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Final rapport
Representation in medias

Constructive Institute
Class 6, 2022-2023
Aarhus University

Media-mirror on the wall, do we reflect the reality as we should at all?

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With support from Real Dania

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Introduction: When a little mermaid goes around the world - again and again

It was a golden moment that touched hearts all over the world. Including mine.

A young black girl sits on a sofa, her eyes engrossed in the blue light streaming from the television. Suddenly she turns her head and stares into the cellphone camera.

"She's brown like me!" she exclaims, her eyes widening in equal parts surprise and pride.

On the screen are the first glimpses of Disney's remake of 'The Little Mermaid'. Back in the original 1989 animated classic Ariel was white skinned with fiery red hair. But in this first sneak peek of the new live-action movie it's black actress and singer Halle Bailey who appears as the iconic mermaid.

Within days more and more videos start popping up on social media. The scenario is the same. There is spontaneous cheering, surprise, even tenderness in the living rooms when the black girls discover that the Disney hero looks like them.

The videos go viral and the hashtag "representation matters" trends across the globe - making headlines in major media outlets around the world.

The experience is in stark contrast to the famous and infamous "doll test" which I also stumble across on YouTube later in my research. And if you need to feel your entire emotional spectrum today I recommend watching the videos back-to-back.

We're going back to the 1940s in the USA. Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark design and conduct a series of experiments where black children are presented with two baby dolls in a clinical room. One doll is white while the other is black.

One by one the children physically designate the black baby doll as 'the bad one' and 'the ugly one'. The white baby doll achieves the opposite result. It is seen as 'the good one' and 'the pretty one'.

This simple visualization sent shockwaves through the United States. It documented and exposed that black children's self-esteem was deeply influenced by a time of segregation, racism and discrimination. The narrative and perception of reality had become entrenched.

Subsequently the trials became part of the decisive evidence a decade later when the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled that segregating white and black children in schools was unconstitutional and harmful.

As we all know, the history of black rights in the US is still far from complete and full of important (unfinished) battles. Having recently returned from a study trip to the US, it's also clear to me that the country is perhaps more concerned with representation and diversity than ever before.

At top universities it has become a trademark and large corporations are investing heavily in diversity training programs for their employees. Starbucks, for example, has declared that by 2025 they will achieve ethnic diversity in at least 30% of all levels of their business.

Therefore, we end up back at the "new" Ariel. Was it a clear signal from Disney, heralding a new era? Was it an apology for the past? Was it a commercial move to future-proof its brand for a new generation? Was it a bit of everything? A random homerun?

The honest answer is probably sitting in the wallpaper of an executive office in Walt Disney's Burbank, California stronghold. But it is actually also something else I'd like to pull out of there.

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Because even though the two episodes - the reaction to the "new" Ariel and the 'Doll Test' - are very different on the surface, they share a common thread when it comes to reflecting reality and not least its effects.

"Perception is reality" is a somewhat famous phrase from psychology. But in our media world we could perhaps benefit from rewriting the doctrine and saying "perception <u>should</u> be reality"?

The many reactions to the new Ariel are at least for me a clear example of how we can and should (still) change the filters through which we see the world. Just as it is a testament to the latent social power we media outlets wield.

There are still biases out there and through my work over the past 10 months it's clear that this is certainly not a phenomenon that only sticks to the US. Quite the contrary.

The good news is that we as a media industry are sitting on perhaps the most crucial weapon when it comes to reflecting reality.

But how do we do it right?

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My personal interest in the field

I am the editor of Ultra Nyt which is DR's (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) news service for children and young teens. Every day we select and translate the most important news for 9-14 year olds.

The smallest citizens also have a right to knowledge about the world they live in. They also have the right to be heard. Regardless of whether it's about local children's stories from Denmark or big politics beyond national borders.

And if you tell it in simple language, without unnecessary noise and without adding fuel to the fire, news can be reassuring knowledge in itself. In the best of worlds it even acts as an information shield against the raw algorithms and false facts that hammer away at young people's smartphones every day.

That, in a nutshell, is our mantra. It's what we do and believe in and I love it!

But in 2021, I was forced to realize that we as media have a crucial role and not least a democratic responsibility when it comes to representation. That we have a powerful weapon that can and should be used for more than "just" news.

Perhaps it's important to declare my colors here. I am part of the DR B&U department where there is a natural focus and awareness of diversity. The ambition is always to accommodate and reflect all of Denmark's children.

Our toddler universe Minisjang has recently won a diversity award. My colleague has written a guide to including disabled people in our productions. A monitoring project of Ultra Nyt's news broadcasts showed that the source composition aligns almost 1:1 with the demographics.

But even though there is a necessary awareness of media representation, I have found that it can be difficult to translate representation work into everyday practice. That we don't really have a language for its levels or a formulated knowledge.

In connection with a new sports format developed for DR Ultra, I was asked to recruit a children's host from a disadvantaged residential area. There was a desire to break with our established conventions - to try out 'unschooled' hosts who could appeal to other target groups.

Here's my first confession. I was skeptical from the start. My girlfriend may even deserve an official apology for several kitchen table rants that occurred during this period. It was for sure a difficult process and task in many respects.

It showed and exposed a clash between a media world pressed for finances and time and the important intentions of integrating all kinds of voices on our media platforms. There was a short fuse and an expectation that we could go live quickly. That it was a task on almost equal footing with others.

At the same time it also challenged and poked at the classic journalistic ideals of program production. Did we have to accept compromising our professionalism and quality? Did we risk increasing the workload for the editorial team? And was it okay to cherry-pick a host with an eye for specific target groups?

In the end we succeeded. We found Ryan Lakou. A lovely young 18-year-old kid with roots in the Ivory Coast who had lived in Paris for his first years. He later came to Denmark and grew up in the Viby area of Aarhus. He attended school at Søndervangskolen where around 93% of students have a non-Danish ethnic background.

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He was qualified. He was a soccer guy and was already playing with YouTube in his spare time. However, it was far from a professional level and his skills in TV production and journalism were non-existent. There were also language and literacy challenges.

But we managed to fit him into a conceptual framework. But did we as a media industry interfere too much there? Because we had a clear idea on how a program should look and feels like? I'll come back to that discussion later.

But when I look back today I'm proud as hell. It may not be the most groundbreaking program I've been involved in creating. We haven't won any prestigious awards. But I got to observe first-hand how we - or our new host - attracted a different group of viewers.

This was especially evident when we visited schools or by a quick glance at the comments section on YouTube when our videos were posted. There were suddenly more children from non-Western backgrounds flocking to Ryan for an autograph or a selfie. Especially boys, who have historically been difficult for B&U to lure into the store.

At the time of writing several of the episodes have over 150,000 views on YouTube. These are great numbers when it comes to a program with a brand-new host who was not on the radar of young people before. On DRTV the new program was also well received and blended in with the general viewing figures.

In other words, I had an aha(!) experience with representation. And it was - thankfully - not the last. But perhaps most importantly, it ignited a motivation to better understand the mechanisms and effects behind the phenomenon.

Why was it so difficult when it made so much sense? Was it a lack of knowledge? A lack of language in the media industry? Can we do it smarter?

These were the questions that pushed me towards the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University.

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How is it a constructive journalistic project?

My personal experience with representation is of course a drop in the ocean. Representation and diversity are many things. From the management of large media houses to the choice of sources in news or program content that is more recognizable to minority groups.

Without a doubt, we have a long way to go in many of these areas. But for me it's a fundamental task that we as media must become better at taking on. Also individually. From children's content to adult content. Especially if we believe in media as the democratic mirror that should engage and frame the entire society.

And what if it fails? Or rather, what happens if it's not prioritized in everything from news to program development? That's where disconnection lurks in my eyes. We as media will - unknowingly - push large, growing groups into the clutches of other platforms.

These could be large international platforms, where algorithms may both feed and satiate their need for mirroring and representation, but which neither strengthen nor support the democratic conversation in and about Denmark.

In other words we are missing out on a lasting friendship with the users and citizens that we really need to move closer to in order to glue our country together with our journalism. We end up with a deficient and dangerous distance to the population.

It may seem contradictory when we talk about constructive journalism. But it's in keeping with the spirit. Because the problem needs to be clear. Otherwise it's impossible to uncover, investigate and take a critical approach to possible solutions.

Ultimately, inadequate representation adds to the polarization storm. In fact this has recently been studied and documented in a large research project from the Reuters Institute at Oxford University.

But are we on the right track when it comes to solutions? What are solutions anyway? How is it experienced out there? And are we media doing it right and wholeheartedly? Or are good intentions drowning in a time-pressured media world?

That's what I've spent a year at the Constructive Institute learning about. It is the experiences and knowledge about media representation I have gathered that I would like to share in this report.

Through interviews and conversations with key players in the field I have looked at the phenomenon. What are the ups and downs when it comes to media representation? What are the do's and don'ts when we look at the initiatives that have been tried? And are there good experiences outside our small country?

A professor of political science specializing in integration. A class from FGU in Gellerup. The NGO Pluralisterne. Media people, journalists, opinion leaders. The sources have helped form a 360-degree view of the topic. From the most theoretical to the close practice.

The report will also contain a number of sections that we could call "academic aha's". Because in connection with my project, I have followed relevant courses at Aarhus University and Aarhus BSS, which have contributed valuable inputs and reflections.

Without a doubt, the ultimate truth or facet has not been found. But my hope is that the project will inspire, provoke thought or leave you wiser on the subject. Especially if you are a media manager, editor or

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journalist and want to improve or add nuances to your work with representation. In other words, I hope that I and my small contribution might be your first "aha" experience.

Happy reading!

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The cold numbers on a hot topic

It's undoubtedly a hot potato that I've been trying to get to grips with for the past 10 months. Almost weekly I've found myself screenshotting articles, comments, analysis or discussions on social media. All of them have revolved around diversity and representation in the world of culture and media.

At the beginning of the year a group of actors released three photoshopped posters of recent TV and cinema blockbusters - including Lars Von Trier's "Riget Exodus". They wanted to raise a discussion about a lack of diversity in major Danish films.

Just shortly after news stories came out about young actors increasingly turning down roles because of stereotypical portrayals. And in the music world, the musicmedia Gaffa recently established a scholarship to be awarded to a person or actor who is actively working to improve diversity.

And if we point the arrow towards our own media industry the examples are also emerging. There are only 3 women - and none with an ethnic background other than Danish - when we look at which 50 experts in Denmark have been most quoted in the news media in 2022.

Underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the media overall is also well documented. In the same year, the report "Dem vi (stadig) taler om" (Those we (still) talk about) once again highlighted that there is a long way to go when it comes to a balanced and diverse source composition in Danish media.

Even though immigrants and descendants make up an increasingly large part of the total population in Denmark (14%) they appear significantly less in the overall news picture (3.5%). This is despite the fact that like everyone else they go to the doctor, go to work, own homes or experience rising prices due to inflation. They are just rarely used as sources on these topics.

On the other hand, so-called news reserves have emerged where certain population groups are overrepresented. This is the case in topics such as integration and crime. This contributes to a distortion of reality and not least the perception of reality among the population.

It can even be read very directly in statistics.

In 2021 the Danish Knowledge Center for Integration revealed that Danes generally believe that integration is much worse than it is. As a population we also significantly overestimate how much non-Western descendants and immigrants make up the demographic. The median guess is 19%, while the actual figure is only 9%.

It is precisely this issue and challenge that is at the heart of my project. I have been curious about whether a greater focus on media representation among the media - and knowledge about it - can change the preconceived - and erroneous - notions of reality.

In my project I have chosen to zoom in on vulnerable housing areas in Denmark. I have done this for several reasons. Firstly, it is one of Real Dania's many focus areas which I have been lucky enough to receive funding from for my project.

Secondly, these are areas where there is a very high concentration of ethnic minorities. According to figures from the Danish Social and Housing agency around 60% of residents in vulnerable housing areas have a non-western descendant or immigrant background.

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It's also interesting with my background in DR. Here there is currently a lot of attention on how we need to be better at reaching the so-called "missing groups". That covers the users, listeners and viewers who do not have a natural contact with DR's offerings during a week. Young people and children from disadvantaged residential areas are an obvious focus area here.

Vulnerable housing areas is also a field that Kristina Bakkær Simonsen, Associate Professor of Political Science, has followed for many years through her research. According to her, children and young people in these areas are "doubly affected" when media representation is skewed.

"It's not just their appearance or background, but also the physical place they live that works against them. Stories about disadvantaged residential areas or the ghetto list have been characterized by black clouds and grey concrete. For several years, a narrative has emerged that these are insanely dangerous areas. This leads to further minoritization," she says.

Lack of representation weakens trust in media and news - especially among minorities

Through my research into the topic there are two major challenges when we look at media representation among young people from and in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

1) Yusuf looks out at the established Danish media and does not recognize the portrait painted of the area. They are negative, he feels politicized and it works against his desire to become part of the Danish society.

2) Samira looks at the content of the established Danish media and can't find anything that speaks to her. There is a lack of journalism that is recognizable and reflects the everyday life she has and experiences. She turns her back on it and finds her fix on social media.

This two-part portrayal triggered reflections in me. But it also gave me goosebumps. Because there is a built-in disconnect that can hit us media like a double boomerang if we don't understand the game here and now.

The group of non-western descendants is growing in Denmark and will continue to do so. So will the proportion of ethnic Danish youth who attend school or have friends with minority backgrounds. Especially around the larger cities.

It is at the same time undoubtedly a different generation growing up right now. Wokeness is a big concept. And if the media doesn't understand, cover or include their friends properly and fairly why should they spend time on traditional media in the future?

At the end of the day it's all about trusting the media to portray reality as it is experienced out there. But there is more at stake when it comes to children and young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods - or other minorities. Research has recently documented this.

In April this year the Reuters Institute, based at Oxford University, presented the results of a major research project on media representation. The researchers studied marginalized groups and their attitudes towards

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media. They interviewed Muslim minorities in India, blacks in the US and the working class in the UK, among others.

For the most part, their views were in line with the more general and common perception, which (unfortunately) is now widespread among several population groups. They expressed distrust in the media as objective and considered news coverage to be biased.

But their experiences and attitudes were much more related to how people like themselves were portrayed in the media. Or lack thereof. And not least how this had concrete consequences for their everyday lives. This is where they differed.

Because while majority youth in Denmark - and adults for that matter - may be concerned about the media's sensationalism or unbalanced treatment of reality they rarely feel that they must "pay" a personal price because of it.

But in the study this is exactly what the marginalized groups across four countries experienced and pointed out. That there are personal consequences for them when the media does not represent accurately or fairly.

So it's about something deeper than "just" a general distrust. The media is seen as a source or actor that can do - or at worst, does - further damage to an already vulnerable community or group.

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Q&A with Kristina Bakkær Simonsen, Associate Professor of Political Science at Aarhus University

For several years she has researched integration with a special focus on young people with minority backgrounds. I met her at Aarhus University for an interview about how the group experiences Danish media and the representation of them.

According to your research, how do young non-western immigrants and descendants feel they are viewed in Danish media?

-They generally experience it through a negative lens. As a group they often see themselves associated with themes of Muslim values, lack of integration, headscarf debates or social control. Politicians and their rhetoric are most often cited as the primary cause. But right after that comes the media, which, according to them, plays a role in creating a simplistic and reinforced image of minorities.

Where does this perception come from?

-They find that ethnic Danes have very little familiarity and knowledge of people with minority backgrounds. So when they encounter a negative view from ethnic Danes in their daily lives it must come from somewhere else. And here the arrow points to political messages, which, according to them, are communicated uncritically through the media.

It sounds like there is not much faith or trust in the Danish media?

-No, there is at least a perceived distance. Many feel that as residents in for example a vulnerable residential area, they actually know something about what's going on. Nevertheless, they have the feeling that they are not being asked, but that the speaking time instead goes to a politician who is never confronted with how they see things. There is a demand to see themselves represented. And a vulnerability associated with not being represented.

In one of your studies, 29% of ethnic Danish youth say that a good "citizen" follows news and politics. But among minority youth, only 9% feel this way. What does that tell you?

-That they are afraid - or don't want - to be confronted with more politicization. It's a kind of self-protective shield. It's a little easier to live a youthful life by shutting it out and not dealing with what's going on around you. In the end, there's just a bigger consequence when you, as a young person with a minority background, take a chance and get involved in the debate.

Is this a democratic problem?

-Yes! Because we can see that it affects voter turnout. Young people from minority backgrounds vote significantly less. And the paradox is that more of them know the political system inside out. Many come from deeply political homes where there is a natural orientation towards the outside world. They have already tested themselves in getting and having opinions in many areas. The potential is huge, but they get stuck and withdraw.

How can media help here? What is being asked for?

-First of all, they want to be allowed to be young and not be politicized all the time. There are different and stricter conditions for minority youth than majority youth. Therefore, safe spaces must be cultivated where their attitudes and opinions can be tested without fear of being labeled an Islamic fundamentalist.

You get the editor-in-chief chair. Where would you take action?

-There is a lot of work to be done in signaling to minority youth that they too can have an opinion. When I've asked "what does it mean to you to be Danish", they stick it out like a sore thumb. They refer to Danes in the 3rd person. "Danes say". They don't consider themselves Danish, even though they were born and raised here. If we follow this logic, then the media has a big task in signaling that these questions are just as important to ask someone with brown

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skin as light skin. It's not just about seeing yourself represented, but also about seeing yourself in all roles. So that you are not only cast as the minority child from Gellerup, but that it can also be about professional interests.

Lack of representation is a (serious) Achilles heel for a strong public sphere

During my time as a fellow at the Constructive Institute I have had the pleasure of soaking up knowledge at Aarhus University. I strayed over to the auditorium benches at the political science department where I followed the course Political Sociology for six months. Actually with Kristina Bakkær Simonsen as one of the lecturers.

There I sat, with the obligatory packed lunch and as the absolute oldest, taking an academic deep dive into some of the greatest and probably controversial social thinkers of recent times. Marx, Foucault, Bourdieu, to name a few.

In many ways it was a far cry from the reality I saw and experienced in Gellerup later that year when I met a group of young people at FGU Vest. The warmth and tenacity were strikingly similar, but the starting points were obviously very different. Nevertheless, the two worlds ended up merging.

Especially thanks to the thoughts of German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He problematized the commercial media for having lost their publicist orientation. That they were not seeking socially relevant and common solutions on behalf of the public but instead had their eyes fixed on profit or their own interests.

I bring him in here because he may have also - no doubt unintentionally - foreseen that a lack of representation would be a serious Achilles heel for society in general.

According to Habermas, democracy does not develop if there is no strong and vibrant public sphere. There must be a space where citizens collectively reflect on issues in society and bring the best arguments and knowledge to the state and decision-makers

The media has almost written itself off as such a space. But there is a clear challenge if some of the citizens in the community are not represented in the channels that are supposed to reflect the pulse of society.

During my visit to Gellerup, I also confirmed this notion. There lurks a disconnection and parallel universes where the citizens of the community never really meet in the same "world".

The young people's consumption of Danish media was very limited. Especially news media. A few read EB (Danish tabloid newspaper) once in a while. The local newspaper was a - for me - surprising favorite for several because:

"I just feel that there is not so much bullshit about it. They embellish a little here and there, but it's just not as obvious as Ekstra Bladet. The local paper understands you better. They also show the positive side," said 18-year-old Eyad Mohammad.

On the other hand, their TikTok profiles only showed content with people similar to themselves. I guess I was prepared for there to be an overrepresentation, but I was quite surprised that there was such a clear representation. And you'll undoubtedly find the same picture a little further down the road, on the wealthy residential streets of Åbyhøj.

The explanation for why their feed looked the way it did was also pretty straightforward:

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"It's because I like the things that I find inspiring or that I can relate to. That's what makes you actually feel more socialized and seen on your phone than when you're in the "real" world", said 18-year-old Iqra.

It was also clear in our conversation that if asked to name mainstream programs in a Danish media context, they had a much easier time identifying programs with a link to non-Western minorities. Ghetto Factor and Uden Filter (formerly Hav and Kamal on P3) recurred as media offerings that most people were familiar with and regularly consumed.

In addition, there was also a consumption of a number of smaller podcasts such as Gråzonen or Drop In. However, it varied quite a lot whether it was a following on various social media or whether it was continuous listening.

They also had a clear distinction between the programs that, according to them, managed to portray and de-dramatize their neighborhoods - and the opposite. Programs such as "180 days in the Ghetto" (DR1) and Q's barbershop (DR1) received high praise and were cited as examples of productions that actually invested time in the areas.

Conversely, there was a relatively large amount of skepticism towards programs that dealt with crime - for example "Bandeland" from Ekstra Bladet. The perception was that the gang environment and leading figures were exalted through the dramatization and that it reinforced the stereotypical image of the areas.

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Q&A with young people from FGU Vest in Gellerup

This spring I met several young people in Gellerup. Some live in the area, others come from outside. They are all descendants or immigrants from a non-western country and aged 18-22 years. I was curious about their media consumption, how they experience Danish media and of course how they feel represented and reflected in Danish media.

Which Danish media do you use?

Taysir: I have the DR-App on my phone because we had to use it in class - and I've just had it ever since. Sometimes I like to watch the news because it's important to know what's happening.

Eyad: I also use DR. And I also read the local newspaper.

Why do you like the local newspaper?

Eyad: I just feel that there is not so much bullshit about it. Just a little bit. They embellish a bit here and there, but it's just not as obvious as Ekstra Bladet. The local paper somehow understands you better. They also show the positive side.

What do you mean by that?

Eyad: Some media look down on our area a lot. For example when BT writes that there's been some gang stuff out here, you're actually embarrassed to be here. Because you're not part of that environment. But the rest of Denmark who don't live here, they think that 80% are criminals or unemployed!

Nazar: Everyone thinks that all immigrants are the same. I've kind of given up on that. It's very patronizing to read what it says. There is a distance. I see myself as a Dane. I speak fluent Danish, I'm part of society and I pay my taxes. But there are still people who will say that I'm not Danish. I personally don't want to read anything about immigrants anymore because the word itself is discriminatory.

Why do you think that is?

Manar: The mainstream media doesn't really listen. I feel like they just cut out what they think is important. They think more about clicks and views. You can say a whole sentence and then three words get cut out.

But you find that it's different on social media? On TikTok, for example?

Igra: Yes, it's because I like the things that I find inspiring or that I can relate to. That's what makes you actually feel more socialized and seen on your phone than when you're in the "real" world.

Taysir: Agreed. You are forced to live in a society where everything is not equal, even though they say it is. I don't think it's something that everyone will understand, but you're living in the eyes of all other people. And if you don't get love from people who aren't like you, then you have to get that love from people who are like you.

Will better representation in the Danish media change your attitude. Or is it too late?

Taysir: I actually think so. If you see someone with a different background who has done TV, for example, people will look up to that and maybe go that way. It becomes motivating. I think it can have a huge impact.

Youssef: In the Danish Parliament, it's very rare that you see someone like us. The guy who stood for the Free Greens (Sikandar Siddique, ed.), he was the first person I've ever seen who had the chance to go in there and have a voice. I can guarantee that he is a role model for a lot of people like me. He's one of us. And he's come so far in politics. He talks about everything. He talks about green transition, he talks about climate change. It's not just integration!

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Eyad: They've also started putting people other than just white people in movies and stuff like that. I think it will help the new generation so that they don't feel what we have felt. But the fact that they are also seen more positively in society, I think that will help a lot more.

Would you have liked to have used it?

Eyad: Yeah, I think so actually. I think I would be more proud of who I am as a person.

Do you have any examples where you felt that the representation had an impact on your interest?

Youssef: "Underworld". There are a lot of immigrants in it. It wakes me up and I think I have to watch that one, because you don't see that very often. I see films from all sorts of other countries where I can see that it's a more normalized thing, that many more of our people are coming in.

And how does that make you feel?

Youssef: It makes you want to watch it, or I personally want to watch it because it looks normal. I mean, to me it looks normal, even though I know that a lot of people will think he's black. It's an immigrant. You know, you know.

Do you have any ideas on how Danish media can make you feel more seen and included?

Taysir: Listen to them. Listen to the people you are actually trying to protect. Instead of talking to people you think will protect them. They don't know what people are going through in their everyday lives

Iqra: I think they should make some programs where there is a better mix. Maybe a Dane and an immigrant, so you can see and hear both points of view. And then they shouldn't just talk about racism or Denmark, but also about world problems, climate and war, for example.

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Final rapport
Representation in medias

Constructive Institute
Class 6, 2022-2023
Aarhus University

Are we there yet? Or are we even on our way?

"I don't think you can find a media-boss who doesn't know these things".

These were the words of Politiken's then culture editor Mette Davidsen Nielsen in 2020. She participated in a debate at Folkemødet on diversity and representation in media but then added:

 "But nothing really happens".

My sense is that since then things have actually picked up in some corners of the industry. Although it's certainly still debatable how much of the change comes from the top-down as Mette Davidsen Nielsen alluded to.

However, it is possible to find a number of examples where it is no longer just beeping on the radar, but where it has actually gained flight altitude with concrete initiatives. Especially around gender balance, but perhaps to a lesser extent in relation to minorities. I'll come back to that.

In recent years several Danish media and editorial offices have used the method of counting sources to raise awareness. Most recently, TV2's digital journalists have been told to register sources based on gender in their articles in their internal CMS system.

The initiative came about after a random sample on tv.2dk showed that there was a very skewed representation when it came to the use of expert sources. 72% were men, 28% women and only 6% had a minority background.

"We want more people to have a voice in the public debate, and our journalism will only get better if we include more nuances and perspectives. Our 1.4 million daily users should feel represented in the journalism we do," said Kristoffer Pinholt, Editor-in-Chief of Digital Content at TV2.

The good (and obvious) question is of course how journalists will find the time in their busy schedules to register this. But according to Kathrine Jo Andersen, editorial manager at tv2.dk, it is a time prioritization they will find room for - to improve the quality of journalism.

There are also examples of newsrooms that have already managed to significantly improve their diversity in source selection through self-monitoring. These include the two DR programs Deadline and Kulturen på P1. In one year, the latter has moved the gender balance from 65-35 (men/women) to 50-50.

In the latest public service contract, it is also written in for the first time that DR commits to promoting and strengthening diversity and gender equality. Or so it stood, right up until the 11th hour and shortly before the deadline for my report.

The Danish People's Party suddenly joined the reopened media settlement and according to their media spokesman Mikkel Bjørn managed to prevent a "woke gender policy in DR" by changing the wording to "versatility and pluralism".

This clearly underlines a a very active battlefield in Denmark where politicians (or at least some) have strong opinions on how representation should be understood and seen. And even though I swore quite loudly because it suddenly meant extra work, the comparison with the BBC - coming soon - is even more exciting and relevant.

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Either way, "versatility and pluralism" will for the first time stand side-by-side with the entrenched phrases about democracy and community in the public service contract.

"In the old days, it was both easy and natural for DR to be the glue that ensured democratic cohesion. There was only DR, so it was the only TV station that you as a citizen could turn on. It created a completely natural and shared conversation. Now we live in a world that is more polarized - also in terms of media. Therefore, it is even more important that DR as an institution reflects the Denmark that is out there," says Karen Lerbech.

She was the project manager of DR Diversity when I met her around Christmas. An internal department that has existed since 2017. They give presentations and share their knowledge about representation work, among other things. And one of their many tasks is to award funding to projects where editorial teams have had initiatives to increase diversity in DR's offerings.

Before our talk, I felt that I had dug deep into the foundation of representation. However, new areas of reflection opened up. Especially by comparing and contrasting with perhaps the Western world's most famous public service station.

To put numbers on or not to put numbers on? Is that the big question?

While diversity has been written down on a piece of "sacred" paper in DR - open to both interpretation and the degree of commitment - "big brother" BBC on the other side of the water has taken a more concrete approach.

They have set measurable goals for their representation and diversity work. Both in terms of content, but also in terms of employees. Tim Davie, the Director General of the BBC, has declared that he sets to create a "50-20-12" organization. This means an equal split of men and women, 20% BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnics) and 12% disabled.

-"It's really about leadership and accountability. I've been very direct with BBC managers. They don't get promoted without us assessing how happy the staff are and how they've delivered against diversity targets," he said in an interview shortly after taking office in 2020.

The BBC's efforts began in 2017 as a small grassroots initiative in a single newsroom in London. It was - just like we see in Denmark now - to record sources based on gender. Since then the project named "50/50 challenge has grown rapidly and is now the largest ever collective effort in the corporation to improve representation.

750 different BBC-teams (across 30 countries) used self-monitoring in their work last year. But what's more interesting is how the project has broadened its scope. It no longer "just" includes gender, but also fixed measures of ethnicity, disability and, most recently, socio-economic background.

The scale, ambition and connectivity is without a doubt one of the biggest things I've stumbled upon. Adding to the equation, of course, is the fact that the BBC is also a media behemoth that spans multiple continents. It's also not insignificant that they come from a nation with different demographics and a longer (varied) history as a multi-ethnic society.

Nevertheless, it is interesting and remarkable how the BBC conducts their change process based on very specific objectives. They dare to go big and put numbers on it. I see great strengths in this.

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250 BBC teams have measured and recorded ethnic representation over the past two years. Although 65% of the editorial teams were able to put a green checkmark next to their target, the overall progress in representation has taken a significantly smaller leap forward than, for example, disability and gender.

However, they have proven that it is possible to move on these parameters. And that's an important point. BBC hasn't "played it safe" and omitted that part of the measurement or scaled it down, even though it is undoubtedly more difficult and time-consuming.

In this way, the measurement becomes a value and statement. It signals transparency to the population being served. Not least to the growing group of ethnic minorities, who will make up a larger part of the demographic in the future.

The issue is taken seriously and not "tucked away" on a piece of paper in the HR department's filing cabinet for fear of poor performance or even just the status quo. It's a credibility builder, pure and simple.

BBC has also built a project that stands on a foundation of shared fact-based knowledge that lives on from year to year. Therefore, it's also possible to correct or discover new opportunities along the way that can be shared with the rest of the organization and potentially push them to the finish line faster.

There is no doubt that the BBC has a new Director General who has made better representation one of his key priorities. Strong support - or willingness - from senior management has been repeated in several of my interviews as a prerequisite for success.

The good question is of course why our medias and managements in Denmark are more reluctant to put concrete figures on the targets for representation work.

Is it the quota debate in new clothes?

Is it the conservative fundamentals of journalism that are holding us back? Is it a generational thing?

Is the media afraid of not being able to deliver KPI results? Is there a fear of touch from the political side?

In any case the conclusion is that it is more than difficult to find Danish media that have officially announced concrete goals for their efforts.

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Q&A with Karen Lerbech, former project manager in DR Diversity

In her work she led diversity projects across Danish Broadcasting Corporation at both editorial and strategic level - including a new diversity action plan. Today she works as a journalist, consultant, project manager and teacher with a special focus on diversity and representation.

Why do you think it is important to work with representation?

- Everyone in Denmark should be able to see their life and everyday life reflected in DR's content, but it's also important to be introduced to lives and people who are not like you. It's about learning more about yourself and others. But we can only do this if the reality we reflect is actually the reality that exists.

In the latest public service contract, it was added for the first time that DR must strengthen gender equality and diversity (interview conducted before the new media settlement with new wording). Does it make a difference?

-Yes, without a doubt. Because diversity is now a mandatory task the efforts must also be accounted for. This means that it is something that both management, the board and the content areas must relate to. It will be made visible in a completely different way than before where diversity work was largely driven by committed standard-bearers in the individual editorial departments.

But it's still just words, isn't it? There are no concrete objectives?

-No, and it certainly could have been even more ambitious. But this is a start and Rome wasn't built in a day. It will be easier to go into the editorial offices and say that this is part of our contract with the citizens. That we must work with equality and diversity. Because those questions always come up. "What are we going to do with this?" "What does management want?" It's extremely important that the work to improve media representation is supported from the top.

It sounds like you've experienced resistance?

-Most journalists are busy people with daily deadlines. You have to break old habits about which sources you call, what angles you take on stories and generally how you work with your ideas and stories. It doesn't happen overnight. In addition, there are several stubborn beliefs; for example, that women are more likely to decline to participate than men. But research suggests that they actually don't. They just get asked less than men do.

Critics will ask, does it move anything? Especially the private media, who have to keep a business running?

-Representation is an important competitive parameter and it can be used in the battle for ratings and subscriptions. BBC has done a large study where they looked at women's consumption of their digital services. After two years of increasing their female sources and staff they measured a significant increase in interest from the female audience. They had both noticed it in the coverage and found the content more relevant.

Where do you think Danish media stands in relation to the representation challenge?

-I feel that we are in some watershed years. It's a different conversation that we're starting to have. And I feel that it is also more often starting somewhere else. I read that as an increased awareness of the need for better representation. Now the media just needs to take the next step, which is to move from thought and speech to real action. Because you can't solve misrepresentation by talking about it.

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The weakest ties are the strongest ties, but does the media live in a closed small world?

We're going back to school at Aarhus University to visit an academic GOAT - the greatest of all time. And if you're also looking for the answer to why LinkedIn is gigantic, you might kill two birds with one stone.

Last fall I was on the hunt for basic knowledge about integration among immigrants and descendants - especially in relation to media consumption. That's why I ended up back in political science, where I followed the master's course "What do friends mean? On immigrants' social networks and political integration".

My first thought was to investigate whether there was a correlation between one's residential area and media consumption. But even though we designed network analyses in the course, it was still a bit too big a bite to swallow. Unfortunately, there were no other studies in this area either.

However, the course did lead me past the theory "The Strength Of Weak Ties". It's a classic and according to our lecturer, one of the most cited academic research papers of all time. Later, I encountered it again in the "Creativity at work" course at BSS.

Fortunately, the theory is straightforward. American sociologist Mark Granovetter from Stanford University argued in 1973 that weak ties - peripheral relationships - are more valuable than strong, personal relationships. Especially in relation to new information and opportunities.

You've probably figured out how LinkedIn fits into the equation by now. The study found that very few people find a new job through their close friends or family. Instead, it was often through an acquaintance further out in the network.

The thesis is that while strong ties to family and close friends are important for our emotional support, there is also a greater risk of ending up in an echo chamber where the same information flows back and forth. That's why it's important to have weak ties that can add new information from the outside.

There are even workplaces - such as Pixar - that are physically built around creating chance encounters between employees from different departments. Because there's a belief that this boosts both creativity and productivity.

It was natural for me to bring the theory into our media world and apply it to representation and diversity. It could even be used to explain how we can move things forward.

It certainly underpins the importance of media, journalists, etc. actively (re)building weak ties with people and groups they don't normally interact with. It is through these channels that we can gain access to new perspectives or experiences. Something that can ultimately contribute to a more diverse and nuanced representation in the media.

But the "chance"-encounters and potential weak ties no longer come dancing through our editorial doors. Mostly because we don't really get out the door ourselves. We work in a time-pressured industry where journalists often spend more time behind desks than out in the real world.

Technology has brought this development with it. We are always just a few clicks away from our research, sources and of course the publish button. Journalistic products are produced and distributed every day like ice cream on a summer's day. It's hard to change and almost utopian to go back. Technology will continue to advance with AI being the latest example.

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This places new demands on us as journalists and media people. As we are more likely to sit "at home" and use our journalistic toolboxes we need to be even more self-critical of the networks of information we move around in.

Do we really have weak ties out there? Are we using them enough? Or are they the same strong ties and relationships that we draw on when we mirror the reality?

There is certainly a risk that we as journalists and the industry end up in our own echo chamber. In other words, the very place that our profession intends to break down. We strive for the "best obtainable version of the truth" and want to be facilitators of broad democratic conversations where different voices are heard.

This was also the starting point for a conversation I had with Mette Mut Andreasen, chairwoman of the NGO 'Pluralisterne'. For a number of years they have worked to promote diversity in the media in Denmark.

"The misconception I often encounter is that representation is an activist approach to journalism. I've given presentations where there are journalists who think it taste a little like charity work. I think that's very misunderstood, and unfortunately, that's one of the things that prevents many people from doing it," she says.

"See you out there!" is a phrase I've read quite a few times when good and talented colleagues have changed jobs. And while it may be a quick turn of phrase, it also illustrates our industry and mentality quite accurately. It's small and we expect to bump into the same people at some point in the future.

At the same time, it's also extremely rare that in my time, I've come across a media person who suddenly dropped in with a different background or ancestry than the classic native Danish. But it happened (thankfully) when Helin Erdem dropped by Ultra Nyt.

She has a Danish-Kurdish background and was training on DR's talent team, but spent a few months with us as a "master student". Since then, she has hosted a number of programs for P3 - both on radio and TV.

It was an obvious choice to get in touch with Helin to listen to her experience of meeting the media industry. And not least to get her views on working with representation - both from the outside and the inside.

It didn't get any less interesting when shortly before our interview I read an article where she named TV Avisen host Erkan Özden as one of her biggest idols. Why him was my immediate reaction?

There turned out to be a very good answer. And furthermore Helin Erdem had a lot of interesting reflections on how she sees her own role in the big picture. So grab a cup of coffee - on the following pages you can read both the Q&A with Mette Mut Andreasen and Helin Erdem.

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Q&A with Mette Mut Andreasen, chairwoman and project manager at the ngo Pluralisterne

Pluralisterne works to promote diversity in the media and cultural life. Mette has visited several media outlets in Denmark and abroad to find inspiration. She also gives presentations to both journalists and editors-in-chief who have requested knowledge in this area.

What is the biggest misconception when it comes to media and working with representation?

-The misconception that I most often encounter is that representation is an activist approach to journalism. I've given presentations where there are journalists who think it's kind of charity work. I think that's very misunderstood, and unfortunately, that's one of the reasons why many people don't do it.

So what is it that they haven't understood?

-I think it's basically about making journalism better. Reaching more people, including more people in being part of democracy and part of the narrative that exists in and about Denmark. You don't get that if the usual suspects keep repeating the same perspectives. Journalism is just the opposite. Or at least it should be.

But journalism is also about finding the most suitable source? Should that give way to representation?

-Many journalists really want to hold on to that. But we might question that a little in the sense that you still have to search from story to story to find out what kind of sources there are in the field. Are there any that are just as good? Maybe even better? In our experience, there's no time for that - and it's easier to inherit one from your buddy at the office.

But especially the private media must look after their bottom line. Can you understand if they don't want to dedicate resources to the work?

-In our experience from the interviews we've done abroad it pays off for the vast majority. Many of them publicly announced that they would now make an effort to improve the representation of women. Some regular subscribers jumped and disappeared. But there was also a similar response from other sides and it evened out after a while. And they often found that they got more users because they included a broader audience.

How have your experiences from abroad been received?

-There is something very closed about the craft of journalism, which makes it quite difficult to change professional practices in the profession. Therefore, you have to tread carefully when it comes to presenting additional elements to the work of journalists and media. We have not been able to tour with the full knowledge we have from abroad. Then I think Danish journalists and media will think we are too progressive.

There has been a lot of focus on "counting" sources in Danish media. Is this the right way to go? Can't it become too superficial?

-Both! It's a good way to get an "aha" experience. But we also find that many people want an effort or a presentation from us because they can then say that they are doing something. Especially because there is a focus on representation and diversity work. And that's great. But counting sources doesn't solve anything on its own. It must be followed up with possible action plans and strategies for how to use the numbers. There needs to be a commitment on the other side as well.

Why is it hard to move?

- Basically, it's just a big structural change. It's about internal culture, recruitment and staff composition - and upskilling and training. And then there's the financial side of things. It requires more resources to prioritize representation work. So the big push comes with a broad effort over time and a realization that this is the only sustainable way to work with journalism in the future.

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Q&A with Helin Erdem, trained on the Talent team at DR and current host at P3

Helin Erdem is 24 years old and has a Danish-Kurdish background. She has been through DR's Talenthold where special creative talents are given the opportunity to develop in the media world - often without an industry-related education. I zoom-interviewed Helin Erdem in the spring to listen and learn more about how she has experienced the media industry - especially with a focus on representation.

Have you had experiences with representation before you entered the media industry?

-In 2019, I had an opinion piece published in Politiken. It ended up on the front page and was a little bigger than I had expected. It was about a DR program called "Mom, he's a Dane". They followed a group of brown girls, mainly of Middle Eastern origin. The sensationalism was that the girls were in rebellion with their families because they were dating Danish men. That whole discourse just choked me!

Why did you do it? What was your message? Surely this is a real issue for some people?

-Without a doubt. But the title alone separated the girls from their own Danishness. They were just as Danish! In addition, I was in the same situation at the time - with a Danish boyfriend I kept secret. The program flared up a lot of crazy ideas in my head about how my family would react.

You thought it would go wrong?

-Yes! But they didn't disown me when I told them. But because I'm so infiltrated by this split understanding, I was totally out of it. And how sad is it that I haven't had an authentic understanding of what my family is? Instead, I gave them characteristics that I saw and experienced in the Danish media.

There are very few people in the media industry in Denmark with your background. Why do you think that is?

-It's hard to force someone into a creative profession who thinks that the best thing you can do with your life is to become a doctor or a lawyer. The previous generations have come here because it's an investment and they want to give their children the best opportunities. I can understand why it's nerve-wracking if your daughter suddenly says she wants to be an actor or journalist.

So why aren't you in a white coat today? Or reading paragraphs in a law firm?

-I'm perhaps a bit privileged because my father is a writer and applied for creative jobs himself. But I applied to the "Talentholdet" because I was tired of not being able to feel real. It might be a bit like if you were walking around Bollywood as a white person. That's not your reality. So the changes have to come from within. There is a huge responsibility on us. And by us, I mean Middle Eastern descendants in Denmark. They need to take responsibility and they also need to be told that they can make a difference.

Was that part of your motivation too? To take the lead?

-I kept having a problem with something instead of trying to solve it myself. There is a media representation in Denmark. It's there, but it's just often caricatured. Why do we boil the brown lady in The Big Bakeoff down to her spices every time? She can't just be there because she loves brunsviger (a famous Danish pastry)! I think as much as I pray about it, I'm also extremely critical every time I watch it at home. I always analyze the agenda behind it. Is it a token or is there a "premium-perker energy".

Are there any places where you think it's different?

- I watch a lot of British television. I've also watched a lot of American and Turkish - just to get that variety. We don't compare ourselves to England because it's a more diverse society. But they're just in a completely different place with their representation. It's really healing for me to see, seriously. And then also being able to choose on social media.

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Instagram has healed me in some crazy sense. I follow brown, hairy women with stretch marks. It's something about taking control of what you look at.

But isn't that a problem for democratic conversation? That the algorithm mirrors you almost 1:1?

I think I'm quite cynical about it. I will always take my well-being and health into account. It can 100% hurt Danmarks Radio, but it can never match up to people's bedrooms or innermost vulnerabilities. I feel like TikTok has really created a space for whatever space you want.

You've said that Erkan Özden (TV-Avisen host) is a great role model? Why is that?

I like him so much. Or that type of being in the world. He's probably also a fantastic Kurd at home and everything, but he doesn't need it to be his entire history. He talks about everything! Even though I'm trying for that natural diversity - to be a character who isn't just my heritage and talks about those kinds of stories - I still find that I have this critical mindset that over-analyzes it.

What do you mean by that?

I had - and still have a hard time sometimes - letting go of the idea of being chosen because it looks good. I mean, do people think less of my skills because I was born at the right time? This is probably true for all minorities right now. Do I get more publicity as a disabled politician because I'm disabled, or is it because I'm so damn talented? It can just give you a really unhealthy relationship with yourself and your abilities.

But are you comfortable with the conflicting emotions?

At least that's what I tell myself. I try to positively manifest it. Because when you're in it, you can easily feel like a pawn in the game. But I have to recognize that it has to start somewhere. That I've put myself in that position because I'm actively aware that I have to be the piece that changes things. And it's also cool to be the one that little girls have to look at and say "she looks like me, I can choose that path too". But it doesn't change the feeling of being typecast. I'm definitely being put into a narrower category because we haven't seen more types of me yet. I guess I'm a bit of a scarce commodity.

Have you noticed that it makes a difference to anyone on the other side of the screen?

Honestly, I haven't invented the deep dish. I've just shown my face and been authentic. But they come and say "Thanks!", like a Somali girl the other day. For what, I asked? I was just so happy to see you, she replied. It was so weird. Like I was a close cousin. So there's quite a lot of that family feeling in the outgroup that I belong to, whether I want to or not.

What do you think is the biggest misconception when it comes to Danish media and working with media representation?

I had actually hoped to be a little more out in the real world, I think. I think this building (DR Byen, headquarter) is very much a city. It is perhaps what I would call a parallel society. It's ethnically Danish families. You reach out to those you know. Who the hell has their hand out to Albertslund (suburb of Copenhagen)? It disappoints me a little that they don't see the value in how different good stories we could get if we came with something else. Or yes, were more out there.

You are now in an industry that quite obviously and also factually has a skewed representation. Especially of ethnic minorities. What is your best advice if you want to work with better representation?

There is a skewed representation. That's an important recognition. And that's where we need to start. And when you have it on the agenda, invite the brown people in. You don't have to hide the fact that this is what it's all about. We know it. That's also why, but it's also because I'm good.

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The soft landing between superficial representation and reproduction of stereotypes

"The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story".

So said Chimamanda Ngozi in her TedTalk "The danger of a single story" back in 2009. Before she shortly afterwards also gave the recipe for how to avoid ending up there:

"It's impossible to properly engage with a place or a person if we don't also engage with all the stories about that place and that person".

This temporarily clashes a bit with our profession and working methods. If you're a journalist or editor, you might recognize that we tend to do the opposite. We (obviously) use angles and cut out the middle ground because every story can't and shouldn't contain everything.

This is why we also put ourselves in the danger zone when it comes to pushing and reproducing stereotypes through our products. I deliberately choose the word products because it doesn't just apply to news articles or other formats that model directly on the real world. It also applies to fiction.

For example, back in January 2022 (before the war), Ukraine's Minister of Culture complained to Netflix because, according to him, the hit series "Emily in Paris" stereotyped a Ukrainian woman. Among other things, she was afraid of being kicked out of the country and had an unflattering shopping gene.

We will also often find that a lack of (full) understanding of a place or a person causes us to unconsciously become overly interested in banalities. We may even stumble into the "exotic trap" and fall in love with things that for a large group are as obvious as a Dane celebrating Christmas would eat duck.

Stereotypes aren't the only pitfall when it comes to creating misrepresentation. On the opposite end of the spectrum is tokeneism. Or superficial representation in Danish (loosely translated). The term refers to including someone for the sake of appearances or to fulfill a "diversity quota".

This could be in films and series productions where, for example, a person of color plays a supporting role, but their plot line is very narrow and never gets to a deeper level. That person could just as well have been called Peter as Ali.

It's all about finding the soft landing between the two extremes. There are probably more bulls-eyes out there but here are a few of the productions that I think can be highlighted as good practice:

- Ramy (American comedy-drama and Golden Globe winner)
- Bad Bitch (DR series, nominated for two Robert awards in 2022)
- One for the team (DR Ultra series)
- 1000 % me (HBO documentary series about mixed-race in the US)
- 17 (Youth series on NRK)
- Kongen av Gulset (Youth comedy series on NRK)
- Norsk-ish (NRK youth series)

I'm not going to go through all of them. Bad Bitch will get a separate section later where I point out a few constructive solutions to representation. But I recommend checking out the productions.

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They have in common that they all work with multicultural main characters in their productions. NRK (the Norwegian equivalent of DR) in particular has produced a number of successful series in recent years that are both about and based on young people with multicultural backgrounds.

In an interview with Nordvision, NKR's head of P3 explained that it is of course a balancing act when topics such as integration and immigration tend to evoke strong emotions. But according to her, the risk of politicization is reduced if the groundwork is done properly in young people's everyday environments - from their taste in music to their style of clothing and language.

"You can always worry about elements being taken out of context and misused. But I'm not very afraid of prejudice when we show what is real and in a way true. My goal is to show what reality is like and create understanding on that basis," says Ingjerd Østrem Omlands, Head of NRK.

The series is also a good example of how representation can take place on different levels. There is of course the quantitative aspect where the source or editorial composition can be measured. Do we have a fair distribution? Are we giving enough airtime?

In the series mentioned above it's more about internal representation. About whether the media products evoke a sense of recognition in the groups we want to reflect and represent better. In other words, do they feel seen and understood "correctly" in the overall media offering? Is there something for them on the shelves?

But how do we ensure that we don't fall into one or the other trap group? That we don't create stereotypes or fall into tokenism? That we land softly?

Among other things, I had a chat with Peter From Jacobsen about this. He is a journalist at the hyperlocal media, Vores Braband, which among other things covers the vulnerable residential area in Gellerup.

Of course, fiction is one thing, but what about when it comes to writing about real people and their lives?

You can read about it on the next page.

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Q&A with Peter From Jacobsen, local journalist at the online media Vores Brabrand

Peter was a journalist at Aarhus Stiftstidende for a number of years and subsequently taught at DMJX in Aarhus. Today he runs his own local media, Vores Brabrand, which covers Gellerup among other places. The media currently has 450 paying members. I met him at the beginning of the year for a chat about how he views media coverage of the area and his own thoughts.

How has the coverage of the area evolved from your chair?

-It's my goal to be the first with the news from this area. But that's not very difficult these days. No one is actively looking for anything, unfortunately. It's a really sad state of affairs, I think. The vast majority of people are writing about the area from their desks at home.

What's the best way to cover the area journalistically in your opinion?

-It's about showing interest and reaching out - without necessarily always looking for a specific story. Showing that you're just listening. I think that's really important. There are many people who come to Gellerup on a "pass-through" or as parachute journalism. They come in, need something - and then they're gone again. It's very short-term. We need to think long-term and gain trust by just being present and available. It also helps if I then do a beard on a story. There will be a shorter distance and probably a better dialog about things.

Do you think there are any media outlets that succeed in this?

-I think TV2 Østjylland had a great initiative a couple of years ago called Gellerup Live. Unfortunately, it has closed again. But along the way, they brought up some good things, partly because they really took it seriously. And it was really well received. They were present and also brought in some people who were quite exciting and not trained as journalists. They gave them space. I think it was really different. They found some blind spots in the media's treatment, which I think also affected young people in general.

Do you have any advice on how to improve the relationship between the media and minorities?

-I have a principle that I always send my story to them. The whole story. It's absolutely necessary for me. I'm sure a lot of people will say "that's not how journalists do it". But for me, it's a tiny little thing that, on the other hand, creates a lot of trust and transparency. I don't experience any problems with it.

What pitfalls do you experience, for example, when journalists cover Gellerup?

-Non-ethnic Danish young people are often pushed into a role model template when they appear in the media. We talk about this a lot here in the area. We need to move on from that.

Why?

-Well, I've done it a lot myself. But I can just see that it becomes trivial in the long run, and I'm not necessarily doing them a favor. Maybe the individual who is allowed to shine. But I'm also helping to cement a perception of what normality is.

What will be the most important task in terms of covering young people from disadvantaged residential areas in the future?

-My children have attended a school where 80% of the students are from other ethnic backgrounds. And they also notice these things when things are skewed. There are also ethnic Danes who feel part of the multicultural community and just think that we don't get them. Especially around the larger cities. It would be an obvious subject area to deal with multicultural youth culture. It's incredibly interesting and will color our society for the next 30 years. We need to get to grips with it.

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From symptom management to systemic thinking?

There is a danger of ending up in the status quo - or even in the negative - if we only treat symptoms and don't look at what's wrong with the patient.

This is roughly the idea behind the concept of systemic thinking, which I was introduced to in the master's course "Entrepreneurship for social change" at BSS in Aarhus this spring.

The concept is perhaps even best illustrated through a story that, the first time I heard it, sounded too crazy to be true.

Imagine you're standing there looking up at the sky. Suddenly, 14,000 cats descend from the sky with parachutes. This exact scenario played out in 1960 when Britain's Royal Air Force "deployed" felines in remote areas of Borneo. But yeah, why?

In the 1950s, the island was hit hard by malaria, which was claiming many lives. To eradicate the disease, the WHO began spreading large quantities of the poison DDT - to kill the mosquitoes. It worked, even quite effectively - until the system started to creak.

The large amounts of DDT also killed a particular wasp. It used to take care of the larvae that were eating away at the rooftops. Without the wasps, more and more houses were being destroyed from the inside and falling apart. But that wasn't the only thing.

The geckos on the island, which mainly fed on mosquitoes, were also ingesting DDT. The geckos were a favorite meal among cats, but they couldn't tolerate the substance and scratched off in droves. This led to the rats on the island having more or less free rein and suddenly plague spread across the island.

In fact, more people died from the plague than when malaria was the problem. And so we're back to "Operation Cat Drop", which was the solution to the rat problem. What started out as a "simple" and straightforward solution suddenly had a lot of unintended effects.

In the words of American author Peter Senge: *"The easy way out usually leads back in again".* Especially when it comes to so-called wicked problems. Problems that are often difficult to define and understand. Just as they will often contain fierce conflicts of interest - both in terms of values and economics.

Climate change, inequality and migration undoubtedly fall into this category. But media representation can also be described and labeled as a wicked problem that requires a different approach than classic reductionism. That be: If we just increase A, we'll get more of B.

After 10 months on the subject, I find it hard to believe that it can be solved solely by, for example, counting sources. Or asking journalists to pay more attention to who they call. A larger system needs to be analyzed and probably also tweaked in several places.

For example, the education system is one of the areas that several people have mentioned in connection with my project. There are simply very few people with minority backgrounds who apply to the classic journalism programs in Denmark.

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It has often been referred to as "the missing link" when media bosses have explained or questioned why their newsrooms in media houses are not more diverse than they are.

However, the numbers also speak for themselves. For the past ten years, the proportion of students with other ethnic backgrounds has been less than one percent at DMJX – the J-school in Aarhus. Last year, only 1 out of 225 students were not ethnic Danes. They recognize the same patterns at SDU and RUC.

Therefore there is now a major project and work underway across journalism education in Denmark, which is actively looking at how the composition of journalism education can become more diverse.

Peter From Jacobsen had the same thoughts.

"The only solution for me is that you get more journalists from different cultures, so that we become more responsive as media houses and editorial offices. There's almost no other way to solve it," he says.

However, there is a huge elephant in the room, which of course also needs to be debated. This is where the value discussion comes in. Because it can undoubtedly also lead to positive discrimination or affirmative action for those groups that are underrepresented. It might even explain why it's a difficult balancing act when media outlets more or less covertly try to create representation initiatives.

Should we be better at saying out loud that, yes, we are casting and looking to service particular groups because we believe it is important for our democracy that they have a stronger voice?

Should journalism programs be more vocal about the need to attract young people from different ethnic backgrounds?

Could they actively choose to recruit a certain proportion on special schemes where they receive intensive training in the qualities that the entrance exam usually tests for?

Is it up to the media to seek out and recruit minorities from, for example, disadvantaged neighborhoods?

Is this a task for some of Denmark's major foundations? To step in and provide financial help and, for example, pay for an internship if the media promise to give them a kind of apprenticeship? A model that they have used in the US, where the challenge is that the majority of journalists in their established newsroom come from the same top universities.

I admit, that was a lot of big, open questions. And I admit again; it's hard to point to a single solution.

The answer probably lies somewhere in between, but requires a critical look at the existing media system. Because one thing is for sure. If we do business as usual, we're likely to end up with the same results.

The question is of course whether there is an answer to be found. Because it is a topic that can very quickly move out of the value-political tangents. Aydin Soei made no secret of this when I interviewed him in the spring.

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Q&A with Aydin Soei, author, sociologist and journalist

Aydin Soei holds a master's degree in sociology from the University of Southern Denmark, specializing in disadvantaged youth. In recent years, he has published several books on ethnic minorities and young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods. He is also co-founder of the NGO "Ansvarlig Presse".

What is the biggest challenge around representation right now?

-The problem today is that all managers are of course saying yes to doing better in terms of representation. But diversity strategies are a bit like the whipped cream on the cake. It's something that's a bit beside the core task. They should fundamentally change it to become an integral part of the nature of journalism. They need to make sure that as many people as possible are represented in the public conversation. That signal needs to go further down the system.

Why is this important?

-When it comes to ethnic minorities, most Danes don't have any personal contact. So when they form an impression, it is dependent on the media's portrayal of the group. This also means that the media's portrayal of ethnic minorities can have a major impact on whether you support one or another type of policy that concerns ethnic minorities.

Do you think the media is too critical?

-No, you do ethnic minorities a huge disservice if you think that the media should not cover the problems with integration in Denmark. But that's not the biggest problem either. The challenge is rather that the group is excluded from stories where they are included as "ordinary" cases - i.e. recognizable citizens. For example, when it comes to the local kindergarten, rising food prices or dental bills.

Why do you think that non-Western descendants and immigrants are underrepresented in these types of stories?

-I don't believe that journalists have bad intentions when it comes to this group. But the identification criterion in journalism is perhaps just a bit of an adversary. We are taught that we should find the sources where there is the most identification, i.e. where as many people as possible can recognize themselves. If it's a story about rising electricity prices, we're likely to find a family with a father and mother and two children living in a villa. Because that's the most recognizable - especially if you're a white journalist.

What do you think the consequences of a lack of representation could be?

-Young people will probably subscribe less to paid media in the future. It's probably a general development. But when it comes to ethnic minorities, I think we will see a group that uses established media even less because they don't recognize themselves. There will be more segregated media realities. Of course, this atomization provides space and opportunities for niche media, but Denmark is probably too small a country.

What do you have in mind?

The US is a large and multi-ethnic country. There is a greater economy for underrepresented groups - for example, blacks and Latinos - who subscribe to niche media that speaks specifically to ethnic minorities. But I doubt that this is a viable and sustainable solution in Denmark. There have been a few examples, but they have been shut down again. It is the established media in Denmark that must be involved. Especially those that are state-subsidized. There must be an expectation that they contribute to the democratic conversation.

At the BBC, the director general has said that middle managers will not be promoted if they don't deliver on diversity requirements. Is this a solution?

-I don't necessarily believe that sanctions are the first step. The media industry is extremely masculine and you are judged on whether your stories are quoted in other media or whether you get a front page. It almost doesn't matter

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that it contains 14 usual suspects (people who are often in the media) and four white male scientists. There is a managerial task in creating a culture of recognition where you are also measured and weighed on whether you ensure that the population as a whole is involved. That's where I would probably start.

What is your best advice for journalists or media managers who want to work with representation?

For the journalists: Stop every once in a while, take a look at who you are calling. For managers, give journalists time to build a source network that is not as skewed as it is today.

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Constructive solution 1): Dialogue-based representation - create authenticity with the audience

It's always nerve-wracking to identify solutions to a wicked problem. However, I believe there are methods and approaches that can be used constructively to improve representation.

The first one here has already proven to have some success, but perhaps lacked a name.

Authenticity is a keyword if you want to stand out in a fragmented media reality, where more content is now produced than Danish Crown sausages. If it's going to feel real, it has to be real.

That's why *dialog-based representation* is an opportunity for a constructive working tool.

It was use when DR created the series "Bad Bitch" which was later nominated for two Robert awards in 2022. The idea first germinated with the tv-journalist Sie Katrine Christesen who works in DR's youth department.

She was also behind the series "Mom, he's a Dane" - the one that Helin Erdem subsequently criticized. And the result of the criticism was the reason why she wanted to make a new series, she told in an interview:

"Even though we were happy with the series, I was left with the feeling that I had gone into the project with a desire to make something that was prejudice-breaking, but which ended up confirming some of the prejudices that exist about women with other ethnic backgrounds".

The process of creating the new series was quite atypical. Instead of starting to write right away, the team invited 12 young and creative people from various minority backgrounds to an idea development and workshop at DR.

According to the team, it gave them a lot of knowledge and ideas that they would never have come up with on their own. Because it came from people for whom being a minority was lived experience - not just habitual thinking or assumptions.

In fact, the team was convinced that they should be allowed to take the idea forward themselves. So they asked for a pitch for a series from all the workshop participants. This led to Diêm Camille delivering the sketches that later became 'Bad Bitch', in which she herself played the lead role.

The series is different, real and original in many ways. You don't have to watch many minutes to realize that. And despite having a smaller budget than the other nominees, the series competed in two categories for the Robert Award.

In my eyes, this is an exciting and constructive way of working with representation. That the represented communities are invited in from the very beginning to provide input. It's a working tool that could also work well in the development of factual programs.

If you are more curious about the Bad Bitch process, you can read about it in the link here[1].

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[1] https://www.dr.dk/om-dr/nyheder/fra-workshop-til-bad-bitch-drs-mangfoldighedspulje-foerte-til-skabelsen-af-tv-serie

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Constructive solution 2): Ensure spaces for debate and special formats that build bridges

If you're looking for a harsh tone and polarization, you don't have to look at many social media comment threads before you can shout bingo. It's even been documented that it directly affects young people's desire to express themselves online.

This also applies when we talk about ethnic minorities and therefore also has a direct effect on representation. Because the sources won't bother all the "hassle" that comes along when they choose to speak out on their own or appear in the media.

But how can we as media help to reverse this trend?

In the UK, the media outlet Black Ballad has experimented with a paid membership where black people were given access to safe digital debate rooms on the medium 'Slack'. Here they can debate stories without being derailed or attacked by internet trolls. There's room to test, grow and break your views and opinions without fear of the comment section.

The downside, of course, is that it immediately cuts off and dampens democratic conversation across demographic groups. So there is also an increased risk of echo chambers. But I still think the idea of safespaces is exciting. Especially among minorities who often experience aggressive or hateful comments.

The spaces should of course still be used, challenged and treated journalistically. That knowledge and opinions are also extracted to be part of a larger context. This could be in major Danish newspapers or public service media, for example.

I also came up with an idea for a new program during my project. "Multijuice" will be a classic dilemma program where young people from different backgrounds - and religions - sit together in a panel to twist and turn classic youth dilemmas.

The common denominator is youth life and the central focus of the program. Their different backgrounds only serve as a "backpack of experience" that may or may not color their position on the dilemma. So if you've read this far and would like to join, just send us an email!

Constructive solution 3): Diversity label or monitoring representation with AI-tools

In most newsrooms - especially in the newspaper industry - you can find monitoring tools that can measure, for example, clicks or reading time in real time. Elsewhere, you can find screens that keep an eye on what's trending on social media or what's being Googled the most.

I predict that in the near future, with the help of AI, a tool will be developed that can scan all articles and, based on this, provide the day's "representation figures" in real time. Both by gender and ethnicity - even broken down by cases, parties and experts.

First and foremost, it will save journalists time who would otherwise have to do it manually - as they are asked to do on tv2.dk, for example. In addition, you will always get a concrete number from day to day, which could indicate how the day has gone in the representation area.

All to create a greater awareness for journalists and editors, so that we can better counteract our own blind spots in relation to representation.

Did we talk to ethnic minorities at all? Were there too many female cases? Were we right in terms of male experts?

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In addition, if the media wanted to signal extreme transparency, they posted their own barometer so that everyone could follow their development from day to day

Conclusion: I've had my nose buried in the representation issue for 10 months now. There is no quick-fix that can get the media on the "right" side overnight. Or in a matter of weeks or months for that matter. Especially not among minority groups.

There's a big hill to climb - especially when it comes to tokeism and the media trying to please the target group because they've "screwed up". We need to break through that mentality first. Then we need to make the right decisions.

There are two core tasks that the media world faces when it comes to representation. First and foremost, there is the source composition, which needs to better reflect the actual demographics of the population. This applies both in our media products and especially in the media industry, where there are currently very few people with a non-Danish ethnic background.

According to experts in the field, it needs to come from the top down. It is possible to get it bubbling as grassroots initiatives from the bottom up, but it is - as in the BBC example - with a top-down direction that the awareness of blind spots reaches a wider audience.

In addition, there is also work to ensure representation and recognizability in the programs, formats, stories, etc. that we push out to our users. On a deeper level. Where your own everyday life or world is taken under loving but also critical scrutiny.

As media, we can perhaps take a look at the supermarket chain Bilka, which in connection with Eid this year made room on a few shelves for special decorations for the Muslim holiday. A customer on Amager said afterwards that "... you feel that you are part of the community."

There was something that spoke to a special group and made them feel included. It's that feeling that needs to be translated into products. So we can invite into the big shared platforms where the important conversations about the whole

I hope that with my work, I have clarified what is at stake. Both in the here and now, but also with the spotlight on the future.

I also hope that the many inputs, reflections and facts can be relevant pieces for the managers, editors and journalists who, in the future, have an important task in strengthening and rebuilding trust in media and news.

Especially among the growing minority groups in Denmark.

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