

Searching for the 'Why' of Gendered News: Journalism Practices and Societal Contexts

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Abstract : Driven by the need to understand the results of previous research that clearly shows deep unbalances of the media discourses about women and men in spite of the growing numbers of female journalists, our paper aims to progress from the 'what' to the 'why' of these unbalanced representations. Furthermore, it does so at a time when journalism is undergoing a dramatic change in terms of professional practices and in how media organizations are organized and run, affecting women in particular. While some feminist research points to the fact that female and male journalists evaluate the role of the news and production methods in similar ways feminist theorizing also suggests that thought and knowledge are highly influenced by social identity, which is also inherently affected by the experiences of gender. This is particularly important at a time of deep societal and professional changes. While there are persuasive discussions of gender identities at work in newsrooms in various countries studies on the issue will benefit from cases that focus on the particularities of local contexts. In our paper, we present one such case: the case of Portugal, a country hit hard by austerity measures that have affected all cultural industries including journalism organizations, already feeling the broader impacts of the larger societal changes of the media landscape. Can we gender these changes? How are they felt and understood by female and male journalists? And how are these discourses framed by androcentric, feminist and post-feminist sensibilities? Foregrounding questions of gender, our paper seeks to explore some of the interactions of societal and professional forces, identifying their gendered character and outlining how they shape journalism work in general and the production of unbalanced gender representations in particular. We do so grounded in feminist studies of journalism as well as feminist organizational and work studies, looking at a corpus of 20 in-depth interviews of female and male Portuguese journalists. The research findings illustrate how gender in journalism practices interacts with broader experiences of the cultural and economic contexts and show the ambivalences of these interactions in news organizations.

Keywords : gender, journalism, newsroom culture, Portuguese journalists

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