

...So What? She's A Newspaperman and She's Pretty. Women Journalists in the Cinema

¿Y qué? Es periodista y además es guapa.
Mujeres periodistas en el cine

Eta zer? Kazetaria da, eta polita gainera.
Emakume-kazetariak zineman

*Ofa Bezunartea Valencia¹, María José Cantalapiedra²,
César Coca García³, Aingeru Genaut Arratibel⁴, Simón
Peña Fernández⁵, Jesús Ángel Pérez Dasilva⁶*

zer

Vol. 13 – Núm. 25

ISSN: 1137-1102

pp. 221-242

2008

Recibido el 28 de marzo de 2008, aprobado el 20 de junio de 2008.

Abstract

This article is the result of a research project, funded by the University of the Basque Country, entitled *The Journalistic Profession in the Cinema and its Reflection in Reality*. The project included an analysis of 104 films, which form the basis of this article. Given that the cinema proposes and stipulates models of behaviour and that, simultaneously, it both reflects and influences reality, we review the cinematographic treatment received by women journalists in film.

Keywords: Journalism · Cinema · Woman

¹ Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, ofa@bezunartea.net

² Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, mariajose.cantalapiedra@ehu.es

³ Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, cesar.coca@ehu.es

⁴ Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, aingeru.genaut@ehu.es

⁵ Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, simon.pena@ehu.es

⁶ Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, jesusangel.perez@ehu.es

Resumen

Este artículo es el resultado de un proyecto de investigación financiado por la Universidad del País Vasco, titulado “La profesión periodística en el cine y su reflejo en la realidad”. El proyecto incluye el análisis de 104 films. Dado que el cine propone y estipula modelos de comportamiento y que, simultáneamente, refleja e influye sobre la realidad, este artículo analiza el tratamiento cinematográfico que reciben las mujeres periodistas en el cine.

Palabras clave: Periodismo · Cine · Mujer

Laburpena

Artikulu hau Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateak diruz lagundutako “Kazetaritzalabidea zineman eta bere isla errealitatean” izenburuko ikerketa proiektuaren emaitza da, non 104 filme aztertu diren. Zinemak portaera-ereduak erakutsi eta finkatu egiten dituen eta, era berean, errealitatea erakustez gain, filmeek harengan eragina duenez, emakume-kazetariak filmeetan jasotzen duten trataera aztertu da.

Gako-hitzak: Kazetaritza · Zinema · Emakumea

0. Introduction

Women journalists in the cinema represent 20% of journalists: one out of every five cinematographic journalists is a woman. According to figures from the National Agency of Evaluation of Quality and Accreditation (ANECA), in the lecture halls of the Faculties where Journalism is taught as a subject, more than 3,000 journalists graduate each year in Spain, while there is an enrolment of 13,000, of whom 63.6% are women. The Report of the Journalistic Profession prepared annually by the Press Association of Madrid offers the fact that men and women share the journalistic profession equitably. An equal percentage, 49.4%, is given by the research report *Gender Representation in Radio and Television News Programs*, of the Official Institute of Radio and Television (IORTV) and the Woman's Institute (MTAS), presented in January 2005.

This figure is, however, less worrying than their life expectancy or their positive discrimination: either they die earlier, or they receive favourable treatment and retire sooner. This is something that is no one looks into: what happens to women journalists in film after the age of 50? A quarter of male cinematographic journalists are over 50: 22 percent are aged between 50 and 65; and there are those, although the figure is a meagre 3 percent, who are over 65: Passion for their work? Poor retirement pensions? Irreplaceable wisdom? Women, on the contrary, disappear at 50. In the films studied for this project there weren't any. They already start to disappear at the age of 35: less than a quarter of women journalists are found at the fork in life represented by the period between 35 to 50 years: 23.5 percent to be precise. Perhaps it's maternity, that recurring split between Journalism and the Home in journalistic film, that removes them from the editorial offices.

However, we are more inclined towards the other constant factor "...and she's pretty", something that, as we shall see, is confronted twice over by women journalists in the cinema: on the one hand, in order to play the role, beauty, which has a greater presence in youth, is taken into account. There are frequent statements by actresses who, finding themselves at the same fork in life as our women journalists, complain that there are no roles available for them. Perhaps because beauty - although this is a risky assertion - symbolises the life trajectory of women in the cinema, where there is a feedback cycle with reality. This trajectory starts to exhaust itself after the age of 35: it seems that beyond that age it is more difficult to fall in love with them, make mothers of them, or instruct them. Men in the cinema - where there is a feedback cycle with reality - have more time available to fall in love or become fathers, and age is an advantage in the role of mentor. To the extent that the frontier of

beauty is extended, as is occurring, towards the 40s or 50s, women will continue in the cinema - where there is a feedback cycle with reality. Also to the extent that the gaze - of both men and women - ceases to be masculine, as explained by Howard Good in his book *Girl Reporter*: “Men act and women appear, John Berger explained in an oft-quoted passage from his book *Ways of Seeing*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female” (Good, 1998:16).

On the other hand, although closely related –that terrible feedback cycle– there are numerous allusions in the films analysed to beauty as a curricular merit when it comes to working in the profession. In some cases because the person doing the contracting is a man who is sensitive to female attractiveness, irrespective of the merits of the woman contracted: at times in spite of her lack of abilities. In other cases, he discovers her talent after first noticing her charm. Without the latter, her ability would have had no opportunity to show itself: if besides being pretty she is intelligent, all the better, but first things first. On the other hand, the films that recreate the profession on television pay more attention to a good appearance: a value for the men, a requirement for the women.

1. Young Women Involved in Investigative Journalism

The figure can be subjected to varied interpretations, but it is a fact that in the cinema three out of every four women, exactly 70.5 percent, are aged between 20 and 35; a percentage that is 31 percent in the case of male journalists, because, as we have said, they continue working to a more advanced age. Few, however, begin their career at an early age, where the differences are slight: 6 percent of the women journalists are aged below 20; 4 percent in the case of men.

Bearing in mind that there are fewer of them and they retire far sooner, it makes sense that the third hypothesis of this article should find confirmation: their careers are shorter, they do not reach executive positions, nor, more importantly, do they reach a position where they instruct, where they become mentors. In the case of films set in newspaper editorial offices the figures are overwhelming: in 57 percent of cases, male journalists are found in the most senior positions on the professional scale: editors-in-chief (12 percent), directors (27 percent), publishers (14 percent) or owners (4 percent); they are figures who, we insist, are in charge, who instruct. In no case do women hold these posts. They start to

exist in the figures of editors and reporters, work that is done by three out of every four women journalists: 30 percent and 45 percent respectively.

But not all the hypotheses are confirmed: surprisingly, 15 percent of women cinematographic journalists are columnists, a figure far removed from the 2 percent of male columnists, and also far removed from reality: while in the news genres the presence of men and women is, as we have pointed out, very similar, the opinion genres continue to be an area dominated by men.

In the case of television, the figures follow the tendency of the press, although they are not so overwhelming. These films are, necessarily, more recent and this is something to be appreciated. Fourteen percent of the cinematographic characters are to be found at the top end of the scale: owners, producers or directors. Women hold a discreet 8 percent of management positions, but it is clear that the distance is no longer unbridgeable. What is most striking about the case of films set in television is that men appear spread throughout the professional categories, while women, on the other hand, are editors, reporters or newsreaders and, in some cases, directors or camerapersons. In the professional categories, the highest percentage in the case of women is held by reporters, with some 50 percent, followed by editors and newsreaders, both with 17 percent. The highest percentage in the case of men, on the other hand, is obtained by scriptwriters, with 20 percent, followed by reporters, with 17 percent, newsreaders with 15 percent and editors with 10 percent. But men are additionally represented in the categories of owner, producer, director, freelance reporter, editor and scriptwriter.

Elena Blanco, in the article *Mujer y poder en los medios [Women and Power in the Media]*, includes amongst the conclusions of a study involving Journalism students the observation that “another cause for the lesser presence of women in posts of responsibility is due to lack of ambition and of the desire to reach positions of responsibility in the media” (Blanco, 2005:99-107). We would venture to say, on the basis of our experience as university lecturers in the subject of Journalism, that the lack is not one of desire, but of confidence, and also daring: of daring to consider such an aspiration. And for aspiration to come naturally, the cinema plays a role as Anneke Smelik explains: “The narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active and powerful: he is the agent around whom the dramatic action unfolds and the look gets organized. The female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s) (Smelik, 1999).

There are women directors. The doctoral thesis *El papel de la mujer en la dirección y gestión de las empresas informativas en España a principio*

del siglo XXI [The Role of Women in the Direction and Management of News Companies in Spain at the Start of the XXI Century] finds that 78 percent of women directors are directors of magazines. Similarly, the Communication Agenda published annually by the Secretary of State for Communication indicates that women basically occupy executive posts in magazines, especially women's magazines, and in FM radio stations (Blanco, 2005).

Our next hypothesis is related to these figures: the hackneyed sexual division between so-called hard news and soft news. The starting hypothesis, as stated in the research report *Gender Representation in Radio and Television News Programs*, which we have mentioned, is that "women journalists concerned themselves to a greater extent than their male colleagues with 'soft' news stories, that is to say with the less important news stories that do not form the first level of news". The study's conclusion is that the hypothesis is false, that it is only in sports where "significant differences are established". Cinema is faithful to reality in the treatment of the sports journalist, as it is only in this section that there are no women journalists. This is a field that holds little attraction for the cinema, as sports journalists only represent 6 percent of cinematographic journalists.

Economics journalists are even less attractive, as they do not have any representatives in film. Sports is followed in unpopularity by Culture, with 7 percent, true to the hypothesis with an asymmetrical 5 percent for women and 2 percent for men. These are small percentages, but the fact is that the women more than double the men. In the Politics section the cinema transgresses not only the hypothesis but reality as well: amongst male journalists, one percent is dedicated to covering politics, against an advantageous and surprising 9.5 percent of women journalists. A similar surprise is provided by the International section, where women repeat the same percentage, 9.5 percent, against 6 percent for men. The clichéd hypothesis returns in Society, where the distribution is one percent for men and 14 percent for women. Society is, together with Politics, the section where the least cinematographic journalists are employed, and, on the other hand, it holds, the third place – shared with Local News – in female occupation following Accident and Crime Reports and Investigative Journalism

The star sections in the cinema are unquestionably Local News, Accident and Crime Reports and Investigative Journalism. Local News, that place where journalists learn their trade and where they become hardened before they move on to other sections, employs nearly a third of cinematographic men, 30 percent. Amongst women, 14 percent are found in this section that arouses such interest in the cinema and in real life. More than a quarter of male journalists are dedicated to another section

with a journalistic and cinematographic tradition: Accident and Crime Reports. Some 28 percent of the men are dedicated to gloomy chronicles, tragedies, violence, pain. Some 19 percent of women answer to this calling.

But if cinema was respectful of masculine Sports and feminine Society, and remained cautious with the other sections, it presents Investigative Journalism as the main work – at least that requiring most journalists- of media activity; and, not content with this, it sets more women to work than men, not in absolute terms (remember that women represent 20 percent of cinematographic journalists) but in terms of percentages. Twenty-one percent of male journalists dedicate their time to investigative journalism. Twenty-eight point five percent of women journalists are dedicated to this noble task of the profession, which is more rooted in the social function of journalism - with the social responsibility of the media towards society, towards democratic values, towards the reader-voter (understood as a consumer of journalistic news through any medium) and the citizen, in the sense that a citizen can only be a citizen, can only fulfil his/her duties and enjoy his/her rights, if he/she is informed, and that task is the responsibility of the journalistic profession.

2. The Eternal Conflict between Journalism and the Home

Both male and female journalists are essentially single, and they are single in similar percentages. What is striking is that in 37 percent of the cases we do not know the marital status of the male journalists, while we do not know this in the case of 6 percent of female journalists. This could be interpreted in the sense that in describing and defining a female character, knowledge of her sentimental life is more important than when presenting a male character. This could also be due to the fact that although there are less women journalists, a greater proportion are leading characters, and one always knows about the life of leading characters. Or one might argue that there is less room for a female journalist without a sentimental life of love or coldness, that this would provide less room for cinematographic play, than in the case of a male journalist, whose working life can be sufficient. Whatever the case, that is the figure.

If we review the cases where the film states marital or sentimental status explicitly, there are a similar proportion of single male and female journalists, 59 percent for women against 52 for percent men. And the same proportion are separated: 3 percent. However, three times as many female journalists are divorced: 2 percent of men and 6 percent of women. It is striking that a far higher percentage of female journalists have a boyfriend: 22 percent of women and 14 percent of men. But it turns out that fewer get married, exactly half: 18 percent of male journalists are

married, and only 9 percent of female journalists. Nor is it a custom for cinematographic women journalists to be widowed, while the percentage of widowers is 7 percent. Finally, although this is merely testimonial, 3 percent of male journalists have been through more than one marriage, while amongst female journalists none of them have. It is also true that they do not have much opportunity: if at 50 years of age, as we have noted, they disappear from the screen, they have less time available to accumulate marriages and also to become widowed.

The fact is that the cinema does not show the traditional renunciation of family/sentimental life by women with demanding professions, although the percentage of married men is double that of women. Renunciation, although we do not have figures, appears to take place in the area of maternity: male journalists have children, in spite of having no time to attend to them; it is the wife who takes responsibility. Female journalists decide not to have any - the figure of the selfless husband has not found a leading role either in the cinematographic tradition or in real life.

In fact, a significant number of the women in the films on journalism are wives who are resentful of the profession, which they feel to be an invincible rival. An example of this is the universal reproach of the wife of Stroud, director of *Crimeways*, in *The Big Clock* (John Farrow, 1948): "At times I believe that you are married to a magazine and not to me. We seem to be two people who simply share a flat. You get home so exhausted that we don't even talk. We should have stayed in West Virginia; we would be a family".

Elena Blanco affirms that "the communication companies are reticent to contract women because of the *work stoppage* of maternity, as well as the obligations deriving from childcare and the needs of the family, responsibilities that are still inherent to women, which accentuate the reticence of companies when it comes to assigning them to posts of responsibility" (Blanco, 2005:99).

In the same article, she sets out the results of a survey of Journalism students at the University of Málaga in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 courses. In response to the question *In order to achieve the post that you propose to reach, would you be prepared to...?*, the results are revealing: in the year 2003, 45.4 percent of the male students chose the option *I would not sacrifice my family and personal life*. Only 2.5 of the female students were certain that they would not be prepared to sacrifice their family and personal life. Evidently the female students are aware of the need to choose. Evidently the male students are aware that it is not necessary to choose. The distances are narrowed in the results for the following course,

but the perspective is upheld: 13.8 percent of women against 37.5 percent of men marked this option.

The men are not prepared to give up on marriage or on living with their partner if this is necessary to reach the position they aspire to. Such a possibility is not considered by any young man. Two point six percent of female students accepted this renunciation in 2003, and 3.1 percent in 2005. However, the perspectives change when it comes to having children. In the 2003-2004 course, no young woman was prepared not to have children in order to satisfy their professional ambitions. In the next course, the figure was 3.4 percent. In the case of the male students, 9.1 percent in the first course would not have children, and 12.5 percent in the second. We will consider the cinematographic presentation of this conflict between Journalism and the Home further on.

3. Social Climbers with Ethics?

The majority of journalists on the screen are experienced professionals: 68 percent in the case of female journalists and 77 percent of male. The figure of the novice seems to hold a scarce cinematographic attractiveness. The figures invalidate the starting hypothesis, which held that a far higher proportion of female journalists than male would be presented as inexpert. However, the distance is not so great either.

Women journalists are less experienced and have less vices. The journalistic profession, which is inevitably associated with a passionate, disordered and dissolute life, does not obtain this profile in the cinema: half of male journalists appear as free of the vices of gambling, smoking, drinking, sex or drugs, which goes against the starting hypothesis. And when they do have one of these vices, they are the more socially acceptable ones: smoking and drinking, 17 and 15 percent respectively. The immaculate female journalists are presented to the spectator without the blemish of vices in 70 percent of cases. And when they do succumb it is, as with the men, to tobacco and alcohol. With few exceptions, this is social not addictive consumption.

With respect to their behaviour, the cinema enjoys journalistic extremes: the character in search of the truth, in search of misery, who is motivated by noble ideals, or who is led by base instincts. The cinematographic journalists put the profession in a good light: the highest percentage is of those who understand their work as being of service to society and democratic values; those who, facing the irreconcilable society/company duality that forms part of the nature of the media, opt for the social function, for justice, for the prevention of the impunity of

abuses, the fourth estate that is vigilant of the healthy functioning of the other three state powers. The percentages of male and female journalists are similar: 41 and 46 percent respectively. The differences become appreciable when the principal motivation ceases to be this and becomes personal promotion, in the case of female journalists, and audience and audience impact in the case of male journalists. Female journalists work for promotion in 43 percent of the cases; males in 28 percent. The percentages are inverted when what is sought is impact, sales, some other form of prominence: then the percentage for female journalists is 11 percent, tripled by the males with 31 percent.

Although this might seem hackneyed, and we will consider this further on, female journalists need to demonstrate that they can reach the top, that they can be the best of all. Male journalists have overcome this phase and demonstration instead involves the stir that they can cause, and the degree to which they can amuse themselves. Related to this question – one that is difficult to set out clearly, to disentangle, to straighten out, since it would need an interdisciplinary study due to its inextricability, as Borges would put it - is the form of working. Journalism has always been presented as a job without timetables, something unpredictable, to which people adapt who are highly flexible, if we take this to be a quality, or who are undisciplined, if we take this to be a defect. The cases where the journalist is shown as someone neglectful of his appearance, without respect for norms or deadlines, who in each case does what seems most convenient independently of the norms, as someone highly independent, unable to submit to any professional or vital routine, are more than double with men than with women: in the cinema males respond to this profile in 34 percent of cases, while women in 14 percent. Although the starting hypothesis was that men adapt to a greater degree than women to this profile, it was also expected that the percentages would be higher. It is not the cinema, as occurred with vices, that provides this widespread stereotype.

Also in relation to motivation, the principal aim of journalistic work, the question of ethical behaviour emerges. Does the cinema provide us with models to be proud of, or does it delve into the profile of the despicable journalist? It makes sense, in spite of it being the social function of the journalist that guides the work of men and women in most cases, that a higher percentage of female journalists are shown as being guided by ethics. Let us recall that for male journalists impact, sales and audience represent - in a percentage that is nearly three times that for women - the driving force of their activity. To attract and hold the attention of the public requires that stories should be interesting, attractive, exciting, morbid or that at least is how this is presented. Perhaps for that

reason, although this is no more than conjecture, male cinematographic journalists behave ethically in 57 percent of cases, against 86 percent for females. Perhaps that is why female journalists lack scruples and morals in only 6 percent of cases, against 38 percent for males. In any case, the cinema rescues – although only to a certain extent – women, at least women journalists, from the cliché of being more manipulative and cunning than men. It is also true that women are traditionally more obedient, that it takes them more effort to abandon what is established, what must be done, and that this at times brings the disadvantage of a fall into immorality, but it has the advantage of bringing a sense of freedom, courage and initiative.

In any case, the cinema neither redeems nor perverts journalists. Only with 6 percent in the case of women, and with 5 percent in the case of men is there an evolution, a change from an ethical beginning to an unethical end, or the reverse: women improve or worsen in 3 percent of cases in each respect; men in 3 and 2 percent respectively.

Another common idea is that the journalist lives a life that is remote from the routine and the predictability of common mortals. Fitting in with this premise is the conviction that - given that they live a different life - they are different: a bit crazy, strange, remote from what is not newsworthy, obsessive, in a word, eccentric in the sense of being disordered and in a mess. This role is played by male journalists in 41 percent of cases, against 20 percent with females. From what has been said so far, one can conclude that women journalists upset the stereotype of the journalistic profession, depriving it of its extravagance and also of its exceptional character.

4. "...And She's Pretty"

On her wedding night Tess Harding, a columnist played by Katherine Hepburn, says to her husband: "Doctor Luvik came to see me before anyone else. A most wonderful break. First real inside dope on the Balkans smash up. He's telling about the nazi infiltration. Isn't this the most thrilling night of your life?" Sam Craig, the husband played by Spencer Tracy, who was expecting a conventional wedding night, replies with irony: "I'm all goosepimples." Tess Harding is living in a film from the year 1942. This was when a journalist, on hearing her on the radio, allows himself to say: "Women should be kept illiterate and clean like canaries"; when Sam Craig, the first time he hears her, comments in surprise: "A dame who knew what was going on in Libya in 1803"; when it was forbidden for women to enter the press box in the stadium, as another journalist puts it:

“No women in the press box. It’s a rule as old as baseball”, to which another replies: “So what? She’s a newspaperman and she’s pretty”.

The film is *Woman of the Year* (George Stevens, 1942), and the husband’s reproach, on the day that Tess Harding goes to collect the prize that names her woman of the year, is as painful as it is revealing: “I’m sorry not to have to write a chronicle because I would give it a sensational angle. The most important woman of the year isn’t even a woman”. And she isn’t one because she neglects domestic concerns in favour of her work, because she doesn’t hesitate to leave a child she has adopted at home to go and receive the prize. To this is added the fact that Tess’s aunt, a single woman with a brilliant professional career whom she admires, decides to get married and tells her that you can’t live alone, that it’s not good for you, that success is no use unless you have someone to share it with. Thus, Tess Harding, with the talent and training to do her job, about which she feels enthusiasm, confesses to the man who will be her husband: “I like knowing more about what goes on than most people ... and telling it”, and she also tells him: “After I came back [from Madrid] I wrote a series of articles which finally blossomed into a regular column and I lived happily ever after”. Tess Harding decides to give up this happiness and dedicate herself to being a wife, that is, to making breakfast for her husband.

But in an amusing final scene, in which she is unable to even make a cup of coffee and feels herself defeated, Sam Craig, a sports journalist with less ambition and social renown than her, asserts: “I like people. I like meeting them and writing about them ... but pretty unimportant people ... I guess that makes me an unimportant guy”. Sam Craig, who has to wrestle with a world that is well represented by his mother, tells her: “All right mum. I’ll find out if she’s a good cook”, knowing full well that Tess would be unable to recognise a kitchen if she saw one. Sam Craig proposes that she should continue being his wife and that she should continue writing columns, that she doesn’t have to be one thing or the other, that she can be both.

This situation represents clearly one of the defining characteristics of the screwball comedy genre, specially during its classic period in the 30s and 40s, where the central romantic story is full of misunderstandings and farcical situations. *Libelled Lady* (Jack Conway, 1936) and *Nothing Sacred* (William A. Wellman, 1937) are also a good example of films that combine the war the elements of the romantic comedies and the work in the newspapers.

Today it would be unthinkable for a cinematographic character to say, with all the naturalness with which this is said in this film, that “Women should be kept illiterate and clean like canaries”. A lot has been gained in

appearances. However, Tess Harding is the most transgressive journalist in cinema. Not only is she ambitious, cultured and passionate about her work. She is more ambitious, more cultured and more passionate about her work than her husband. Hers is the only case in the films studied for this article. It was, we repeat, the year 1942. Exactly 60 years later, 60 dramatic years later, on December 18th 2002, the readers of *elmundo.es* interviewed the journalist Teresa Viejo, who had been appointed editor of the magazine *Interviú*. More than half the questions referred to the fact that she was a woman editor. As one of them put it: "First, congratulations on your appointment, and, secondly, I want to ask you if you think you're going to encounter many attitudes - like in the questions that I see they're putting to you - of the 'feminist position' type, since what I can see is that people are asking you about the fact of your being a woman, more than anything else". Amongst other things, it was put to her: "How do you view, from your condition as a woman, the treatment you receive from your colleagues both at work and away from work?" 60 years after Sam Craig consented -because he was the one who consented- against all the odds to Tess Harding being a prestigious columnist, questions are put to Teresa Viejo *about her condition as a woman*.

Tess Harding would never have been asked, as Teresa Viejo was, whether she would pose naked. Nor would Tess Harding ever have been told by her boss, as was Suzanne Stone Maretto, played by Nicole Kidman in *To Die For* (Gus Van Sant, 1995):

"The point is, Suzanne, if you want it bad enough you'll get it. But you've got to really want it. You have to be able to do things that ordinary people wouldn't do... When I was at the network, there was this girl from some 10-watt station in the mid-west where she did the weather. The weather! So, she comes up to New York, in her best Donna Karan dressed-for-success knock-off. Blonde hair all done up in a French twist, an audition tape in her imitation leather case, along with a letter of introduction from her station manager, that says: "Please, give your most serious consideration to the bearer of this letter, Miss so and so, who is of moderate intelligence, who has some experience in broadcasting and more importantly who can suck your cock until your eyes pop out. (...) You know who that girl is today? And here comes the best part. About ten years ago, I'm at some TV conference somewhere and I run into that station manager and I congratulated him on his letter writing skills. An he doesn't know what I'm talking about. Because he didn't write the letter. She wrote it herself."⁷

⁷ The Colombian journalist Fabiola Calvo, winner of the 2003 prize for women in the European Union, in an article titled *Women Journalists between Silence and Fear*, reported that "the editors take advantage of any opportunity for seduction, mixing flirtation with vague

The cinematographic presentation of the conflict between journalism and the home, if not the conflict itself, has evolved, has been laid bare from Tess Harding to Suzanne. Tess didn't know what to do. Suzanne has no doubts: "I love kids. I absolutely love them. But a woman in my field has two strikes against her. Say I'm in New York and I'm called for a foreign assignment, a royal wedding or a revolution in South America. You can't run from place to place with your crew following and conduct serious interviews with a big fat stomach. Or say you've had the baby, and you've got this blubber and boobs out to here. Bah, it's just so gross".

Martha Hackett represents one of the forms of female loss in this conflict. In *The Paper* (Ron Howard, 1994) she is a pregnant reporter, on maternity leave, wife of the editor-in-chief Henry Hackett. The two of them are going to have a baby, but he continues to experience the intensity of journalism. Meanwhile, she stays at home trying to convince herself that it's fantastic to finally have time for all the things she's never been able to do, and trying to persuade her husband to accept a post that would leave him more free time for the family life they are going to start. But he puts up resistance. His job is such fun... A meal with a friend, who gave up working to look after her children, presents Martha with a bleak panorama, removed from the life she likes so much; so much so that, about to give birth, she meets a civil servant, whose jokes she is prepared to laugh at so that he will give her information her husband needs. However, Martha cannot be accused of dishonesty: "Tell me something," asks the civil servant, "honestly, did any of my stories amuse you?" "No, Tom, not one of them." "Well, I wanted to know where I stand." "You already knew when I called you Tom."

In *Deadline USA* (Richard Brooks, 1952) we find a model of renunciation. One of the women journalists puts it very well: "It's a nice corpse, a pity about the poor dead guy. I knew him well. I gave him the most marvellous 14 years of my life, and what did I get in return? 81 dollars in the bank, two dead husbands and two or three kids I always wanted but that I never had. I covered all the issues. From electrocutions to love scandals. I had ceilings fall in on me and I lost two or three teeth and I never got to see Paris. But, you know something? I wouldn't change those years for anything in the world". Returning to *The Paper*, Alice Clark, acted by Glenn Close, can also be found adopting a similar attitude. Alice resolves the conflict in the traditional, masculine way: her private life is a disaster, as is the private life of the newspaper's editor.

promises, in other cases squabbles, insults, an exaggerated workload or blackmail. The novelty is the silence kept by women journalists about what happens in the editorial office. Fear is a constant in other cases, yes, fear of losing their job, fear of reporting this because no media would contract them, both because they have dared to speak out and because of rising unemployment".

Now, not even Alice, who holds a position of responsibility and is highly independent, can escape from having a boss and mentor. Women journalists generally have a boss and a lover, who might be the same person, and one of them, if not both, is normally also her mentor. The character of Helen in *The Reporter* (Pavel Pawlikowski, 1998) is illustrative. She's involved with her boss and her work motivation is not only journalistic: she works for him, but also because of him. The situation is the same with the main character, Vadik, who becomes a reporter to win her affections. But Vadik is an adolescent. And Helen, an adult, illustrates the asymmetrical cinematographic relationships: adult man-adolescent woman - not in terms of age but of behaviour. The secretaries, if not the women journalists, of *While the City Sleeps* (Fritz Lang, 1956), offer us the female extremes: the young and naïve woman who falls in love with the editor and is prepared to act as bait for the murderer to help her beloved; the most vivacious and seductive character uses the clichéd and reviled female arts to influence professional intrigues. Asymmetrical relations.

The research paper *La mujer y el hombre en la publicidad televisiva: imágenes y estereotipos [Women and Men in Television Advertising: Images and Stereotypes]* concludes that "males occupy up to 80% of the roles of authority", that is, figures who, from the television advertisement address "the fictitious consumer, in the first place, and the final consumer, in the last, from a higher level invested with authority" (Berganza and Del Hoyo, 2001:175). Similarly, every woman journalist has a man who addresses the fictitious woman journalist, in the first place, and the general public, in the last, from a higher level invested with authority.

We recall the character of Michelle Pfeiffer in *Up Close and Personal* (John Avnet, 1996), when she is told Warren Justice, played by Robert Redford: "You know what you're ready for? Could you stop tomorrow on your way in to collect my dry cleaning, shopping..." She, distressed, which is a normal state of mind amongst women journalists, confesses: "No matter what I do I will always be written off as the news director's protégé. So fine, I am perfectly capable of finding a job where I am nobody's protégé".

We recall the character of Annika in *Deadline* (Colin Nutley, 2001). The editor and mentor has to give her the self-confidence she hasn't got. "You're good in all respects. Probably a future boss, so don't let Spiken trip you up, or let the first setback get in your way. You're worth much more than you imagine. Don't let anyone get in your way".

We recall Laurie Callaghan in *Mad City* (Costa-Gavras, 1997). To a lesser extent, the paternalism of Sarah Melas's boss in *Hitch*, the protective editor of Polly Perkins in *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (Kerry

Conran, 2004), or Laura, the reporter in *Territorio Comanche* (Gerardo Herrero, 1997) who is received by the journalists with the fine superiority brought by experience and also by manliness. Arturo Pérez Reverte titles one chapter of the book *Territorio Comanche* "There are women with a pair". The same chapter ends a survey of women in wars, the majority reporters, by concluding the phrase from the title: "There are women with a pair of balls". We can all understand that his intention is a laudatory one, but we also understand that there is something of a discovery in it, as if valour was a male quality and only exceptionally a female one.

Jon Sistiaga puts it very well: "The Iraq war has certainly been one of the conflicts in which more women have been practicing journalism". Good news at last for this profession, in which it seemed only men could work. For years a stereotype of the war reporter has been cultivated. A hard man, a drinker, solitary and misogynist. The few women who dared to work in conflicts were almost made into myths, because of their scarcity (Sistiaga, 2004: 167).

The cinematographic treatment given to Laura would be neutral were it not for the fact that she appears in the nude. "She's a newspaperman and she's pretty", they would say in *Woman of the Year*. So they let her into the press box. In *Territorio Comanche* they strip her.

5. You Wouldn't Have Taken Me if I Hadn't Been Doll-faced

"...and she's pretty" together with the Journalism-Home conflict are the two constants of women journalists in the cinema. Kimberly Wells, in *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges, 1979), has a lovely conversation with her boss, that indispensable figure: "Let me do some hard news. I want to do some real reporting", Kimberly requests, and Jacovich, that indispensable figure, replies: "I feel you're better off doing the softer stuff. Let's face it, you didn't get this job because of your investigative abilities. Don't fight it. Don't try to be anything else". "I'd be good doing news", insists Kimberly. "We'll see. I like your hair like that," replies Jacovich. As can be appreciated from this conversation, the saying is transitive: "...and she's pretty"; or "and she's a newspaperman". Two employees of the television station comment: "The red hair was a good idea". "We'll cut it". "What does she say?" "She'll do what we tell her". The woman journalist Mamen Mendizábal, at a talk given at the University of the Basque Country in February 2006, reported that after being selected for the program *59 Seconds*, she had her hair trimmed. And this nearly cost her the job - she had the presentiment that if she had cut it any shorter, she would have lost it.

Even Gale Gayley, a ruthless and excellent journalist of *Accidental Hero* (Stephen Frears, 1992), played by Geena Davis, whose

professionalism is above question, receives a reprimand related to the transitive maxim: "No, Gale," her boss tells her, "you're none of those things. You're a God damn cream puff. You're a marshmallow. That's why everyone loves you. Try and be a professional marshmallow. And get out there and report on the God damn human drama".

Or Erica Stone, the university lecturer in *Teacher's pet* (George Seaton, 1958) played by Doris Day. The hardened editor-in-chief Jim Ganon pays attention to her academic speech because he has previously felt attracted by her. Ganon distinguishes between sexually attractive women and women with intellectual responsibilities. One thing or the other. In the lecture hall he excuses his presence to an ungrateful student, taking her for the lecturer. When he discovers that the lecturer is a blonde with a tight skirt, he decides to stay in the class. Ganon's first reaction on discovering she's a female not a male lecturer is: "Do you mean to tell me that now they've got dames teaching unsuspecting suckers how to...?" She, on the other hand, was prepared to listen to what an editor-in-chief had to tell her, irrespective of his appearance. She sets out with a double prior respect: for the journalistic profession and for men; he sets out with a double prior lack of respect: for the university and for women. Only the graceful gait of Doris Day can bridge the gap. "She's a lecturer, and she's pretty", let her in.

In one of these classes for *unsuspecting suckers* the lecturer Erica Stone makes a description of the gentlemen of the press that is worth reproducing: "He works, I'm sure, with a cigarette hanging out from his mouth like so and a suit that he hasn't had pressed in months and, of course, he has the battered old hat that he wouldn't give up for the crown of England. Poker comes easy to him but, oh boy, he drinks hard, and after he's had a few, he'll always tell you, 'Why, I never even got to high school and I'm proud of it.' And of course he boasts about his exploits with the ladies. Of course he'll never marry anyone but his job. In short, he's a perfect example of that dying race: the unpressed gentleman of the press."

Teacher's pet is from the year 1957. In the year 2004 *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (Adam McKay, 2004) presents the "unpressed" gentlemen of the television together with Veronica Corningstone: "pretty and she's a newspaperman". The start of the film says the following: "There was a time, a time before cable, when the local anchorman reigned supreme, when people believed everything they heard on TV. This was an age when only men were allowed to read the news. And in San Diego, one anchorman was more man than the rest. His name was Ron Burgundy. He was like a god walking amongst mere mortals. He had a voice that could make a wolverine purr, and suits so fine they made Sinatra look like a hobo. In other words, Ron Burgundy was the balls."

When Veronica aspires to present the Champ news, one of the journalists on Burgundy's team sums up the spirit of the film: "It's anchorman not anchorlady. And that is a scientific fact!". The book *Women and Journalism* states that "when the European pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s tried to find a way into radio and television newsreading, it was adduced as a reason for turning them down that the female voice was not true-to-life and that it did not transmit sufficient authority" (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming, 2004:33). In the year 2006, Rosa María Berganza and Mercedes del Hoyo, in the work already cited on television advertising, offered the figure that "the speaking characters verge on 50% (exactly 49%), and the feminine figure does not reach even a quarter of these (22.9%). The figures obtained," they continue, "seem to confirm that the age-old questioning of the credibility of feminine discourse continues to be in effect in advertising practices, especially when women intervene in the public space."

Champ, an intuitive man, shows why "until 1948 no woman had worked as a correspondent for a television channel". Or perhaps he knew that "it was the North American ABC that hired the first, and although she worked on hard news for twelve years, when she was assigned to interview the wives of the presidential candidates at national political conventions, they also asked her to put the make-up on the interviewees" (López Díez, 2005).

In compensation, Champ adds: "I will say one thing for her. She does have a nice, big old behind. I'd like to put some barbecue sauce on that butt." The editor cracks up laughing. Meanwhile, the highly professional Veronica, half a century after ABC had contracted a woman, delivers a sad monologue: "Here we go again. Every station it's the same. Women ask me how I put up with it. Well, the truth is, I don't really have a choice. This is definitely a man's world. But while they're laughing and ass-grabbing, I'm chasing down leads and practicing my non-regional diction. Because the only way to win is to be the best. The very best."

Teacher's pet poses an interminable question: whether journalism is a trade or a profession. In films it is not usual for the training of journalists to be shown. Only 22% of the male characters provide facts in this respect, and this is to make it patent that 11% have a university degree and that the same percentage lack qualifications. In fact, the main character in *The Stringer*, an adolescent from Moscow who falls in love with an English woman correspondent, makes a statement at the start of the film that could be considered a revelation: "I decided to become a correspondent". That is to say, becoming a correspondent is a decision. In order to become a correspondent what is needed, besides resolve, is a video camera.

Nonetheless, 32% of cinematographic women journalists have university qualifications, a percentage nearly three times that of men, and

besides this accounts for 100% of the occasions when the question is referred to: to be *the very best*, as Veronica Corningstone would say. The character of Veronica Nadal in *Crusader* (Bryan Goeres, 2004) comes first in her year at the Journalism Faculty; Barbara Becnel in *Redemption* (Vondie Curtis-Hall) holds a PhD; Andie Anderson, the journalist who writes *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* (Donald Petrie, 2003), and who works for a woman's magazine in which she cannot aspire to write about Kazakhstan, studied at the prestigious University of Colombia. Female characters in the journalistic profession are also shown as being more obsessed about their work than the male characters. In 41% of the cases the woman journalist appears completely absorbed in her work, to which she dedicates her talent, time and energy, against 31% in the case of men.

But the cinema gives the sensation that qualifications do not provide the commitment of the adolescent from Moscow who, video camera in hand, sets out to record. The cinema gives the sensation that in order to become *the very best* - as Veronica Corningstone says with moving, and also somewhat pathetic, conviction in her soliloquy in the mass of clichés entitled *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* - the starting point is the studies that were unnecessary for Jim Ganon or Vadik, the taciturn Moscovite, and, as a finishing point, we find the tag that has given shape to this article: "...and she's pretty." It comes from the mouth of Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), one of the best treated and most lucid woman journalists in the cinema: "Well you wouldn't have taken me if I hadn't been doll-faced".

6. Conclusions

The first hypothesis of this study was that a favourable evolution could be appreciated in the cinematographic treatment of women journalists, in terms of professionalism and independence, from the oldest films, dating from the 1940s, up until the most recent ones. We formulated this hypothesis with a certain feeling of guilt as it seemed more of a cliché than a hypothesis for study. However, the conclusion with respect to this starting point is that the best treated women, by a long way, are the characters of Tess Harding (*Woman of the Year*) and Hildy Johnson (*His Girl Friday*), two films from the years 1940 and 1942 respectively. In the films analysed we have not found two characters who are as respected, as appreciated and as free in the journalistic profession.

The article *La mujer y los medios de comunicación [Women and the Mass Media]*⁸ expresses, with reference to the television, what we perceive

⁸ "La mujer y los medios de comunicación". Can be accessed at <http://www.ft.ccoo.es/periodistas/Documentos/mujer.doc>.

in the cinema: “The persistence of values and attitudes last much longer than the social structures that created those values (...). Thus we find ourselves facing a perverse combination. On television they are transmitting to us, in a combined form, old muddled values mixed with this new woman”. Indeed, the woman journalist that we have seen in this study, at first needing permission, and later almost thrust into forming part of the editorial offices and into abandoning, or combining, Journalism and the Home, is tied by a chain, which the same article calls *the chain of beauty*, specifying that: “Women are more chained to beauty than men and we are especially so in this century, which is that of women’s emancipation. From the 1960s onwards, the woman’s need to seduce has been tremendously exaggerated, a very old sentiment that is deeply rooted amongst us”.

That is our conclusion: muddled, that is to say, mixed in, introduced amongst features of independence, autonomy and the conquest of public space, we find that chain that conditions the whole professional and life trajectory of our cinematographic women journalists. Hildy Johnson and Tess Harding had to confront the barriers of their time. It was still unusual for women to leave the private sphere and to share the public space with their masters, the men. But the women journalists of the XXI century, with the frontier separating those two spaces, the public and the private, overcome, are subjected to the discourse that is condensed so exceptionally by the two phrases on which this article is based: *So what? She’s a newspaperman and she’s pretty*: which enabled Tess Harding to enter the press box that was exclusively for men; and *you wouldn’t have taken me if I hadn’t been doll-faced*, and without which Walter Burns, husband and boss of Hildy Johnson would never have known that she was a first class reporter.

The rest of the conclusions are no more than inevitable derivations from this first one: their adolescent behaviour, in the sense that they do not reach an adult age, where adult means achieving their greatest growth and development. That profile can be noted in professional relations and in personal relations: in the majority of cases they are accompanied by the figure of the mentor who not only teaches them but gives them confidence, convinces them of their possibilities, of their potential, as is done with adolescents. The women journalists are much more disciplined than the men, subtracting not only extravagance, as has been said, but also exceptionality from the figure of the journalist; this discipline is aimed at personal promotion in more than 40% of the cases, at showing that besides being pretty they are also newspapermen, like Tess Harding in 1942. Because clearly if they hadn’t been doll-faced, they would never have been newspapermen.

References

- ANTEQUERA YEPES, Mónica. *El papel de la mujer en la dirección y gestión de empresas informativas en España a principio del siglo XXI*. Doctor Thesis.
- Berganza, María Rosa; y DEL HOYO, Mercedes. "La mujer y el hombre en la publicidad televisiva: imágenes y estereotipos". **In:** *Zer*, Vol. 11, number 21.
- BLANCO CASTILLA, Elena (2005). "Mujer y poder en los medios: Dificultades para una incorporación plena". **In:** *Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística 2005*. Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre (2003). *La dominación masculina*. Anagrama.
- CALVO, Fabiola. "Mujeres periodistas entre el silencio y el miedo". **In:** *Cimacnoticias* [accessible at <http://www.cimacnoticias.com/noticias/04may/s04051805.html>].
- CHAMBERS, Deborah; STEINER, Linda & FLEMING, Carole (2004). *Women and Journalism*. London: Routledge.
- GHIGLIONE, Loren (1990). *The American Journalist: Paradox of the Press*. Washington: Library of Congress.
- GOOD, Howard (1998). *Girl Reporter. Gender, Journalism, and the Movies*. London: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- HANSON, Christopher (1996). "Where have all the heroes gone?". **In:** *Columbia Journalism Review*. March-April.
- HASKELL, Molly (1987). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. University of Chicago Press.
- HERITIER, F (1996). *Masculino, femenino: el pensamiento de la diferencia*. Ariel.
- LÓPEZ DÍEZ, Pilar (2005). *Representación de género en los informativos de radio y televisión. 2º Informe de la Investigación*. Instituto Oficial de Radio y Televisión (IORTV) e Instituto de la Mujer (MTAS).
- OLIVER, Mary Beth (1998). "The impact of Sex and Gender Role Self-Perception on Affective Reactions to Different Types of Film". **In:** *Plenum Publishing Corporation* [accessible at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_n1-2_v38/ai_20816291/print].
- PÉREZ REVERTE, Arturo (1994). *Territorio Comanche*. Madrid: Ollero y Ramos.
- ROSS, Isabel (1936). *Ladies of the Press*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

- SISTIAGA, Jon (2004). *Ninguna guerra se parece a otra*. Barcelona: Mondadori.
- SMELIK, Anneke. *Feminist Film Theory* [accessible at http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/anneke/filmtheory.html].
- SWANSON, Gillian (1991). "Building the Feminine: Feminist Film Theory and Female Spectatorship". *In: The Australian Journal of Media&Culture*, vol. 2, number 2.
- TASKER, Yvonne (1998). *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- TÉLLEZ INFANTES, Anastasia (2003). *Cine y antropología de las relaciones de sexo-género*. Diputación Provincial de Alicante.
- VIEJO, Teresa. Interview in *elmundo.es* [accessible at <http://www.elmundo.es/encuentros/invitados/2002/12/579/>].