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# “Send pretty girls to the White House”: the role of gender in journalists – politicians’ interactions

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**Abstract:** Interrelations between politics and media are often described as a power-play, a rumba or even a *danse macabre*, and the key question of political communication is “who leads and who follows” in the “power-play between politicians and journalists” (Ross, 2010, p. 274). As today “[m]eaning, media and politics become blurred, but arguably in highly gendered ways” (Holmes, 2007, p. 12), gender inevitably enters the discussion of the journalists – politicians’ interactions. Based on interviews with 40 Russian and Swedish political reporters working for the “quality” press, this paper discusses the role of gender as a social practice (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010) in journalists – politicians’ communication in different political and cultural contexts, which Russia and Sweden represent. The paper answers the following questions: Do journalists perceive the interrelations with politicians as gendered? Do they use gendered interrelations strategically to acquire information efficiently? How do the gendered political communication practices differ dependent on the political and cultural context?

**Keywords:** gender, political communication, journalists, Russia, Sweden

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*“Envoyez les jolies filles à la Maison Blanche”: le rôle du genre dans les interactions des journalistes avec les politiques*

**Résumé :** Les interactions entre le politique et les médias sont souvent décrites comme un jeu de pouvoir, une rumba ou même une danse macabre ; la question-clé de la communication politique est « qui dirige et qui suit » dans le « jeu de pouvoir entre les politiques et les journalistes » (Ross 2010, p. 274). Aujourd'hui, « sens, médias et politique s'estompent, mais sans doute de façon très sexuée » (Holmes, 2007, p 12), le sexe pénètre inévitablement dans les interactions entre les journalistes et les politiques. Basé sur des entretiens avec 40 journalistes politiques russes et suédois, travaillant pour la presse « de qualité », cet article examine le rôle du sexe en tant que pratique sociale (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010) dans la communication

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journalistes et politique, dans différents contextes politiques et culturels, dont la Russie et la Suède. L'article répond aux questions suivantes : les journalistes, perçoivent-ils les interactions avec les politiques comme sexuées ? Les journalistes, utilisent-ils les interrelations sexuées de manière stratégique afin d'obtenir des informations de manière plus efficace ? Comment les pratiques de communication politique genrées diffèrent-elles selon le contexte politique et culturel ?

**Mots-clés :** genre, communication politique, journalistes, Russie, Suède

### Introduction

Political communication is often viewed as a power play, where the political logic competes with the media logic (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014; Esser, 2013) in setting the rules and the sequence of steps in a “rumba” or *danse macabre* of politicians-journalists' interrelations (Ross, 2010). The key question that arises is “who leads and who follows” (Ross, 2010, p. 274), and the answer to this question largely depends on the context where political communication is taking place (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). Journalists – politicians' interrelations, thus, can be analyzed as a struggle for power, even though the media and politics are so closely connected that researchers talk about the “mutual interweaving” of the media and political spheres (Edin & Widestedt, 2010). From the point of view of gender media scholars, “[m]eaning, media and politics become blurred, but arguably in highly gendered ways” (Holmes, 2007, p. 12).

Political communication, according to the scholars, appears as a gendered practice. From the previous research we know about its outcomes – media representations of politics and politicians, discussed as gendered mediation of politics (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). Female politicians worldwide are rarely treated by the media in the same way as their male counterparts: they are “symbolically annihilated” in the content (Tuchman, 1978), shown as women first and foremost, trivialized by media speculation over their private lives, domestic arrangements, and sartorial style; often seen as unnatural, incompetent, and unviable actors of the political process, which reproduces gender inequalities in the society (Braden, 1996; Kahn, 1996; Norris, 1997; Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000; Norén, 2001; Ross, 2002; Bystrom et al., 2004; Falk, 2008; Jarlbro, 2009; Wagner et al., 2014; Gerrits et al., 2014; Fernandez Garcia, 2014; Suboticki, 2014).

Scholars, thus, view the media as some kind of “aggressors” constructing gender stereotypes and myths about “victimized” female politicians doing their best but not yet succeeding in applying proactive strategies to counteract the media. As the research taking into account the politicians' vision of political communication demonstrated, female politicians in different contexts have to play by the media's rules and not the other way round (Ross, 2002). Although politicians (both female and male) can try to manage their visual and textual mediatized images (Kroon Lundell, 2010; Bystrom et al., 2004; Nedyak, 2002) and search for special strategies of communicating with the media (e.g. orienting at female journalists – Ross, 2002), in the situa-

tion of political scandals media turn “from watchdogs into attack dogs” (Ross, 2010, p. 280), making it difficult for the politicians to control political communication. Women politicians tend to suffer more from the media hunt: the media’s reactions against women politicians not living up to stereotypical expectations are harsher (Allern & Pollack, 2012), moreover, political scandals about women politicians tend to “sell” better, and, thus, are beneficial for the media economically (Bromander, 2012).

The scholars accuse media logic in the patterns of gendered mediation of politics (Nordberg & Edström, 2004). Among the components of the media logic feeding into these patterns the scholars name the traditional values of newsworthiness (Falk, 2008), (en)gendered construction of the normative value of objectivity (Allan, 1998), and the fact that reported politics is determined by a male-oriented agenda, “which privileges the practice of politics as an essential male pursuit” (Ross, 2002, p. 167). The scholars also blame the media’s political economy: gender-sensitivity<sup>1</sup> requires commitment, which employees in profit-oriented media seldom can afford due to time-limitations dictated by the market competition (Cerquiera et al., 2014). The journalists themselves too are blamed for having “a negative effect on the democratic process through their insistence on privileging their own perspectives above those of the political actors they purport to cover” (Ross, 2002, p. 163). Although journalists and the role of journalists’ gender in production of the content are broadly discussed in gender studies of journalism cultures (van Zoonen, 1998; de Bruin, 2000; Armstrong, 2004; de Bruin & Ross, 2004; Ross & Byerly, 2004; Gallagher, 2005; Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Melin, 2008; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Djerf-Pierre, 2011; Ghersetti, 2012; Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012; Meeks, 2013), we still know very little about journalists’ experiences of the “gendered ways” of political communication.

Against this background, this article focuses on the role of gender as a social practice (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010) in journalists – politicians’ communication in different political and cultural contexts, represented by Russia and Sweden. The paper answers the following questions: Do journalists perceive the interrelations with politicians as gendered? Do they use gendered interrelations strategically in order to fulfil their professional roles? How do the gendered political communication practices differ dependent on the political and cultural context?

## 1. Theory

As gender media scholars suggest that it is the media logic that often dominates in the journalists’ relations with politicians, leading to gendered representations of politics and politicians, and the necessity for politicians to search for specific (gender) strategies of interaction with journalists, it can be useful to lean on the conceptualizations of the media and the political logic suggested within the studies of mediatization of politics (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014, 2009; Hjarvard, 2013; Esser, 2013;

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<sup>1</sup> Gender-sensitive – recognizing gender inequalities, focusing on gender as a reason to discuss them.

for similar approach applied to the politicians' visions of political communication see Kroon Lundell, 2010). Mediatization of politics is "the process by which the political institution is gradually becoming dependent on the media and their logic" (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 43). According to Hjarvard, media logic should be understood "as a conceptual shorthand for the various institutional, aesthetic, and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which the media distribute material and symbolic resources, and operate with the help of formal and informal rules" (2013, p. 17). Despite the critique of the concept first introduced by Altheide & Snow (1979) (see Strömbäck & Esser, 2014; Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2009; Landerer, 2013; Donges & Jarren, 2014; Schulz, 2014), media logic appears as a useful term for emphasizing the power-play character of political communication. In order to adapt to the media logic, politicians' messages have to be simplified, concretized, and personified, and the political style of individual politicians comes to the front (Strömbäck, 2002). Against the media logic also stands the political logic, which implies "formal and informal rules, routines and principles for thinking and acting" within the political sphere (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014, p. 14).

While logic appears as something inanimate and abstract, it is important to point out how it is related to the journalists, the actors of political communication concerned in this text. There are different ways of interpreting the relations between actors (i.e. journalists) and structures (i.e. political journalism as an institution) in mediatization of politics studies (e.g. Meyen et al. (2014) suggest to apply actor-structure theory in order to tackle the problem of defining the role of actors within the structure). I would like to point out that the media logic should not be equalized with the journalists' logic, although journalists represent the media institution in the process of political communication. Indeed, the media logic can oftentimes go against the journalists' perceived ideals and roles, and journalists have to subsume themselves to the logic of the media (Kammer, 2013; Hjarvard, 2013; Vartanova, 2013). The terms political logic and media logic, thus, in this study will be used in order to demonstrate how the journalists perceive the changes in the balance of the power in the process of political communication: whether it is them as representatives of the media institution, or the politicians as the representatives of the political institution, who set the rules of the game.

As it is the role of gender as a social practice (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010), which is in focus of this study, it is crucial to also point to the importance of the journalists' individuality as a factor influencing their professional performance. Journalism in general is understood as a gendered institutional practice, splitting the field both horizontally (female journalists covering "soft" topics and male journalists covering "hard" topics) and vertically (men dominating in the managerial positions) (Gallagher, 2005; Djerf Pierre, 2007; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010). Moreover, gender expectations are embedded in daily practice, routines, and rituals: gendered journalism cultures are by large characterized by the male homosociality and the female heteroso-

ciality<sup>2</sup> at work (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010). Professional values of journalism are perceived as “according better” with masculinity (de Bruin & Ross, 2004; Djerf-Pierre, 2007; van Zoonen, 1998; Smirnova, 2012). Gender of journalists does not influence directly their choice of news sources (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012), or the type of the content they produce (Braden, 1996; Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Edström, 2011; Ross, 2014). However, the process of communication with the sources itself is described rather as gendered, that is where gender influences relationship of the communicator with others (Gamble & Gamble, 2002), or, as Löfgren Nilsson (2010) formulates it, “the gender we think guides the way we act” (p. 3). Such an understanding of gender as a social practice, based, in its turn, on the assumption that gender can be done, or performed (Butler, 1990/1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987), will guide the analysis of the journalists’ visions of the role of gender in their interactions with politicians.

## 2. Method

The journalists’ perceptions of their roles and practices constitute an important object of studies, allowing a better understanding of the processes both inside and outside of the media (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). In order to address the role of gender as a social practice (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010) in journalists – politicians’ communication, I conducted semi-structured interviews with political journalists involved in the production of articles in the so-called “quality” press in Russia (with 21 interviewees) and Sweden (with 19 interviewees). The interviews were conducted in 2011-2012<sup>3</sup>.

As the major focus of the article is on how journalists themselves conceptualize gendering, I chose the ethnographic approach, meaning that it is the journalists’ ideas and views, experiences and conceptualizations that are central to the analysis (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Theoretical construct sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) was combined with snowball sampling (contacts of other potential informants were received from the interviewees). Reporters and editors were chosen as the key informants, as these are the most common professional roles occupied by journalists (e.g. among all Russian journalists 53.4% work as reporters, and 31% fulfill the roles of editors – Anikina & Johansson, 2013).

The sample in both of the countries aimed to include different quality outlets – common interest, with incline on business and politics, and daily and weekly (see Table 1). The chosen media represent the broad spectrum of the quality press in the

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<sup>2</sup> Homosociality and heterosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976) are referred to as the constructions of gender within the nonsexual interpersonal relations. Homosociality refers to the nonsexual attractions held by men or women to the people of the same sex, and heterosociality, accordingly, to the nonsexual attractions to the people of the other sex (see Bird, 1996, p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> As a part of a doctoral study “Gendering in Political Journalism: A Comparative Study of Russia and Sweden” (Södertörn University/Örebro University, Sweden).

two countries<sup>4</sup>. Despite the fact that the social media are recognized as an increasingly influential actor of social change, manifesting the tendency of the transition from centralized media control to human agency (Hjarvard, 2014), the press still has an important role in the media systems (Vartanova, 2013), and the amount of journalists producing content for the paper platform in Russia and Sweden is significant<sup>5</sup>. Outlets, positioning themselves as “quality brand” (Anderson et al., 2013), promise readers a certain quality of a journalistic product (such as reliability of facts, pluralism of opinions, non-biasness), which makes the quality press a “preferable terrain for the public dialogue” (Resnyanskaya, 2007, p. 83, my translation). Unlike the popular press, quality outlets orient at citizens rather than consumers (Hanitzsch, 2011). The quality press still reaches to a high number of politically active potential voters, and it can be considered among the most influential actors of political communication, as influential intermediaries in the process of what voters learn about politicians (Ross, 2010).

**Table 1.** Information about the outlets in the sample

<b>Title of the media</b>	<b>Type<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Launched (year)</b>	<b>Circulation (thousands exemplars)</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>Russian outlets</b>					
<b>Kommer-sant</b>	Daily business newspaper	1992	120 (Media Atlas 2014)	“Kommer-sant” publishing house, 800 employees	Businessman Alisher Usmanov
<b>Kommer-sant. Vlast’</b>	Weekly political magazine	1997	60 (Media Atlas 2014)	“Kommer-sant” publishing house, 800 employees	Businessman Alisher Usmanov

<sup>4</sup> Initially the amount of the outlets in the two countries whose employees were interviewed, was supposed to be equal. Yet, in Sweden journalists of one of the outlets initially included in the sample did not react to the invitation to participate in the study. In Russia, on the contrary, journalists from one of the outlets initially not included in the sample, volunteered to participate.

<sup>5</sup> In Russia 69.2% of all journalists produce content for paper platform (Anikina & Johansson, 2013), and in Sweden - 75% (Nygren & Appelberg, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> All the information in the table, except for the circulation, was obtained from the web-sites of the outlets.

<b>Novye izvestiya</b>	Daily common-interest newspaper	1997	108.2 (Media Atlas 2014)	Publishing house "Novye izvestiya", 60 employees	Holding "Alliance" led by Bazhaev family
<b>Moskovskie novosti</b>	Common-interest newspaper, 3 times a week and a weekly supplement	1930 (re-launched 1980, 2011), last issue published in January 2014	30, weekly supplement – 100 (Media Atlas 2014)	News agency RIA Novosti	RIA Novosti (which is, in turn, owned by the federal government)
<b>The New Times</b>	Weekly common-interest and political magazine	1943 (new format – 1998, English title - 2007)	50 (Media Atlas 2014)	Until 2013 Lesnevskie family	Published on donations and money coming from subscriptions
<b>Forbes</b>	Business magazine	2004	105 (Media Atlas 2014)	Axel Springer Russia	German holding Axel Springer AG
<b>Swedish outlets</b>					
<b>Dagens Nyheter</b>	Daily morning newspaper	1864	282.8 ( <a href="http://info.dn.se/info/om-oss/kort-fakta/">http://info.dn.se/info/om-oss/kort-fakta/</a> )	Holding Bonnier AB, 400 employees	Holding Bonnier AB
<b>Svenska Dagbladet</b>	Daily morning newspaper	1884	159.7 ( <a href="http://www.ts.se/mediefakta-upplaga-">http://www.ts.se/mediefakta-upplaga-</a> )	Holding Schibsted, 270 employees	Holding Schibsted



			gor/snabbfakta /?mc=001848)		
<b>Fokus</b>	Weekly news magazine	2005	30.2 (http://www.ts.se/mediefakta - upplaga-gor/snabbfakta?mc=006137)	FPG Media AB	Companies Nordstjernen and Tagehus, and the Johan Björkman Foundation
<b>Veckans Affärer</b>	Business weekly magazine	1965	16.5 (http://www.ts.se/mediefakta - upplaga-gor/snabbfakta?mc=005665)	Bonnier Business Press	Bonnier AB

By political journalists I will in this article understand professionals in the positions of reporters and department editors covering politics on local, regional, national, and international levels. Political journalism has its gender specifics: it not only covers predominantly men, but also is still dominated by male reporters and editors (van Zoonen, 1998; Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Gallagher, 2005; Klaus, 2009; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010). Among the Russian interviewees there were 7 women, and 14 men. Among the Swedish interviewees there were 10 women and 9 men. The gender misbalance among the Russian interviewees can be explained by the representation of women and men in the political and international departments of the outlets chosen for this study at the moment of the field-work, as well as by visible homosociality at the work places, which manifested in the way the interviewees were giving recommendations on whom of their colleagues to contact further. In the Swedish case the quantitative superiority of women interviewees does not correspond to the existing data on the amount of women and men covering political issues (according to the Global Media Monitoring Report (2010), there are only 37% of news on political issues reported by women). Here the results of the sampling can be explained first and foremost by the way the professional networks function: unlike in the Russian case, both female and male interviewees tended to give me contacts of their female colleagues in the process of snowball sampling.

I am aware of a common mistake of the researchers, who identify sex of the research participants, but then announce findings about gender (see Dow & Wood, 2006, p. xiii). In this article, I analyze not the sex and linked to it behaviors and ideas, but rather the journalists' own assumptions about the gender they and their communication partners do, or perform (Butler, 1990/1999; West & Zimmerman,

1987; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010), and the gendered practices they are involved in. The article deals with the journalists' understanding of the role of their own subjective perceptions and individual features in production of gendering. It is the journalists themselves who point to the gendered nature of the interaction between them and politicians, and to the differences of subjective perceptions women and men have or are supposed to have as long as they cover political actors and processes.

The interviews were transcribed and read as texts (van Zoonen, 1994). The empirical data was the starting point in the analysis. The interview accounts can be read as both "for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer", and "in terms of perspectives that they imply, the discursive strategies they employ, and even psychosocial dynamics they suggest" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I focused both on *what* the journalists tell about gendering, and on *how* they were telling it. The data was sorted into categories, and labeled theoretically (Jensen, 2002).

The interviewees in this paper are anonymous. The interviewed journalists signed a consent form and were sent the transcriptions of the interviews. They could refuse participation in the study at any time. I do not identify the journalists' place of work, as the interviewees many times pointed to the fact that there is a common culture of quality political journalism in their country, and that other quality outlets have similar approaches to theirs. However, the journalists' positions are provided (the mentioned positions were valid for the time of the interview) in order to specify the kind of tasks the journalist undertakes in political communication, as this proved to be important for the analysis. The interviews in Russia were conducted in Russian language, and excerpts from them were translated by the author. The interviews in Sweden were conducted in English language, and the grammar and stylistic mistakes were edited in the excerpts.

### 3. Contextual background

Russia and Sweden were chosen due to the differences of the cultural and political contexts in the countries these cultures are located within. Yet the countries are situated within the Baltic Sea region (Bolin et al., 2005) and are geographically proximate. The comparative approach allows to answer the question about the link between the gendered political communication practices' dependence on the political and cultural context.

According to Hallin & Mancini (2004), Swedish media represents the Democratic Corporatist Model, which refers to traditionally close ties between the media and the political groups, and coexistence of press freedom and state intervention in the media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 195-196). Due to increasing commercialization, and, thus, dependency of journalism on market instead of the state (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011; Ekecrantz, 2005), today the Swedish media system is reported to turn to Liberal Model (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011; Wiik, 2014), and is labelled post-corporatist (Dahlgren, 2000). There is a close to zero political influence on the me-

dia content (at least in the perception of the journalists themselves – Nygren & Appelberg, 2013). Post-Soviet Russian media system is defined by Vartanova (2013) as representative of Eurasian model, synthesizing “European” and “Asian” characteristics of media spheres, Soviet traditions and current global trends (p. 217-218). The logic of commercialization in this government-commercial system (Vartanova, 2013, p. 222) is combined with authoritarian approach of the government (Pasti & Nordenstreng, 2013).

Speaking about the level of mediatization of politics, scholars suggest that the Swedish model of political communication is characterized by a high influence of the media logic (Strömbäck, 2009, p. 248). The press has taken upon itself an active watchdog role (Dahlgren, 2000, Wiik, 2014), and news media compete with the political parties in their influence (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011). However, although the press can harshly attack an individual politician in a situation of political scandal (Allern & Pollack, 2012), the press is reported to have a “cooperative relationship” with the power structures (Dahlgren, 2000).

In Russia the political regime forms a tight matrix for the media activities (Resnyanskaya, 2007, p. 10), where the journalistic practices are subject to strict top-down government control (especially in the television sector) (Vartanova, 2013). If in the 1990s the power of the political influence of the media became comparable to that of the political institutions (McNair, 2000), today the pendulum of the media's independence swayed back to the political logic overwhelming the media one. Since 2000 the regime of “managed democracy”, or “manipulative democracy”, has implied a tight control over the major media through financial and political control of its owners and administrative and economic control of journalists (Resnyanskaya, 2007, p. 77).

**Table 2.** Background information about journalism in Russia and Sweden

	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
<b>General amount of journalists in the country (in different types of media)</b>	<b>150.000</b> (Anikina & Johansson, 2013)	<b>16-17.000</b> (Nygren & Appelberg, 2013)
<b>Female/male journalists</b>	<b>64.9/35.1%</b> on the level of senior professionals (reporters and editors), <b>48.9/51.1%</b> on the level of senior management (editors-in-chief), and <b>58.5/41.5%</b> on the level of	<b>49/51%</b> on the level of senior professionals (reporters and editors), <b>40.6/59.4%</b> on the level of senior management (editors-in-chief), and <b>39.8/60.2%</b> on the level of top management (publishers, chief executive officers) (Global Report

	top management (publishers, chief executive officers) (Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media, 2011)	on the Status of Women in the News Media, 2011)
<b>Journalists working for national (paid) newspapers and weekly magazines</b>	<b>33.6%</b> (Anikina & Johansson, 2013)	<b>27%</b> (Nygren & Appelberg, 2013)
<b>Press freedom index (rank out of 179 countries)</b>	<b>43.42</b> (148) (Press Freedom Index, 2013)	<b>9.23</b> (10) (Press Freedom Index, 2013)
<b>Instances of censorship (in 2011-2013)</b>	<b>Instances of censorship:</b> 2011 - <b>75</b> , 2012 - <b>76</b> , 2013 - <b>83</b> (Timoshenko, 2014)	No available data
<b>Professional risks</b>	<b>92</b> journalists died in work-related incidents since 1993 (Azhgikhina, 2014), killed in 2013 - <b>3</b> . Acts of violence against journalists: 2013 - <b>74</b> . Short-term detention of journalists: 2013 - <b>74</b> . Criminal charges against journalists: 2013 - <b>32</b> . Unlawful dismissal: 2013 - <b>16</b> . Threats: 2013 - <b>27</b> .	<b>38.2%</b> of journalists report that they have experienced abuse, pressure or harassment from their readers in the past five years (Svenska Journalistförbundet, 2013)

Russia and Sweden differ as well as long as gender equality in the political sphere is concerned. Being considered a “feminist state” (Bergqvist et al., 2008), Sweden officially promotes gender equality policies, and is atop the list when it comes to achievements in the sphere of gender equality (Djerf-Pierre, 2011). According to the Global Gender Gap Report, Sweden is on the 4th place (out of 135) when it comes to the political empowerment of women (Hausmann et al., 2013). However, while a “passion for equality” characterizes the Swedish society (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Holli et al., 2005), the scholars see a problem with putting gender equality into practice (Holli et al., 2005).

Russia ranks 94<sup>th</sup> place (out of 135 countries) when it comes to the political empowerment of women (Hausmann et al., 2013). According to Russian political scholars, political power remains as one of the most impermeable “ceilings” for women (Zdravomyslova, 2003). The “patriarchal renaissance” of post-Soviet Russia, according to the scholars, takes its roots in the Soviet interpretation of gender equality, where women’s emancipation proclaimed a man as a role model to orient at, and a combination of formal gender equality and its inexistence in real everyday practices of women and men (Voronina, 1994; Temkina, 1996; Kay, 2007).

**Table 3.** Background information about gender (in)equality in politics

	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
<b>Gender gap index<sup>7</sup> and gender equality rank (out of 136 countries)</b>	<b>0.698 (61)</b> (Schwab et al., 2013)	<b>0.813 (4)</b> (Schwab et al., 2013)
<b>Gender gap sub-index: political empowerment, and rank (out of 136 countries)</b>	<b>0.095 (94)</b> (Schwab et al., 2013)	<b>0.498 (4)</b> (Schwab et al., 2013)
<b>Female representatives of the parliament</b>	<b>13.6%</b> in the lower chamber, <b>8%</b> in the upper (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013)	<b>44.7%</b> (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013)
<b>Female ministers</b>	<b>1</b> Deputy Prime Minister out of 7, <b>1</b> minister (out of 21)	<b>13</b> ministers out of 24
<b>Female politicians on the regional level</b>	<b>2</b> governors out of 83	<b>13</b> county governors out of 21

#### 4. Analysis

The interviewed journalists in Russia and Sweden acknowledge the specificities of the context within which they practice political communication. As such, the journalists in Russia suggest that “the political process is very reserved”, and the “information field is even getting narrower” in Russia, which corresponds with the more general findings stating that almost a half of the Russian journalists believes that the level of press freedom in the country has decreased in the last 5-10 years (Anikina & Johansson, 2013). They describe their relations with politicians as an

<sup>7</sup> Gender gap index suggests to consider 0.00 as inequality, and 1.00 as equality.

everyday confrontation, which more often leads to the symbolical victory of the politicians:

*“Our main aim is to attain information and cover, so all our activities are aimed at getting to know as much as possible. And the political sphere is aimed at us and the society getting to know as little as possible about what they [politicians] do, why they do it, and what their decisions are based on. Naturally, this is wrong (O, political reporter, female, Russia).”*

The Swedish journalists, on the contrary, highlight the dialogical, cooperative relations with politicians, which sometimes even creates problems for fulfillment of professional standards, as “politicians and reporters sometimes get too close”, which challenges the objective stance required by the profession. As the political journalists state, “Sweden is a dream country to work as a journalist”, because of the openness of the political sphere.

#### 4.1. *Political communication as a “male game”*

Despite these differences, in both of the countries the journalists find that interactions with politicians turn to a struggle: “who's got authority, who's got credibility” (K, political reporter, female, Sweden). This struggle, moreover, appears as a highly gendered practice. Even in Sweden, where representation of women in politics is high, the female journalists find that political communication is to a big extent “a male game”, where rules are established by male politicians and male journalists, and where nothing seems to be changing despite the introduction of new technologies and new ways of practicing interactions with news sources:

*“Male politicians are twittering with male reporters [...] I sometimes find that Twitter and Facebook and all that sort of things almost enhance the “gentlemen’s club” within politics somehow [...] And it's not like there are no great female reporters on Twitter or female politicians either. But sometimes you find that you have this “club”. And that's interesting. I don't know really how to deal with it (K, political reporter, female, Sweden).”*

As in Russia men still constitute the majority in politics, they also are the main actors with whom political journalists build the connection, thus, the interviewees stated that there is a lack of experience of communication with women politicians in general:

*“I recalled with whom I actually talk, and I understood that there are all in all just two or three women, out of all my [contacts]. And I wouldn't say that they are so few, because I have it difficult to communicate with them. No, they are just few in politics! (D, political reporter, female, Russia).”*

Thus, despite a larger number of women politicians in the Swedish context, and better conditions when it comes to the societal discussion of gender equality as a crucial democratic value, both the Russian and the Swedish journalists perceive

political communication as a practice mostly happening between men. The journalists have to find the ways to interact with politicians in these conditions.

#### 4.2. *Male journalists strategies' of interaction with politicians*

In Russia the situation where men politicians dominate quantitatively, is perceived positively by the male journalists. They suggest that inter-gender political communication happening between men is easy, as they speak "the same language". The idea of a common, shared "male" language and rituals lies beyond the preference of inter-gender interaction in this case:

*"With men politicians it is just splendid – you drink vodka, and ok! Ha-ha! And with women – I don't know [...] I have it easier with men, because a man would always understand another man, and with a woman you have to do it gracefully, you need to do your best (I, political reporter, male, Russia)."*

*"[With male politicians] it is clearer, or something... Their way of thinking, to a great extent what they will say, what they think – it is more comprehensible. Women, probably, are more tactful, reticent, it is more difficult to understand their genuine thoughts, and what they actually think (P, international reporter, male, Russia)."*

Thus, the conscious choice of the male political communication partners, and of the rituals of communication drawing on stereotypes (like drinking vodka) help the male journalists in the Russian context to be in control over the interactions with politicians. In Sweden too, the male journalists often lean on traditional understanding of male-male interactions, and perceive the political communication in competitive terms. As one of the female interviewees told me, she learned from her male colleague that for him when he gets to an interview "it's like a game of tennis, it's like a competition of who knows most figures in the last annual report" (C, political and economic observer, female, Sweden). The methods that male journalists employ in their interactions with politicians often remain inaccessible for the female reporters even in Sweden: as such, "it would be hard for a young female reporter to go into a sauna with old male politicians definitely! I don't know how often you need to do that, but, of course, that could be an issue" (D, political reporter, female, Sweden). As another journalist commented,

*"I was thinking about the difference in the approach that I have to politicians, and that my male colleagues could have. They say: "Oh, I go and take a beer with him, you know, just to chat". I could never do that! Because it would ruin my reputation. I cannot go out and have a beer with a politician just to chat, it's impossible! The next question is: well, should journalists do that at all? Should they go out and have a beer [with politicians]? That's also an issue, but I think that as a woman reporter you have to be much more careful with what you are doing (G, political reporter, female, Sweden)."*

Thus, male journalists in both Russia and Sweden occur to use a stereotypically masculine style of behavior in their relations with male politicians (competing, drinking, going to sauna). However, if some male journalists take these competitive homosocial relations with politicians for granted, others tend to have a self-reflexive stance on the way they practice political communication. As such, one of the Swedish journalists touched upon the tendency to address only male sources in political journalism. According to him, for male journalists it is especially important to notice the male homosociality in political communication (despite the overwhelming amounts of men in political sphere), and to try to counteract it, introducing other patterns first of all into own practices of interacting with the sources:

*“Do I bond better with men? Yeah, probably I do. In my life, I have more female friends, than male, but I always bond better with men, so that's the problem when I do this kind of background texts... I have to make contacts with female politicians, or bureaucrats, or just staff members, just to balance it! And you can also claim and have it right, that it's also because of the work: there are more male politicians; there are more male staff members. So it's a broader group, ha-ha, to pick persons from (T, political editor, male, Sweden).”*

One of his Russian colleagues confessed that he prefers to communicate with women politicians because of the culturally constructed mutual expectations of how men and women in the Russian culture are supposed to perform their masculinity and femininity, which he does not feel comfortable with and readily avoids:

*“I don't like hunting, fishing, vodka, and not so much adore sauna and so on. Probably the majority of other men dislike it the same way. However, it is a certain strand of all these “tough 'uns”, “normal guys”, and I am always afraid – when I start to talk to a male politician, that he will start to tell me something like this, or suggest, and then I will not know how to react. To accept? It is impossible, because I am not interested. To reject? It is impossible, because then I will lose control. And as women are usually not fond of hunting, hockey, sauna, and things like these, - I comfortably communicate on (N, head of international group, male, Russia).”*

Thus, the male journalists across contexts tend to accept the rules of the game and lean on stereotypical interpretation of how male-male communication should be practiced in order to be in control of political communication. However, there are exceptions to this pattern in both Russia and Sweden, as some male journalists search for alternative ways of interacting with politicians by choosing to address women politicians.

#### 4.3. *Female journalists strategies' of interaction with politicians*

Female journalists too have to find ways to practice political communication, and to find their strategies of efficient achievement of information in the situation when both male politicians and male journalists mainly lean on traditional stereotypes



when establishing the connection. In the situation of a risk of losing control over political communication, as both the Swedish and the Russian female interviewees pointed out, it is important to learn how to turn alleged “disadvantages” to benefits. One of the common strategies in both contexts is to comfort the (male) political actors by a stereotypically feminine behavior, in order to achieve more information:

*“That's not always a disadvantage that people think less of you than what you actually are, when you are making an interview, you know? If you seem like a friendly-listening, and not so knowledgeable woman, with not a lot of pontus, you are not very scary. And if you're not very scary, people relax [...] So in that respect, yeah, sometimes there is an advantage of being a woman (K, political reporter, female, Sweden).”*

*“Men are easier to get information from. It's easier to come up to them, start a conversation, make them talk about really sensitive topics and news. I generally like more to communicate with men – both in the newsroom and in work [...] Let's say, while communicating men are spurred on the desire for showing themselves in all their glory. So they are more likely to tell more twists and turns, more news, to add exclusive details. Sometimes, maybe, I have a feeling that they have it easier to communicate with female journalists, because they don't feel kind of this male contest or something (E, international reporter, female, Russia).”*

The Swedish female journalists, however, point to the fact that such a strategy does not always bring good results. First of all, because of the risk of losing authority: male politicians tend to show their paternalistic attitude to female journalists, especially to young ones. Treating a female journalist as “that little girl”, they immediately turn the interaction into a gendered tango, where they expect to lead:

*“[There were] politicians calling me “Hello, little [name of the reporter]”, and I'm like “hm”. There are colleagues of mine who would react to that and, you know, they would have a break down or freak out. I don't care that much. But, of course, I can see that, you know, things would have been taken more for granted if I'd been a man of a certain age [...] You are supposed to be very strong (K, political reporter, female, Sweden).”*

Second, this strategy of playing on the politicians' essentialist views on how women are expected to behave is not beneficial in all cases. The journalists practice gender differently depending on situation. For example, for international correspondents the cultural context appears to be the key determinant for the way they build a connection to their news sources. As such, one of the interviewees covering Middle East suggested that the fact that she is a woman does matter when it comes to access to sources (as a woman she is allowed to talk to women and come to people's homes even in the most conservative environments of the region), however, it doesn't matter when it comes to interaction with politicians (despite the dominance of men in political positions):

*“In the Arab world, as a woman travelling on my own, I became nearly gender neutral! The way I live and travel is different from the way a general Arab woman could do [...] It also means that when I get into the power circles, I know that there is a responsibility on me – not to play on any gender tricks. But having this feeling of being more gender neutral in certain occasions can make things easier. It's something you can use. It's also important to show men in power: "Don't use these tricks on me. It's not going to work! Don't try to womanize me! Shame on you if you do!" (B, international reporter, female, Sweden).”*

Not only international correspondents though have to adjust to the context. Political reporters covering domestic politics in Sweden, too, find it important to strictly define the limits of how gender can be practiced in the interactions with politicians. Playing on the essentialist understanding of femininity, according to the journalists, is more often than not inappropriate in the Swedish context:

*“We [in Sweden] have this idea [that] the right thing to do is to act as if we are equal, and then it's not a proper way for me as a female reporter to flirt with these men in power (A, political reporter, female, Sweden).”*

The Russian female journalists readily apply the form of a “light coquetry” in order to achieve information from the news sources efficiently. The male correspondents, and male editors are not only aware of the methods their female colleagues use, but often make use of the female correspondents’ skills in order to benefit in acquiring more or richer information from the political sources. Thus, the interpretation of gendered newsrooms (de Bruin & Ross, 2004; Melin, 2008; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010), as long as it comes to gendering in political journalism, receives one more dimension: certain journalistic practices, such as communication with news sources, are gendered by the journalists consciously – and seemingly to both male and female media producers’ satisfaction, despite the cynicism with which gendering of the interactions is practiced. The (male) editors get information quickly, the (female) journalists receive honorariums and appreciation of their skills:

*“All the pools, by the way, mainly consist of girls – both the presidential and the prime-ministerial. And, of course, outlets prefer to send pretty girls to the [Russian] White House [where the government of the Russian Federation sits], because a he would be flipped off by Peskov<sup>8</sup> [...] But Peskov would not reject a pretty girl, ha-ha... This is the only thing where we see something gender-related in our political-journalistic life. Just as speed and efficiency are important, it is easier to send a girl, as she has more chances to get a comment (I, political editor, male, Russia).”*

Thus, female journalists across contexts tend to perform gender strategically, and learn to adjust to the context where political communication is taking place. While

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<sup>8</sup> Peskov, Dmitry - is the current Press Attaché for the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. Peskov has been in charge of handling Putin's press and media activities since 2000. At the moment of the interview in 2011 Peskov was accordingly the Press Attaché for the Prime-Minister of RF.

for the Russian female journalists leaning on the traditional stereotype of femininity appears as unquestionably beneficial, the Swedish female journalists often find gender neutrality to be a preferable tool for efficient political communication.

#### 4.4. *Female-female political communication as an alternative*

The female journalists also try to find alternatives to this male-male homo-social culture of interactions with politicians. Here, however, there was a difference, which could be observed as long as the Swedish and Russian journalists' views are taken into account. As such, according to the Swedish journalists, women politicians appear as very different actors of political communication, who usually do not contribute to gendering of interactions with journalists. The Swedish female journalists suggest that there are mutual advantages of their interacting with women in politics. The "female solidarity" appearing in the female-female interactions between journalists and politicians is based on common gendered life experiences. Although helping the female journalists to find an alternative way to stereotypical behavior, the female-female interactions with politicians are difficult in a sense that they imply more responsibilities for the female correspondents, who are expected to sympathize with the subjects of their stories, and to live up to the gender-awareness requirement:

*"I think sometimes there is an understanding between female politicians and female journalists, because we both know what the other one is [going through]... It's a sign of understanding, and you would never discuss it. You do understand something about what they are going through. I think so! It's never outspoken, but I do think it's there sometimes! With some, not with all. And maybe they are more disappointed, if they find out that, you know... if they feel, that you sort of describe them as women, or not so "statesman-ish" (K, political reporter, female, Sweden)."*

The Russian journalists, on the contrary, see few advantages of inter-gender interaction when it comes to female journalists and female politicians. As one of the male interviewees suggested, "if it is a very pretty journalist and a female politician, then there can be an outright hostility" (A, co-editor of international department, male, Russia). This view is supported by the female journalists, who claim that such an interaction can easily fail – because of the female politicians' gendered preferences in political communication. If the female reporters' interaction with male politicians occurs to be under the journalists' control, their communication with women in power is often challenged by a certain barrier in communication built by politicians, which is difficult to cross:

*"Men have it easier to work with women, and vice versa. It's easier to establish contact. I will give an example. The president's press secretary is a woman, Natalya Timakova<sup>9</sup>. So she has much better relationship with male journalists than*

<sup>9</sup> Timakova, Natalya - was the Press Attaché to the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008 – 2012. Since 2012 she has been the Press Attaché to the Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

*with female journalists in most of the cases. It is from her side, so to say, a preference, and we feel a certain barrier in communication. We understand that she will tell and show everything we need, but anyway in communication she will prefer [men]... I at least have it much easier to communicate with male newsmakers. Good that there are more of them! (N, political reporter, female, Russia)"*

Even in Sweden the “female solidarity” between journalists and politicians often appears as an obstacle to fulfill the professional journalistic obligations. As such, according to the interviewees, some women politicians play a gender card in the interactions with female journalists, trying to create an atmosphere of a “women’s circle” in order to influence the way they are covered in the media. The journalists find such an approach unacceptable, and counteract the establishment of gendered communication by emphasizing the professional character of it:

*“There was one female politician that we interviewed recently together with a colleague. We were two female reporters, and when we walked into her office, and she approached us, she said to my colleague - she touched her jacket - and said: “Oh! This is a very nice jacket!” And we both thought, that was very strange, we got this strange feeling, that this woman wanted to disarm the whole situation, to personalize the whole situation, as if we were [...] in her office for a nice coffee break at Christmas time. But it was her making this - we didn’t. I am sure she wouldn’t have done this if we would have been two male reporters [...] Me and my colleague - we were there as professionals, we were not there to chit-chat around the table with lighted candles (A, political reporter, female, Sweden).”*

Thus, inter-gender interactions between women, although viewed by the female journalists as an alternative to the “gentlemen’s club” of political communication, do not appear as an unquestionable option of interaction with politicians. The journalists question both the eagerness of women politicians to choose female journalists as communication partners, and the purity of their purposes, insisting that “women’s solidarity” can be an obstacle on the way to fulfilling professional obligations.

## **Conclusions**

It occurred that the journalists in both Russia and Sweden in the interactions with politicians identify themselves as women and men and often have clear preferences and views on the sex of politicians they find it the most convenient, enjoyable, or efficient to communicate with. This proves the earlier stated fact that “the gender we think guides the way we act” (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010, p. 3). Gender appears to the journalists as a significant factor in their interaction with politicians, and in the way they perceive the political actors and processes. In both Russia and Sweden political communication requires that the journalists hold to the traditional interpretation of how inter-gender and cross-gender communication should be practiced. Even in Sweden, with its high level of representation of women in politics, and high level of

gender-sensitivity in the society, female journalists still feel patronizing attitude of male politicians, and the female and (some) male journalists have to adjust to the rules of the “male game”.

The individual characteristics (such as gender) can be used by the journalists strategically to achieve information in a more efficient way. Both the Russian and Swedish male political journalists mainly lean on the stereotypical interpretation of male inter-gender interactions, building their strategy of communication with male politicians on either creation of an atmosphere of competition, or traditional rituals (drinking alcohol, going to sauna). The female journalists across contexts have to adjust their strategies to the rules and methods of the established political communication (cf. Melin, 2008; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Smirnova, 2012 on female journalists’ strategies in journalism culture in general). They do so by either trying to fit into the roles ascribed to them by traditional gender stereotypes, or (in the Swedish case) by trying to “neutralize” the gendered nature of political communication by not relying on their femininity.

Female-female interactions appear as an alternative to homosocial male-male political communication. Previous research in other contexts demonstrated that women politicians are eager to communicate with female journalists (Ross, 2002, 2010). However, both the Russian and Swedish female journalists question female politicians’ eagerness to communicate with women, and the purity of purpose of “women’s solidarity” when it is set as a tone of political communication by women politicians. Yet, the Swedish female journalists are more open for inter-gender political communication.

Political communication, thus, appears to be gendered across the contexts, as it is determined by expectations of how women and men (both journalists and politicians) are supposed to behave in inter- or cross-gender interactions in a particular context. Moreover, it occurs that the rules of this “power-play” are set by male journalists together with male politicians. The dominant male homosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Bird, 1996) creates difficulties for the female journalists, and for those male journalists who self-reflexively intend to choose alternative to stereotypical practices of interaction with politicians. We can speak, thus, not only about the media logic competing with political logic in political communication (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014; Esser, 2013), and not only about the gender logic of journalism (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010), but about the *gender logic of political communication*, where the rules are set by male journalists and male politicians *together* and are (usually) enjoyed by them.

Thus, it is not just women politicians who have to adjust their strategies to the “brutal” media logic in order to control their coverage (Nedyak, 2002; Ross, 2002, 2010; Bystrom et al., 2004; Kroon Lundell, 2010). It is also female political journalists, who – as within the newsroom (Melin, 2008; Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Smirnova, 2012) – have to use specific tactics to adjust to the rules of homosocial and highly gendered political communication. While we can agree with Ross & Comrie (2012),

who suggest that “sex, politics and news work together to produce a gendered news agenda which mostly disadvantages women, not just in tone and content but also in visibility” (p. 981), we shouldn’t also forget that gendered political communication might disadvantage female journalists as well.

The comparative approach allows us to see that the political communication remains a highly gendered practice across contexts (at least in the journalists’ view). It shows that even the achievements in the sphere of gender equality and openness of the political processes (as in the Swedish case) do not guarantee the changes in what political communication occurs to the journalists – a highly competitive “male game”. This appears as a paradox to the Swedish female journalists: in the context where media logic is supposed to dominate and political process is considered to be open, they find it surprising that they have to find ways to deal with the already existing rules of the “male game”. In this sense, their Russian female colleagues might have a professional advantage being used to the challenges of the political and cultural context and even trying to find an enjoyment and satisfaction in the gendered practices of interacting with politicians.

This allows us to conclude that across the contexts political communication tends to initially benefit men on both sides – with an assumption that male politicians and journalists subscribe to the traditional way of performing traditional masculinity in inter-gender communication. In this sense, it does not matter which logic dominates within the context – the media or the political one: it is men who will try to take the lead in political communication. This situation might change in two cases. First, if there are more women in politics and if female journalists perceive inter-gender interactions with them not as unusual and challenging, but as benefiting both them and the politicians. This will establish a different style of political communication, an alternative to the “gentlemen’s club”. Another possibility for the change can be paved by male journalists, who instead of developing the skills to win the “male game” with its rituals (such as sauna or drinking) and “tug-of-war” rules, choose a different, probably more distanced and less competitive, style of communicating with male politicians, and in general choose to communicate more with female politicians. Probably this could turn political communication into a more modern and engaging dance than tango, rumba, or *danse macabre*.

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