

Communication

Social Inclusion in Swedish Public Service Television: The Representation of Gender, Ethnicity and People with Disabilities as Program Leaders for Children's Programs

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Abstract: We studied the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups in society, females, persons of non-European ethnic background and people with apparent disabilities. Specifically we addressed their participation as program leaders in children's programs in the Swedish Public Service Television to see if they corresponded to their relative share of the population. Using the official web site of the Swedish Public Service Television, listing all their programs, we found that of 65 program leaders in 41 television programs, 42% were female, 12% of the program leaders were of non-European ethnic background and 20% had apparent disabilities. There was a non-significant trend for women to be underrepresented as program leaders, people of ethnic non-European background had significantly higher representation than their share of the population, and people with apparent disabilities had significantly much higher percentage than their share of the Swedish population as program leaders for children programs. This case study indicates that traditionally underrepresented groups such as people of non-ethnic European background and people with disabilities do well in the competition for positions as program leaders for television programs that target children. This can be seen as an encouraging step from the present norm in Swedish society of mainly hiring people that you know.

Keywords: disabled people; ethnicity; gender; public service television; social inclusion

1. Introduction

The Swedish population consisted of roughly 9.6 million persons on 1st November 2013, of which women had a slight majority (50.1%) of the population [1]. About 15% of residents are born outside Sweden, and of these, 44% originate from outside Europe [2]. There is a trend of an increasing proportion of the Swedish population originating from other countries [2]. If we would add children that have been born in Sweden in families with non-European background, the share of people with non-European ethnic background in the Swedish population would increase as the numbers above only represent people immigrating to Sweden. At the same time, about 0.7% of the Swedish population received some kind of disability support in 2012 [3], although this does not mean that the people receiving disability support have an apparent disability.

Sweden is highly segregated when it comes to positions of influence and power, as can be seen in the relative share of various groups in the work force [4]. Only three percent of the chairs of boards of companies listed in the Swedish stock market (NASDAQ OMX) were women in 2011 [5], and only one out of the seven political parties that are represented in the Swedish parliament has a female party leader (Centerpartiet), and one has a shared leadership with one woman and one man (Miljöpartiet). While politicians promote Sweden both internally and internationally as a country of equal opportunities for all, immigrants find it very difficult to find work in Sweden [6]. Recent statistics show that Sweden is worst in the EU28 + Norway and Iceland when comparing rates of unemployment among people born within the country to those born outside. Despite arguing for openness in immigration, in Sweden, people born outside the country have a much higher share of the long-term unemployed compared to their relative share of the population [7]. Other countries like Malta and Poland have the opposite trend, with people born inside the country having a higher share of long-term unemployment than people born outside the country [7]. This is likely caused by the fact that Sweden has a tradition of giving work to those that you know, or nepotism. In a recent study, Bergström and Nilsson [8] showed that only roughly 30% obtain employment by virtue of their qualifications, while the majority of the jobs in Sweden are recruited through personal contacts [8]. A further problem for immigrants is that Sweden frequently does not acknowledge academic qualifications from other countries, thus Sweden holds a large number of highly qualified immigrants (with university education) that can not find any work; unemployment for immigrants with university degrees has actually worsened since 2001 as was recently shown in a study on immigrants with university degrees in law, economy, human resources, communications, information sciences and social sciences [6]. Thus, immigrants face the double problem of not having the personal contacts to get hired and not having their qualifications accepted [4].

Here we report from a case study on inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, people of non-European ethnic background and people with apparent disabilities in the Swedish work force, specifically their representation as program leaders for programs targeting children in Swedish Public Service Television. The positions as program leaders in television are highly coveted as they have high status and visibility. We chose to focus on children's programs as they are likely to have influence on what children will perceive as "normal" and thus have a large influence on shaping future generations' beliefs and attitudes [9]. Also, as TV portrayals have been shown to influence personal judgments of people [10], high visibility of traditionally underrepresented

groups might influence hiring decisions in the longer-term by increasing the positive perception of these groups.

2. Methods

A survey of the program leaders in Swedish Public Service Television was conducted in February 2014 using the official web site of the Swedish Public Service Television listing all their programs [11]. The survey included 41 of 226 program children's programs (as branded on the web site itself). We excluded foreign children's programs and programs without clear program leaders, such as serials or cartoons. A total of 65 program leaders in the 41 programs were assessed, with some programs having more than one program leader. We used a combination by checking the information on the webpages for each program and by looking at the TV program through the web channel. A person was classified as program leader if they were hosting a program, thus we did not count persons in "serials telling a story" or movies as they were considered being "actors" playing a written "character". The program leaders were grouped according to (1) gender, female or male; (2) ethnicity, ethnic European or ethnic non-European background; and (3) disability, with apparent disabilities or without apparent disabilities (for detailed data on programs and program leaders see Supplementary Table 1S). To have an apparent disability, a person on the TV program would be seen to be deaf, blind, intellectually disabled, or having apparent physical disabilities by program viewers. The ethnicity was assessed by a combination of observation and information from the webpages for the TV program and the program leaders. The proportion of the women and different ethnic groups in the Swedish population was retrieved from official statistics from Statistics Sweden [1,2]. The statistics for the number of persons receiving support for physically disabled people in Sweden was retrieved from The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen). To analyse if the proportion of the different groups differed to their relative share of the population, we used the nonparametric binomial test in SPSS Statistics software (IBM version 21).

3. Results and Discussion

If the genders were represented according to their relative percentage of the Swedish population, we would have expected 33 program leaders to be female and 32 to be male. We found, that out of the 65 program leaders, 27 were female and 38 were male. Similarly, if the ethnic non-Europeans were to be represented in the Swedish Public Service Television according to their relative percentage of the Swedish population, we would have expected five program leaders to be of non-European ethnic background. We found that 57 of the 65 program leaders were ethnic Europeans and eight were ethnic non-Europeans, of whom five had Asian origin, two had African origin and one had South American origin. Regarding disabilities, if people with apparent disabilities were represented according to their relative percentage of the Swedish population, we would have expected one program leader to have an apparent disability. Instead we found that 13 of the 65 program leaders had apparent disabilities. All except one (who used a wheelchair for mobility) were deaf.

Thus, the relative share compared to their share of the population differed for the groups that were studied. While recognizing the limited sample size, there was a non-significant trend ($p = 0.10$) towards women being underrepresented as program leaders for children's programs in Swedish Public

Service Television compared to their relative share of the Swedish population. Meanwhile people of ethnic non-European background had twice as high a share ($p = 0.03$) as program leaders for children's programs in Swedish Public Service Television than their share of the Swedish population, and people with apparent disabilities had much higher representation ($p = 0.001$) as program leaders than their relative share of the Swedish population in this study. That the overwhelming majority of the program leaders with disabilities were deaf was somewhat surprising, we had expected a somewhat broader representation of different kind of disabilities, such as people with intellectual, orthopaedic or mobility disabilities. The proportion of people from different ethnic non-European backgrounds (African, Asian and South American origin) reflected their internal share of the ethnic groups for immigrants to Sweden. It appears that traditionally underrepresented groups such as people of non-ethnic European background and people with disabilities do well in the competition for positions as program leaders for television programs that target children, which might be seen as an encouraging step from the present norm in the Swedish society of mainly hiring people that you know. A possible reason for these results might be that the executives of public service television targeting children are more aware of discrimination, and might have more pressure from the society to include underrepresented groups. On the other hand, women have often been "overrepresented" in professions related to children and they might therefore not be considered as a group that needs to be included in higher proportion. In reality, the discussion in Swedish society is more tuned toward how to get more men into professions relating to children. Another possible explanation for the results is that there exist a ranking of "prestige" among TV programs, with news programs having higher prestige than children programs. Station managers maybe opting for opening up positions for underrepresented groups in less highly regarded areas of TV. This could be an interesting area for further research. A third possibility could be that members of traditionally underrepresented groups are more interested in pursuing the positions as program leaders. Also, our initial case study points out for the need for future research whether the observed progress holds for other areas of the media and for other European countries. Finally, for a more practical point, it would be interesting to do a more thorough study regarding the recruitment process for the program leaders in this study. This would allow dissemination of the positive experience of how to include traditionally underrepresented groups in positions of high visibility and influence in Swedish society.

4. Conclusions

This case study indicates that traditionally underrepresented groups, such as people of non-ethnic European background and people with disabilities, do well in the competition for positions as program leaders for Swedish Public Service television programs that target children. This might be seen as an encouraging step.

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Author Contributions

Juha M. Alatalo and Anna Ostapenko Alatalo designed the study. Anna Ostapenko Alatalo gathered the data on program leaders. Juha M. Alatalo drafted the manuscript. Anna Ostapenko Alatalo gave comments on the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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