Gender, Sex, and Newsroom Culture

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In the late 19th century, women began entering UK and US newsrooms in great numbers, usually to support themselves and their families. They met with several challenges. Men said news work would defeminize and even desex women. A UK women’s magazine reader warned that “girls will rush into journalism, teaching or the stage . . . and neglect really useful branches of employment, by which they might earn a steady, if not luxurious livelihood” (in Onslow, 2000, pp. 15–16). This worry about women’s invasion had little to do with beliefs about women’s inherent inability to report, as evident in silence regarding women journalists during World Wars I and II, when women were urged to substitute for men going off to battle. Rather, the issue was men’s interest in preserving a monopoly on reasonably well-paid work of relatively high status.

In any case, these concerns indicate that women were managing to compete in this masculine space. Women continued to demand newsroom jobs, despite their oft-expressed complaint that male editors, colleagues, and sources refused to take them seriously and relegated them to the women’s angle, except for a very few “front-page girls” whose work was admired for being “just like men’s.” Indeed, women continued and continue to work as journalists despite many challenges, including, inter alia, sexual harassment by sources, colleagues, and supervisors.

Both working journalists and scholars have largely equated gender with women, indicating the “Otherness” of women. Maleness is the taken-for-granted, “unmarked” standard. The conflation of women, femininity, and gender issues also relies on a problematic notion of men and women as polar opposites, an unhelpful dichotomy that ignores gender minorities and, with reference to journalism, overlooks the impact of professional socialization. Scholarship on gendered practices in journalism rarely challenges assumptions about gender or sex differences per se. Instead, gender is collapsed into femaleness and treated as a distinctive, fixed, self-evident category. Equally implausibly, the shifting formations of masculinity are also largely ignored; with John Beynon (2002) the prominent exception, scholars rarely attend to how media help produce and bolster shifts in versions of hegemonic masculinity. Whether the newsroom is treated as a literal site, an institution, or a set of cultural practices, the attention to gender as an attribute somehow possessed only by women overlooks fundamental problems of power, sexism, and the intersection of sexism with racism. As this chapter will show, the notion that journalism is practiced by “journalists” and “women journalists” ignores ideological formations both inside and outside newsrooms that misleadingly assess people’s potential by virtue of a single feature of identity.

Women in journalism have tended to take a practical view of this, rather than struggling with it. The few early 20th century women who wrote journalism textbooks (and these were aimed at
women students) encouraged women to write women’s news for women audiences. Ethel Brazelton (1927), who taught journalism for women at Northwestern University, insisted: “The fact of sex, the ‘woman’s angle,’ is the woman writer’s tool, but it must never be her weapon. . . . But being a woman, she is possessed of a real advantage in the business of doing, recording, interpreting women’s interests, ways and work” (p. 8). Yet, women reporters’ autobiographies and other self-reports increasingly emphasized how they avoided becoming “sob sisters” or “agony aunts.” Thus, the ancient history of gender in the newsroom begins with initial consensus that, at best, women could use their distinctive womanly sensibility to cover women—only women—whose interests were dichotomously different from men’s. Men, for their part, were uninterested in covering women. In the 1960s, many women began to claim that they could produce the same “unmarked” journalism as men, despite men’s efforts to protect their status, jobs, and salaries. Even then, however, women’s topics remained women’s entry point. This was especially true in radio news, where women’s voices were assumed to irritate audiences (Franks, 2011); women were only heard on shows for women audiences about domesticity. Women’s topics were not, however, women’s goal. Women understood that forms explicitly marked as female or feminine or aimed at women audiences represented professional ghettoization, not natural instincts (Steiner, 1998). Then, with television, women understood the individual and collective downsides to exploiting their appearance to get jobs and attract audiences.

Scholars offer an increasingly complicated picture. Feminist standpoint epistemologists such as Sandra Harding (1998) and Nancy Hartsock (1987, see also essays in Alcoff & Potter, 1993) suggest that ways of thinking and knowing are highly influenced by social identity, in turn, affected by experiences, differences in socialization, and social history. That is, standpoints reflect experiences that are over-determined by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and gender or gender nonconformance. Such standpoints explain what questions we regard as important, what methods we use to answer those questions, and what kinds of solutions we deem useful and ethical. This body of theorizing thus clarifies the importance of gender without treating it as an independent, much less encompassing explanation for professional practice.

THE IMPACT OF THE WOMEN’S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Sympathetic women reporters at legacy news outlets, because they sounded objective to their sexist editors, managed to cover the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s, as well as feminist issues, such as anti-abortion and rape laws. The National Organization for Women mobilized material resources (money, skills, technology, labor, and especially information)—so it could serve as a news source for journalists; members used their knowledge of news routines to develop effective media strategies (Barker-Plummer, 2002). Moreover, the women’s movement had major consequences for newsrooms. First, emboldened by the movement, women used regulatory and legal channels to challenge exclusionary hiring and promotion practices at several news organizations. The so-called second wave brought so many women into newsrooms that some (men) journalists and journalism educators expressed concern that journalism would become a “pink-collar ghetto” (Beasley & Theus, 1988). More positively, many observers claimed the increased presence of women reporters changed (and challenged) journalism, with women reporting on social issues and subjects that were previously marginalized and using more women, feminist organizations, and “ordinary people” as sources (see, e.g., Mills, 1990). This brought about new-found respect for women audiences and topics of concern to women.
The long-term consequences for content are less clear. Subsequent increases in the percentage of women to one-third of the newsroom staffs—thus achieving what would be called critical mass—did not significantly change coverage patterns. According to one global monitoring project (Gallagher, 2010) women appeared as subjects in 25 percent of the stories reported by women, 20 percent of men’s stories. Women did disproportionately more stories on gender (in) equality, but such stories represented only 4 percent of the total. Nor did women’s successes solve the problem of the double bind, such that women journalists, especially in leadership positions, are criticized for qualities that are expected of men.

The women’s liberation movement inspired many more women to earn PhDs, enter academia, and to study women’s culture and work, including journalism. Some of that early research involved bringing women Up from the Footnote, as the title of Marian Marzolf’s (1977) pioneering history put it. Consistent with Gerda Lerner’s (1975) critique of “compensatory” or “contribution” history as the first two stages in women’s history, early feminist scholars went to pains to discover women firsts whose accomplishments were omitted from journalism history textbooks and to credit, as another title put it, Great Women of the Press (Schilpp & Murphy, 1983). Eventually scholars addressed distinct categories—black women (Streitmatter, 1994); war reporters (Elwood-Akers, 1988); and sob sisters (Abramson, 1990). A second stream of research involved content analysis of news stories, finding that women received less coverage, were more often described in terms of marital status and appearance, and were less often used as expert sources. “Effects” researchers speculated that the newsrooms’ literal or perceived absence of women (the same was later said of people of color and LBGTQ journalists) resulted in inadequate and insufficient coverage of such groups. Denis McQuail (1994, p. 203), for example, explicitly linked “the relatively low numbers and the lower occupational status of women in news media organizations and the underrepresentation or stereotyping of women in the news.” In 1979, sociologist Gaye Tuchman said that researchers were “blinded” by their anger at the blatant sexism of mediated depictions of women, and “crippled by dependence” on mass communications research, “a field hardly known for its intellectual vigor” (p. 528). Sexism and discrimination in hiring and promotion of women were real—but not the cause of the trivialization and even erasure of women in news stories. Rather, the symbolic annihilation of women served economic interests of advertisers and commercial media women and accurately revealed women’s lack of power.

Newly hired and emboldened second-wave feminists also attacked women’s pages, whose editors in the 1950s and 1960s had tried to expand, albeit in limited and inconsistent ways, the political, social, and racial scope of women’s sections. In the 1970s, however, feminists in the US and in Europe criticized these sections for symbolically erasing women, analogous to other sexist forms that condemned or trivialized women. Women’s pages were dismantled, first at elite papers and, later, smaller papers. As several oral histories (see http://npc.press.org/wporal) underscore, the immediate effect of eliminating women’s pages was to eliminate the single editorial slot reserved for women.

Meanwhile, subscribers have avidly supported women’s magazines—that feature beauty, fashion, and/or domestic and family guidance. To various extents, women’s magazines have embraced social and political controversies, including birth control, health, and workplace and food safety legislation. Not unimportantly, the popularity of women’s magazines showed newspaper executives and advertisers that women were desirable—i.e., exploitable—consumers (Harp, 2007; Zuckerman, 1998). Many women’s magazines in the US, Europe, and Asia were at least initially published and/or edited by men. Eventually, as at the women’s pages, women managed to achieve high levels of responsibility at women’s magazines, even if women editors adopted and promoted sexist stereotypes. Nonetheless, journalists and feminists worldwide largely disdained women’s magazines, given concerns about women’s magazines’ increasing
power to tell women what to think and do (Ferguson, 1983). As with newspaper coverage of women, women’s magazines were said to limit how women see themselves and how society views them (Weibel, 1977). Reviewing 50 years of scholarship on women’s magazines, Amy Aronson (2010) described three positions: the feminist accusation that women’s magazines push a relentlessly conservative view of women as homemaker; the ultra-conservative accusation that they push an overly progressive notion of a working wife and mother; and the accusation that, for all their entertaining “mental chocolate” (Winship, 1987), women’s magazines offered a disabling, confusing “schizophrenic mix.” Suggesting that the inherent dynamics of their complex form offer a wider range of gender discourse and reader opportunities than previous analyses allowed, Aronson herself treats women’s magazines as potentially able to provide opportunities for creativity, agency, and critique.

WOMEN’S ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Given the evidence that commercial media aimed at women regarded their audiences primarily as consumers, one key research area has been media owned and led by women for the purposes of promoting a cause or movement. Mid-19th century periodicals of young US textile workers represented women’s first consistent efforts to produce their own news and thereby redefine themselves (Leary, 2012). Of continuing interest are proto-feminist and feminist periodicals, given their importance in explaining, justifying, and sustaining women’s liberation and transformation; in debating new models for womanhood; and often experimenting with newsroom structures and policies, including regarding advertising, accommodating family responsibilities, commitment to journalism training, and demolishing newsroom hierarchies. Mid-19th century suffrage editors, for example, insisted that women be the ones to produce, edit, and even print those periodicals and to write on a wide variety of topics. This included voting and other women’s rights, but also professions, education, and health and exercise (Steiner, 1983). Similarly, women-run UK political papers published in 1856–1930 facilitated an effective activist public sphere (DiCenzo, Ryan, & Delap, 2011; Tusan, 2005).

The 20th century feminist periodicals that proliferated in the US and UK in the 1970s were usually narrower in scope than the “first wave” suffrage papers. They were for, about, and generally by a niche: ecofeminists, prostitutes, celibates, older women, Marxists, feminist witches, and a host of other special interests. They were also wittier in decrying sexist stereotypes, and more self-consciously creative in rejecting conventional definitions of newsworthiness and newsroom structures, and in finding new ways to fund and distribute their work (Endres & Lueck, 1996). Evolving distinctively feminist ways of working often was equally important, although developing collective, noncompetitive modes proved difficult. Women producing these alternative or crusading media rarely identify themselves foremost as journalists. They are primarily activists, reformers, and campaigners. Uninterested in profit, they typically limit advertising to goods and services that they deemed compatible with feminist causes. Ms., representing popular US feminism, and the UK-based Spare Rib, both launched in 1972, drew praise as well as criticism for efforts to reach women outside the liberation movement, and also united conflicting factions within feminism. Emma, a German monthly published since 1977 “by women, for women,” aggressively covers abortion, equal rights, pornography, and prostitution. Canada’s Herizons, begun in 1979, earns revenue from subscriptions, donations, advertising, and sales of music and clothing, as do many activist organs (see Zobl & Drüeke, 2012). General criticisms of alternative media apply to feminist political papers, given their amateurish writing, inattention to aesthetics, lack of long-range business strategies, and inefficiency caused by collective or horizontal
organization and obsession with principle. However, feminist reception studies and the increasingly important area of black feminist criticism both underscore how audiences actively engage their mediascape (Watkins & Emerson, 2000).

These approaches suggest the value of research on new platforms, including streaming radio, public access cable channels and Vimeo, internet blogs and zines, and now especially social media and Twitter, for global coverage of feminist and gender issues difficult to discuss elsewhere. Online sites such as Feministe and Jezebel, feminist public affairs programs, and even women-run radio stations operate with varying degrees of feminist commitment in several countries, as do formal organizations to distribute global flow of feminist news and foundations that collect and share data about gender equity in news media (Steiner, forthcoming). Meanwhile, postfeminists and third and fourth wave feminists draw on seemingly wholly new principles in using their news outlets to redefine gender or eschewing it altogether.

**EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN VALUES**

Some scholars argue that women apply different ethical concepts and professional practices and the fact that women and men think and act differently in the newsroom has feminized journalism. Others suggest that because critical mass has still not been achieved, newsrooms remain organized around a “man-as-norm and woman-as-interloper structure” (Ross, 2001). Data are inconclusive. But, as time passes, the case for strong gender differences looks less convincing. According to one large-scale national survey (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007), men and women understand journalism ethics and the role of news in similar ways, although data showed some differences in opinions on political issues (firearms and abortion, for example). Cross-national data on journalists’ role conceptions turned up meaningful gender differences at neither the individual level nor in newsrooms dominated by women (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). They found substantial disagreement among professionals regarding journalism’s normative and actual functions. Nonetheless, undermining the suggestion that journalism will become more “feminized” once women represent half or more of the newsroom staff, this comparative study found no meaningful differences by gender even in newsrooms dominated by women (as the critical mass theory would have predicted). Women and men did not differ more greatly in societies where gender roles tend to be more differentiated, compared to countries where women enjoyed empowerment. That is, conformity to prevailing journalism standards appears to be important to all reporters.

Several smaller studies likewise found that gender was not a significant predictor of journalists’ perceptions of their professional roles in Indonesia (Hanitzsch, 2006) and Tanzania (Rampasasad, 2001). Rodgers and Thorson (2003, p. 659) contend, “men and women socialize differently into the workplace because men and women have different values and priorities.” Their content analysis of three US newspapers found that women overall drew upon a greater variety of women and ethnic sources, especially in positive stories, but at the large paper, women and men similarly sourced and framed stories. War reporting has also provoked unusually intense debate among audiences, journalists, and scholars regarding whether women and men report differently. At least with respect to coverage of the Vietnam War, men and women wrote substantially similar kinds of stories (Elwood Akers, 1988). Analysis of reporters’ tweets (Artwick, 2014) showed that women and men quoted far fewer women; women working at larger newspapers quoted fewer women than those in smaller outlets. Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2005) properly describe data from their content analyses of Israel’s two major public radio stations as internally and externally inconsistent. They found “gender otherness” in topic selection: men
preferred “hard” news while women tended to emphasize soft news. But their questionnaire yielded minimal differences in how men and women editors defined the functions of news. So the authors attribute the wide gap among women between declared news values and actual editorial behavior to women’s ambivalence about new trends toward more feminine journalism. They conclude that women must “overcome their ‘professional-psychological block’ about being true to their innate value system” (p. 84). An alternative would be to abandon the idea of an innate gender value system.

The Global Media Monitoring projects conducted every five years cast doubt on the assumption that additional numbers of women in journalism in most countries will radically transform content. Many journalists are unsympathetic to feminism as a movement and insensitive to historical changes accomplished by feminists. Many women say that they react differently from men because they have more sympathy for women and emphasize personal and emotional dimensions, but they also object to being assigned to write “as” women for women. Ross (2001) described many women journalists as blind to gender issues, having normalized and incorporated male-identified concerns, after finding that three-quarters of her respondents did not incorporate feminism into their reporting and many agreed that women managers are even more macho than men. In sum, women recognize that many of their male colleagues are sexist, but they largely adopt journalism’s structures as part of the profession and choose to embrace its reward system. Gender socialization theory cannot settle the chicken/egg argument, largely because it ignores the key way to understand gender—not as a role, much less a static and dichotomous set of differences between women and men, but as a performance, a relational act (Butler, 1990). Men and women perform gender, sometimes creatively and often uncreatively, and provoke others to perform gender.

GENDER GAP DATA

Globally, glass ceilings constrain women from achieving management success (e.g., Byerly, 2011). In China, for example, women make up almost 46 percent of the journalism workforce (Wang, 2019). That is, women have achieved critical mass but are confined to the lower status beats; are paid less; have less job security; and are exposed to sexist jokes, pornography, and sexual harassment. Colleagues and families tell them that journalism is inappropriate for women, especially wives and mothers. So, on top of structural, institutional, and cultural obstacles, Chinese women journalists face self-doubt.

Historically in both the US and UK, the few women who achieved news outlets’ highest ranks did so through family connections. In colonial America, women got involved in editing and publishing through their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers. Nearly a century elapsed between when a woman first headed BBC News (1927) and the second woman to do so (Franks, 2013). In 2014, of the top 25 largest papers in the US, only three had women editors. The situation looks better at non-elite news outlets such as at the McClatchy chain, where women are executive editors at 13 of 29 papers. In 2014, the Miami Herald and its Spanish-language El Nuevo Herald had Hispanic women as editors and publisher; the editorial page editor is an African-American woman. Only 4 of the 18 major online news outlets have women as top editors (Griffin, 2014). According to the 2016 Diversity Survey of the American Society of News Editors, however, 77 percent of the 646 newspapers and 91 digital-only news sites surveyed reported having at least one woman in a top-three position; women were 37 percent of all supervisors. In 2016, women made up 38 percent of employees at daily newspapers (a percentage fairly constant for 15 years) and nearly 50 percent at online-only news organizations.
Indeed, understanding the dominance of women in particular job sectors is complicated. In 2012, although women were 23.3 percent of the leaders in journalism and media, this was 55 percent in social media (Lennon, 2013). Entry-level and intern job ads in social media call for workers to be ever-available, juggle various tasks and responsibilities, and engage in persistent emotional labor—both online and off; these expectations underscore the increasingly feminized nature of social media labor, characterized by invisibility, lower pay, and marginal status within the technology sector (Duffy & Schwartz, 2018). Meanwhile, women internationally describe audience engagement efforts as bringing on rampant online harassment—based on their gender or sexuality—that influences how they do journalism (Chen et al., 2018).

According to a recent Women’s Media Center’s annual report, in 2016, more than half of women’s bylines were on lifestyle, health, and education news; men produced most stories on sports, weather, and crime and justice. Notably, men wrote a statistical majority of articles and opinion pieces about reproductive rights and about rape in the most widely circulated newspapers and news wires (Women’s Media Center, 2017). At 100 US and Canadian newspapers and websites, women were 9.8 percent of assistant sports editors in 2014, down from 17.2 in 2012. Women comprised one-third of the radio and TV news directors in 2015, and 44.2 percent of all radio and TV news staffers but were more likely to work in the smallest markets. In comparison, minorities made up 17.2 percent of all radio and TV news directors, breaking the 2008 record of 15.5 percent.

Significant salary gaps continue for women, especially minority women. According to 2017 data, full-time women at the Wall Street Journal earned on average less than 85 percent of what men made; among union employees at the paper’s publisher, Dow Jones, the gender salary gap averaged $11,678, and, on average, white women earned $18,514 more than black women (Mohajer, 2017). In 2017, the BBC had a 9 percent gender gap in salary (Zillman, 2017). In 2017, the Mirror’s editor-in-chief called its gender pay gap even worse than the BBC’s (Sweney, 2017b). Financial Times journalists threatened to strike (but apparently did not) after discovering a 13 percent gender pay gap (Zillman, 2017).

The persistence of pay inequity is subject to some degree of monitoring, albeit not much scholarly attention. But the increasing precarity of communication workers—women are disproportionately among the freelance and outsourced nonpermanent journalism precariat—has prompted attention to the interventionist potential of labor/trade unions (McKercher, 2013; Mosco & McKercher, 2008).

TELEVISION REPORTING

Television news continues to emphasize and exploit women’s physical appearance: the problem is not unique to television news but particularly acute there. The question, then, is whether they are taken seriously, given a double bind they face by virtue of being required to conform to a narrow and sexualized standard of appearance (Newton & Steiner, 2019) that is officially irrelevant to the production of high quality journalism—and is almost never demanded of men journalists. Decades ago, the sociologist Erving Goffman (1976, p. 318) acknowledged that, at least for jobs in public view, women are hired because they are “young and attractive beyond what random selection ought to allow.” But the point is that what Goffman called gender displays—highly scripted strategic behavior—nearly always disadvantage women. Catherine Hakim (2010) argues that women generally can exploit their workplace “erotic capital” (because desirability is relative to scarcity). Nevertheless, women journalists’ investments in make-up, clothes, and exercise programs to raise that erotic capital is time-consuming, expensive, and often unhealthy.

A British study found that for women viewers the appearance of male and female anchors had nearly equal importance, but men emphasized the necessity of attractive women (Mitra,
Webb, & Wolfe, 2014). Grabe and Samson (2011) found that men who perceived women broadcasters as more sexually appealing also believed those anchors to be more professional generally, although they perceived less sexually attractive women as more competent to address typically masculine subjects such as war and politics; women viewers were less likely to differentiate in this way. In any case, the required “look” for women may change: the androgynous blazers and tasteful jewelry of the 1970s and 1980s have now been replaced with sleeveless sheath dresses and stiletto heels. Remaining unchanged is the close surveillance of women’s appearance for purposes of determining who gets hired, how they are used, and how long they last on television.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Nearly every woman journalist who has written a memoir or autobiography has mentioned sexism; many mention sexual harassment (Steiner, 1997). Elizabeth Jordan (1865–1947), who wrote for the New York World, recalled “horribly degrading” winks and passes: “There was a period when I was wretched over them—when I felt that they not only smirched me but that, in a way, I might be responsible for them” (in Steiner, 1997, p. 152). Yet, until recently, women journalists rarely described themselves as victims or even defined behaviors that met the legal definition of sexual harassment as such. Some women seemed to accept the sexual attentions as inevitable or even flattering (Robertson, 1992). This problem continues around the world, as a Jezebel headline proclaims: “Female Journalists Harassed at Offices All Around the Damn Globe” (Dries, 2013). Jezebel was referring to an international survey finding that nearly half of women journalists around the world experienced sexual harassment; more than half of the abuse was perpetrated by a boss, supervisor, or coworker. They also experienced unwanted comments on dress and appearance (67.9 percent), suggestive remarks (60.6 percent), and sexual jokes (57.4 percent) (Barton & Storm, 2014).

Data from specific countries provides greater detail. More than one-third of women journalists surveyed in Israel, where approximately 37 percent of newspaper staffs are women, reported experiencing sexual harassment (mainly verbal) or sexist contempt from sources (Lachover, 2005). In India, women journalists face everyday sexism and gender discrimination at the hands of sources, colleagues, and editors; women describe Supreme Court guidelines designed to protect women as ineffective and rarely implemented, and they are reluctant to complain, perhaps because of job insecurity (Chadha, Steiner, & Guha, 2017). In Brazil, 70 percent of the women journalists responding to a survey said someone had made a pass at them at work that made them feel uncomfortable (Monnerat, 2018). The researchers concluded that sexist practices are naturalized in Brazilian newsrooms but also that women’s work is severely impacted by the embarrassment they suffered.

In Australia, Louise North (2016) noted that scholars rarely studied sexual harassment, despite stories of harassment detailed in autobiographies and occasional new articles about individual incidents. Australian women whom North surveyed in 2012 tended to downplay the seriousness of harassment. They rarely report it formally out of fear, usually of retaliation; they also apparently believe they should work it out and that enduring harassment is the price for working in a male-dominated industry (North, 2016).

Sexual attacks on CBS chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan while covering the uprising in Egypt in 2011 provoked many women to reveal that they too suffered sexual assaults while covering conflict, often not telling their editors about the attacks lest the editors pull them off dangerous assignments. Similarly, in 2017, well-confirmed allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault by film producer Harvey Weinstein unleashed a tsunami of complaints. First, journalists exposed harassment and assault by others, but soon came a torrent of news about men
journalists committing it. Among the most prominent men to be fired for inappropriate behavior was Today co-host Matt Lauer; several women said that NBC executives had ignored their complaints about Lauer’s behavior, apparently because of the lucrative advertising surrounding Today (Setoodeh and Wagmeister, 2017). A total of 35 women—most in their very early 20s at the time—have told the Washington Post that longtime PBS and CBS host Charlie Rose made unwanted sexual advances; repeatedly walked nude in front of them; and groped their breasts, buttocks, or genital areas. Other US journalists accused in the post-Weinstein period of sexually harassing multiple women include several magazine and newspaper publishers and editors, including two editors at the New York Daily News and several major journalists at National Public Radio (NPR) and Fox News.

The #MeToo movement by—and for—women journalists spread globally. In the UK, the allegations against Weinstein emboldened BBC staff women to speak out about sexual misconduct, including that of a Radio5 radio presenter who reportedly groped four women. The BBC announced shortly after that it was investigating 25 sexual harassment claims, although it usually gets “a handful” of sexual harassment complaints a year (Sweney, 2017a). In Italy, 125 women journalists published a manifesto promising to expose abuse of power and sexual assaults. Women journalists accused two Israeli journalists and several Israeli politicians, including the former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, of sexual harassment. In late 2017, some 200 Australian women publicly complained of indecent assault, sexual harassment, and bullying by the host and producer of a top-rated Australian lifestyle program, and a call for sexual predators’ names quickly resulted a list of at least 40 Australian media and entertainment figures (Moran, 2017).

In Russia, five journalists accused a lawmaker in the State Duma, Russia’s lower parliament, of sexual harassment. One woman said that victims keep silent about the sexual harassment rampant across government institutions because we “understand there’s no point in this, you only risk incurring insults and accusations of lying” (Krasilnikov, 2018). Indeed, several high-level Russian officials expressed hostility to the women, even threatening to revoke their press accreditation (Isakova, 2018), although 20 Russian-language media outlets announced they would boycott the deputy, and a popular radio station even stopped covering the Duma entirely.

Journalists in Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines described unwanted sexual aggression by elected officials. A Chinese woman journalist, who once kicked a senior colleague in the crotch to prevent an assault, launched an online survey after hearing similar stories from fellow journalists. Nearly 84 percent of the survey’s respondents said they had been sexually harassed, 18.2 percent more than five times. Over 40 percent of the perpetrators held a position of power over the victim, about 30 percent were colleagues, and under 20 percent were interview subjects. Few of victims said anything: they thought complaining would accomplish nothing and could affect their privacy, careers, or personal lives (Wen, 2018). In Southeast Asia, media “bigwigs” sanction or even encourage sexual harassment by men politicians who “are enabled and encouraged by the power structures that make it difficult, and sometimes nearly impossible, to speak out against, in addition to the public’s general propensity of doubting sexual violence victims” (Kong, 2018).

METHODS AND PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Much of the 20th century gender scholarship was marked by a tendency to associate women with all “good” qualities—privileging readers’ needs, emphasizing nuance and context; men were regarded as engaging in pack journalism and using objectivity as a shield against sympathy (Christmas, 1997; Van Zoonen, 1998). The same dichotomies seemingly emerged in leadership:
“feminine” management style was said to be more interpersonal, democratic, constructive, collaborative, while “masculine” management is more autocratic, competitive, and defensive (Arnold & Nesbitt, 2006). Notably, during the four years between 1999 and 2003, when the Sarasota Herald Tribune’s publisher, executive editor, managing editor, and two assistant managing editors were women, it carried the same content as other papers, with the same percentage of female sources. Yet, that paper’s all-women management team was perceived as offering, as promised, an atmosphere of openness and transparency (Everbach, 2006). Celebrating women’s styles in this way overstates women’s preference for consensus and concord. Insisting that women express such sentiment is potentially distorting, both methodologically and affectively, and ignores crucial feminist insights on the arbitrary social construction of gender.

Both journalism history and studies of contemporary practice require contextualized critical research on how men and women work, including how maleness and femaleness has figured in the newsroom, how these have changed, how gender works, and how outdated or irrelevant gender conceptions can be worked against in the newsroom. Research can determine the extent to which the meanings of gender (and sexism) are consistent across countries and cultures. Persuasive discussions of gender identities at work in newsrooms in various countries (for example, see deBruin & Ross, 2004) treat gender as persistent and universalizable, but geographical and cultural differences referenced in those small-scale studies also suggest the need for much larger scale, comparative research. At a minimum, issues of national ideology would complicate the question of whether newsroom routines represent professional norms or a specifically white male prism.

Feminist methods suggest, inter alia, expanding the scope of research materials. Journalists’ autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories are unreliable as research materials, given the form itself and how authors edit these texts for a public audience, but they are no more unreliable than other forms. Especially when analyzed collectively, autobiographies and oral histories allow reporters to be self-reflective and self-critical and to explain why they entered or quit journalism (Steiner, 1997). If our behaviors reflect our sense of what others expect of us, then popular culture representations of journalists are also worth investigating. The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture project (www.ijpc.org) maintains an extensive bibliography.

Ethnographic fieldwork informed by feminist theorizing and methodology is difficult but important in analyzing informal practices and cultures of mainstream and alternative newsrooms. Fieldwork may help explain newsroom culture and the intersections of work and family responsibilities. Whether ambitious women reporters are less likely than other women, and far less than men colleagues, to marry or to stay married requires more study. In the absence of total restructuring of all workplaces and of the stubbornly persistent expectations that women must be the primary care-takers, women—but also men—may have useful proposals for helping newsrooms to accommodate and support healthy interpersonal relationships, families, and working parents. Effective suggestions will emerge from fieldwork.

Conversely, surveys, especially online, are relatively straightforward, cheap, and popular but over-used and decreasingly productive, given the difficulty of determining the extent to which volunteer respondents represent the broad population. As much as sexual harassment warrants further research, especially regarding how it can be mitigated, Barton and Storm’s (2014) very widely reported finding that approximately 64 percent of journalists around the world experienced “intimidation, threats or abuse” while working can be legitimately criticized for the researchers’ inability to account for the likelihood of a disproportionate response from women who had been harassed. Content analyses of published or broadcast stories produce at best inconclusive, surface-level data, given that journalism is a complicated, institutional, thoroughly mediated and partly anonymous process. Bylines may be non-gendered or pseudonyms, so most large-scale
studies of news representations of “gender” cannot effectively deal with who “actually” produces that news. Meanwhile, women continue to face a double bind: their editors “pinkwash” their writing to make it sound more “feminine,” but writing attributed to women is discounted as feminine (Hallberg & Schneider, 2017).

Transnational approaches are crucial, despite the difficulties of language skills and other resources necessary for comparative research. Nearly everywhere more (new) women are being hired. The status of older women in journalism, meanwhile, is unclear. Are they getting fired, perhaps because women are not allowed to age? Are they moving into jobs permitting greater stability? Women are more likely than men to say they want to leave the profession (Reinardy, 2016; Weaver et al., 2007). The causes—burn-out, lack of support, over-work, family responsibilities, perceived lack of relevant new skills, online misogyny, or finally getting fed up with toxic newsrooms—may be changing, and thus the solutions, so this requires ongoing research.

The global parallels in sexism and gender are remarkable, as are global shifts toward new technologies, to celebrity and lifestyle reporting, and increased impacts of marketing and advertising. More to the point, numbers do not explain where (in terms of culture and geography) or how gender is meaningful, and when and how women have cracked the glass ceiling in terms of senior-level management. How does gender compound (or not) problems of caste, ethnicity, religion, marital, or domestic status? How does color bear on journalists’ career trajectories? What about marital status? In Sweden, where women are almost 50 percent of journalists but 26 percent of senior managers, women top managers were more likely than men to marry other senior managers (i.e., gained professional and economic capital through marriage) and had more mentors (Djerf-Pierre, 2005). That is, since female capital is generally negative and maleness is positive capital (Moi, 1999), these Swedish women countered the negative gender capital by amassing social capital. When must women adopt distasteful professional values for the sake of career advancement? When can these norms be challenged or transformed? What are the consequences for resistance? Why do many women journalists distance themselves from feminism? Sophisticated histories and research need to be informed by theory with respect to the impacts of political economy (see Byerly, 2011) and national institutions, newsroom dynamics, and structures.

New technologies and digital contexts raised enormous questions for gender research. Social media and audience engagement editors are required to be “soft,” often invisible team players who mediate between journalists and audiences; the concealed or invisible nature of digital labor connects it to “women’s work,” but the seeming devaluation of audience engagement work makes it much closer to public relations than, say, computer coding (Duffy, 2015; Jarrett, 2016). If these new jobs are becoming a pink or velvet ghetto, as in public relations, what does that bode for the status and legitimacy of that position? Is it even possible to avoid coding new jobs or technologies as pink or blue?

Furthermore, digital platforms suggest new ways for women journalists to be harassed, and this deserves serious inquiry. After more than a century of women treating workplace sexual harassment as an open secret—not to be discussed or researched—the flood of sexual harassment accusations suggests a host of issues about men’s power, patriarchy, and sexism. It underscores questions about the unfairness of women being silenced, embarrassed, and about the loss to journalism when otherwise professional women are discouraged and literally pushed out. Newsrooms did not invent workplace harassment, of course, but it’s worth considering whether so many of the harassment stories of 2017–2018 came from the journalism world merely because women journalists have access to publicity, or because newsrooms are particularly toxic. It remains to be seen whether the 2017–2018 furor has lasting implications or was a fleeting response that faded away after provoking a controversy.
If the former, the big research question is what would change newsroom culture? What are the solutions? In the post-Weinstein period, several news outlets promised policy or structural change. NBC News adopted a zero-tolerance policy, promised to require employees to take anti-harassment training, and undertook an assessment of the news division culture. NPR overhauled its structure after repeatedly failing to address sexual harassment allegations. Fox News established a Workplace Professionalism and Inclusion Council. Meanwhile, the UK-based The Second Source and the US-based Press Forward are new support networks that ensure women know their rights and help organizations bring about change. Whether these actions, in and outside the newsrooms, will change newsroom cultures, of course, is unknown, but this is a crucial researchable question.

CONCLUSION

Covert (1981) was among the first to observe that journalism history celebrated independence and individual autonomy, ignoring the impact of family and friendship networks. Journalism itself was written in terms of conflict, controversy, and competition, which Covert took to reflect men’s interest in winning. Covert contrasted this masculine language to women’s values: concord, harmony, affiliation, and community. But well before Covert’s provocative essay, the debate has been whether sexual identity (i.e., of women) trumped professionalism.

While this continues to drive considerable research, claims about women’s distinct news values have become internally and externally contradictory. First, the claim constructs women journalists as ever and always sharing a fixed standpoint as homemakers and parents. It ignores how gender may go in and out of focus. It ignores contemporary differences in experience by virtue of race, sexual orientation, and religion. Ann Marie Lipinski, the Chicago Tribune’s first woman editor (serving 2001–2008), suggested: “Being a woman gives you access to some experiences in life that men don’t have, just as the reverse is true” (Ricchiardi, 2011, p. 31). But being a woman intersects with all sorts of standpoints.

Melin-Higgins (2004) quotes a European journalist who argues that newsrooms are so wracked by gender-based power, conflict, and culture clashes that they require guerilla warfare. Women journalists can take on the role of the “woman journalist” as defined by the dominant culture; challenge male supremacy by becoming one of the boys; or challenge the very “doxa” of journalism by becoming one of the girls, making journalism more feminine. However, not only have feminists changed newsrooms and privileged soft news and women’s forms, but the very forms that Melin-Higgins promotes as oppositional are precisely the ones marketers seek. Historical work must take seriously how women have changed journalism, in part, by inventing forms never credited to women. Perhaps once these softer forms became normalized and “hardened,” they were redefined as conventional: sob sisters and front-page stunt girls morphed over the century into civic journalists and enterprise journalists. Even discarding the essentializing and universalizing dynamic, to conclude from data showing few sex differences that organizational constraints force women to reproduce existing masculinist practices ignores widespread social changes, including in journalism, where hard/soft binaries have been radically blurred.

Claims about gender differences in reporting and editing may involve perception far more than evidence and thus are caught in philosophical, empirical, and methodological traps. In the 1980s and early 1990s, a series of studies addressed gender differences in writing and the widespread belief that articles by men were judged (these studies used college students) to be more credible and accurate than those attributed to women. For example, experiments comparing responses to stories when the first name of a byline is clearly associated with women or men (e.g.,
Christine versus Christopher) found that, at least when the topic was stereotypically associated with neither men nor women, students deemed the story more accurate, informative and credible when they thought a man had written it, but more interesting when they thought a woman had written it; men were more extreme in their reliance on stereotypes (Shaw, Cole, Moore, & Cole, 1981). With syndicated political columns, too, overall bylines did not significant affect credibility, but men students trusted male bylines more than female bylines (Andsager, 1990).

Assumptions about gender remain important, from war reporting (where the stress of putting bodies are on the line is marked by problems in intimate relationships and substance abuse among men and women) to political cartooning (where, women remain under 5 percent of those employed). These problems intersect with other structural and economic problems that compound the likelihood of exploitation of women. For example, the increase in the women, who are especially likely to be stringers or freelancers even as foreign correspondents, may reflect a profit-driven shift to cheaper workers. Certainly, sexism and using women sexually continues in society and in newsrooms. Indeed, accusing women of reproducing masculinist assumptions does not solve the problem of using women on air to add spice, drama, and sex appeal as well as encouraging women to express disdain for women (say, for their dress or sexuality) and feminism.

Instead of describing a female journalism, which depends on hard/soft and neutrality/subjectivity binaries and which sentimentalizes women, we might imagine a feminist journalism. Feminist theorizing suggests the value of more contextual and situated journalistic forms that get at reasons, consequences, and impacts and of collaborative, noncompetitive, horizontal work structures that allow for integrating domestic responsibilities. Encouraging journalists to revise, if not reinvent, ways of understanding and representing human action is commendable. New kinds of newsrooms and new forms of print, broadcast, and online journalism require a new political sensibility. They require a feminist epistemology, not women’s innate values. Experiments in newsroom structures, content, policy- and decision-making emerging from feminist theorizing and critique are necessary if journalism is to serve the ongoing political and social needs of inevitably embodied people, who may be particularly disadvantaged by class and race.

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