

Gender and Journalism FREE

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Summary

Understanding the role of gender in the newsroom involves tracing a shift from an initial consensus that women's only journalistic role was to write with "a woman's touch" about women, for women readers, to a claim that women should be allowed to produce the same "unmarked" news as men. The claim became that women's forms—women's sections or other materials intended for women audiences—represented professional ghettos, and that women were needed to produce better, more ethical journalism. That is, within the newsroom, gender was first dichotomized, rendering the interests of women and men as opposites, and then it claimed to be irrelevant. Feminist scholars point out that, over time, men have consistently tried to protect their status, jobs, and salaries, and have failed to acknowledge how journalism was set up as a male enclave with "macho" values and a culture that disadvantaged women, especially mothers, with its tradition of long and irregular hours and lack of childcare.

Research on gender and journalism can be divided into two categories: (a) gender "at work" in newsrooms (including opportunities or inequities in jobs, promotions, and salaries, as well as sexism), and (b) representations of women. Scholars often assume that the first issue over-determines the second. On both issues, research shows improvement, but also continuing problems. Now women journalists appear to be well established; the news includes issues associated with women's quotidian concerns, and it takes women seriously. Yet a variety of gender divides continue to characterize journalism. Researchers find gendered patterns in coverage, especially in politics and sports. Women television journalists are routinely sexualized, and their high visibility in television broadcasting—through explicit scrutiny of their bodies, hairstyles, clothing, and voices—is countered by their invisibility in management. Gendered double standards and a glass ceiling continue to stymie the promotion of women to key decision-making and governance positions in print and broadcast news organizations. Moreover, women are far from enjoying equity in the online context.

Women continue to be concentrated in low-status media outlets and beats: they dominate community, small-town, and regional news organizations, and they produce "soft news," human-interest stories and features. Men still dominate, although they do not monopolize, most of the high status areas of news production, particularly politics and business, as well as the lucrative and popular area of sports, a highly gendered and sexist domain. The most overtly gendered arena is war correspondence. Women who report on war and conflict are judged by very different standards than men. In particular, mothers are condemned when they go off to dangerous conflict areas, although fathers who cover war continue to be largely immune from public criticism. Women war reporters run a high risk of sexual violence and harassment, although women who have been sexually attacked rarely tell their supervisors—probably for fear of being pulled off an assignment.

Countless platforms are now available to citizens to disseminate their views as citizen journalists, including blogs and Twitter; these provide opportunities for challenging gender roles and democratizing relations between men and women. On the other hand, social media threaten the business model of professional journalism; the resulting trend to part-time, freelance, and even unpaid work creates a precarious and potentially highly feminized labor force.

Keywords: gender difference, women journalists, women's pages, glass ceiling, critical mass, sexism, precarity, deskilling, feminism

Subjects: Critical/Cultural Studies, Gender (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies), Journalism Studies, Mass Communication

Women journalists have been controversial since at least the 1880s, when, to support themselves and their families, but unenthusiastic about the jobs usually seen as appropriate for women, such as teaching or nursing, women in the United Kingdom and the United States began applying for newsroom jobs in great numbers.¹ Whether it was because they believed that women “naturally” lacked the “nose for news” or, more likely, men were concerned with preserving their hold on high status work, men editors and reporters expressed increasing alarm at women's presence; men insisted that reporting would defeminize and masculinize women. When women continued to demand and get newsroom jobs, they were often relegated to the much maligned women's angle and complained that men editors, colleagues, and sources refused to take them seriously.

The character of gender as socially constructed, not biological, is precisely what makes the gendered aspects of journalism important: the various media define and dramatize what people can do and be in society. Feminist activist and founding editor of *Ms.* magazine, Gloria Steinem said: “It's hard to think of anything except air, food, and water, that is more important than the media ... It creates for us the idea of normal, whether or not the normal is accurate ... If we can't see it, we can't be it” (Zernike, 2014, p. A20). Hypothetically, this applies to women and men. Nevertheless, gender debates have focused primarily on women. In part, this is because the gender roles constructed and prescribed for women have remained narrow and limiting even as they have evolved. In part, this illustrates the continuing dichotomization of gender: if maleness represents the benchmark, women are the “Other.”

The question becomes whether women reporters should try to act like men, or whether women should insist on doing journalism differently. Such formulations of the issues, however, confuse gender with sex differences and ignore how gender roles in journalism have changed over time. After some historical context, as well as historiography, this article tackles several questions about journalism's production or professional side, especially who gets to succeed in which kinds of journalism jobs, the extent to which gender is associated with differences in newsroom assignments and subjects, and different approaches to the jobs. The article also looks at the association of gender with differences in the treatment of women and men as news subjects and sources as well as audiences. The particular focus is on gender in the context of journalism in the United States with some attention to the United Kingdom, but parallel developments appear in other nations.

History of Women Journalists

In the United States, women began participating in journalism during the colonial period, in the mid-18th century, typically through husbands, brothers, or fathers who were publishers and printers. By the end of the 19th century, educated, middle-class women saw journalism as a

meaningful vocation. It was more glamorous than teaching and nursing, the paid domains typically open to women. Even more women managed to get journalism jobs when publishers needed to attract women for their advertisers, especially department stores and consumer products, including national brands. The popularity of women's magazines proved that women were desirable consumers.

Furthermore, developing material for women required hiring women to write columns, features, and pages with a "woman's touch." In the 18th, 19th and first half of the 20th century, most women's magazines in the United States and Europe were initially published and/or edited by men. But men reporters had little interest in covering domestic life, fashion, beauty, household tips, or society news; men had little interest in writing for women. At a time when the notion of separate spheres still held sway, important news ("real news") had to do with men's interests and experiences. Likewise, in early 20th century radio, women hosted highly popular service programs for women; otherwise, only male voices were considered as authoritative, and women's voices were assumed to be irritating to listeners. Thus, women entered a highly gendered public sphere, defined on men's terms, and largely confined to women writing for women about women. In the 1950s and 1960s, some women's page editors and later some women's magazines tried to expand the political and social scope of these sections; but these efforts were limited and inconsistent.

Some women, as their autobiographies emphasized, schemed to avoid becoming "sob sisters" or "agony aunts." A very few even managed to earn newsmen's highest compliment, that their reporting was "just like men's." Indeed, during both the first and second world wars, with men conscripted into the war effort, women did all kinds of "serious" news work. But this fact did not protect them from being forced out of the most visible and prestigious responsibilities once the war was over.

U.S. universities that launched journalism programs in the early 20th century did not anticipate that women would apply, so they did not exclude them. U.K. journalists trained on-the-job, within an apprenticeship system, until as late as the 1980s; the main challenge for U.K. women, therefore, was being recruited as an apprentice. Wherever it was taught, journalism textbooks and teaching materials addressed men as the norm, and relegated women's writing to a subcategory; even the materials written by women generally discouraged women from regarding journalism as a serious career (Steiner, 1992). Contemporary journalism curricula and textbooks tend to ignore gender issues, that is, naturalizing professional norms and standards invented by men and that sometimes advantage men.

Through trade unions, guilds, and especially their own regional or organization-specific press associations, women challenged gender discrimination and sexism in recruitment, assignment, procedures, and salary decisions. More importantly, inspired and emboldened by the women's movement, women journalists used regulatory and legal channels to challenge exclusionary hiring and promotion practices; women successfully filed class action suits against several major news magazines and newspapers. The numbers of women working in some form of journalism, including television, started to rise dramatically in the 1970s, when broadcasting executives began to understand the benefits to ratings of having a woman co-anchor (she had to be blonde, white, and attractive). In 2007, a visibly re-modeled Katie Couric became the first woman to

anchor, solo, a U.S. network evening newscast. Nonetheless, reflecting the premium on women's physical attractiveness, around the world, women make up nearly half of television reporters 19–34 years old and 28% of reporters 35–49 years old, but almost none of those 65 years and older (GMMP, 2015).²

Women's Alternative Media

The mid-19th century periodicals by young U.S. textile workers represented the first consistent and concerted efforts by women to produce their own news and thereby redefine themselves. In the mid-19th through early 20th centuries, suffrage periodicals were often a labor of love by a few people or even a single woman; these not only advocated women's right to enfranchisement but also invented and dramatized new versions of women, who had new ways of dressing, of naming themselves, and of thinking about marriage and motherhood, health, law, politics, and labor. Suffrage editors had ideas about what kinds of advertising were appropriate and how to make subscriptions accessible to women. Terms such as "feminism" and "gender" were not available. Nonetheless, these editors facilitated the emergence of activist communities and convinced women that they could bring about social change and create a new public political culture for women (Steiner, 1993; Tusan, 2005).

Editors of women's liberation periodicals of the 1960s and 1970s were even more imaginative in their commitments to accommodating family responsibilities of volunteers, figuring out how to reach (and convert) audiences, and teaching women a range of skills. They often experimented with producing journalism in innovative ways consistent with feminist theory, such as flattening or eliminating hierarchy, even if this meant amateurish content and production values, lack of long-range business strategies, inefficiency, and burnout. They had no interest in profit or in conventional journalistic principles.

The alternative periodicals of the 1970s and 1980s contested the mainstream news media images of a highly aspirational, self-assertive woman who "can have it all," with "all" including a perfect husband, successful children, high-paid career, beautiful home, and stylish clothes. Women's alternative news media addressed women as citizens rather than as consumers, offered robust critiques of the ideological underpinnings of conventional gender roles, and, as one slogan famously noted, made "the personal political." At least in the United States, feminist periodicals proliferated that were for, about, and produced by different niches, such as ecofeminists, prostitutes, celibates, lesbians, Marxists, and a host of other interests and professions. The suffrage movement and the so-called second wave women's liberation movement, as well as most of the news outlets that sustained them, typically featured the interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual, educated Western women. More recently, experiments in alternative philosophies and new versions of womanhood and gender relations have shifted to radio, television, cable, and especially the Internet.

What the Numbers Say

In 2014, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) found that women constituted 37.2% of all U.S. newsroom employees; the numbers of Hispanics, Native American, multi-racial, and blacks were still very small, but most ethnic women (except black women) have gained ground in recent years, compared to men of the same race (ASNE, 2014).

The Women's Media Center (WMC), which activists Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem founded with the explicit goal of making women visible and powerful in media, compiles an annual report on the status of women in U.S. media. On the basis of data collected in 2014 from the ten most widely circulated newspapers, four national evening news broadcasts, the four most-viewed Internet news sites, and two wire services, the WMC concluded that the media remain sites of inequality, "dominated by male voices and male perspectives" (WMC, 2015). That analysis found that men reported 65% of all U. S. political news and were more likely to write or report stories about criminal justice, science, and technology. Women produced 10% of sports news, an almost 7-point drop from 2013. Meanwhile, women produced 54.6% of education coverage, 49.6% of religion news, 49.6% of lifestyle stories, and 49.3% of health coverage (these percentages were largely unchanged from 2013). This suggests in part the gendered aspect of the "hard" and "soft" divide, but more importantly how—since sports could easily be considered soft news while health and medicine topics have major consequences—the gendered categories represent obdurate but constructed tautological categories. The difference is merely what has long been *associated* with women versus men.

According to that WMC report, in 2014 women had 41% of all television jobs (39% in the top 50 markets; 44% in the smallest markets); they were 31% of TV news directors, a record high (WMC, 2015).³ Minorities were 22.4% of all TV news workers and 7% of all general managers. In radio news, women were 45.5% of the workforce, compared to 34% in 2013; 23% of all news directors; and 18% of all general managers. The gender gap in broadcast news was not consistent across race, however: among whites and Latinos, men outnumbered women. Among Asian Americans, women continued to significantly outnumber men; while among blacks women slightly (and for the first time) outnumbered men.

Women were 26% of all guests on major talk shows sampled in 2014 on CNN, Fox, and MSNBC; non-white women were "strikingly underrepresented." Whether the host was a woman or man did not seem to be the determinant: Bill O'Reilly had the highest percentage (36%), while one quarter of Rachel Maddow's guests were women (Hart, 2014). Of analysts and journalists invited to appear on Sunday political talk shows, 61% were white men; 20% were white women; 14% were non-white men; and 5% were non-white women (Media Matters, 2015). Editorial boards of the ten largest newspapers are dominated by men, usually white men. Notably, women columnists wrote about the same topics as men and tended to cite more men than women (Harp, Bachmann, & Loke, 2014).

Every five years the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) collects and analyzes data on news coverage of women and men from around the world on a single day. The GMMP's report for 2015, when 114 countries participated, produced findings similar to the WMC and to its own 2010

report. Summarizing across all countries, women reported 37% of stories in newspapers, television, and radio newscasts. Women were 35% of all print journalists. Women presented 41% of radio and 57% of television newscasts, slightly below what it was in 1995. In terms of regional differences, the percentage of women presenters/anchors was highest in Asia (58%) and the Middle East (57%); women presenters made the greatest gains in Latin America, making a significant climb from 29% in 2000 to 44% in 2015.

The Impact of Women and Empirical Evidence of Gender Differences

In a very early feminist analysis of how journalism is gendered, Catherine Covert (1981) astutely observed that journalism history celebrated independence and individual autonomy, thereby ignoring the influences of family and friendship networks. News itself was written in terms of conflict, controversy, and competition, reflecting, Covert suggested, men's interest in winning. Covert contrasted this masculine language to women's values: concord, harmony, affiliation, and community. Since then, feminist scholars have continued to treat gender as inherently dichotomous and eternally significant, although not always with Covert's nuance. As a result of static claims about effects, the argument for hiring and promoting women is based not on equity or the inherent value of diversity, but the claim that women's unique values, interests, and priorities would transform journalism. The idea was that the shift in gender perspective would produce changes in the structure, definition, and constitution of news.

Feminist theorizing suggests that ways of thinking and knowing are highly influenced by social identity, which is affected in turn by experiences, socialization, and social history, all of which are gendered. Some scholars conclude from this that gender affects how stories are researched, sourced, framed, and written, and that women are socialized differently into the newsroom. In terms of broad values, the supposition has been that women journalists, with their distinctive *womanview*, are, compared to men, more interested in their audiences, more concerned about context, and skeptical of "male" strategies such as objectivity (Van Zoonen, 1998). The only hitch was reaching critical mass, a physics term referring to the point at which a chain reaction may begin. Rosabeth Moss Kanter pioneered efforts to quantify the point at which women would no longer be isolated tokens in organizations and could feel comfortable in forming alliances, and therefore, in acting collectively on behalf of their shared interests to mitigate sexism and discrimination (Kanter, 1977).⁴

In fact, the data are mixed on the extent or ways that gender influences the processes of searching out, reporting, and writing stories. According to the GMMP, women write approximately the same percentages of science and health stories as men, but 39% of economic stories. Women report 30% of political news in Africa, Europe (30%), the Middle East (27%), and North America (28%); worldwide, women also write considerably less on crime. Summarizing transnational data, the GMMP found that, in stories reported by women, 29% of news subjects are women compared to 26% by male reporters. Some commentators insisted that the increased presence of women reporters had an important, positive impact, transforming the newsroom culture and extending definitions of news, bringing attention to women's problems, social issues, and subjects relevant to women, such as rape laws and the women's movement itself (Armstrong,

2004; Correa & Harp, 2011; Mills, 1997). Women reporters are said to use more women, feminist organizations, and ordinary people as sources and to produce more confessional narratives, including by personalizing stories and featuring their own feelings.

Disputing this, others say that the increased emphases on human interest news and the personalization of issues reflect a broadening of news that is independent of women's presence in newsrooms, and that the increased use of women as sources merely reflects the drive to attract women audiences. Some research finds that women and men broadcast correspondents continue to use men sources more often than women sources, and that women draw upon a greater variety of female and ethnic sources, especially in positive stories; but otherwise they source and frame stories much like their male counterparts (Meeks, 2013). Some of the differences seem to reflect research method: small in-depth interviews, surveys, and content analyses produce different results (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2005). Data from national surveys in the United Kingdom, the United States, and many other countries showed substantial disagreement among professionals regarding journalism's normative and actual functions, but not meaningful gender differences (Henningham & Delano, 1998). Nor is the gender gap greater in societies where gender roles tend to be more differentiated, compared to countries where women enjoy less empowerment. Men and women conceive the role of news and evaluated the ethics of reporting methods in similar ways. Contradicting the predictions about the impact of attaining critical mass, this also remains true at newsrooms dominated by women. That is, the notion of critical mass has not been borne out.

War and conflict are the domains in which the strongest claims about gender differences in reporting are made: when covering war, women are said to feature collateral damage, sexual violence as a tactic, and the wider consequences and human impact of conflict, while men emphasize military strategy (Elwood-Akers, 1988). But others, especially war reporters themselves, insist that women do not write differently, although editors may make assignments on the basis of gender. Women journalists have often described being assigned to provide the "women's angle" on a particular conflict; they reluctantly accepted such assignments because that was their only chance to get to a war, or sometimes because they wanted to be at the top of the news hour or on the front page (Bartimus et al., 2002). In direct contrast to the usual Western stereotypes, one study found that Arab women prefer a detached unemotional style when reporting on pain and suffering, while Arab men engage emotionally with this kind of news (Mellor, 2012).

Women activists and scholars are the most likely to find that gender matters, or that it should matter more. According to informal surveys by an advocacy organization, women journalists believe they offer a different, more human perspective, to the news, although some women assert that "news is news" and ethics are ethics. Similarly, many members of another women's advocacy group said that they tend to sympathize with women and emphasize personal and emotional dimensions. But because many journalists agree that women managers and editors are even more macho than men, scholars have accused the respondents of being blind to gender issues, having normalized male-identified concerns of a male profession (Ross, 2001).

The form that arguably has the most intentional impact on gender identity is women's and men's magazines. As it turns out, the editors of both men's and women's magazines define themselves as professionals and define professional success in economic terms: both sets use focus groups and life-style research to determine how to attract readers in the interests of advertisers (Ferguson, 1983). Nevertheless, in the United States and the United Kingdom, women acted to dismantle women's pages, which, among other things, had the immediate effect of eliminating the single editorial position reserved for women. Ironically, in the 1980s, to please advertisers, some U.S. papers reintroduced women's pages. This largely failed experiment likewise reveals how marketing concerns drive the sex-binary packaging of news and the construction of women (readers and reporters) as interested in lifestyle issues and domesticity.

In 1978, the sociologist Gaye Tuchman described the trivialization and even erasure of women as both subjects and sources of news stories. Tuchman argued that the symbolic annihilation of women served the economic interests of advertisers and commercial media and exposed women's real lack of power (Tuchman, Daniels, & Benet, 1978). Again, news has changed over the decades, and women in positions of power are quoted. On the other hand, evidence is available showing that journalists, regardless of gender, tend to marginalize or trivialize women, especially as athletes and political candidates. Compared to men running for office, women candidates get less coverage; more negative coverage (more criticism that they lack the required personality, experience, and knowledge); more skepticism of their likely influence; more discussion of their physical appearance, lifestyle, and family; and less discussion of their positions on major issues except on those topics conventionally associated with women, such as abortion, childcare, education, and the environment (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Devitt, 2002; Falk, 2008; Wasburn & Wasburn). These patterns are said to have important consequences: they discourage citizens from voting for women or contributing to their campaigns, and they discourage women from running for public office.

Newsrooms continue to be dominated by men, who at best rarely recognize the newsroom's gendered or macho character (North, 2009). And gender segregation is uneven across domains: for no apparent reason, only 15 of the 185 members of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists are women (Sorensen, 2011). But all journalists remain subject to the daily routines and structures of news organizations, as well as extra-organizational factors (time constraints, the convention of getting information from the most authoritative sources, sources lined up by bookers, the impact of stereotypes on story assignments). One can reasonably argue that the macro structures and micro routines of newsrooms retain the residue of their male-ordered history. Commercial imperatives have simultaneously driven changes in news values and practices. Meanwhile, masculinity and femininity have changed. Women form no unitary or universal bloc. Many women in journalism are unsympathetic to feminism as a movement, are indifferent to historical changes accomplished by feminists, and uninterested in contesting traditional masculine constraints.

In sum, women recognize that many men who are their colleagues are sexist, but they largely adopt journalism's structures and conventions as part of the profession and choose to embrace its reward system. What this underscores is how gender is not a static role or dichotomous set of differences. Rather, gender is dynamically performed in conjunction with intersecting aspects of social identity and complex cultural and social histories.

Management

Feminist scholars now assert that representing women's distinctive perspective and undoing the maleness of news requires women in top management, since change comes only from the very top; they invoke the image of the glass ceiling, referring to invisible but impenetrable barriers, artificially and wrongly preventing women from moving into decision-making positions to explain women's inability to break into media management. The willingness of many news organizations to hire women reporters, however, is not accompanied by an equal willingness to promote women as editors and publishers. Except for women's magazines, where women could achieve high levels of responsibility (at least if, according to feminist critics, they adopted and promoted sexist stereotypes), news organizations have resisted women as top executives.

The number of women in all types of U.S. newspaper management (mainly low and mid-level) grew slowly but steadily during the 1950s and 1960s, primarily because of the doubling of managerial newsroom positions, reaching about 25% in the 1970s. According to 2013 ASNE data, 63% of newspapers had at least one woman among their top three editors; and 15% of news organizations had at least one person of color among their top three editors in 2013; women were 35.4% of newsroom supervisors (ASNE, 2014). A 2011 study by the International Women's Media Foundation found glass ceilings for women in 20 of 59 nations. Altogether women held 27% of all the top management jobs of news organizations; unsurprisingly, regions varied: Eastern Europe (43%); Nordic Europe (37%); Asia and Oceania region (13%).⁵

The suggestion that women and men execute leadership differently parallels dichotomized notions of gender applied to reporters: feminine management style is said to be more interpersonal, democratic, constructive, and collaborative; masculine management is more autocratic, competitive, and defensive. But women editors do not make significantly different decisions. Women and men television news directors and newspaper editors manage in similar ways, and make similar decisions about topics, although one study found that women-led newspapers tended to focus on positive stories and to treat reporters with gender equity more often than newspapers headed by men. Women executives are not more likely to hire or promote other women to management positions. Notably, during the years 1999–2003, the *Sarasota [Florida] Herald Tribune* had women as its publisher, executive editor, managing editor, and two assistant managing editors, it carried the same content as other papers, with the same percentage of women sources (Everbach, 2006). But employees perceived the paper's all-women management team as offering an atmosphere of openness and transparent decision-making.

One explanation is that women remain highly vulnerable to news organizations' fears of feminization and lack the strength in numbers needed to challenge a male-dominated culture. Possibly, feeling compelled to prove their abilities within a traditionally male-dominated

business, women editors and news directors encourage their reporters to gather information from traditional sources, while men may want to prove that they are not sexist and therefore attempt to use more women as sources. Notably, for all the excitement when, for the first time, *The New York Times* chose a (white) woman as executive editor in 2011, considerable debate ensued in 2014, when she was replaced by an (African American) man. Some said Jill Abramson was fired because she complained that her pay and pension benefits were less than the man she replaced. But insiders and outsiders criticized her decisions and especially her management style, calling her divisive and pushy. In any case, all these explanations arguably had a gendered aspect.

The Greatest Challenges

As journalism's highest status, most dangerous and most competitive beat, war reporting is widely regarded as a male domain. Nonetheless, a few women have always angled for such assignments, and increasingly, they are getting them. No longer can the U.S. and U.K. military and news organizations prevent women from getting war assignments, as they did during the First and Second World Wars and in Korea, with the excuse that the front lacked toilets for women. Vietnam was the first war that women (the large majority from the United States) covered in significant numbers, albeit often as freelancers. Almost 50% of the U.S. press corps in Iraq are women.

Different explanations are available for the recent increases in the number of women war reporters. It is at least partly economic. Especially after 9/11, many news organizations suddenly needed journalists in conflict zones because they had cut back on foreign bureaus, but some men were unenthusiastic about undertaking risks—and increasingly war reporters are targeted for attacks—for the sake of career advancement. Savvy television executives came to understand that pretty faces leaven the sight of body bags and that audiences may even enjoy seeing women doing what was the epitome of maleness (Cohen, 2001). Meanwhile, editors may be increasingly willing to let women exploit their sexuality, although this may provoke resentment among rivals. Historically, many women covering wars have described exploiting their feminine advantages: their visibility meant they were noticed at press conferences, and their questions were answered first; soldiers eager for female contact helped them in a variety of important ways. Recently, women journalists working in Arab countries have said they can get through check-points more easily than men can; women's very subordinate status helps them get away with subterfuges (Playdon, 2002).

The issue, according to public critics and even reporters themselves, now turns on violence, including sexual violence, to women in war zones. Women war reporters face a high risk of sexual harassment and rape. A survey of 29 women reporters found that more than half reported sexual harassment while on assignment (Matloff, 2007). Many have been raped. But correspondents who have been sexually attacked—often in combat zones—rarely tell anyone, whether as a matter of embarrassment, compulsion to remain part of the macho club, or most likely, fear of being pulled off an assignment. The risks of kidnapping, serious injury, and death are stressors for both men and women; both suffer very high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and self-medication through alcohol (Feinstein & Sinyor, 2009).

Essentially at the opposite (low-brow) end of journalism's status continuum is market-led, post-feminist journalism. Not unlike the advice columns of the early 20th century, this involves trying to attract women audiences through daytime talk shows, as well as confessional and therapy news, features on sex, consumerism, fashion, and gossip about the rich and famous. Some feminists decry the highly personal playful style of journalism aimed at women as demeaning. Others defend it in terms of its accessibility, its consonance with women's lives and interests, and its very popularity (Mayes, 2000; Whelehan, 2000).

Especially in television, one major and ongoing problem is the emphasis on women's physical attractiveness, which determines who gets hired, how their talents get used, and how long they last. Networks are known for promoting, literally and metaphorically, attractive women not ready for prime time. Appearance is becoming increasingly important for men; nonetheless, men can remain on-air even when they grow old, fat, and bald. In contrast, women's attractiveness is narrowly defined and has limited shelf life. Several have been fired or demoted as anchors when focus groups deemed a woman unattractive. Christine Craft explained why she lost her anchor slot in her book's title: *Too Old, Too Ugly, Not Deferential to Men* (Craft, 1986). Notably, sexism and look-ism intersect with ageism and racism; these issues present particular problems for women of color.

Around the world, women journalists often describe sexual harassment from colleagues; harassment and disdain for women in newsrooms represents a globally acknowledged dimension of the occupational culture of journalism (North, 2009). Complaints often come with a sense of resignation, particularly in sports, where women face problems with both colleagues and sources (Hardin & Shain, 2006). If workplace sexual harassment of women is as old as the paid employment of women (McAdams & Beasley, 1994, p. 127), attention to this problem has varied. Perhaps the trend toward professionalism and middle-class respectability slightly moderated the bohemian "pub culture," long seen as inherent to journalism and much romanticized by male journalists. But 60% of U.K. women reported having experienced sexism. In Israel, where approximately 37% of newspaper staff are women, more than one third of women journalists surveyed reported sexual harassment (mainly verbal) or sexist contempt from sources (Lachover, 2005). In 2016, Roger Ailes was forced to step down as CEO of Fox News, after from several women accused him of workplace sexual harassment. Women journalists in India seem to be particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexism, including in terms of work assignments, promotion, and salaries; they connect this to sexism and a tolerance of sexual harassment in Indian society, despite laws forbidding sexual harassment, such that they generally do not bother to complain about it (Bhagat, 2004; International Federation of Journalists, 2015). Notably, Australian women likewise rarely describe themselves as victims or even define behaviors as sexual harassment; they ignore it, in the name of professionalism and in part because of the stigma against complaining (North, 2016).

Women and the Internet Future

The Internet applied to journalism brings significant and also gendered challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the Internet's provision of free news created by citizen journalists, amateur fans, aggregators, and a host of professional news outlets has led to an overall loss of credibility and deskilling of the profession; more importantly, this has dramatically undermined professional journalism's business model. The result is precarity: work life is marked by unpredictability, uncertainty, low income, limited benefits, and general lack of security.

Gendered vectors explain why such precarity predicts a feminization of online journalism. Relevant here is that in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries, women have long outnumbered men in university journalism programs, and the people most vulnerable to precarity are students, interns, and temporary and contract workers—all of whom tend to be women. In India, a disproportionate number of women journalists work on contract, often with unfavorable terms; women are the ones to be axed when jobs need to be cut (Bhagat, 2004, p. 122). Freelance journalists are often romanticized for their supposed autonomy and freedom from bureaucracy and office politics but increasingly they suffer declining incomes, layoffs, and competition—partly because freelance journalism is women's work; in Canada, women almost double the number of men freelancers (McKercher, 2009). The deskilling, lowered status, and plummeting symbolic and monetary rewards of journalism that resulted from technological change may now bring feminization that did not come to pass in the 1980s, when alarms circulated that journalism was becoming a “pink-collar ghetto” (Becker, Vlad, & Simpson, 2013).

As it turns out, women use social media and certain information platforms at greater rates than men. But they remain only 10 to 15% of the writers of Wikipedia articles, an increasingly important knowledge base. The largest and most important online news companies are largely white and male. Women wrote 42% of the content at CNN.com and 31% at the online-only *The Daily Beast*.⁶ Moreover, gender-specific impacts of news items went unreported or under-reported.

Globally, according to the GMMP, 42% of news stories published online are reported by women. But the gender differences in reporting practices may be greater online than in legacy media. Women are 33% of sources for online stories by women, compared to 23% in online stories by men, a difference that is over three times higher than in traditional media. And only 4% of news tweets clearly challenge gender stereotypes (the same as for television, radio, and print news stories). So while the freedom of online sites to depart from conventional objective reporting opens up opportunities for women, the sites of both legacy organizations and online sites retain a commercial orientation rather than a justice orientation.

That said, the Internet opens up significant possibilities for women to participate in a more democratized public sphere, to disseminate information, and to expose social inequalities. Women have launched countless online sites, including ones that are expressly feminist. Among other things, alternative news media create and sustain networks among women literally across

the globe. Some women's information networks call into question the distinctions between professional and non-professional journalism, providing a crucial space for ordinary women citizens to speak directly for themselves, as well as reporting on their concerns.

Conclusion

Newsrooms have been changed (and challenged) by new economic constraints, technologies, audiences, norms of professionalism, and by the women's movement and the pronounced visibility of women themselves. Whether gender is irrelevant in contemporary newsrooms is a matter of debate among journalists; but certainly many women see themselves as professionals first, as journalists. Women working in the most highly gendered arenas—sports and war reporting—must prove themselves by becoming one of the boys. Otherwise, women's choices regarding gender performance are far less draconian. In the 21st century, women are no longer confined to a woman's ghetto or called unfeminine if they infiltrate the newsroom. Even women who individually or in groups face substantial sexism do not necessarily develop gender-consciousness, much less female-specific approaches to work.

Women have changed journalism, in part, by inventing forms that were never credited to women, but instead were eventually redefined as conventional. For example, front-page *New York World* reporter Nellie Bly pulled off sensational stunts such as beating Jules Verne's fictional *Around the World in Eighty Days* by circumnavigating the globe in 72 days, and writing about her exploits, in 1889–1890. She also undertook dramatic but important investigations through subterfuge; for example, she feigned insanity in order to investigate horrible conditions at a New York City mental asylum (Bly, 1887; Kroeger, 1994). Such practices became normalized and hardened into enterprise and investigative journalism. The once ridiculed soft news and women's forms are precisely the ones marketers seek, albeit still deemed marginal to professional status, and hard/soft binaries have been radically blurred. Thus, the issue is not static organizational constraints that force female reporters to reproduce male interests, but the intersection of sexism and myths about gender with structural problems, such as newsroom profit agendas that compound the likelihood that women will be exploited. For example, the increase in women may reflect a profit-driven shift to cheaper workers, in that they are especially likely to be stringers or freelancers.

Certainly sexism continues in society and in newsrooms, where female reporters are assumed to add spice and sex appeal to attract male audiences. Indeed, precisely because men can now only rarely get away with crude sexism, women journalists who dress provocatively and who make snide comments about prudish women are providing intellectual cover for news organizations that wish to mock women subjects and feminism. What this means is that dichotomous thinking is unproductive, including the male/female, hard/soft, and neutrality/subjectivity binaries. More productive would be imagining feminist approaches to journalism (more contextual and situated journalistic practices and forms) and to newsroom organization (collaborative, non-competitive, horizontal work structures) that allow for deeper and more serious work, and are more equitable, allowing working parents to take care of family responsibilities.

Historiography

The second wave of the women's movement inspired women to enter the academy, where they researched the history of women's culture and women's achievements. In journalism, this first meant research to show that women were equal to men but neglected by sexist historians.

Marzolf (1977) wanted to bring long-forgotten women journalists, as her title put it, *Up from the Footnote*. Such books usually emphasized, as another title put it, *Great Women of the Press* (Schilpp & Murphy, 1983). The next step was biographies of individual journalists or groups, including black women (Streitmatter, 1994), war reporters (Elwood-Akers, 1988), and sob sisters Abramson, 1990, as well as studies of the feminist press. These typically emphasized women's distinctive achievements.

Research gradually shifted to intentional or inherent differences between women and men, sometimes with the concomitant claim that women's talents are complementary to or more useful than men's. The debate over whether or how sexual identity trumps journalistic values and practices continues to drive considerable research. When journalism studies grew, researchers adopted social science methods and used content analysis to study coverage of women's issues, and gender differences among journalists. Applying the theory of critical mass, researchers set out to figure out what conditions were necessary, or how many women, first as reporters and then as editors or owners, would be necessary to effect change in newsrooms.

But claims about women's distinct news values have become internally and externally contradictory, philosophically confused, and methodologically circular. Such claims construct female journalists as ever and always sharing a fixed standpoint dichotomously opposed to a (white) male prism. This ignores history, including how gender may come in and out of focus and how journalism norms and conventions change. Attention to masculinity—and especially changes over time in what Connell calls “hegemonic masculinity”—has been uneven and infrequent (Connell, 1995). It also ignores contemporary differences in experience and standpoint by virtue of race, sexual orientation, age, and religion, as well as differences by geography, culture, and comparative national ideology. At a minimum, this suggests the value of comparative research and of intersectionality, which emphasizes the intersection of complex historical, material, cultural, and social conditions. How women of ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual minorities, for example, negotiate the particular challenges they face in newsrooms, understand competing loyalties, address professional and ethical dilemmas, and resist or challenge sexist and racist stereotypes and newsroom conditions is highly understudied.

Interviews and surveys are relatively straightforward, cheap, and popular, but over-used and decreasingly productive. Regarding thorny issues that warrant continued attention, such as sexual harassment, focus groups do not systematically prod respondents to confront issues; but online surveys where people can choose to participate can produce misleading accounts if certain kinds of people are disproportionately inclined (or disinclined) to participate. Content analyses of published or broadcast stories produce at best inconclusive, shallow data, given that journalism is complicated, institutional, and thoroughly mediated. New appreciation of ethnography may allow for richer understandings of how gender matters in journalism, and how women respond to

newsroom dynamics and structures, including in the new “distributed” newsrooms and in the context of postfeminist notions of women’s identity. Meanwhile, media content was long assumed to influence (i.e., to limit) how women see themselves and how society views women. Ethnographies will be relevant to exploration of the potential for playful, counter-hegemonic, or oppositional readings that recent scholarship emphasizes.

Feminist methods suggest, inter alia, expanding the scope of research materials. Journalists’ autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories are unreliable research materials, given the form itself and the fact that these texts are edited for a public audience; but they are no more unreliable than other forms, and are especially useful when analyzed collectively. Autobiographies and oral histories allow reporters to be self-reflective and self-critical, including with reference to why practitioners entered or quit the newsroom, and how their work was affected by editors (Steiner, 2002).

Primary Resources

The GMMP website has links to numerous projects, resource packs, training materials, conferences and seminars that use data from ongoing monitoring events. Diaries and letters of women journalists are found in archives all over the country; papers are not collected in any one place. Northwestern University has an excellent collection of feminist periodicals of the 1960s and 1970s; and transcripts of oral histories of women journalists sponsored by the Washington Press Club Foundation <<http://npc.press.org/wporal>> are available online. The Women’s Media Center <<http://www.womensmediacenter.com/>>, the International Women’s Media Foundation <<http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/iwmf-global-report/>>, the Ms. magazine websites, and other organizations listed in non-textual resources provide data and links to other sites.

Literature

Women and Journalism (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004) provides a history of the relevant issues in the United States and the United Kingdom. Over the last 125 years, literally hundreds of women journalists, especially war reporters, have written memoirs or autobiographies; and biographies of individual women are available. Book-length histories of women in journalism by reporters or former reporters include: *A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page* (Mills, 1990); *Battling for News: The Rise Of The Woman Reporter* (Sebba, 1994); *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and the New York Times* (Robertson, 1992); and *Waiting for Prime Time: The Women of Television News* (Sanders & Rock, 1988).

The Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (Byerly, 2011) offers analyses of 60 countries. Excellent collections of essays tackling gender issues cross-culturally or internationally are found in *Gender and Newsroom Cultures: Identities at Work* (de Bruin and Ross, 2004); and *News, Gender, and Power* (Carter, Branston, & Allen, 1998). Few books address gendered content or representations of women and men in news stories. Research is available, however, on political figures and/or politics, such as *Gendered News: Media Coverage and Electoral Politics in Canada*

(Goodyear-Grant, 2013) and *Hillary Clinton in the News: Gender and Authenticity in American Politics* (Parry-Giles, 2014). *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963–1975* (Bradley, 2005) analyzes the interactions between the mass media and Second Wave feminists. Relatedly, following up on her book *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Dow, 1996), Bonnie Dow has written *Watching Women's Liberation, 1970: Feminism's Pivotal Year on the Network News* (Dow, 2014). Michael A. Messner has written about sports and gender (and masculinity) in a variety of ways, including the gendered treatment of athletes, in *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports* (Messner, 2002). The first volume of *Women's Periodicals in the United States*; (Endres & Lueck, 1995) addresses consumer magazines; the second (Endres & Lueck, 1995) deals with the alternative press. Men's magazines and masculinity have gotten extended treatment especially in the United Kingdom, in *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* (Benwell, 2003) and *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (Edwards, 1997). Taschen has brought out a six-volume *The History of Men's Magazines* (Hanson, 2004). Also addressing masculinity are *Men, Masculinity and the Media* (Craig, 1992) and *American Masculinity Under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties Crisis of Masculinity* (Malin, 2005).

Non-Textual Materials

Popular culture representations of journalists are worth investigating, because many films, television shows, and novels are set in newsrooms. The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture <http://www.ijpc.org/> project maintains an extensive bibliography. (The organization's co-directors, Joe Saltzman and Matthew Ehrlich, recently co-authored *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* http://www.ijpc.org/page/heroes_and_scoundrels” [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015].) A couple of the documentaries produced by the Media Education Foundation <http://www.mediaed.org/> include journalism's role in gender construction. Several documentaries from other sources, such as *No Job for a Woman: The Women Who Fought to Report WWII* <http://www.neh.gov/films/no-job-woman-the-women-who-fought-report-wwii>), focus on women journalists.

Several organizations challenge gender stereotypes across popular culture, including in news content, such as the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media <http://seejane.org/>. The Representation Project <http://therepresentationproject.org/> engages in many initiatives; its film *Miss Representation* tackles how mainstream media reproduce the underrepresentation of women in power and influence. Many national and international organizations, such as Women, Activism, and Media: WAM! <http://www.womenactionmedia.org/>, Women in Journalism <http://womeninjournalism.co.uk/>, Skillset <http://www.skillset.co.uk/>, the International Women's Media Foundation <https://www.iwmf.org/>, sponsors the International Conference on Women Media Leaders <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/node/1008> and has produced useful reports about the status of women journalists. Some organizations represent specific beats, such as the international Association for Women in Sports Media <http://awsmonline.org/>, or specific identity groups, such as the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association <http://www.nlgja.org/>, which has produced a useful stylebook. All of these organizations maintain an online presence.

Further Reading

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Notes

1. The terms *female* and *male* refer to biology, while the terms *women* and *men* refer to social or constructed categories; that is, words are about gender. Therefore, in order to highlight issues of gender and to avoid confusing gender with sex or biology, the words *women* and *men* are used in this article as both nouns and adjectives; typically, for example, the phrase *female journalists* will be avoided unless the point is that women are being sexualized.
2. The GMMP report is available in several languages; and individual reports for specific regions around the world are also available.
3. According to Bob Papper (2014), women news directors are the least likely to complete the survey.
4. Thirty percent quickly became the canonical threshold for critical mass, given early empirical research in politics, although the theory never specified a specific percentage.
5. International Women's Media Foundation (2011). Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media <<http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/iwmf-global-report/>>.

6. Women's Media Center <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/>.

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