

# Gender in Audience Research

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Gender is nowadays increasingly recognized as an important concept also in mass communications research. Sex in its biological meaning has been instead a long time one of the central background variables in all social sciences. Gender has been the core concept especially in feminist theories. E.g. de Lauretis (de Lauretis 1987, 5) defines the gender: "...gender is not sex, a state a nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes." Gender and the whole human identity are thought to be socially constructed. But it's not only gender but also race, ethnicity, class and so forth that affect the construction of human identity (van Zoonen 1994, 3).

The media has always been at the centre of feminist critique. One of the central themes has been that the media reflects society's dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles (van Zoonen 1994, 11-17). An abundance of studies has been made all over the world that show the male dominance in media production and content. But how gender is related to media consumption is one of the most under-theorized questions in mass communications research. Ang suggests that we can-

not presume a priori that in any particular instance of media consumption gender will be a basic determining factor. And you must notice that gender identity is both multiple and partial, permanently in process of being articulated, disarticulated and rearticulated (Ang 1996, 110-125)

In the other Nordic countries research of gender has been more extensive than in Finland and it also started earlier than in Finland, at least as far as the research work of public-service broadcasters is concerned. In Finland the issue of gender and mass media was back in the limelight however in the autumn 1995 when the Finnish Broadcasting Company's Council for Equality published its first research reports on *Women, Men and the News*, and *Women, Men and Children's Programmes*. The focus in these studies is the supply side of programming. In the news study both television and radio were included, but because of the minimal supply on radio the study on children's programmes was restricted on television only.

The impetus for the present study was provided by the statement of YLE's Administrative Council on 1 June 1994, which confirms the Company's commitment through its own programming to promote equality between men and women in all domains of Finnish society. And there is also the statement in the YLE law concerning the equality between men and women.

The studies I just mentioned are by no means the only or even the first works in this field in Finland. University scholars have long been concerned in their studies with gender breakdown of the people acting in the programmes and the people making the programmes. YLE also conducted a survey in the early 1980s into the gender breakdowns of people appearing in television news and current affairs programmes. The authors were partly the same as in the study carried out last year, but the time was not ripe in those days for this kind of work and the study didn't attract very much attention.

The equality work (i.e. between men and women) in general strengthened in Finland as late as the second half of the 1980s. E.g. the equality law was enacted in 1987. The same year YLE's Board of Directors set up a working party to clear up how the equality is put into practice at the company. And this led in 1989 to the formation of The Council for Equality. One of its main tasks is to look after that the equality law is followed at YLE. It gives announcements, organizes education and seminars, publishes research and other reports, gives every year The Equality Prize to one tv and radio programme etc. YLE has also the Equality Officer since 1992 and the Programme Expert since 1994, the latter is responsible for the development of the equality in the programming and the research work connected with it (The Council for Equality 1996).

My empirical data of this article concentrate on radio (although up until 1980 radio listening and television viewing studies used one and the same diary for both media so till then the conclusions I propose apply in part to television as well). My main interest is with the appearance of sex as background variable from the earliest

years of research onwards and its meaningfulness on planning radio programming.

Has sex always been queried? How has sex been reported, has it been given any attention in interpreting the results? And insofar as there are research results on sex, I shall also present findings on the development of radio listening among men and women. In other words the discussions that follows is concerned both with methodology and with empirical research results.

## Early Audience Research

The Finnish Broadcasting Company's first programmes were broadcast on September 9, 1926. Initially the number of listeners was monitored simply by following the number of licence holders. In 1930 a total of 100 000 licences were purchased, by 1945 the figure had climbed to 500 000 and by 1955 to one million.

However, as early as 1947 Finnish Gallup was commissioned by YLE to conduct a survey of programmes which are usually followed. The following data is based on the survey made two years later, January 1949, among Finnish-speaking radio listeners. "The purpose of the study has been to explore the daily habits of listeners and in rough outline to describe how different programme items are listened to and what people have to say about them" (Gallup Study January 1949). The study was carried out on the basis of personal interviews and was restricted to those people who had a receiver at home. A total of 2192 radio listeners were interviewed. For sampling purposes the interviewers were given instruction as to how many men and women and how many people representing different occupational and age group had to be interviewed in different areas.

In this early investigation radio listening was linked up with time-usage patterns. On the one hand the study explored the radio listeners' daily habits: do they work at home or outside the home, what time they leave home for work, what time they return home from work, etc. Radio listening was queried by asking the respondents how much they listened to the radio the previous day and which programmes they had listened to. In addition, the respondents were asked their own personal preferences about the frequency for different types of programmes. All the results are presented for different background variables, with sex appearing first on the list.

The average daily listening time for all was 2 hours and 5 minutes: women listened to radio for 2 hours and 10 minutes and men for 2 hours. In the analysis of the results for individual programmes, special attention is given to the respondent's occupation and place of residence (rural, small town, medium-sized town, Helsinki). For those programmes where the sex difference are clearest, data are also presented separately on the listening habits of men and women. These programmes were morning service (20 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men) and home programmes (22 per cent women and 7 per cent men). Home programmes were defined by the "Radio Listener" magazine in 1955 as programmes which chiefly address women's problems or other practical matters related to household management.

In 1950s there was in Finland only one national radio channel the programme time of which was about 4 500 hours/year in the beginning of the decade. According to YLE's operating licence programmes had to consist of elements of communications, education (culture) and entertainment. In Finland the radio was in its earlier days for both sexes more the source of news,

knowledge and education than the source of entertainment. The most favourite programmes according to the first audience studies were just the news and the weather reports. And as late as in 1950s the listeners were even worried about the influence that the radio entertainment has on children especially in the countryside (Oinonen 1994, 34). Meanwhile the radio had developed in America from the technical, masculine gadget to more feminine instrument of broadcasting. The feminine role of the radio manifested in the programming, particularly in the soaps that grew out of American commercial radio (Allen 1985; Ruohomaa 1995). But the soaps had no place in the Finnish public service radio even though the women worked in those days mostly at home also in Finland.

One of the chief concerns in the earliest listening study back in 1949 was just to find out how people used their time and where they were at different times of the day. At that time 83 per cent of the men but only 45 per cent of the women were in gainful employment 'somewhere else or outside the home'; accordingly only 17 per cent of men worked 'only at home', while the figure for women was 55 per cent. 'Outside' has here the concrete meaning, it is the opposite to inside the house. At that time farmers still accounted for a large part of the population, so it was also relevant to address the question of gainful employment outside the home. At that time outside the home also meant beyond the reach of radio; in those days there were no radio sets in tractors or other vehicles. The same applies to other radio-listening at the working places.

So as sex was recognized in early radio audience studies, the most important factors seemed to be occupation and degree of urbanization. That is natural because people at this time were engaged in the

process of reconstructing the land after the war, and various programmes were launched that were aimed specifically at strengthening professional identities (programmes for lumberjacks, labourers etc.: see Oinonen 1994). In terms of social structure this was still a period of relative stability: most people were engaged in primary production and degree of urbanization was still low. In both respects the most dramatic changes have occurred during 1960-1975 (Haavio-Mannila, Jallinoja, Strandell 1984). In 1960 nearly 40 per cent of the economically active population was working in agriculture and forestry, but twenty years later, in 1980 slightly over 10 per cent.

As late as in the beginning of 1960s radio reached regularly all Finns and those who listened to the radio was demographically like the whole population (Saraneva 1982).

## Regular Studies from the 1960s Onwards

YLE has carried out regular radio and television audience studies since the 1960s. The early studies were so called time-usage surveys. Up until 1980 the same diary was used for both radio listening and television viewing, i.e. as far as radio is concerned regular audience measurements have almost always been based on the diary method. And the ownership of television was one significant explanatory variable to radio listening in 1960s and 1970s. Even though it seems that gender did not seem to be of any great importance on radio, regular studies did continue to measure the differences on listening between men and women. There has been some methodological changes in studies that have some impact on the longitudinal analysis over time, but they do not supposedly affect the relationship be-

tween men and women and their listening habits.

It is not easy on the basis of current indices (i.e. average daily reach and listening time) to create a systematic time series of women's and men's listening because even in the 1970s reports provided no summary data by background group. Data for different programmes (and later for 15-minute periods), on the other hand, are given for different background groups. Up until 1980 occupation was the most important background factor in explaining the amount of listening. The groups who spent most time at home – farmers, housewives and pensioners – listened more than average to the radio. This is not to say that gender had no meaning in any study in the 1960s and 1970s. There were separate reports on radio listening among children and young people and the elderly etc. in which the analysis did take account of the sex factor. The results didn't differ significantly between men and women and maybe that's one reason why the sex variable didn't attract much attention.

Data on listening habits in different background groups became more readily available since 1980s as summary accounts began to appear of average listening days in certain background groups; initially by occupation, education and age, and the from 1983 onwards also by sex.

## Women's and Men's Radio Listening in 1976-1995

In 1976 radio reached an average 81 per cent of Finnish population aged 15 or over. The figure for women was 83 per cent and for men 79 per cent. Almost 20 years later, in autumn 1995, radio reached 84 per cent of all people aged 9 or over, 83 per cent of women and 85 per cent of

men. If the lower age limit were still 15 years, the figures would probably be nowadays even higher because the reach for children in the age group 9-14 is lower than in other age groups.

In 1976-1983 the average daily reach of radio was higher among women than it was among men. During the remainder of the 1980s the reach statistics were almost the same for women and men. In 1990, radio reached a larger proportion of men than of women. During 1991-1995 there have been no significant differences between the figures for men and women. And all in all there has been no great differences in reach figures between men and women.

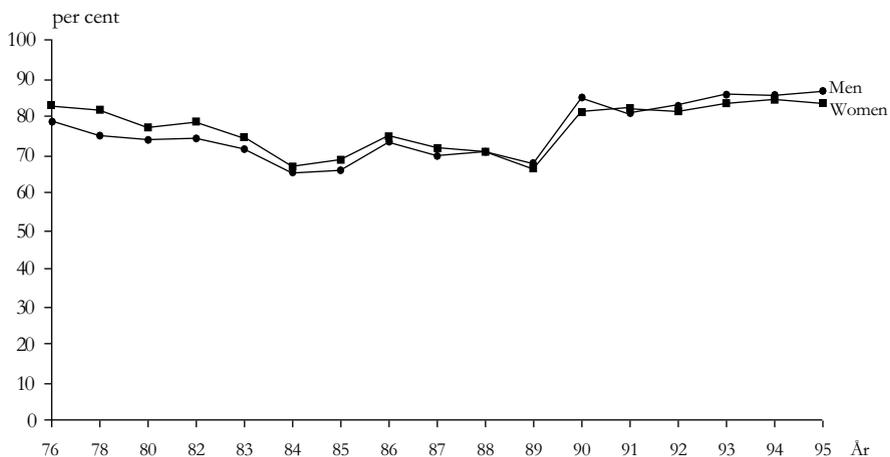
The reach of radio declined in the early 1980s, with the lowest figures recorded for 1984-85 when the average daily reach of radio was 68 per cent. In 1985 private local radio stations went on the air in Finland, clearly activating the radio scene and increasing audience ratings for 1986. This was followed by an immediate backlash and later by another revival with YLE's

channel reform in 1990. Today the average daily reach of radio is around 85 per cent for both women and men, which is the highest figure on record.

The amount of time that people spend with the radio has clearly increased during the period under review. In 1976 women listened to the radio for an average 2 hours and 35 minutes a day, while the figure for men was 40 minutes less at 1 hour and 55 minutes. In 1995 women listened to the radio for an average 3 hours and 40 minutes a day, or about 1 hour more than in 1976. The figure for men has risen to 3 hours and 38 minutes, indicating an increase of 1 hour and 43 minutes. Today the difference between women's and men's listening time has nearly disappeared. Listening times increased most around the mid-1980s when the first private local radio stations started up.

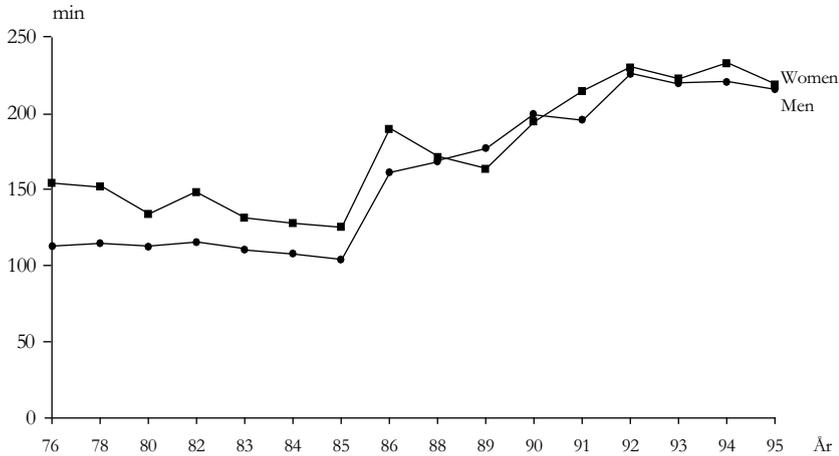
Questions concerning place of listening have not been included in the standard repertoire of audience research until the 1990s, so there is hardly any information

Figure 1. Average Daily Reach of Radio in 1976-1995 (Per cent)



Source: Erholm 1987, Audience research reports 1988-1995.

Figure 2. Daily Listening Times 1976-1995



Source: Erholm 1987, Audience research reports 1988-1995.

on this aspect from earlier years. Table 1 shows the breakdown of daily listening time by place of listening; the figures for 1986 are based on data obtained from one single day.

Even within the short space of time 1986 to 1991, there have been clear changes in place of listening. Home has been and still is the most important environment for listening to the radio, but its share of total daily listening time has decreased. The share of listening in the car has no doubt increased, even though the

figures here do not directly support that conclusion. In 1986 the question we had concerned listening while travelling to and from work, which means that travels during leisure time were apparently included under the 'Other' category.

Listening habits- amounts, times, places- seem to reflect rather mechanically the living conditions of different population strata, their time -usage and everyday situations in which they lead their lives (Alasuutari 1993, 38). Women continue to report more often than men that they typi-

Table 1. Breakdown of Daily Listening Time by Place of Listening

	1986	1991	1992	1993	1995
Home	74	67	69	68	66
Working place	18 *	19	14	15	18
Car	5 **	11	11	12	12
Other	4 ***	3	6	5	4

\* At work and at school

\*\* Travelling to and from work

\*\*\* Visiting and elsewhere

cally listen to the radio in the morning at home, and during the daytime at home. Men, on the other hand, listen to the radio more often in the car, which is hardly surprising in the view of the fact that men drive more than women. The same applies, by and large, to most preferred listening situations. Women prefer to listen to the radio during their morning chores or when working around the home, men prefer listening when they are driving to work and back from work, or in the car during their leisure time (Alasuutari 1993, 38; Sarkkinen 1993).

And the women emphasize that they prefer to listen to the radio rather than watch in tv, because they can do something else at the same time. (Alasuutari 1993, 71) This reflects still the traditional position that the home is for women further to some extent a working place but for men a place to have leisure time even if the time spent to home work increased by men and decreased by women in the 1980s.

As far as radio listening at the working place is concerned, there is no clear difference between men and women. There is also no difference in participating in the working life, but men's and women's occupations differ in some respect.

## Women and Men in Different Age Groups

Although men and women do not, on average, differ from each other in terms of their amount of listening, it is nonetheless possible to identify differences when we focus our attention on smaller groups, such as women and men in different age groups. On the supply side, too, there is a growing tendency now to profile channels according to the interests of specific target groups. As yet Finland has no radio chan-

nel that is specifically dedicated to either women or men.

Age, on the other hand, was an important factor in the planning that led to the 1990 radio reform at YLE, including the setting up of a channel aimed specifically at younger listeners: Radiomafia. During the last year private local radio stations have also been stepping up (in addition to the old ones) their programming for young people. There are two radio stations that have now started operations in several towns on a 'seminational' basis: one of these is the youth-oriented Kiss FM and the other Classic FM.

Although YLE has not profiled its channels according to gender, listening studies indicate that there has been some tendency towards gender differentiation. YLE 1 reaches a larger part of the female than the male population. Women also listen to YLE 1 some 10 minutes more per day than men do. The popularity of YLE 1 also increases with age. Yle 1 has several programme types or topics that appeal more to women than to men. During weekdays the channel reaches most listeners in the morning around 8 a.m. and in the evening around 7 p.m., with religious services and news programmes attracting people to the radio. Religious services are clearly favoured by elderly listeners and most specifically by women. Women also listen to classical and spiritual music to a greater extent than men, and the same applies to folk music and chansons (Seppänen 1993,91). These are the very music genres that YLE 1 plays most.

Choices of radio channels also have to do with listening situations and place of listening. Reception studies based on small group conversations have shown that people feel listening to Yle 1 requires time and concentrated effort (Ruohomaa 1994).

Perhaps the best environment for listening to this type of programming is the home, which is a more preferred and a more common listening environment for women than for men.

On the age and gender dimension, Radiomafia's (the youth channel) audience is the exact opposite to the audience of Yle 1, i.e. its reach is highest among men. The number of listeners peaks in the afternoon between around 3 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. This is a good time for listening to the radio if you have just finished school or work or are travelling home from work. There is also a fair number of listeners in the morning before and after 8 a.m., i.e. when people are getting ready to go to school or work or already on their way. Young men said that their most preferred place of listening was in the car. Some 70 per cent of Radiomafia's programme time consists of rock and pop, which is more popular among men than women.

There is no great difference in Radio Suomi's listening figures, when they concern men and women in average. The channel, on the other hand, reaches a larger share of the male population than the female population, but women have listened to it on a daily basis somewhat more than men. But Radio Suomi is sending e.g. sports programmes, that appeal especially to men.

There is only a couple of programmes that are directed especially to women in today's Finland. The best known and oldest is The Women's Hour (nowadays in fact a half an hour). It started in the beginning of 1990s from the initiative of one female journalist, who is making the programme also today. The programme handles different subjects from women's perspectives: science, art, society, home, politics etc. The listeners of the programme are mostly women but also a lot of men. But in gen-

eral it's not the genre or subject that matters most, when you want to appeal either women or men, but the style and the format, the perspective of the programme (Ruohomaa 1996).

## Conclusions

Sex has appeared in audience researches since the late 1940s when the first studies were conducted. Its importance as background variable has not been so great as such variables like occupation, place of residence, the ownership of television and age, in this order. And the reason is probably not that it has had no meaning in explaining the listening behaviour but rather the situations in society has been such that other things has been considered more important. In 1960s there was a rapid change in occupational structures and urbanization. It was also the pioneering time of television. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was also the strong Marxist doctrine in social sciences that weighted work and position in the production.

The situation in Finland is nowadays so that women and men are working equally outside the home. And many traditional family patterns has changed but they are changing slowly. So also women have moved from the private family circle to the public sphere.

The amount of radio listening is nowadays the same for men and women. There was neither very big difference in the times of the first audience studies. In 1949 the women listened the radio ten minutes longer than men on an average day. Indeed the women were in those days longer times inside the home and so in the reach of radio. The radio was in that time the family medium so the listening situations were common and there was no great difference in using it.

It seems that there was a little bigger difference in the daily listening time between men and women in 1970s and early 1980s; (maybe also in 1960). It can be that those dramatic changes that occurred mostly during 1960-1975 changed the living conditions of men in bigger amounts than those of women i.e. the men moved outside the home first and more quickly than women. The home was in that time the main place for radio listening and the women had so better possibilities for it.

The home is yet nowadays the main place to listen to the radio, but there are also more other possibilities than ever. And although there is no difference in the amount of radio listening among men and women there are differences in the places of listening. And these places reflect the different situations in which different people are during the day. And it is not only the matter of gender but also gender in combination with age, education and so on.

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