, focusing on women working in a non-traditional job and fighting sexism, was modified by removing overt references to feminism and by representing Cagney and Lacey as women who 'combine competency with an element of sensuality' (d'Acci, 1987: 215).

Other networks caught on to the women-orientated programming and scheduled movies such as *9 to 5* and *Gloria*, featuring independent women, opposite *Cagney and Lacey*, with the result that the potential audience was fragmented and the ratings for *Cagney and Lacey* were reduced. Had it been for the ratings alone, the series would not have survived, but several other factors contributed to its success: the women's movement launched a successful letter-writing campaign to support *Cagney and Lacey*; the series received several television nominations and awards for best series and best actress; it received critical acclaim in the press; and finally, the reruns in the summer did attract considerable audiences.

Throughout its existence *Cagney and Lacey* was subject to conflict and negotiations between writers, actors, producer, network executives and audiences which had obvious effects on the ultimate representations of gender. In this struggle, the network was the most influential actor exercising its power at all levels, for instance in script development, as illustrated by d'Acci's account of an episode in which Cagney (single, no partner) thinks she is pregnant. The writers did not even consider allowing Cagney to have an abortion, anticipating that the network would never permit such a solution. Although a miscarriage was proposed, the network rejected the story anyway, unwilling 'to shine the spotlight on pregnancy and the problems of an unmarried pregnant woman' (d'Acci, 1987: 219). Obviously, the problem at this point concerned the ideological implications of the script. Network executives countered the writers with a proposal for a story in which Cagney (in her late thirties) has to decide whether she will ever have children. This in turn was unacceptable to the writers for its lack of narrative resolution, the problem now being one of professional standards and sound scripts. Finally, the contending claims were reconciled by letting Cagney think she is pregnant although, as becomes clear by the end of the episode, she is not. How she could have become pregnant, and what she meant to do about it, is hardly discussed in the rest of the episode since that would involve such politically and socially explosive issues as birth control and abortion. A rather dim narrative remains upon which

each audience member can play her own experience with (un)wanted pregnancies and 'career-children' dilemmas.

### Studies of media production

Case studies like d'Acci's, however, have not been carried out often (see for some examples Ettema, 1982; Gitlin, 1983; Saferstein, 1991). As far as research on production is concerned, there is a heavy bias in communication studies towards journalism and factual programming without much attention being paid to gender issues, or to other types of media content. Feminist media studies, on the other hand, have concentrated primarily on the position, experiences and views of individual female communicators ignoring the immediate context in which they carry out their roles. D'Acci's analysis of *Cagney and Lacey* makes clear that it is not much use to study the production and encoding process from the perspective of the individual (woman) communicator. Already at the level of 'personal' ideas for a programme or a story, the influence of external factors is heavily felt: the existence and strength of the women's movement; the anticipation of network censorship or professional standards; the question of whether the creative ideas of individuals will be selected or agreed by whatever production unit; all depend on a complex interplay of personal, organizational, commercial and other factors. Hirsch (1973) proposes that the transformation of a creative individual idea into a collective mass media product should be construed as a process of passing through increasingly narrow 'gates' of production, media and distribution. In the *Cagney and Lacey* case, the ratings of the initial movie were of crucial importance; for other TV programmes the results of audience testing of pilots can be decisive. In journalism, ideas for stories are selected on the basis of other kinds of considerations mostly originating from organizational requirements such as availability and suitability of sources (cf. Gans, 1979).

The collective nature of media production is even more evident if one moves from selection processes to the actual production and construction of media products. For an outsider to the industry, it is hard to make sense of the particular and different contributions to media output of employees with intriguing and obscure titles like continuity girl, vision mixer, floor manager, executive producer, on-line producer, production assistant, editor-in-chief, senior editor, editor, reporter etc. Such a list of functions, which can be extended easily, does make clear that aside from formal hierarchies no individual communicator can be held responsible for the final product. This association of individuals needs to deliberate, consult, compromise, cooperate, reconsider, bargain, adjust and concede. Their negotiation is constrained by the organizational context which is determined among other factors by the organizational goals and constituencies, and by the social/legal context enabling and inhibiting certain kinds of

Several authors have presented analytic frameworks for studying the production process. Dimmick and Coit (1982), for instance, propose to think of media production as a hierarchic system that can be studied at nine interdependent levels. At the lowest level (level 9) is the individual communicator. Her or his decisions are directly influenced by social-demographic features such as gender, ethnicity, education or age, by their cultural and political convictions, by professional features such as role conceptions and ethics, and by organizational features such as available time, space and budget. While individual freedom and autonomy is a constitutive part of the mythology surrounding media professions, decisions that are purely individual seldom occur. Gans (1979: 13), for instance writes about journalism that: 'obviously, journalists are in the end individuals, but news organizations are also sufficiently bureaucratized that very different personalities will act much the same in the same position'. On the other hand, Murdock (1980) contends that those involved in the production of TV drama are less constrained by organizational routines and that therefore knowledge of individual factors like backgrounds, lifestyles and commitments are essential to an understanding of drama production. In any case, a key issue for any study of media production is to find out which decision criteria are individual and which are determined by the communicator's environment (cf. Dimmick and Coit, 1982: 174).

So-called 'dyadic communication', face-to-face contact with other individuals, is, according to Dimmick and Coit, a direct factor influencing communicators (level 8). A more structured and influential form of interaction takes place in formal and informal groups and meetings of communicators, such as editorial meetings, professional organizations, informal socializing, etc. (level 7). Furthermore, communicators' decisions are shaped by organizational factors such as policy, organizational structure, work routines and power relations within the organization. The organizational dimensions of media production (level 6) have been studied extensively with focus on organizational policies, goals, work routines and assignments, division of labour, hierarchies etc. Most of these studies concern the production of news and indicate the routinized character of news work. Tuchman (1978b), for instance, speaks of news production as 'routinizing the unexpected'. The production of fictional content seems to be less routinized, although the production of weekly TV drama series does seem to necessitate a degree of standardization (Gitlin, 1983). The music, film and book publishing industries produce on a more irregular basis, but these organizations too have implemented routine procedures to ensure a steady input and output of creative material (Hirsch, 1973).

Moving higher up Dimmick and Coit's hierarchy the focus shifts from influences exercised upon the individual communicator to the impact of external factors on the media organization. To begin with, there is the location of the media in the community or market it caters for (level 5). The competitive structure of a market operates also at the level of 'supraorganizational' influence (level 4), which focuses on ownership and

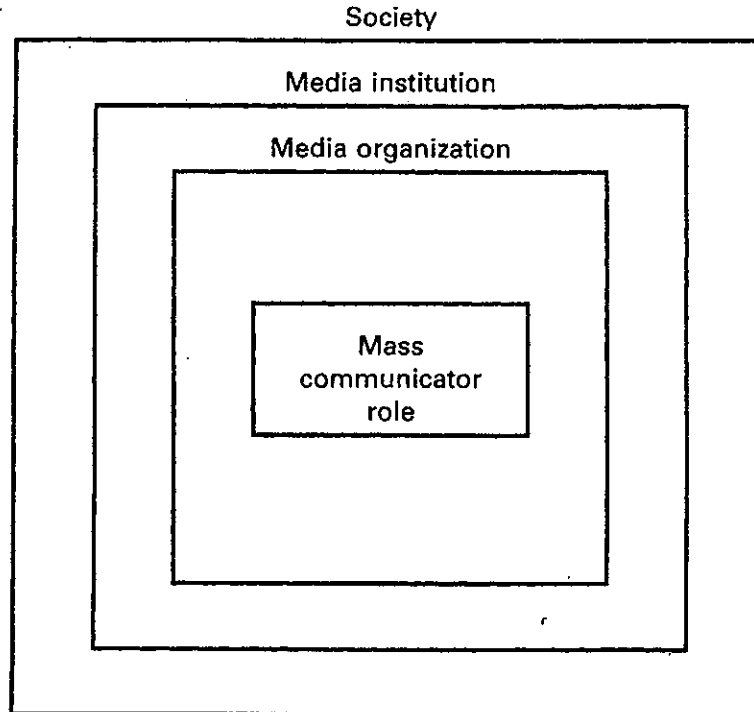


Figure 4.1 The relation between media institution, organization and role (McQuail, 1987)

management structures of media corporations. The next level (level 3) has to do with the organization of the industry as whole, and which vertical alliances (applying to the whole chain of communication from suppliers to retailers) and horizontal alliances (connecting different types of communication conglomerates) are active. Finally, there are the policies of nation states (level 2) and international organizations (level 1) regulating communication industries, communicator behaviour and possibilities, content, advertising etc.

Dimmick and Coit's taxonomy illustrates clearly the range of constitutive influences on communicators and their employers. International and national media policies and regulations place constraints on the actions and courses the media industry can take; whilst the financial-economic organization of the media industry restricts the leeway of media organizations, the latter in turn constitute the direct environment in which the individual communicator has to operate. Seen from the perspective of the individual communicator, media production entails an ever-widening set of circles constraining her or his autonomy. Most of these circles are not directly experienced but are often taken for granted as 'the way things are'. McQuail's (1987) simplified scheme of the various levels of media production demonstrates just how distant are some factors influencing a communicator's autonomy from her or his daily work experience (Figure 4.1).

Models such as that of Dimmick and Coit, McQuail and a number of others (cf. Cantor, 1980; Gallagher, 1977; Hirsch, 1977) should not be understood as adequate descriptions of the production process. They are

far too general for such a purpose and suggest too strict and neatly separated hierarchies. Moreover, the basic contradiction of media production between commercial and artistic or social values tends to cut across all levels:

The dilemma may involve a distinction between high and low culture, between professional or craft standards and commercial judgement, between self-regulation and close bureaucratic control of the work situation, between self-motivation and financial inducement, between self-monitoring and serving an audience, between using one's talents for a purpose and having them used for none except the survival of commercial success of the organization for which the work is done. (Elliott, 1977)

Despite the limitations of such models, however, they do reveal the deeply social and collective nature of media production, in which a range of factors influence the decision making process: there seems to be no such person as the 'individual' communicator. She or he has to cooperate with colleagues, has to take the specific needs, routines and traditions of the organizations into account, and is limited by the social, economic and legal embedding of the media institution. For feminist media research in particular it is important to recognize this, since – as will become clear later in this chapter – too many publications about the role and possibilities of the female journalist or broadcaster assume that women are by themselves capable of changing the media production process. To facilitate the review of research and point to gaps in existing knowledge I follow McQuail's (1987) distinction between the three levels of individuals working together, of organizational requirements and of economic and legal constraints (see Figure 4.1).

### **The gendered structure of media production**

#### *Women as communicators*

*Employees* Reviewing the results of research about gender and media production more than a decade ago, Margaret Gallagher (1980) contended that exact numbers and figures about women working in the media industries were hard to come by. The industries were not particularly disposed to allow access to their organization and to their administrative records. Moreover, the nature of media organizations with their mix of tenured, part-time and freelance staff, and with their idiosyncratic alignments of productional units and facilities, made it hard to collect comparable and verifiable facts about the media workforce. Today, it seems that facts and figures about women working in the media abound, at least in western industrialized countries. The media industries themselves have initiated much research in order to provide a basis for policy measures aimed at increasing the number of women working in the industries. The European Community, for instance, set up a large scale research project



on employment and positive action for women in television organizations of the EC member states which resulted in the subsequent issue of EC directives about the employment of women in the television industries (Commission of the European Communities, 1987). However, there are still many fields of communication like the magazine, film and music industry, whose labour force has not been subjected to systematic research. Moreover, we know next to nothing about the position and possibilities of women working in media industries in the developing and former communist countries.

Despite the uneven distribution of knowledge about female communicators, existing research suggests some general tendencies which seem to apply world wide. To begin with, the media industries are dominated by men, and in the western world they are dominated by white men in particular. A Unesco report comparing results from Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, India and Nigeria concludes that 'in every case women are very much a minority presence in . . . the "man's world" of the media' (Unesco, 1987). Stone (1988) contends that while affirmative action programmes stimulated the American news broadcasters to hire women members of minority groups in the 1970s, deregulatory policies of the Reagan administration and increased local competition brought this development to a halt.

Recently, in western countries like the United States, United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the number of women entering schools of journalism or academic training in communication has increased to the extent that some authors speak of a 'gender switch'. Fields like public relations and advertising are said to have become 'velvet' or 'pink collar' ghettos dominated by (white) women (Creedon, 1989). This trend points to the fact that some areas of media production are more easily accessible to women than others. From the few figures which are available, it seems for instance that magazine publishing in industrialized countries has traditionally offered jobs for women at all levels, including senior management (Johnson, 1989). One of the factors explaining why some areas of communication provide more opportunities for women than others is the status of the medium, which can differ from country to country. Radio is a good case in point. In many western countries national radio has lost its audience to television and as a news medium it has been overtaken by television as well. The resulting loss of prestige may have decreased male competition for job openings enabling women to fill the gaps. On the other hand, in many developing countries radio is still the mass electronic medium and dominated by men. For instance, in Ecuadorian radio stations 90 per cent of the total workforce is male (de Camargo, 1987). Another indication of the importance of the medium's status for the employment of women is the fact that local (low prestige) media almost invariably employ more women than national (high prestige) media (for example, Smith, 1980).

The vertical segregation of the media workforce is apparent in other divisions as well. Across the board, men dominate the technical sectors,

while women are overrepresented in administration. To a substantial degree women tend to prevail in those areas that can be seen as an extension of their domestic responsibilities: in children's and educational media, programmes or sections; in consumer and domestic programmes; in human interest and feature sections of newspapers; in entertainment programming, etc. Smith (1980) contends that female journalists in Britain work predominantly in 'advertising goal' fields, where the relevance of the sector to the institution is in advertising revenue. Although economically crucial to the media organization, advertising revenue fields are not taken very seriously by media professionals and are seen as 'operating largely in order to finance what is seen as the "real" function of the papers (i.e. providing news, information and comment)' (Smith, 1980: 241). In the "real" fields of, for instance, political, foreign and economic news, and current affair programming, women tend to be a minority.

Like most other employment sectors, the media workforce is also horizontally segregated. It is hard to find women in senior management positions, even in women-dominated areas. Moreover, female managers tend to get paid less than their male counterparts, an inequality most women working in the media industry suffer from. Lafky (1989) studied the salaries of American journalists and found that even after controlling for other variables, like type of job, years of experience, market and editorial size, gender still was a significant determiner of income. For younger journalists the gap seemed to be narrowing, a trend that was also observed by Abrahamson (1990) studying the Swedish Broadcasting Company. In the case of the US journalists, however, the gap was not narrowing because of rises in the salaries of women but through a general decline in the wages of journalists. Creedon (1989: 17) concludes therefore that an increase in the number of women in media production 'does not translate into superior power or influence for women; instead, it has been translated to mean a decline in salaries and status for the field' (cf. Abrahamson, 1990; Baehr, 1981; Butler and Paisley, 1980; de Camargo, 1987; Fahim, 1987; Gallagher, 1980, 1984; Irukwu, 1987; Joshi, 1987; Muir, 1987; Smith, 1976, 1980).

The inequalities faced by women in the media industries have various sources. In many countries, direct sexual discrimination against women is forbidden and many countries and industries have installed some kind of affirmative action policy to facilitate the entrance of women and minorities to the media industries. In other cases, prevailing mores tend to inhibit direct discrimination. However, all kinds of organization procedures and routines can lead to indirect discrimination, which – by being less visible – tends to be more difficult to contest. Muramatsu (1990), for instance, argues that the system of lifetime employment prevailing in the Japanese media prevents the growth of the female workforce because job openings are very rare and thus competition is harsh. Other authors have argued that the informal recruitment procedures of media industries based on personal contacts and ('old boys') networks, tends to exclude women as

potential applicants (Gallagher, 1980). Similarly, the lack of formal career structures means that ascent through the hierarchy depends unduly upon personal contacts and acceptance. According to Smith (1980: 243), 'the largely informal occupational socialization . . . tends to act against women in a number of ways by excluding them from informal information grapevines and a number of "key learning situations" which are vital to the development of a wide range of journalistic skills and the acquisition of "relevant occupational knowledge" '.

The most important barrier within the organization comes from the attitudes of male colleagues and decision makers. Gruesome anecdotes of women encountering blatant sexism abound, and can be found in any number of popular press clippings, biographies and research reports. Castro (1988: 42) reports the story of a woman applying for a vacancy at a television station: 'And then the vice president came over and stood so close to me that his nose was nearly touching mine, and said: "We don't have anything right now, but we could probably arrange something. Do you fuck?"' Research from countries as diverse as the Netherlands, the United States, India and Senegal produce strikingly similar results when it investigates the attitudes of male communicators towards their female colleagues. Joshi (1987) carried out a survey among senior level staff of the Indian television company Doordoorshan and found that most men considered women to be incapable of making independent decisions. Moreover, they preferred male colleagues and distrusted women as colleagues, feeling that their workload increased while working with women. Diekerhof et al. (1985) examined the attitudes of male newspaper journalists in the Netherlands. They too expected their female colleagues to be disloyal and some of them considered the women's professional success to be the result of 'feminine wiles'. In a survey conducted by Smith et al. (1989), American television reporters dissented from any form of sex discrimination when asked directly, yet when presented with a particular question on the ability of women to undertake war reporting, male reporters and news directors did express sexist attitudes. Senegalese female journalists experienced discrimination from their male colleagues, who kept the best stories to themselves and doubted the women's capacities (van der Wijngaard, 1990). Whatever particular cultural form they may take, discriminatory attitudes towards women on the workfloor seem to be common practice in media production world wide. Similar examples have been reported at least from Germany (Neverla and Kanzleiter, 1984), Nigeria (Irukwu, 1987), Egypt (Fahim, 1987), Canada (Craen, 1987) and Great Britain (Baehr, 1981; Muir, 1987; Smith, 1980).

A final obstacle for the entrance and advancement of women in media professions has to do with family responsibilities. The domestic and parental responsibilities of working women have proved to be a double burden in all professions. In the media industries, however, the problem seems to be even more acute, since many of its professions are said to require a round-the-clock availability. Part of the professional ideology of

journalists for instance is that news happens 24 hours a day, therefore a journalist's work – like a mother's – is never done. Moreover, reporters are expected to be mobile and to travel anywhere at short notice. While the all pervasive nature of journalists' work must be considered a product of professional mythology rather than of organizational necessity, the impact of the myth is considerable. By and large female journalists have considered it impossible to combine career and family, since media organizations do not yet provide many childcare facilities and parental leave arrangements, forcing women to make a choice between a career or children as the age and demographic profile of female journalists and broadcasters testify.<sup>1</sup> The few women remaining in the profession after their thirties usually do not have children, whereas their male colleagues of the same age do (cf. Diekerhof et al. 1985; Neverla and Kanzleiter, 1984; Smith et al., 1989). The lack of childcare facilities and the irregular working hours may be one of the reasons why women seem to prefer public relations and advertising to journalism and broadcasting. Aside from such practical barriers societal norms and values work against the combination of a career with motherhood as well. Irukwu's (1987) study of Nigerian broadcasters suggests that as long as the ideal of the man as 'breadwinner' prevails, a female professional will not be perceived as needing the same kind of payment and rewards. Female journalists in Senegal believe that their fellow country men and women doubt their ability to mother, since they are said to spend so much time away from home (van der Wijngaard, 1990). Dutch female journalists experienced that their employers did not expect female 'career makers' to have a desire for children as well. Moreover, in the immediate surroundings of friends and family, they met with covert hostility for combining work with children (Diekerhof et al., 1985).

While the studies referred to above cover many different countries and different media sectors, the results are similar enough to warrant some rather crude generalizations: press and broadcasting are media industries dominated by men; the higher up the hierarchies, or the more prestigious a particular medium or section is, the less likely is it to find women; women tend to work in areas of communication that can be considered an extension of their domestic responsibilities and their socially assigned qualities of care, nurturance and humanity; regardless of difference in years of experience, education etc., women are paid less for the same work. These inequalities stem from indirect discriminatory recruitment procedures and from discriminatory attitudes among decision makers. Moreover, most women in media professions have experienced sexist behaviour of male colleagues. Finally, media work and motherhood have been made notoriously difficult to combine due to a lack of provisions at the workplace and to social values and beliefs.

*Professionals* Aside from the question of how women are employed and treated by the media industries, we know very little about their perform-

ance as media professionals. How do women perceive their own professional role and how is this role perceived by their male colleagues? Research in this area is extremely scarce and limited mainly to journalism. The discriminatory attitudes women experience in the media industries seem to indicate that being a woman and being a professional is problematic. Women are confronted with social and cultural expectations of femininity and at the same time are expected to meet criteria of professionalism. In the Netherlands, for instance, many female journalists feel that they are judged primarily as women being subject to continual comment on their appearance and 'invitations' from male colleagues. Playing this game implies losing a great deal of prestige as professional journalists. Women who ignore it, however – or worse, criticize it – will not be accepted by their male colleagues as 'real women' (cf. Diekerhof et al., 1985). Senegalese female journalists experience a different kind of tension between 'femininity' and professionalism. They are accused of having lost their femininity since their jobs require them to be away from home and to 'neglect' their husband and children (van der Wijngaard, 1990). Yet another tension between 'femininity' and professionalism is expressed by female journalists who believe that 'feminine' values such as compassion, kindness and humanity are at odds with qualities expected of journalists such as a certain amount of directness, distrust and toughness (Neverla and Kanzleiter, 1984).

While 'femininity' and journalistic professionalism are not inherently at odds with each other, the current definitions of femininity and the historically specific requirements of journalism produce tensions which – while expressed in different forms – are felt by many female journalists. There is no evidence, however, that they constitute a different group of professionals from their male colleagues: the results of research examining women's professional values and performance are too ambiguous to warrant such a conclusion. For instance, female journalists in the Netherlands were asked on different occasions whether they thought women contributed in a particular way to journalism. Two-thirds of them believe that women journalists pay more attention to background information and are more willing to look for spokeswomen instead of spokesmen. They perceive a difference in approach, but not in the actual selection of topics and issues (cf. van Zoonen, 1988).

On the other hand, American research into journalism which focused on factors that explain the variety of professional values held by journalists found no significant difference at all. Johnstone et al. (1976) conclude that education explains most of the differences of professional values. Women do seem to hold more explicit, but not fundamentally different views on journalism. Lafky (1990) analyses the results of a more recent survey among American journalists and also finds no very significant differences between women and men in journalism. A study comparing the professional values of British and German journalists suggests that in both countries female journalists tend to adhere to advocacy or participant

roles, although in Britain this implies a desire to help and advise people, while in Germany it means propagating new ideas (van Zoonen and Donsbach, 1988). Research on actual news selection behaviour shows similar discrepancies. For instance:

Whitlow (1977) submitted to a large number of American journalists hypothetical news items which differed in terms of the traditional and non-traditional roles of women and men. Whitlow found no differences in selection behaviour, with all journalists selecting items mainly on the basis of the presence or absence of conflict.

Merrit and Gross (1978) inferred from a survey among female and male editors of women's pages in the United States that although some women had less traditional purposes in mind for the women's pages than their male colleagues, the majority of women held traditional values.

Jensen (1982) observed and interviewed journalists working in Danish television news. She noticed that women invited more spokeswomen than men.

Muramatsu (1990) conducted several case studies of women working in Japanese broadcasting claiming that women side with underdogs in society and identify with the oppressed. They tend to have a more practical view of everyday life and look at women as individuals rather than judging them by their appearance.

These few examples show that gender itself is not a sufficient factor to explain the professional performance and values of female journalists. Some studies report the absence of difference, while others claim that there is something specific about female journalists, but when examined more closely it seems that what it is exactly that constitutes the difference varies from country to country. These contradictions indicate at least the interaction of gender with the political and cultural environment of the nation state. Moreover, the studies reported have all focused on the individual communicator, ignoring the organizational influences and pressures that bear upon her or him. As was explained in the previous paragraph, the particular location of the individual in the organization might influence his or her performance and values. In order to examine the interaction of gender with political, cultural and organizational variables, we need a higher level of analysis.

### *Gender and the organization*

There exist very few studies that examine the interaction of gender with organizational variables. D'Acci's aforementioned case study of *Cagney and Lacey* is one example, paralleled in journalism by Tuchman's and my own analysis of how the newsmaking process affects coverage of the women's movement (Tuchman, 1978b; van Zoonen, 1991c, 1992b). However, these studies focus more on gender related issues than on gender *per se*. With such a dearth of research, it is only possible to give an indication

of the kinds of issues and questions relevant at this level of analysis. In doing so, I shall draw mainly from my own research about journalism which addresses a number of different issues concerning gender and news organizations, ranging from the effects of professional socialization, processes and organizational policy, to the influence of national professional cultures.

According to Hirsch (1977: 24) the leading theme in the study of media organizations is the tension and conflict that arises from the necessary subordination of individuals to the organizations they work for. This usually implies a process of adaptation brought about not by repressive force but by a subtle process of rewards and punishments which ensures that communicators newly entering the field become acquainted with unwritten rules, norms and values of journalism and learn to perform accordingly. The continual pressure to produce news, shows, series, books, movies, records etc. usually leaves little room for substantive doubts and debates. A shared set of professional values therefore facilitates decision making, and as such it is instrumental to a media organization's efficiency (van Zoonen, 1989). Some authors argue that professional socialization affects women in a particular way. For instance, Smith (1976) claims that British female journalists tend to be excluded from the 'key learning areas' of hard news experience, sub-editing, night shift working and the informal pub and club culture. As a result they tend to be at a disadvantage with respect to technical, normative and folk knowledge of the organization, which seems to prevent their development as mature professionals. While Smith's argument deals with women's adaptation to the organizational rules and procedures, Neverla (1986) contends that women's disadvantage arises from the requirements of professional socialization and a competitive, assertive and detached style, which are at odds with their socialization as women. Moreover, the specific contribution in the area of sensitivity and humanity that women could make to journalism – following from their socialization as women – is not appreciated by colleagues and editors and is not considered professional. Thus for women to become professionals without forgoing their 'femininity' – the author's ideal – women have to maintain a precarious balance between 'deviance' and adaptation. Putting Smith's and Neverla's argument together suggests an interesting contradiction: Smith's call for equal opportunities accepts the status quo of the news room and implicitly denies the value of 'feminine' qualities; whereas Neverla takes these 'feminine' qualities for granted and criticizes the prevalent norms in the news room. As she herself acknowledges however, a delicate balancing act is necessary between 'femininity' and ('masculine') professionalism in order to be taken seriously as a journalist. In both cases, gender appears as a rather stable feature which journalists bring with them to the news room, remaining unaffected by the daily routines, events and meetings of the profession.

In a study I conducted among young Dutch feminist journalists, I tried to overcome this dilemma by studying how journalistic practices and socializ-

ation processes constructed a particular kind of gendered professionalism (van Zoonen, 1989). A central question was how the experience of feminist journalists at the schools of journalism, and subsequently during internships in news and other media, and the beginning of their professional careers as full-time employed journalists, affected their sense of feminism and journalism. Most of them developed their feminist ideas during their education in journalism (in the early 1980s). All three institutes of journalism had been affected by the women's movement and have incorporated a small variety of courses into the curricula which started from the liberal feminist idea that women (and men) suffer from discrimination and sex role stereotyping. The 'individual socialization history' of students was often used as a starting point to discuss the position of women and the media were said to have a responsibility in providing less stereotypical role models for women (and men). The key challenge for feminist journalism then – as expressed by the schools' curricula and my informants – was to find female spokespersons in as many non-traditional areas as possible. 'Where to find her' was the title of regularly offered courses. The way feminist journalism became defined at the institutes implied an individualistic strategy to make women just as visible as men. In their exam papers the feminist journalists all expressed the best intentions for their own professional conduct, but hardly anyone gave any thought to patterns of authority in the news room, organizational routines or the social responsibilities of colleagues and editors.

Despite the attention given by the schools to some feminist issues, the established message spread by precept and example was that feminist journalism was nonsensical and tedious. The courses occupied a marginal and optional place in the curricula; there was no substantial debate among staff and students; students preparing their exam papers about feminist ethic and role conceptions met with a lack of interest on the part of the faculty; and external examiners from newspapers, magazines and broadcasting explicitly rejected feminist concerns. The message students were given was that feminism – even moderately defined – and professional journalism were at odds with each other and this message was reinforced by the experience during internship. Most of my informants adjusted smoothly to in-house norms and values, experiencing an increase in their autonomy along the way. There was hardly any mention of conflict, although the list of issues mentioned that did give rise to tension is conspicuous: a gay demonstration, ethnicity, sexist language and 'locker room' culture in the news room. Some of the women I interviewed were deeply disappointed with journalism as they came to see it during apprenticeship – especially with the chauvinism of male journalists – and decided to pursue another career.

Already at the level of education then, the process of adjusting to professional norms tends to reaffirm a conservative status quo, less by clear cut instruction than by more subtle messages about 'professional journalism' which result in self-censorship among journalists with 'deviant'



values. By the time my informants had entered the profession, they knew very well that feminism does not belong to standard operating procedures. Oddly enough though, they all said they have all the autonomy they could possibly ask for and most claim that they have the opportunity to accomplish their ideals. Yet it is strikingly clear from their accounts that a journalist who consciously seeks to make her work contribute to an improvement of the position of women – in whatever modest ways – continually meets almost insuperable obstacles to the realization of her ideals. Little by little these obstacles (attitudes of colleagues, audience conceptions, social-political contexts) take on objective status and become a self-evident part of ‘normal’ and desirable routines. Feminist journalists tend to accept and internalize these demands of the profession, which leads to the significant paradox that they claim to be autonomous while at the same time they report a considerable number of factors circumscribing their already moderate role conception even further.

From a secondary analysis of data about German and British journalists, another example can be drawn of the way professional and organizational surroundings construct a particular kind of ‘gendered’ journalism (van Zoonen and Donsbach, 1988). An important difference between German and British journalism lies in their conception of freedom of the press: ‘Freedom of the press was interpreted as freedom of social communication from the very beginning in England, while on the continent – including Germany – there was a tendency to view it as a natural right of individuals to develop freely. The latter view encourages subjective evaluation, while the former impedes it’ (Köcher, 1986: 49). We therefore assumed that German journalism could be characterized by ample possibilities for personal styles, while the work of British journalists would seem to be less open to individualized routines. We defined gender for the time being as a possible dimension of individuality expecting gender-specific response patterns to questions about professional values and ethics in the German survey, while gender-specific answers should be relatively absent in the British case. Indeed, the conformity among British journalists did appear to be far greater than among the German journalists; but in both countries we found some considerable gender differences. For instance, both German and British female journalists tend to adhere more to advocacy roles than male journalists, implying a desire to help and advise people in Britain, and propagating new ideas in Germany. The question was whether we should attribute these differences to gender itself, or to some other factor. Assuming ample room for individualistic professional performance in Germany we expected that individual factors such as age and political preference would be most likely to explain gender difference. The far more restricted nature of British journalism directed the search for rival explanatory factors towards organizational variables. We observed, for instance, that British female journalists tend to adhere to a conception of journalism in which helping, educating and entertaining the public, and respect for private persons were important mores. These specific role

conceptions are very closely linked to traditional definitions of femininity, but they could also be explained by the position of these women in the news organization. British women tend to be overrepresented in those sectors of journalism that serve audience and advertising revenue goals, like education, human interest, women's and consumer pages, fashion and cosmetics. Given the priority which these departments give to attracting readers a role conception that is tuned to audience demands follows simply from organizational logic. Thus existing concepts of femininity are (re)constituted in and by a specific organizational context. For German female journalists the story is slightly different. They opt for an advocacy role in which taking up grievances and propagating new ideas to an audience, perceived predominantly as right wing and opinionated, are important aspects. This specific view can hardly be ascribed to gender, however, since being a woman in German journalism also means being young and on the left side of the political spectrum. Moreover, these role and ethical conceptions may be extreme but they accord with general tendencies in German journalism. Thus in both countries, it is impossible to see gender as an independent variable influencing the ideas and opinions of men and women by itself. The specific organizational context in which journalists work constructs not only whether 'gendered' professionalism can exist, but also how it will be expressed.

As a final example of the interaction of gender and organizational context, I return to my earlier analysis of the position of women reading Dutch TV news (van Zoonen, 1991b). Since the mid-1980s, the majority of news readers on Dutch national TV news have been female. They are all highly acclaimed professionals with a vast experience in other fields of journalism and do not feel that there is anything specifically feminine about their professional performance. Their principals too contend that the women were hired for their superior capacities, not because of affirmative action policy nor because of supposed attractiveness to audiences. The high presence of anchorwomen in Dutch TV news therefore, should definitely be considered a success for the emancipation of women, yet, almost in spite of the news readers themselves, there is also an undeniable gender-specific element in their presence which can be considered a by-product of the organizational goals and editorial policy of the national news. In the mid-1980s the editorial policy and style of the national news was revised. It was thought that the news should offer audiences opportunities to identify with events and personalities. Human interest stories therefore had to be a major ingredient of the news, and news readers were urged to transform their hitherto serious mode of address into a more personal and intimate style. Previously, the rationalistic approach of television news was thought to prevent identification: now the entertainment value and emotional qualities had to be emphasized. As one editor said: 'One tear on TV tells you much more than an ever so well described tear in the newspaper. Television made us communicate and participate in world affairs with tears. TV news without a tear is not good enough and we

should adjust to that.<sup>2</sup> In theory this 'intimization' of television news could have been achieved with an all male anchor team, but that would deny the gendered nature of subjects and the gendered nature of cultural expectations and values. While it is definitely not the case that the anchorwomen were recruited simply because they were women, it does seem that the change in editorial policy opened up a space in which it is more acceptable for women to function. A new women's terrain has been created in which traditional 'feminine' values of intimacy and emotionality are almost coincidentally coupled to women again, that is, the news readers. Writing about the British BBC news, Patricia Holland (1987: 142) has made a similar observation:

Is there some quality expected of news readers, which, despite the apparent contradictions, is turning this into a suitable role for women to play? . . . Is this role of mediation and management one that can be reconciled with the forms of femininity that have been constructed out of power relations between women and men?

However, while Holland claims that news reading has become a performer's job especially appropriate to women because 'they are easy on the eye', another exploitation of femininity is at stake in the Dutch case. Here the news readers cannot convincingly be described as objects of the audience's gaze. A comparison with the caring and never failing mother who tucks you in after a day of emotional arousal seems more to the point, a characterization which is underlined by the deliberately plain and ordinary appearance of the anchorwomen.

The three studies discussed here are all examples of the way gender interacts with the organizational context. While limited to studies in journalism, the issues addressed – professional socialization, organizational culture and structure, and organizational goals and policy – are relevant to other types of media production as well. In fact, Hirsch (1977: 13) has shown convincingly that in the actual production and distribution of news and entertainment the organizational similarities outweigh the differences. But the three case studies discussed above also warn against too much generalization. The studies have illustrated that gender takes on a specific meaning in particular organizational contexts (although not necessarily a new meaning), but the extent to which this happens or is allowed to happen, and its specific sources, expressions and consequences differ from case to case.

#### *Gender and economic, social and legal contexts*

At this level of analysis, the question is how the economic organization of media production, and its social and legal environment, relate to gender, and in particular to the discourses of gender circulated by the media. Apart from rather general political economic analyses of the media, which show that their profit making, commercial interests and their transnational power tend to support consensual and conservative values with regard to

gender and many other issues, little detailed and relevant research has been done in this area. This does not mean that the political economic approach has no relevance to matters concerning media and gender; on the contrary, it points to the limits of cultural production set by the prevailing economic and power relations in the industry, and raises the old insuperable issue of the relation between the macro level of the media institution and the micro level of media texts and audiences. This is not an issue I am particularly keen to address here, since it seems that the immediate concerns with gender and media are located at the micro and meso levels of media production discussed earlier, and at the level of media-audience interactions (to be discussed in later chapters). Suffice it to say at this point that the political economic relations of the media industries are an important circumscribing factor inflicting valence on media access and output, that is, a bias towards a particular kind of meaning and social relevance (Bush, 1983). This tendency has been recognized clearly by the women's movement which, by a variety of means, has tried to put pressure on the industries to live up to their social rather than their commercial responsibilities. In Chapter 2, I discussed, for instance, the way the American women's movement challenged the licence renewal of TV stations failing to meet emancipatory demands. While none of the attempts was successful, the action did sensitize broadcasters to the issue of women's liberation. Other minority groups have been in the forefront of criticizing the media as well and have been able to establish themselves as legitimate lobby groups criticizing the media about their representation (Montgomery, 1989). While there are indications that some media organizations will take some minority concerns into some consideration (Gitlin, 1983), the pervasive commercial logic of the media constitutes the overwhelming criterion for decisions and policies. Public broadcasting differs less and less in this respect, since increasingly they have to compete for the same audiences as commercial organizations producing an organizational logic which is remarkably similar (Ang, 1991). As a rule – with the proverbial exception – media organizations will hardly ever bend directly to social pressure from outside, unless it is in their own interest. Thus, when it appeared that women were increasingly taking up paid labour, they were recognized as an important new group of consumers to be addressed by 'modern' advertisements showing women as capable workers, a change much demanded by the women's movement but only realized by the changed market structure (Janus, 1977; Rao, 1992).

Still, the system is not as impervious as it seems. Turow (1982), looking at the conditions under which unconventional innovatory TV shows like *All in the Family* came into being, found that the organizational logic is sometimes superseded by personal ambitions of network executives and producers. A particularly relevant example is given by Marguerite Moritz (1989) in an examination of the possibility of representing gay women on prime time American television. According to Moritz lesbian characters have discretely begun their 'fictional coming out' since a changing institu-

tional context has lifted the former taboo status of the subject. Moritz traces several factors that account for the increased room for lesbian characters and storylines. According to the networks, their policy towards gay and lesbian issues has become more liberal because of the increased social acceptance of homosexuality. There is a less considered reason as well; as a result of budget cuts, standards departments at the networks, which control the standards of morality and decency of programme proposals and scripts, lost up to 40 per cent of their staff, necessitating a less rigid enforcement of rules. Next, the competition of cable and video faced by the networks has undermined their monopoly of the entertainment sector, forcing them to look for new, creative and competitive programmes and approaches. According to Moritz, cable TV and cinema both proved that gay themes can be profitable and appealing to audiences which have been raised on television and are extremely familiar with the usual genres and storylines. Moreover, Moritz contends that American audiences are willing to be entertained and informed about controversial issues. Moritz concludes that the representation of lesbianism relates to white, middle class heterosexuality: 'In this sense what we are getting more of from prime time television is not lesbians coming out, so much as lesbians coming in' (1989: 75). All in all, a change in the social, economic and organizational environment has enabled the incorporation of a particular kind of lesbianism into prime time television programmes.<sup>3</sup>

### **Encoding**

The research presented in the previous sections clearly shows that the gendered structure of media production extends from micro and meso to macro levels. Although in some instances it was clear how this gendered structure affects the encoding of gender discourse in media content, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a straightforward connection between the gendered structure of production and the encoding of gender discourse. Nevertheless, the feminist concern with media production is mainly inspired by a desire to influence media content in a more feminist direction, however defined. 'Getting a grip' on media production should theoretically yield strategies for innovation and change, but unfortunately for such aims, the encoding of meaning is a process which escapes simple generalizations, depending rather on particular, historical articulations of the preferences and performance of individual communicators, the organizational context they work in, and the larger social environment of the media institution. As a result it is not easy to hypothesize whether and how in general the gendered production structure affects the encoding of meaning. Case studies like that of d'Acci (1987) presented at the beginning of this chapter are required in all areas of media production in order to get a grasp on the range of encoding practices.

This conclusion is definitely at odds with a premise that underlies much

feminist research on media production, which is that an increased participation of women in the media industries, taking up positions at all levels of the organization, would be to the benefit of the feminist or emancipatory project. To a certain extent this is a truism, since as a matter of relatively straightforward civil rights every profession should be accessible to women, ethnic minorities and the disabled. Moreover, for isolated women working in male dominated professions, the arrival of female colleagues might mean a considerable relief. To this extent, the feminist claim to stimulate the employment of women in the media industries – journalism and broadcasting in particular – is entirely legitimate. However, most authors do not leave it at that, they contend that media content would also benefit from an increased number of female communicators. One comes across this argument in different disguises. For example, in a preface to an equal opportunities guide of the European Community, Vasso Papandreou, member of the Committee on Employment and Industrial Affairs, notes that women should obtain equal positions in broadcasting ‘in order to influence and shape the programmes we see’.<sup>4</sup> Miiko Kodama observes that in Japanese broadcasting there are no women in the positions of director or producer of news programmes, which means that ‘women’s views and volition are totally ignored in the process of news selection’ (Kodama, 1991: 38). Maurine Beasley speculates that ‘the nature of [American] news itself might change, at least somewhat, if women become the majority in the newsroom’, but changes her mind after a disappointing personal encounter with the press (Beasley, 1989: 189). In the late 1970s, the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation adopted an equal opportunities programme, assuming that ‘an equal distribution of women and men in as many occupations as possible is a necessary – if not necessarily sufficient – condition for equality in the company’s programme output’ (Abrahamson, 1990: 10).

In spite of its attractive simplicity and apparent utility, there are serious theoretical fallacies involved in this argument that lead to practical and political repercussions (cf. van Zoonen, 1988). To begin with, for media output to change as a result of the presence of women in the profession, one must be convinced that female communicators share a certain perspective, approach, preference or style that distinguishes them collectively from their male colleagues. In other words, one must assume ‘femininity’, however defined, as a feature of female journalists and ‘masculinity’ as a different characteristic of male journalists. Thus, a dichotomous conceptualization of gender emerges, with gender inevitably and consistently attached to human beings in whatever social context. In the previous chapter, I argued that gender should not be conceived as a fixed property of individuals but as part of a continuing process by which subjects ‘work’ on a sense of self. Human identity can therefore not be thought of as stable, but should be seen as fragmented and dynamic, depending among other things on the particular articulation of various discourses in concrete historical contexts. If we conceive gender as such, we shall not expect that

female communicators will have enough in common to produce a radically different type of media output. On the contrary, as I tried to show in discussing the articulation of gender and organizational context, the particular position and experience of women in media organizations construct an identity of 'woman and professional' that can take many different forms, mostly traversed by the tension between professionalism and being a woman which dominant culture dictates. Next, it is imperative to realize that gender is not the only relevant dimension when discussing the possibilities of transforming media production. Film and video maker Alile Sharon Larkin, for instance, duly argues that not only white patriarchal culture but white feminists as well, have ignored and framed the experiences of black women:

I believe that many contemporary Black women artists have been compelled to speak with a voice that is not really our own. . . . As a Black woman I experience all areas of oppression – economic, racial and sexual, I cannot 'pick and choose' a single area of struggle. I believe it is in this way that feminists and other progressive whites pursue their own interests at the expense of those of us subjected to racism. (1988: 158)

Arguing for an increase in the number of women working in the media industries, without incorporating prominent discourses of identity and politics such as race, class, sexuality etc., is an address to the interests of middle class women, mainly from the dominant ethnic groups. In western industrialized countries policies built on this principle are bound to produce improvements, mainly for white middle class women, which is in itself not bad, but certainly extremely limited (see also Baehr, 1981).

Secondly, the call for more women communicators, in order to transform media output, completely ignores the organizational context in which media production takes place. Apart from expecting a particular input from women, it is assumed that the individual communicator is sufficiently autonomous to implement her own preferences without significant modification by colleagues, technical requirements, professional values, organizational routines etc. Admittedly, literary production and film- and video-art, both produced in relatively relaxed organizational settings, have seen the emergence of cultural products labelled 'feminine writing' or '*écriture féminine*' (cf. Showalter, 1989). Others have attempted to develop specific 'feminine' film styles, characterized, according to some, by a disavowal of traditional cinematographic means such as linear narratives, realistic visualization and voyeuristic identification (cf. Mulvey, 1975; Erens, 1990). Cultural products subject to the organizational logic of mass cultural production, as in the press and broadcasting, do not leave much room for individual autonomy. It is tempting therefore to conceive of the organizational logic and routine as a factor inhibiting the expression and impact of women communicators. Apart from the problem of defining the specific nature of these expressions that were discussed earlier, organizational power is not merely restrictive but significantly productive as well. Specific organizational policies, routines, job requirements etc. are intersected by

different discourses among which are those of gender, ethnicity, professionalism, to produce an organizational identity reflecting both the individual preferences and styles of the communicator and the productional culture of the media organization.

The argument proposed in this chapter does not lead to straightforward conclusions about the way the gendered production structure affects the encoding process. By demonstrating the complexities, contradictions and tensions involved in the production of the American TV series *Cagney and Lacey*, the concept of negotiation and encoding was made concrete. Then, the different types of possible contradictions were separated analytically by distinguishing micro, meso and macro levels of production. Although existing research on women in media production has been conducted mainly at the micro level of demographic and occupational features and values, the gendered structure of production is visible at meso and macro levels as well. How this gendered structure of production affects the encoding process depends on the particular coupling of 'organizational identities' of communicators – referring to the mixture of discourses of gender, ethnicity, professionalism etc. which constitute the communicator – and organizational routines, requirements and policies. Such a perspective necessitates academic research on concrete cases of media production, such as examining the production histories of particular programmes, the coverage of feminist issues in the news or observing the daily routines and practices of media production units. Strategically, such a perspective does not undermine the call for an increase of the number of women communicators, since that is perfectly legitimated by the consideration of equal opportunities. But to expect that an increase in women communicators will influence media content in a desired feminist direction, is theoretically and strategically unsound. For a feminist cultural politics other strategies are necessary, an issue that I shall return to in the last chapter.

## Notes

1. In Dutch journalism, the majority of female journalists are younger than 35, are unmarried and do not have children. Their male colleagues are older on average, married and do have children (Diekerhof et al., 1985).

2. Editor in chief, Peter Brusse, *Elsevier*, 14 May 1988.

3. Moritz' study dates from 1989. Susan Faludi argued in 1991 in her book *Backlash* that the programmes on American TV had rapidly become more conservative as a result of the Reagan decade. It may prove that the spirit of the Clinton administration will inspire networks and producers toward a more liberal style of programming again.

4. Preface to *Gelijke kansen in de Europese Omroep* (Equal Opportunities in European Broadcasting), Commission of the European Communities, no date. My translation from the Dutch.