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Gender's Role in Spanish-Language Journalism- An Examination of How Gender Plays in Hard Vs. Soft News

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GENDER'S ROLE IN SPANISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALISM- AN
EXAMINATION OF HOW GENDER PLAYS IN HARD VS. SOFT NEWS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The inequality of women in the workforce has been an ongoing issue. The 19th amendment granted women the right to vote in 1920. Since then, women have continued to fight for their equality in its entirety. Specifically, in the 21st-century women continue to fight for equality in the work place. Studies have shown that the amount of women in the workplace has exponentially increased. In fact, “they caught up with men in the rates of higher-education graduation, they increased their training and representation in formerly male-dominated professional fields and they entered many previously male dominated occupations” (Vokić, 2017). However the increase of representation doesn’t necessarily positively correlate with the treatment of women in the workforce. In many countries the most prominent journalists remain male. The purpose of this paper is to detect if Spanish-language journalism is male dominated in regard to the kinds of stories male and female reporters are assigned. Through the observation of which gender gets assigned hard/soft news stories we will examine if this pattern continues in Spanish-language broadcast journalism. We will determine if stereotypes and gender roles are being reinforced in the media through the assignment of stories to reporters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 1

LITERATURE REVIEW..... 3

 TYPES OF GENDER SEGREGATION 3

 WOMEN IN JOURNALISM..... 6

 WOMEN IN SPANISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALISM 7

 GENDERED PATTERNS IN NEWS COVERAGE 8

METHODOLOGY..... 10

RESULTS..... 11

DISCUSSION..... 13

CONCLUSION 15

REFERENCES..... 17

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1.0	12
CATEGORIZATION OF TOPICS INTO HARD OR SOFT NEWS	12
TABLE 1.1	12
DIGITAL NEWS OBSERVATION JUNE 11TH-22TH WITH BINOMIAL TEST.	12

INTRODUCTION

News stories are generally divided into two types; hard news and soft news. Hard news tends to be news stories that require immediate attention and are often the most popular, while soft news is considered 'background news' (Deahl, 2018). Soft news topics usually include interest-based news such as entertainment. The main difference between these types of news is the method in which they are delivered. Usually hard news is urgent and factual while soft news is much lighter and serves to entertain an audience. The purpose of this paper is to detect if Spanish-language journalism is male dominated in regard to the kinds of stories male and female reporters are assigned. According to studies by the Global Media Monitoring Project, in 1995 women reporters were "more likely to be assigned soft-news stories about entertainment, arts, and culture. Such stories were also more likely to feature women in traditional, rather than professional roles" (Mills-Brown, 2014). Has this trend continued into 2018?

Although women's representation has increased in the news business, women may not receive the same hard news opportunities as men given that the majority of high profiled journalists are still male. "Women enter communications schools and the journalism industry at roughly the same numbers as men, according to the Nieman report. From there, the number drops off — only one-third of people with 20 or more years of journalism experience are women" (Segel,2014). Where is the disconnect? Are women getting discouraged? It is critical to have equal representation of genders covering both

kinds of news in order for gender equality to improve. The more equal opportunities all genders receive, the more we will see all genders in prestigious positions and correspondingly, less vertical and horizontal segregation. Not just with gender but also equal opportunities for diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. According to Keith Woods, vice president for diversity in news and operations at NPR, “When you fail to pursue the most diverse news staff, you fail to open up the possibilities created when you bring a broader range of life experience,” he said (Segel, 2014). Diversity is key for any successful company, especially in the 21st century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TYPES OF GENDER SEGREGATION

Women make up the majority of journalism students however men make up the majority of top journalistic roles (Franks, 2016). “All the women who are interested in journalism enough that they write for their university newspaper and all the women who apparently take journalism courses, what happens to them? . . . if fairly equal numbers of women and men are actively trying to break into journalism and for some reason the women aren’t succeeding, then this needs to be looked at more closely” (Franks, 2016). What happens after college that the number drops for women? Roy Greenslade, the former Daily Mirror editor and now a journalism professor wonders “how the profession could remain so male-dominated when the classes he was teaching were increasingly full of young women” (Franks, 2016). Some people argue that whether or not the woman has a family- including children- determines the path their career may take. Perhaps a number of women decide to stay home and take care of their family, while the husbands pursue a career. Consequently, “These exacting roles – such as news reporting or senior editor – which are dependent upon a news or output agenda are difficult for anyone with other responsibilities. The relatively few women who do get these jobs at a higher level have few outside responsibilities; for example, they are far more likely than men to be childless.” (Franks, 2016) The question that should arise is why should women have to choose between a family and a career but not men?

According to the literature on segregation there are five kinds of gender segregation- (1) educational segregation, (2) horizontal occupational segregation, (3) vertical/hierarchical occupational segregation, (4) pay segregation, and (5) segregation in values and preferences (Vokić, 2017). Educational segregation is when females are told to not further their education but instead take the role as the mother in the household. More recently, studies show that women are graduating with bachelors, masters and other professional degrees just as often as men. However, females are still pursuing more stereotypical feminine roles such as teaching, nursing and art instead of the more stereotypical masculine fields such as business and science. In addition, there is still gender stereotyping in companies when deciding on who should get further development training. The fact that women often have other responsibilities, such as children and other family obligations means companies are less likely to invest in them for further development. Horizontal occupational segregation occurs when genders are expected to work in the fields where the majority of their gender works. For example, most heavily male populated fields include manufacturing, engineering, and management whereas female populated fields include childcare, teaching, and human resources. Journalism in this case-specifically hard news journalism- would fall under the male heavily populated. Especially, journalists that are front line in war. Vertical/hierarchical segregation is the belief that managerial positions or any position with the highest power is reserved solely for men. In the journalism field, that would include senior editors, producers, news directors and any powerful position as an anchor/reporter. Companies whose most powerful positions are fulfilled by men could

be accused of vertical/hierarchical segregation. In fact, “2014’s census by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), which looked at diversity at print newspapers, shows women accounting for only 35.4 percent of supervisors” (Segal, 2014). In addition, “A survey of 500 media companies in nearly 60 countries discovered that men hold 73 percent of management positions. And among Fortune 500 CEOs, women account for 4.8 percent” (Segal, 2014). Because of this kind of segregation, the pay gap is argued to be as wide as it is. There are less woman taking on larger roles.

Furthermore, pay segregation is a reoccurring issue. In fact, “women still earn less than men because they are more likely to be employed in lower paying industries and in jobs with less career potential but also because of the stereotype in terms of their minor value for organizations compared to men (e.g. direct discrimination)” (Vokić, 2017).

Therefore, there can be an abundance of woman working low end positions, however if those woman find it difficult to get into those larger roles, is gender equality improving?

Lastly, segregation in values and preferences has to do with how a society’s culture sees gender. In other words, gender roles can stem from biological and psychological characteristics. However, according to the cultural conditioning theory, socialization cultivates gender roles more significantly than biology does. Some can argue that gender role differentiation is something made up by society to maintain some kind of control.

WOMEN IN JOURNALISM

The journey of women into the male-dominated field of journalism has been a very difficult one. For instance, Margaret Jones (1923–2006) was an Australian journalist said to be a “trailblazer for women in journalism”. She confronted any and all kinds of sexism she came face to face with in the journalism industry. Jones faced all kinds of segregation but she was resilient. In fact, her first big break in New York was a battle. According to Jones, “The Herald was not only sexist in those days, Fairfax was phenomenally mean. They said they’d give me a job in New York if I resigned at this end, paid my own fare across to New York, and they’d re-employ me at the other end” (McDonald, 2016). However, Margaret Jones did not give up.

In the 1970’s women tried making their voices heard by launching a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for sex discrimination. In *US Weekly’s Newsweek*, “Women were hired as mail girls, secretaries and researchers, while men with the same qualifications became reporters and writers” (Whyte, 2017). This was the first time in U.S. history that employees had sued a print journalism company over gender discrimination. This lawsuit became possible because of Lyndon B. Johnson’s Title VII that declared it was illegal to discriminate based on race, religion, sex or national origin. This was the first real light shed on gender segregation in journalism.

WOMEN IN SPANISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALISM

According to a survey done at Harvard University, there are “Twice as many female employees, but half as many female executives”(Steinmetz, 2015). Consequently, Harvard University took a survey of the people who worked at a Hispanic media company to shed light on gender patterns. It was concluded that “while the number of women in editorial positions at Hispanic media outlets is more than 61%, the number of women in executive positions is less than 38%”(Steinmetz, 2015). However, the reason as to why this is, is still not very clear.

It is important to take a look at stereotypical gender roles in Hispanic cultures. Being Hispanic and growing up in a Hispanic household, gender roles were clearly defined. Women would always be the ones to take care of the home while men went out to work. “This attitude that separates gender roles is typical of *machismo*, which is a social behavior. Surprisingly, it's the mothers who usually encourage this behavior in their children. Men and women may not even be aware that their attitude is *machista*” (Barzallo, 2018). Could machismo be the reason women are less likely to take on tougher roles in journalism?

GENDERED PATTERNS IN NEWS COVERAGE

The ongoing inequality of news coverage stems from the topics the two different genders often get assigned to cover. Males seem to dominantly cover sports and politics while females tend to cover community and health. The topic of war continues to be the most controversial of all. “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” (Steiner,2017). This is where as a society we have to look at gender differentiation being a psychological factor more than a biological one.

Sports coverage is also vital. Most sports news is covered mostly by males and female sports are under appreciated. “According to the available studies, with reference to female sports, the media (1) devote less space or time to the coverage of women's events than men's events; (2) pay little attention to sports dominated by women, e.g. rhythmic gymnastics and synchronized swimming; (3) depreciate the achievements of women by focusing on the appearance of sportswomen or their roles outside sports rather than their sports skills and results; and (4) infantilize sportswomen by emphasizing childlike qualities or their roles as daughters (frequent in women's female tennis), as well as through naming practices (use of terms such as ‘girls’, ‘our ladies’,

the informal use of first names)” (Jakubowska, 2015). The equal representation of sports in the media is necessary due to sponsors, views and market value. Based on a review of the literature, my hypothesis is males are more likely to cover hard news than females, in Spanish-language broadcast journalism.

H₁: Males are more likely to cover hard news than females.

METHODOLOGY

Although female representation has risen in the workplace, women may still not receive the same opportunities as men given how the majority of high-profiled journalists are still male. Specifically, if journalism companies are giving men more opportunities to cover hard news than women, this could shed light on a form of segregation. In order to test this theory, I conducted a quantitative analysis- an observational study of journalists over a period of time. The study was based on digital journalism. I watched Univision's local, digital news program for 10 days, June 11th-22th (Monday-Friday 11pm broadcasts). I documented what kind of news story was covered (Hard or Soft) and the journalist's gender (Female or Male). For the purposes of this study, I chose to observe the news packages from Univision. Univision is an American Spanish-language broadcast television network that targets Hispanics and the Latino community. Specifically, I observed the Univision local Orlando news 11pm program. After I collected my data, created a table that shows how many hard/soft news packages a male reporter covered versus a female reporter. With the results I should be able to shed light on the controversial topic of gender segregation and if it still exists in our day to day news.

RESULTS

After watching the news consecutively for 10 business days (Monday-Friday) I was able to record how many hard news and soft news packages were presented during the 30 minute shows and if those packages were covered by a female reporter or a male reporter. Prior to elaborating on the results, it's important to discuss what topics are considered hard news and what topics are considered soft news. For the purposes of this experiment I defined hard news as topics that are extremely significant at a local, regional, national or international level. For example, topics such as politics, economics, scientific developments, homicides/kidnappings, and welfare constitute hard news. Whereas, soft news make up people's interests and entertainment. For a complete list of how I categorized the news stories please refer to table 1.0. I organized the results from my observation study on table 1.1. According to table 1.1, there is a significant increase of male reporters covering hard news rather than females. Over the course of 10 business days, females covered 16 hard news stories while males covered 22. Consequently, in that same time frame females covered 13 soft news stories while males covered 7. These results suggest females are more likely to be assigned soft, rather than hard news stories at a higher rate than what would be expected by chance.

TABLE 1.0

Categorization of Topics into Hard or Soft News

Hard News Topics	Soft News Topics
Man Killed in House Fire Hurricane in Puerto Rico Man Killed in Car Crash Fire in Guatemala Woman Killed by Lightning Suicide Child Pornography Pulse Protest FEMA (Politics) Homicide Kidnapping Robbery Shooting Break-in	Pixar Studio Information Tips for Summer Hair Tips for Staying Cool Kardashians Behind the Scenes Movie Weight loss Tips Office Exercises Health Tips Cooking Recipes Social Media New Apps Disney Parks Singer/Celebrity

TABLE 1.1

Digital News Observation June 11th-22th with Binomial Test.

	Soft News Stories	Hard News Stories	z	<i>p(one tail)</i>
Female	13 (65%)	16 (42%)	1.66	.048
Male	7 (35%)	22(58%)	1.66	.048
Totals	20	38		

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that hard news is predominantly reported by males and soft news is predominantly reported by females. According to the 2010 GMMP study that maps the representation of genders in news all over the world, “men report 67 per cent of stories about politics and government, 65 per cent of stories about crime and violence, and 60 percent of stories about the economy. Inversely, female reporter’s highest allocation of stories is in the science and health categories (44 per cent) and the social and legal area (43 percent)” (North, 2014). Eight years later, my observational experiment yields similar results. However, is this a direct correlation of horizontal segregation or are there other factors to consider?

Having firsthand experience in a newsroom through my 2018 spring internship, I can shed some light on the process of how a reporter gets assigned to a story. First, the reporters can pitch their own stories to the producers. This brings up the question; are women more interested in soft news topics than men? According to a survey done at Oxford University, “We can see clear differences in gender, with men more interested in subjects like sport and politics and women paying more attention to stories about health and the environment” (Newman, 2016). Therefore, part of the reason women seem to cover less hard news and more soft news could be their own personal preference. Although, one could argue that health and the environment, depending on the content aren’t always soft news. Katherine Lanpher, a senior seminar leader with the Op-Ed said in an interview with Buzz Feed that, “women may pitch more editorials on "soft"

subjects because "they're convinced that no one's going to question their expertise there," whereas "they think that in hard subjects there will always be someone who knows more" (North, 2012). Thus women may feel that they have a better chance of having the soft news story pitches accepted. It is possible editors decline hard news pitched by women but accept more soft news pitched by women.

Secondly, producers can assign the stories to the reporters. This process could be linked to horizontal segregation if producers are choosing to assign hard/soft news regarding reporter's gender. According to a survey taken in Australia, "while more female reporters appear be covering hard news rounds like politics and business, the majority are still assigned to cover the bulk of the soft news areas of features, the arts, education and health—and most perceive that female reporters remain pigeon-holed in those traditionally female story areas" (North, 2018). Thus, the assignment of news could be the cause of journalism having a gender if that reporter isn't in control of choosing their story. There needs to be a change not only in pitching stories but also assigning.

Lastly in terms of Spanish-Language journalism, the Harvard study has shown us that there is a significant amount of women in the workplace, however not in the significant job roles. In Hispanic cultures, women are kept out of harm's way by making the men do the toughest jobs. Perhaps, women are being chosen for softer news stories to keep them safe? Or women should be given the same opportunities as men safe/unsafe?

CONCLUSION

To conclude, research suggests that Spanish-language hard news does have a gender – male. After watching and reading the news for 10 days, I observed that the majority of the hard Spanish-language news stories are covered by males while the softer news stories are covered by females. These results show a relationship between gender and Spanish-language news stories but it does not show causation due to the outlying factors such as the pitching/assignment of news. As a female journalist graduating from the University of Central Florida and working with an accredited media company, I'm eager to take on any story-soft or hard. Women should not feel like they are not up to the challenge of covering harder news stories-instead they should feel empowered to break barriers. If woman are more inclined to cover soft news rather than hard news due to gender stereotypes then perspectives must change and woman must break free from traditional roles. "There's a one-to-one parallel between the shunting of women's bylines into only a few core areas that are considered 'soft' stories and the vast marginalization of women as newsmakers and sources in both print and broadcast news." (North, 2012) Simply put, there is too great of a disparity between gender and news coverage to not acknowledge that there's a severe problem. Producers/editors should make it a mission to assign women more hard news stories. Jennifer Pozner, founder and executive director of Women in Media and News, suggests "systemic solutions like tying executive bonuses to newsroom diversity targets, both in bylines and in sourcing." (North,2012) In sales, companies offer incentives to teammates who meet

their quarterly goals. These incentives create motivation and help the company flourish. Similarly, incentives should be in place in news rooms to encourage diversity. In conjunction, women should make a stronger effort to avoid traditional roles set by societal bias.

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