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ISLANDS OF DIVERGENCE IN A STREAM OF CONVERGENCE
Comparing the news practices of male and female journalists in Israel

Zvi Reich

This study focuses on the performance of female and male reporters in various news processes for which little systematic research has been accomplished. It is based primarily on a series of reconstruction interviews with 60 Israeli reporters in parallel beats and on the ways in which they obtained material for a sample of their recently published items (N = 494). Findings challenge the accepted theoretical wisdom which suggests that male and female reporters obtain news differently. Regrettably, female reporters do not diversify the overwhelmingly restricted and male-hegemonic source pool. Female journalists show some greater journalistic initiative and greater time pressures. Gender discrimination migrated to less observable arenas: female reporters experience more editorial involvement in their news work and a greater news beat overload. Together with reduced emphasis on exclusivity and newsroom presence, these factors endanger the status that female journalists achieved in a long and exhausting struggle.

KEYWORDS gender; journalism; male/female reporters; news practices; news sources; source diversity

Introduction

While the literature regarding male–female differentiation in news production is relatively rich, the evidence concerning their distinctiveness or similarity is remarkably poor and inconclusive, as various scholars acknowledge (Correa and Harp 2011; De Swert and Hooghe 2010; Rodgers and Thorson 2003).

One striking example demonstrating the theoretical, methodological, occupational and ethical challenge of studying the gender effect on news concerns the inconclusive and even contradictory data surrounding the question of whether female reporters fulfill scholars’ hopes of increasing source diversity. While some studies show that female journalists do live up to these hopes and rely on female sources significantly more than male journalists (Armstrong 2004; Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Freedman, Fico, and Durisin 2010; Rodgers and Thorson 2003; Zeldes, Fico, and Arvind 2007; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998), others deny such a straightforward relationship between gender and sourcing patterns (Credon 1993; Len-Rios et al. 2008; Mills 1997; Spears, Seydegart, and Gallagher 2000).

Despite the contradictory evidence, many scholars, exemplified by Steiner (2009, 117), adhere to the working assumption that “men and women work differently or that they should”. Expectations of a difference however is reasonable; the impact of gender on news is not easily measurable, as it is complex, evasive, naturalized, denied, dismissed,
undiscerned and taken for granted (Löfgren Nilsson 2007). Social phenomena such as male hegemony, a macho newsroom culture and discrimination against female journalists are often hidden behind seemingly gender-free distinctions such as objectivity and subjectivity, hard and soft news, male-oriented and female-oriented news beats, hierarchies of credibility and the extent to which sources are considered “authoritative” (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989; Gans 2004; Löfgren Nilsson 2010; Manning 2001; Sigal 1973; Soloski 1979; Steiner 2009).

The feminization of newsrooms (during which women increasingly became a substantial part of the journalistic workforce) turned gender into one of the most fundamental dichotomies cutting across the journalistic community and its pool of news sources, in some cases comprising more than half the journalistic workforce (Djerf-Pierre 2007; Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, 2010; Steiner 2009; Weaver and Willnat 2012). Hence every journalism scholar, and actually every citizen, has a stake in two major implications of feminization:

- **Political**: The extent to which feminization helped diversify the public sphere, that was dominated by hegemonic, monolithic voices of white male officials and experts (Brown et al. 1987; Chambers and Steiner 2010; De Swert and Hooghe 2010), and whether news continues to be “mostly about men, by men and through the eyes of men” (Hartley 1982, 146) even when increasingly produced by women. A more diversified source mix can put an end to the “symbolic annihilation” of women (Tuchman, Daniels, and Benet 1978) and also enable “a more complete, just and fair representation of society” (Correa and Harp 2011, 301).

- **Sociology of journalism**: The more distinctiveness we find between the performance of female and male journalists, the less we may consider the existing knowledge regarding news production conducive to generalization, opening the door to a potentially distinct sociology of news for each gender.

This paper explores the role of female and male journalists comparatively and comprehensively by focusing primarily on their actual work processes. If male and female reporters do behave distinctively, there are two reasons for assuming that these differences will surface during the reporting stage: first, the organizational impact of gender is expected to be manifest in interactions (Acker 1990)1—in this case among reporters, superiors and sources, in their different gender combinations—and second, journalism itself is an interactional expertise (Collins and Evans 2007; Reich 2012b). Obviously, the same practices may yield entirely different news products and framing. These aspects, however, extend beyond the scope of the present study. Work processes were largely overlooked in previous gender studies, a vast majority of which used content analysis, which is highly limited with regard to news processes, as detailed in the section entitled Methodology.

The comparison of female and male reporters will address the following four aspects: their personal background, work conditions and work style, sourcing practices, and status indicators.

To explore these aspects and cover a series of previously unexamined variables, the current paper uses a mix of methods, foremost of which is a series of face-to-face reconstruction interviews, using a sample comprising male and female reporters in parallel roles, who were asked to detail how they obtained each of their recently-published items. Role equivalence was mandatory in the current study to maximize comparability by
minimizing intervening variables such as beat and medium differences. Each studied item entailed its own “micro-interview”.

**Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

While similarity or difference may be perceived as a continuum, the traditional theoretical approaches to questions about whether female and male reporters perform their roles distinctively surround the poles of this continuum. In this study, the respective approaches are termed the **convergent** and **divergent** camps.

The divergent camp (also known as the “gender model”) claims that male and female journalists perform their roles distinctively (Armstrong 2004; Beam and Di Cicco 2010; De Swert and Hooghe 2010; Grabe et al. 2011, 303; Rodgers and Thorson 2003), some of whom note contextual factors associated with a greater gender effect.

On the other hand, according to the convergent camp (also known as the “job model”), there is no such thing as female journalism, since even if female reporters do display different values, attitudes and perspectives, these are overshadowed by the male-dominated organizational climate (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; De Swert and Hooghe 2010; Djerf-Pierre 2007; Grabe et al. 2011; Rodgers and Thorson 2003, 662; Ross 2007). News reporters may differ in their work, suggested Sebba (1994, cited by Cann and Mohr 2001, 163), but this is a function of temperament rather than gender.

The convergent model claims that the homogenizing (and male-dominated) forces in the news environment are powerful enough to counterbalance female attitudes, tendencies and perspectives, the divergent model asserts that they are not. The convergent position is supported by both new institutionalists, who emphasize the homogeneity of news and news making (Benson 2006; Cook 1998; Ryfe 2006), and field theorists, who maintain that female journalists join the existing competition over resources in the journalistic field, including prevailing notions and standards of success, prestige, and “good” and valuable journalism (Djerf-Pierre 2007).

An intriguing derivative of the sameness/difference question, that receives much less attention in the literature, goes one step further, asking whether we expect female reporters to display higher, equal or lower standards of journalism compared to their male counterparts (in aspects such as number of sources per item or frequency of cross-checking, field work and reliance on PR). The answer is disputed by two groups of scholars, who by definition inhabit the divergent camps. According to those who support the overcompensation hypothesis, female journalists are expected to display higher standards than males, in an effort “to beat the boys at their own game” (Armstrong 2004; Chambers and Steiner 2010; Grabe et al. 2011, 288). An opposing view, that expects female journalists to lag behind their male counterparts, is suggested by scholars who emphasize their constraints, discrimination and efforts to juggle among numerous professional and private obligations (North 2009; Steiner 2009). Both these hypothesized directions, that expect female reporters to manifest either superior or inferior journalistic standards, may orient the divergent expectations of the current study, especially concerning aspects of the following research question that lack specific theoretical and empirical references. While the convergent camp expects similarity throughout, the divergent one must specify its expectation in each of the following dimensions, based on theory and research:
Personal background: One may expect women journalists to be in earlier stages of their lives than their male counterparts and better educated (Chambers and Steiner 2010; Djerf-Pierre 2007; Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig 2003). Women who do have children may find it increasingly difficult to balance their professional and private obligations (Chambers and Steiner 2010; North 2009).

Work style: In line with the overcompensation perspective (Armstrong 2004; Chambers and Steiner 2010; Grabe et al. 2011; Löfgren Nilsson 2010), one may expect female journalists to try harder and display more initiative, more field work and the like, despite their greater work pressures (Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998); they are also likely to invest longer hours (Chambers and Steiner 2010; North 2009) and produce more stories than male journalists (Grabe et al. 2011).

Reliance on sources: Female journalists are expected to show greater source diversity (Chambers and Steiner 2010; Correa and Harp 2011; Rodgers and Thorson 2003), relying more frequently on female sources (Armstrong 2004; Beam and Di Cicco 2010; De Swert and Hooghe 2010, 80; Freedman, Fico, and Durisin 2010, 30; Rodgers and Thorson 2003; Ross 2007; Zeldes, Fico, and Arvind 2007; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998), as well as on ordinary citizens and minorities (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Correa and Harp 2011), while basing themselves less on senior sources, officials, spokespersons and PR practitioners than their male counterparts (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998).

Status indicators: Female reporters may suffer gendered typecasting that assigns them to “female” news beats, where they experience lower status, less of an authoritative and expert voice, lower proportions of exclusive stories, lower salaries, and a slower promotion pace with editors trusting them less than they do male reporters (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Cann and Mohr 2001; Chambers and Steiner 2010; Correa and Harp 2011; Grabe et al. 2011; Kitzinger 1998; North 2009; Ross and Carter 2011; Van Zoonen 1998; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998).

Methodology

Research consisted primarily of a series of face-to-face reconstruction interviews, a method that has demonstrated its viability in exploring different facets of news processes (Anderson 2009; Brolin and Johansson 2009; Brueggemann 2011; Reich 2009). For this study, the sample consisted of female and male news reporters representing various domains of coverage who were interviewed face-to-face, recreating—contact by contact—the “biographies” of stories randomly sampled from their publications during the previous month.

This method is markedly capable of overcoming several of the drawbacks of traditional methods in capturing the ways in which female and male reporters perform their role in a systematic, comparative and measurable manner. According to Steiner, interviews and surveys are “overused and decreasingly productive” and content analysis is “at best inconclusive” and shallow (Steiner 2009, 124–125). Nevertheless, content analysis is the dominant methodology in comparative studies of male and female journalists, although several of the researchers employing it admit that they were unable to crack some of the common hard nuts of news production, such as reliance on anonymous sources or use of unisex bylines and source names (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Correa and Harp 2011; Freedman, Fico, and Durisin 2010; Geertsema 2009; Grabe...
et al. 2011; Rodgers and Thorson 2003; Ross 2007; Zeldes, Fico, and Arvind 2007; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998). The most severe shortcoming of content analysis in the context of the current paper, however, is its speculative nature in all that concerns news sources and news processes, as final news products bear only faint, equivocal and sometimes misleading footsteps of the news processes that preceded them (cf. Brown et al. 1987; De Swert and Hooghe 2010; Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle 1993; Manning 2001).

The reconstruction interviews used in this study were preceded by three preparatory measures:

1. **Random selection of beats and reporters**: A full list of reporters and newsbeats at 13 leading national news organizations, representing all four media, was prepared in two months of byline monitoring. As the mix of male and female reporters and sources may change according to news beat (Chambers and Steiner 2010; Rodgers and Thorson 2003), we covered three clusters of beats in each organization, displaying their distinct patterns of news production (Reich 2012a): politics (e.g. diplomatic, political and parliamentary affairs), domestic affairs (e.g. regional and police reporters and thematic beats, such as environment and education) and business affairs (e.g. banking, treasury and macro-economics, finance, real estate).

2. **Identification of all published items**: The sampling period extended over four weeks—long enough to supply a rich mix of stories, but not long enough to tax participants’ memories.

3. **Random sampling of news items**: To limit interview duration to 60—75 minutes, the sample included 8—11 items per reporter (the exact number varied according to medium and size of organization).

Special seating arrangements were used to avoid infringement of source confidentiality. For print, online and radio items, the reporter (with a pile of sampled stories or printouts) and interviewer (with a pile of questionnaires) sat on opposite sides of a table with a screen placed between them to give the reporter privacy each time he or she was asked to choose another item from the sample pile and detail how it was obtained. Television reporters were given a laptop with video clips of their sampled items and a pair of earphones, enabling them to watch their items in privacy.

To enhance comparativeness, the study focused on a carefully matched sample of 60 female and male reporters in equivalent roles. The decision to narrow the sample from 133 to 60 reporters may appear odd at first glance, ostensibly distorting the natural and unequal distribution of male and female reporters. Matching samples was mandatory in the context of the current study, however, to minimize the impact of intervening variables, such as beat and medium effects, resulting from the coincidental mixes of genders and beats in different news organizations and media, while still enabling a large enough sample of news items.

As this study focuses on the question of similarity or difference and as significance tests (here we used t-tests, MANOVA, Chi-square and Mann–Whitney) can prove only difference, an additional statistic was required to test whether cases that look similar are indeed not substantially different. The chosen effect size, $D$-statistic, proved itself no less strict than significance tests (Cohen 1992).

The double filter—significance and effect size tests—raises the threshold for what counts as meaningful difference, suggesting four possible combinations, with different implications regarding the meaningfulness of the findings:
1. Significant result with meaningful effect size—a substantial difference.
2. Significant result with negligible effect size—a not necessarily meaningful difference.
3. Non-significant result with substantial effect size—a difference that could prove significant and meaningful if replicated in a larger sample.
4. Non-significant result with negligible effect size—no difference at all between results.

Measures

- **Personal data:** Personal information was obtained through a questionnaire completed by the interviewer at the end of the reconstructions, referring to variables such as age, seniority, main reporting work venue (home/newsroom/news scenes or combinations thereof), schedule change frequency (five-degree scale) and perceived salary levels compared to those of journalists in the same job and with the same seniority (average/higher/much higher/lower/much lower).
- **General source data:** Reporters were also asked to indicate the role types of the sources they relied on for each item (senior/non-senior/PR practitioner/ordinary citizen), as well as the sources' affiliation to a specific sector in society, differentiating between two stages: news discovery, in which the reporter receives the initial lead for the potential item, and news-gathering sources from whom the reporter obtained the building blocks of the story.
- **Source diversity index:** Ranges between 0 and 4, with one point for a mix of human sources who differ in terms of (a) gender, (b) sector in society, (c) role type and (d) novelty (at least one source interviewed for the first time).
- **Reliance on specific deprived communities of sources:** Proportional contributions of female sources, ordinary citizens and non-senior sources. All in all, 84 percent of the contacts were identified clearly as male or female sources while the remainder consisted of mixed-gender sources, groups of sources or genderless sources such as documents, websites and other media.
- **Initiative:** To indicate which party initiated each contact, the reporter or the source, we used the technology as a reference, asking the reporters to specify the communication technology that served for each transaction of information. In bidirectional channels such as telephone calls, emails and SMS, they were also asked to specify whether the contact was incoming or outgoing. The initiating party was identified clearly for 94 percent of the contacts in the discovery phase and 96 percent in the gathering phase.
- **Workload pressures:** The total number of items by the specific reporter as registered daily by the sampling team during the month sampled.
- **Time pressures:** For each item, the reporter detailed the time that elapsed from inception of work on the item to the time it was submitted to the newsroom.
- **Beat status:** Determined by a panel of two judges on a 1–5 scale. The judges, one male and one female, both journalism scholars and former senior editors, were given a pack of 64 cards with names of beats and asked to arrange them in a five-level hierarchy, according to the status prevailing in Israeli news organizations, while keeping each group relatively equal in size. A single grade gap (on a 1–5 scale) was considered relative consensus. In the first round, they agreed on the hierarchy of 52 beats and in the second, after negotiations, on the remaining 12. All in all, they expressed full consensus for 29 beats (45 percent) and one grade gap for 35 of them (55 percent). For each of the latter, the average score of both judges was taken into account.
•  **Beat specialization**: The average number of beats per reporter, as detailed in the personal questionnaire.

•  **Item prominence**: To address the inherent differences among media types, measures of prominence were defined separately for each medium: TV—starting minute (measured from beginning of newscast), radio—opening item (yes/no), internet—item featured as main headline (yes/no), and print—item page number. Taking the methodological and logistic constraints of sampling and tracking item prominence into account, for radio and online items, prominence was noted by the reporter for each of the studied items, while for TV and print, it was documented by the sampling team for the reporter’s total output during the month sampled.

**Findings**

Findings are displayed according to the four categories of demography, work style, sourcing practices and status indicators.

**Demography**

The matched sample included 30 female and 30 male journalists, compared with 24 percent female journalists in the general sample and 33 percent in the beats studied within the 13 news organizations.

According to Table 1, female reporters were found to be significantly different from their male counterparts only in one variable that concerns personal background: they have significantly fewer children. There are additional variables with substantial effect size ($D$-statistic $\geq 0.20$), however, that might prove significant if replicated in a larger sample: younger age, less experience in journalism and in their current medium (although not their current job) and fewer children at home. Educational gaps were not found to be significant, contrasting with the findings of previous studies (Djerf-Pierre 2007; Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig 2003).

**TABLE 1**

Demography of male and female reporters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reporter's gender</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>$D$-Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority in reporting (years)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority in current job (years)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority in medium (years)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (% married)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (mean number)</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.045**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children at home (mean number)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic education (%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional education (%)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance tests: *t-test; $b$Chi-square.

* $p < 0.05$. NS, not significant.
**Work Style**

Three striking differences, all significant and with a substantial effect size, may be seen in the working conditions and work styles of male and female reporters described in Table 2. Female reporters face significantly higher time pressures, producing a greater proportion of their items (52 percent compared with 41 percent) within one hour or less. Obviously, news cycles differ from one medium to another, but the matched sample—a careful comparison of male and female reporters in the same medium—guarantees that the effect is beyond media type differences. Furthermore, female journalists tend to initiate contacts with their news sources more often than male reporters in the news-gathering phase, during which they obtain the building blocks for their stories. Third, female journalists tend to perform significantly less work from the newsroom, as reported in personal interviews. Whether this reflects accelerated fragmentation and individuation of news work (Deuze 2009), reluctance to encounter the macho atmosphere of many newsrooms (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Lachover 2005) or preference to be closer to their homes (a possibility that was not confirmed in the personal interviews), relative distance from the newsroom may exact two interconnected tolls: (1) organizational—female journalists may find it more difficult to develop close and informal relationships with superiors and decision makers; and (2) practical—female journalists may systematically miss preferred and prestigious assignments, as described in a former study (Löfgren Nilsson 2010) only because these tend to pop up without prior notice and are assigned instantly to journalists present around the newsroom, a majority of whom are usually men.

Other variables whose substantial effect size indicates that they might be found significant if tested on larger samples are the less fluid schedules of female reporters and their tendency to do their work from news scenes. While there is no reason to question their reports regarding their distance from the newsroom, their responses about working from news scenes more than male reporters should be taken with a grain of salt. As shown at the bottom of Table 2, their actual use of legwork, reconstructed item by item by the same reporters, shows no gender difference whatsoever.

Findings suggest that female and male reporters work under similar workloads, as reflected in their similar outputs during the month sampled. They maneuver somewhat differently in time and space, however: Female reporters face greater time pressures than male reporters, although they report less fluid schedules. Their use of legwork is similar to that of male reporters, although they tend to avoid the newsroom as a place of work more than their male counterparts do.

**Reliance on Sources**

As shown in the upper tiers of Table 3, differences between male and female reporters, in all that concerns their sourcing practices, are virtually non-existent. None of the results in this table has a minimal effect size. Three variables do indicate that female journalists display a somewhat more diversified and careful work style that might correspond with their higher level of initiative. However, under the strict tests that this study imposed, involving both significance and effect size, the results, no matter how close to the threshold, cannot be considered substantial: greater source diversity ($p = 0.059$), more sources per item ($p = 0.09$) and more cross-checking of information ($p = 0.09$).

Not only do female reporters show no substantially greater source diversity but they even avoid relying on female sources more than their male counterparts, as evident in the
lower part of Table 3. Furthermore, contrary to expectations (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Correa and Harp 2011), female reporters were no more reliant than male reporters on ordinary citizens and non-senior sources. While this part of the table describes the news-gathering sources that contributed the published information, similar patterns, including poor reliance on deprived sources, also appeared in the news discovery stage.

These findings suggest that contrary to the hopes of scholars (cf. Correa and Harp 2011; Ross 2007; Rodgers and Thorson 2003), female reporters do not reduce the male hegemony of sources and do not give more voice to voiceless communities.

### TABLE 3

#### Source relations of male and female journalists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporter’s gender</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>D-Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General source data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>D-Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sources per item</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.09&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source diversity index</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.059&lt;sup&gt;**&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-checking (per item)</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.09&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaks (% of items involving)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reliance on source types for news-gathering (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>D-Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male sources</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female sources</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior source</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-senior sources</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokespersons and PR</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional sources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.04&lt;sup&gt;c*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary citizens</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NS&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance tests: <sup>a</sup>t-test; <sup>b</sup>Chi-square; <sup>c</sup>MANOVA.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. NS, not significant.
Female reporters rely significantly more on professional sources, such as lawyers, accountants and other free professionals who are not affiliated with a particular organization. In the present results, however, the significance evident may be the result of a sampling error, as it is the only significant result out of six categories. Furthermore, the relative contribution of this source type is very limited.

**Status Indicators**

Table 4 displays factors that reflect or shape the status of female versus male reporters, two of which were found to be significant and to have a substantial effect size. First, editors tend to be involved in items of female reporters significantly more often than in those of males. Their intervention is manifest in different ways: contributing story leads, consulting the newsworthiness of stories and the ways in which they should be covered, as well as updates and coordination. In principle, more frequent editor—reporter contacts could have indicated a more collaborative work style. It is more likely, however, that these are manifestations of the more restricted autonomy of female reporters, following Kitzinger’s (1998) observation that editors tend to trust female reporters less than male and considering their scores for several of the following status indicators.

A second substantial status-oriented difference concerns exclusivity: in 35 percent of the cases, male reporters claimed that the specific item was exclusive, compared with only 25 percent of female reporters ($p = 0.02$). It is clear that male reporters tend to emphasize their (real or perceived) accomplishments more than female reporters and thereby signal their purportedly greater commitment to the competitive ethos of journalism (Cook 1998; Ehrlich 1995) in ways that can promote their status inside and outside their news organizations.

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status indicators</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>D-Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beat status (in the news organization)</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat status (in the general sample)</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential expertise (number of beats per reporter in the general sample)</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors involvement (of items)</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>$0.02$</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exclusive stories</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$0.02$</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived income: average or above (%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print: average page number</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.91</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television: average minutes in the newscast</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio: percentage of opening items</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet: % of items featured as main headlines</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance tests: $^a$t-test; $^b$Chi-square.

$^c$Contributing story leads, information, consultations regarding newsworthiness or coverage method, or coordination.

$^d$On a news page or a homepage.

*p < 0.05. NS, not significant.
A third status-oriented difference proved non-significant but yielded a substantial effect size that might be found significant if replicated on a larger-scale sample, namely the extent to which both female and male reporters are able to specialize in their beat, according to the number of beats they are assigned to cover on a regular basis. While males were assigned to cover 1.38 beats per reporter, females were assigned to cover 1.61 \((D\text{-statistic} = -0.33)\). In other words, managers treat male beats more like domains of expertise, while female beats are considered more as domains of responsibility. This tendency renders the status of female reporters more fragile, particularly in an era of cutbacks, when the remaining staff is asked to fill in and cover their beats along with their regular ones. On the other hand, one cannot rule out the possibility that female journalists would eventually become more valued employees, following the same trends, thanks to their growing versatility and compliance.

Surprisingly—and contrary to overload effect and to former studies (cf. Chambers and Steiner 2010; Grabe et al. 2011; Zoch and VanSlyke Turk 1998)—no significant status gaps were found between female and male reporters in the general sample or the overall news and business reporting staffs of the organizations studied.

Another indication of status gaps, that was found to be non-significant but with substantial effect size, was the prominence of items submitted by male and female reporters. Results were mixed: while no significant difference was found in the prominence of TV and printed news, female reporters’ items received substantially less prominence online and substantially more on radio. While these results invite further research, the overall picture suggests no evidence for broad and systematic discrimination of female reporters in all that concerns the prominence of their published items.

The overall picture regarding status indicators suggests that discrimination of female reporters did not disappear but simply migrated to less overt and observable places. The current form of gender discrimination involves greater beat overload and greater editorial intervention in female reporters’ items.

**Discussion**

As the differences found between male and female reporters are islands of divergence in a stream of convergence, it is important to put them into the proper context of general similarity rather than to dramatize their dissimilarity. The general pattern derived from the findings—despite focus on various dimensions of news work, different levels of analysis, meticulous research design, a relatively large sample and careful matching of reporters in parallel roles and media—suggests that the respective genders are not that different in their actual practices studied here. Obviously, one cannot rule out the substantial differences that can be found in other aspects of these practices (e.g. in the negotiations of male and female reporters with their sources, or in the cooperation they receive), as well as in other aspects of their work (e.g. the content they produce, its framing, style, etc.).

The divergent position could have been strengthened substantially by a series of findings that at first glance suggest a more distinct profile of male and female journalists. According to these findings, that were based on the general sample, female reporters receive significantly fewer leaks from their sources, rely more often on public relations professionals and spokespersons during the news discovery stage, work much more
regularly at news scenes, perceive their salaries as substantially lower (fewer female journalists believe their salaries are average or above) and submit items that are aired significantly later than those of male reporters in television newscasts. While both genders relied overwhelmingly on male sources, male reporters did so substantially more often than did female reporters.

While this series of differences emerged as significant in the general sample, it was non-significant for the matched sample. The vanishing significance effect may indicate that these differences represent the effect of the respective news beat and news media. The effect is consequential theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, it highlights the importance of avoiding essentialist frameworks, as ostensible gender effects may turn out to be associated with other intervening variables. Methodologically, it not only invites a careful beat and medium balance in future studies, but also suggests that at least some of the contradictory evidence in former studies may reflect differences in emphasis on news beat and medium-type balance.

The differences found to be substantial suggest that female journalists employ a somewhat more instigative work style, while their occupational status is more fragile than that of their male counterparts. Their greater initiative-taking may be seen as supporting the overcompensation approach, according to which female journalists are more alert and meticulous at work “to beat the boys at their own game” (Armstrong 2004; Grabe et al. 2011; Löfgren Nilsson 2010; Ross 2007). This interpretation, however, does not conform with their lower emphasis on exclusivity. An alternative explanation suggests that their greater initiative is a strategy to address their inferior access to sources—who tend not to take them seriously enough (Steiner 2009) and thus cannot be relied on to take the initiative. Furthermore, the greater initiative exerted by female reporters may represent a preventive strategy, addressing threats to their status manifested in a series of variables: more frequent editorial intervention, less emphasis on competitiveness and exclusivity, their less solid expertise (evident in number of beats per reporter) and sparse presence at newsrooms. The combination of these variables may be detrimental to their status, that was obtained through a long struggle (e.g. Djerf-Pierre 2007; Steiner 2009), especially because in their profession, status is not determined by formal credentials and measurable achievements, but is susceptible to intra-newsroom politics (Tunstall 1971).

How representative is the Israeli case? Although the role and social status of women in Israel is shaped by various forces, including the ongoing struggle between religious and secular, historic and contemporary, civil and military factors (Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar 2010), in all that concerns gender relations, patterns in the Israeli national media generally appear similar to those found in other Western countries (Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, 2010). National newsrooms are dominated by a secular, Western, liberal (some would say left-wing) ethos that largely protects female journalists from religious or political discrimination. This ethos, however, does not eliminate confrontation with sexism and with the male-dominated environments of their superiors and news sources. Hence they employ gendered tactics in an attempt to overcome these obstacles (Lachover 2005).

The proportion of Israeli female journalists has been increasing since the mid-1970s (Caspi and Limor 1999; Lachover 2005), although estimates currently vary. The most convincing figures are around 35 percent—a moderate rate of female journalist employment, close to those of South Asian countries such as China and Hong Kong (32–33 percent) and that of the United Kingdom (34 percent) but somewhat behind that
of the United States (41 percent)—a figure that also represents the average proportion of 29 countries calculated by the Global Journalist Project (Weaver and Willnat 2012, 530–531).6

Conclusions

Despite several substantial differences, this study found a sweeping overall trend of resemblance between the ways in which female and male journalists produce news, cutting across various dimensions of their work—personal background, work style, sourcing practices and status indicators—and covering a wide array of variables, some of which were studied here for the first time, based on detailed testimonies of female and male reporters in parallel reporting roles.

Interpretation of these findings, especially regarding the similarity between the performance of male and female reporters, may vary in line with one’s theoretical perspective. The findings challenge the divergent camp, according to which female and male reporters perform their roles distinctively. Scholars who support this position, that represents the accepted wisdom in gender studies (Steiner 2009), may embrace the gender distinctions found here and emphasize their importance and ramifications, claiming that greater involvement of editors in female items, their greater initiative-taking and newsbeat overload, and their lower emphasis on exclusivity should not be dismissed as minutia. These scholars may insist that in real life, male and female reporters are assigned to much less equivalent roles and their actual performance is thus more divergent, although the specific differences in their conduct represent intervening factors, such as news beat effect. Furthermore, scholars of the divergent camp may maintain that further differences between male and female reporters remain largely immeasurable because of the complex and evasive nature of gender factors, that tend to be unconscious, deniable, not dichotomous and not always present where expected (Löfgren Nilsson 2010; Steiner 2009).

According to the sociology of news perspective, although this study overlooks substantial aspects of journalism (e.g. writing style, framing, editing, role perceptions and values), its overall findings indicate that newswork is homogenous not only across organizations and countries, as the new institutionalists suggest (Cook 1998; Ryfe 2006), but also across gender, thus enabling further reliance on a single sociology of journalism. On the other hand, critical scholars who support the convergent model may insist that the so-called unisex nature of journalism is no more than male hegemony and editorial macho culture that saturates the news environment, overtly and covertly governing the entire media logic of mainstream newsrooms in every aspect: structure, division of labor, power relations, workflow and even emphasis on seemingly neutral values such as objectivity and detachment (Cann and Mohr 2001).

Discrimination and stereotyping are still going on, but have withdrawn from the organizational level—where they were entwined in policies, structures, routines and ideologies—to the individual level of specific superiors and coworkers, that has a relatively lower impact on news making.

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, suggesting that female journalists work “just like men” embodied a dubious and insensitive element bordering on sexism (Steiner 2009, 116). Today, however, it denotes a grave political problem of
unbearably limited source diversity. Paraphrasing Hartley (1982), news is mostly about men and through the eyes of men, even when increasingly produced by women. Furthermore, now that we are more disillusioned about the possibility of enriching the ensemble of sources simply by hiring more female reporters, the problem of diversity appears even less curable. Is this pessimism justified? Not necessarily. Not too many decades ago, female voices were believed to be irritating and unauthoritative for radio listeners in the United States and Sweden (Chambers and Steiner 2010, 51; Djerf-Pierre 2007, 85). Obviously, appointing a female anchor is much easier and more audible and visible than overall diversification of news sources, yet both involve a radical redefinition of voices that count as acceptable, legitimate and authoritative.

The method applied in this study is not free of shortcomings, the most severe of which is dependence on self-reporting by human subjects. The results may still be valid, however, for several reasons. First, a Danish study showed that reporters’ versions were almost totally consistent with their sources’ accounts (Albæk 2011). Second, reliance on self-reports was somewhat mitigated by anchoring reporters’ testimonies in specific samples of items, by asking interviewees to report specific actions rather than evaluate their own performance and by focusing on freshly-published materials, thereby minimizing possible memory gaps. Third, reporters felt safe enough to report cases in which they used lower standards of journalism, such as avoidance of legwork and cross-checking, or reliance on PR. Finally, even if the findings were somewhat biased despite these precautions, there is no reason to expect that their biases are distributed unevenly among female and male reporters to any substantial extent.

Critical scholars may perceive the current research design as embracing a so-called masculine framework that emphasizes the measurable and the competitive, thus forcing the masculine yardstick on feminine journalists. A less masculine perspective may use observations, despite the limitations noted above, to map potential similarities and differences between genders that could be overlooked by current research and of which interviewees may be unaware. Future studies should explore whether female journalists in less competitive news environments, such as the local press, alternative press, citizen journalism organizations and news blogs, experience less pressure to adopt unisex or so-called masculine performance, as well as whether more differences between female and male reporters can be found in less Western-oriented cultures that manifest less gender equality. There are at least two reasons for replicating this study: reassessment of the impact of gender factors and especially of status indicators, considering the turbulent times the press is undergoing at present, whose impact on the work of male and female reporters may prove differential.

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NOTES

1. The other dimensions were: gender typing, gender symbolism, gender expectations and gendered professional identities.

2. The study involved only news outlets in their principal medium of activity, avoiding subsidiary outlets that make second-hand use of their mother organizations’ contents. Print press: Haaretz, Yedioth Ahronoth, Maariv; free papers: Israel Hayom, Israel Post; Radio: Kol Israel and Galey Zahal; television: Channels 1, 2 and 10; internet: Ynet, Walla, News 1 (Mahlaka Rishona). The total number of reporters in the news and business departments of the organizations studied was 393—a third of whom were female journalists. Hence the 133 reporters that were interviewed comprise about a third (33.8 percent) of the total reporting corps in the beats studied.

3. For each female reporter, we selected the most equivalent male partner, according to the following criteria: (1) Member of the same news organization, or at least the same medium and the same organization type (e.g., avoiding coupling a reporter from a popular paper with an elite one, or a reporter from a public broadcasting network with that of a private one). (2) Covering a beat from the same category. (3) Closest number of years in journalism. For two female reporters, we could not find male mates who fit the criteria. In terms of media, the 60 reporters comprised 18 print, 18 radio, 12 television and 12 internet reporters; in terms of beat clusters they included 12 political, 36 domestic affairs and 12 financial.

4. D-Statistic was calculated as the average for male reporters minus the average for female reporters, divided by the pooled estimate of standard deviation. As suggested, effect sizes of 0.20–0.49 were considered small, 0.50–0.79 medium, and 0.80 and above large (Cohen 1992, 157).

5. Items that were produced within one hour or less comprised 12 percent of the items on television, 30 percent in print, 79 percent on radio and 72 percent online.

6. According to our findings, female journalists comprise a third of the reporting staff. The actual figures are probably closer to 35 percent, however, as found in the Global Media Monitoring Project (2005, 135; 2010, 94), as female journalists are probably slightly more prevalent in soft news beats, magazines and local news, that were not studied here. Lachover (2000) measured 37 percent in the print press and Limor and Lavie (2002) measured 41 percent in five leading Israeli dailies. In the Global Journalist project (Weaver and Willnat 2012, 530–531), Israel lags behind in average proportion of woman journalists with only 29 percent. These figures, however, probably underestimate the proportion of female journalists in Israel because of overrepresentation of senior journalists.

REFERENCES


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