

GENDER MATTERS: HOLYROOD 2016



WOMEN IN MEDIA WATCHDOG

We are calling for political parties to make a commitment to:

- Create a Scottish 'Women in Media' body, resourced to monitor and challenge sexism in print, broadcast and online media.

Sexism in the media

The negative impact of the media on women is profound. In 2013, only 5% of editorial positions and 0% of political editorial positions in daily newspapers were held by women across the UK. Globally, women feature in just 16% of political reporting, and just 7% of this focusses specifically on women.¹ This is reflected in widespread stereotyping of women in the print and broadcast media, and lack of gender balance on screen. The absence of quality reporting on gender issues contributes to low awareness of women's inequality and thus to sustaining it. Women standing for political office are routinely subjected to sexism in the mainstream media.

The subordinate representation of women in the media is extremely damaging. Sexualised imagery of women and girls across media platforms is so commonplace and widely accepted that it generally fails to resonate as an equality issue. This objectification of women's bodies shapes how women are valued, reinforces sexist attitudes and has negative impacts on body image, self-worth and health. Online safety, particularly for young people, is an emerging issue that requires investment and development.

Sexism in the media is an extremely pervasive cause and consequence of gender inequality. It is fundamentally linked to the social value placed on women's paid and unpaid work, and participation in politics, the labour market and society. However, in Scotland there is a lack of information data regarding gender inequality across different media channels, in terms of production and representation, and there is no systematic approach to tackle the problem.

We are calling for creation of a Scottish 'Women in Media' body, resourced to monitor and challenge underrepresentation, gender stereotyping and sexualisation of women and girls across all media channels. Such a body would also work with and support media bodies to create content that does not reinforce sexism and misogyny, but to develop gender analysis, to represent women equally and accurately and to challenge gender inequality.



Women in the media roundtable

In February 2016, Engender and Zero Tolerance held a discussion event with women who work in the media, as part of a broader process to think about ways to challenge sexism in the industry. The following points and comments were made.

Women's representation

Women are systematically under-represented in the media in Scotland. For instance, during the 2015 General Election, between 66% and 75% of political commentators were men.² Where women are represented they are often tokenistic and portrayed stereotypically. They are scrutinised and judged on a different basis to men.

- *'As soon as a woman puts herself out there, people are all over her with scrutiny of her clothes, kids, personal life.'*
- *'I always get comments about what I'm wearing not about what I've said.'*

Violence against women

In order to end violence against women (VAW) we need to change cultural attitudes. The media has a key role in this, and could be a force for progressive change, however it often reinforces the structures of gender inequality which underpin VAW. Images, headlines and sensationalist language contribute to stereotypes and normativity regarding VAW.

- *'I was told great, she'll get on the front page'. [Because a murdered woman was attractive].*
- *'Gender is the last bastion – it's still ok to slag women off.'*

Women making media

As within many areas of politics and public life, macho culture often dominates media institutions. Editorial teams are predominantly men, which has a major impact on content, tone and approach, and hours are extremely 'family-unfriendly'. All of this curtails and shapes women's participation. There are no women editors in Scotland.

- *'I sometimes feel like I'm 'manning-up' to get involved in these things.'*
- *'I get lumped in with the guy I'm there with.'*

Online abuse

Systematic sexism and harassment online has a huge impact on women's wellbeing and ability to do their job. More needs to be done to protect women who voice an opinion online. Employers need to take responsibility, especially where journalists are expected to have an online presence. Online spaces should be seen as the same as any other workplace.

- [Editors say] *'they say they're going to rape you, they probably won't.'*
- [If you complain it will be seen as] *'just women moaning.'*

holyrood.engender.org.uk

² Women for Independence *Media Watch* project – the figures depend on the particular programme.