

## Dr. Maria Edström (University of Gothenburg) on the GEM-index, the Nordic Countries and the GMMP

For Dr. Maria Edström (University of Gothenburg), it all started, when she was a PhD student, with the Swedish media watch group *Everything is Possible*.

That is what eventually led her to the GMMP, the Global Media Monitoring Project.

‘We did a study on the media buzz and presence in general,’ says Dr. Edström. ‘We did it in 1994 and the first GMMP came out in 1995.’

However, we weren’t aware that that work was ongoing. But once we heard about it, after the Beijing Platform for Action Conference, we wanted to get involved.’

That was the beginning of her work with the Global Media Monitoring Project, research that takes a snapshot of news media around the world during one day.

‘So, we started this collaboration between this media watch group and the University of Gothenburg, and we started doing the Swedish data collection in 2000. Since then, every five years, we’ve been involved.’

Dr. Edström’s journalistic background played a role in her getting involved with the GMMP.

‘I thought it was kind of a fascinating profession and, while working in journalism, I also started covering more gender equality stories.’

Dr. Edström and her colleagues and peers felt as if they were contributing to a status quo that was lacking gender equality.

‘My way into this was from this media watch group. Myself and a number of colleagues, who were in advertising, or film, or journalism, felt that we were part of the problem – that we kind of produced these stereotype images of people, whether it was migrants, women or children, too.’



## The GEM-Index and Balance

Along with Professor Monika Djerf-Pierre, Dr. Edström has contributed to the GMMP with a key research asset, the GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure)-index.

‘Our idea was *how do you measure gender equality in the media?* It has to do with presence, whether women are there or not as news subjects, as well as as reporters.

And then, we also wanted to know where women were, in terms of news subjects.

As we know, politics, economics, and business are those areas that are kind of “high status”.

So, we said: “the level of where women and these topics are would be a very interesting thing to put into our index.”

And then, it also has to do with what roles do women and men have in the news media, and whether you are an expert, a spokesperson, or just have a personal opinion on something.’

When it comes to gender equality, the conversation often revolves around the Nordic Countries. Sweden, Finland and other Nordic Countries are oftentimes seen as an example to follow when it comes to equality.

In the recent GMMP round, for instance, Sweden and Finland have been “high in the rankings”, both with a female presence in the news of around 30%.

However, when thinking about gender equality, it’s important to consider what can be considered a good balance.

‘If you think 30% is balanced, it’s not very balanced, right?’, Dr. Edström asks. ‘You can always discuss whether to balance 50-50, 40-60 or something else.’

According to Dr. Edström, the idea of talking about representation in the news is about so-called *Politics of Presence*: ‘If you’re there, you count, and your voice matters.’

What is in the front page gets the attention, the rest is either seen as secondary or even ignored. ‘What is on the top left corner or on the news front page is usually the most important thing.’

And even though certain issues may be considered new, they still seem to be connected to past challenges.

‘Already in the nineties, we had this dimension of a broad representation, so, we worked on age, ethnicity, gender, and the functionality – as well as whether you are from the countryside or from the city.’

Now, you have *Black Lives Matter* in the U.S., but that kind of connects very well to older issues.

You can go back to the sixties or the nineties, you have different waves of engagement, and the same thing goes for gender equality.'

## Gender Representation in the Media vs. In the News

During the interview, Dr. Edström and Yann Ilunga dive into gender representation in the media and in the news – and into a key difference between how the issue manifests itself in those two spaces.

On the one hand, we have the news. 'I would say that the news media is kind of a more traditional, they have very strong formats,' says Dr. Edström. 'You have foreign news, national news, and so forth. And the national state is very important in the news.

So, there are very old routines that are not so easily changed.'

And on the other hand we have media, where things appear to be different than in the news space.

'If you work, say, in the film industry, or in fiction, it is only your mind that represents your limit – and you could change this gender representation.

I was at the seminar where Geena Davis said "we could fix this in seven years".

Seven years, because, that is like changing all the production.

In fiction, you are not bound to anything. But the news media is bound to cover power representatives. And in politics, for example, there are not so many women.

## The Impact of the Global Media Monitoring Project

The Global Media Monitoring Project, or GMMP, is a voluntary project, which gives those involved in it – grassroots movements, researchers, activists, and scholars – the opportunity to be part of a global community.

'It is just a fantastic way of getting people together across the world.

Every five years you know that you voluntarily go into this project to raise the awareness and level of knowledge on gender equality in the media,' says Dr. Edström.

Now, the question becomes not only what it means to be involved in the GMMP but what does it mean *not* to be involved in it. Does that translate into a country lacking freedom of expression?

'You don't have that high level of gender equality, you don't take part in the studies, then you don't know what's going on.'

Dr. Edström has some powerful words for those who may want to get involved in the Global Media Monitoring Project: 'The more you learn and the more you can kind of understand what is going, the freer you become – and you can have a possibility to be a change agent wherever you are.'

If you're interested in learning more about the GMMP or would like to contribute to it, you can visit [this webpage](#).