

Gendering Worcester News

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Abstract

This research explores gender and gender stereotypes in a local newspaper, focusing on issues such as whose voice is accessed as a news source, as well as whether female and male journalists dominate soft news or hard news articles. Using the local newspaper, *Worcester News*, detailed content analysis was conducted for six months (Monday to Saturday for the same week each month). The analysis highlighted that gender biases continue in *Worcester News* and that this has implications for training journalists. Male journalists tended to write far more articles about Politics (Political articles were written by 89% of male journalists compared with 11% of female journalists). Similarly, male journalists were more likely to write about Crime and Business (73% of these articles were written by male journalists compared with 27% of female journalists). Female journalists also wrote more about Family issues (36% male journalists compared with 64% of female journalists) and Leisure (34% male journalists compared with 66% female journalists).

These differences reinforce hard news/soft news gendered perceptions, as well as providing the readership with role models that tend to strengthen gender stereotypes, such as women being discouraged from engaging in politics and the public sphere. The sole authoritative voices used also tended to be male (49% were male compared with 14% that were solely female). Female sources were often placed alongside a male (this constituted 29% in *Worcester News*) – and although these figures tended to be better than the findings from Cochrane (2011), it is suggested that such gender disparities are continuing to reinforce hegemonic masculinity as the dominant norm for journalists and the news they produce.

Introduction

Duncan (1990 cited in Arslan and Koca, 2011, p.311) suggests that ‘of all the socialisation influences that work to shape the skills, values, norms and behaviours of individuals, the mass media appears as one of the most prevalent and powerful’ on society. Similarly, Riffe et al. (1998) propose that we are influenced through all forms of media, including through what we read, and that these tend to create and maintain our social perspectives (Fink, 1998), which can reinforce stereotypes.

Cochrane (4 December 2011) in a report for *Women in Journalism*, counted the bylines for seven national UK newspapers and found that ‘in a typical month, 78% of newspaper articles are written by men.’ Her research noted that this was the case for a wide range of newspapers including *The Guardian* (72% male, 28% female), *The Daily Telegraph* (78% male, 22% female), *The Sun* (80% male, 20% female) and *The Independent* (84% male, 16% female). In her report, *The Mail* had the highest number of female bylines (68% male, 32% female; 4 December, *ibid*) although this still underrepresented female reporters. Likewise the Global Media Monitoring Project (2015, 126) found the same gender disparity regarding newspaper reporters in the UK (27% were female and 73% were male). This is despite the higher number of women being accepted onto full time undergraduate journalism degrees (Reid, 2015).

According to Greenslade, (2012) news is still important for local people who tend to trust their local newspaper (even if this is read online). They look to local news to tell them about what is happening in their neighbourhood and tend to have more confidence in local news. Therefore, if gender disparities exist in regional newspapers they may provide stereotypes that filter through to local communities in cumulative and subtle ways. Fran Collingaham (previously the Assistant Director for Communications at Coventry City Council and formerly a journalist at *Worcester News*) notes that Worcester ‘is a symbol of middle England where the Worcester Woman is looked at in relation to political balance.’ With two authors of this paper also belonging to Worcester Women’s Equality Party, it was decided to analyse *Worcester News*, published by Newsquest, which attracts an online readership of 420,783 per month (Rasheed, 2016) and an average daily circulation of 8,487 (Linford, 2015). It was given the title of the Midlands best local newspaper of the year in 2010 and has an increasing online audience having 1,575,714 unique users per day to the online *Worcester News* website (Rasheed, 2016). Thus, *Worcester News*, still plays an important ideological role

in relation to how audiences may perceive the world around them (Hodkinson, 2017). *Worcester News* also contributes to specific discourses, or ways of making sense of the world about particular issues, including how we think about men and women (Hall, 1997). Thus, if there is underrepresentation of women in the press, both in terms of content and reporting, including *Worcester News* (Shor et al, 2015, p.961), it will clearly have implications for both the local and wider society.

Bias in news sources

According to Poindexter, (2008) women in general are less likely to be used as news sources. It is much more likely that men will be used as sources. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2015, p.18) suggests that ‘the visibility of women as both subjects of news and reporters of news, has changed hardly at all over the past five years.’ They note that the voices of women are absent or few and far between regarding experts, professionals and politicians, and that they are far more likely to be sought in relation to domestic roles or the private domain. Therefore official sources that appear in the media, still tend to be male (Armstrong, 2004). Shor et al. (2015, p.961) note that ‘The actions and behaviours of men are more noteworthy simply because they are done by men.’ Other research (Niemi and Pitkanen, 2017, p.357) has also analysed how male sources are much more likely to be quoted, or quoted first in an article. This reinforces long standing gender beliefs that regard men as being more competent, important and worthy of consideration when compared with women (Ridgeway, 2011). It also normalises and legitimises the overrepresentation of men in authoritative positions (Shor et al., 2015, p.961). It highlights power hierarchies whereby masculinity is more dominant and hierarchically placed above femininity. This dominant position is perceived as self-evident and natural (Connell, 2003) and the underlying norms remain unquestioned. This is another reason why it is important to explore whether such overrepresentation of males (and by implication the underrepresentation of females) also happens in regional newspapers such as *Worcester News*, especially as Prime Minister Theresa May has announced a review of local and regional newspapers (McCarthy, 2018).

Gendered role models in the media

The media, including printed news, provides role models about how to be female and male. Connell (2003) notes that gender is not only socially constructed but that masculinities are defined in relation to femininity. The media provides a wider range of masculinities than it does of femininities. Thus, anything seen as feminine such as family, nurturing relationships or being emotional (Matud et al., 2010, p.254) is perceived as being hierarchically beneath masculinity. As well as this, traditional ideas about masculinity (such as competitiveness, assertiveness, heterosexuality and professionalism) are given greater prestige and are seen as the ideal standard. These gender differences are about ideological constructions rather than actual attributes of men and women (Steiner 2012, p. 209). However, the danger is that these stereotypes are seen as innate attributes to which men and women are made (or encouraged) to conform.

Thus, what is considered appropriate masculinity and appropriate femininity is highlighted by the media which continues to teach people how to be male and female (MacKinnon, 2003). People are encouraged through the media to ‘incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society’ (Goffman, 1990, p.45), which are implicit (and sometimes explicit) in printed news in relation to gender identity. Armstrong (2004) notes that news stories themselves can influence public perceptions of reality. Thus, printed news also provides people with gender ideologies and stereotypes (Connell, 2003; Milestone and Meyer, 2012).

Newspapers and gender

Newspapers have tended to focus on women being described as ‘domesticated homemakers’ (Godoy–Pressland, 2014, p.160), emphasising the domestic sphere alongside sexualised images of femininity (Mulvey, 1989). This divides idealised femininity into mothers, homemakers or being sexually available. More importance is given to women who conform to these perceived stereotypical notions of femininity provided by the media (Stuart and Donaghue, 2011). Connell (2003) notes that emphasised femininity practices include being nurturing, submissive and sexualised. For males, whilst there are various masculinities on offer, hegemonic masculinity is still ‘... a standard of masculinity to which men are supposed to aspire’ (MacKinnon, 2003, p.115). The idea of masculine hegemony refers to the ways ‘in which the behaviours and traits.... such as toughness, competitiveness and aggressiveness’ are privileged by society and involves patterns of practice and control (Schmidt, 2018, p.60). This type of masculinity also reinforces male privilege and

subjugates women and gay men (Babac and Podobnik, 2016). The newspaper industry has supported a masculine/public versus feminine/private dichotomy (Harp, 2015) with a culture of discrimination against women. Thus, there is a deep gender binary that is reinforced in printed and online news which helps to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity.

Journalists and gender

Lucht (2016) notes that female journalists reported not being respected in the workplace and that the journalism profession itself tended to accentuate perceived maleness as the norm. This is despite the increasing number of female journalists 'because journalism practices are deeply rooted in a male-centred professional culture' (Greenslade, 2012, p.1150). Newsroom cultures therefore privilege male reporters (Schmidt 2018, p.59). According to North (2016, 360) '...male reporters are overwhelmingly allocated hard news stories in comparison to female reporters.' Allan (2010) asserts that there are sexist assumptions about women's professional abilities as journalists which limit the blurring of these hard news/soft news gendered boundaries.

Thus male journalists are associated with hard news consisting of 'politics, economics, international relations, welfare and scientific developments' whereas female journalists are associated with soft news consisting of 'human interest stories, gossip... arts, entertainment, celebrities and lifestyles' (Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig, 2003, p.7). Similarly, Ha et al. (2013) distinguish between hard news associations of business, finance, the economy, national events, health and medicine compared with soft news associated with arts, culture, celebrities and entertainment. Steiner (2012, p.202) notes that '...men report hard news, focus on facts, and require detached objective journalism...[whereas] women focus on features and news about or important to women.' Hard news is also considered to be the most prestigious type of journalism whereas soft news, often connected with emotions, is seen as less prestigious (North, 2016, p. 357). Franks, (2013 cited in North 2016, p.360) noted that sports and politics are two areas where female bylines are least likely to be found and this is also the case with online news (Barnes, 2017, p. 742). There has already been a wealth of research regarding sports reporting and gender (See Arslan and Koca, 2011; Babac and Podobnik, 2016; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Green et al., 2016; Schmidt, 2018) so instead of focusing on sports, another aim was to explore gender disparities in relation to the reporting of hard and soft news (including politics) within *Worcester News*.

Women also tend to be underrepresented in the written press in terms of being reported (Shor et al., 2015). In some cases, there is symbolic annihilation of women's voices in newspaper coverage (Armstrong, 2004) where women are completely absent and are thus annihilated (Tuchman, 1978). Women are therefore trivialised, marginalised and are often entirely absent from the news (Everback, 2013). Thus, the press has traditionally overrepresented men and underrepresented women – both in terms of sources as well as in terms of writing certain types of news stories. Whilst it may be true that individual journalists' power might be gradually diminishing, editors still continue to make important content decisions and as Shor et al. (2014, p.977) note, such decisions are guided by gendered institutional norms. This means that journalists (and editors) of both genders are rewarded for conforming to such newsroom culture (Steiner, 2012, p. 214).

Method

In order to investigate whether there was any gender bias in the news reporting of *Worcester News*, six months of the newspaper were analysed, including full weeks of print (Monday-Saturday) from July 2016 to December 2016. The weeks included were 11-16th July; 8-13th August; 5-10th September; 10-15th October; 7-12th November and 5-10th December). Thus, in total there were 36 days of *Worcester News* that formed the basis of this study. The content analysis included the topics that were noted for each day including Business, Politics, Charity, Entertainment, Crime, Family, Health, Leisure and Politics. The content analysis categories were devised after a pilot was carried out on *Worcester News* to investigate which categories should be included. After this pilot, it was decided to note the gender of the journalist, gender of sources quoted, authoritative voices and any gender included in headlines. The gender of the letter writers were also noted. Only articles by a named journalist were looked at, together with Health and Business which had specific sections in the newspaper. For the purposes of this particular study, sport was not included as the pilot revealed that this reporting was extremely male dominated – both in terms of content and reporters. Thus, the aim was to explore whether there were gender differences in the rest of the newspaper that could have more

subtle implications and influence. Once the content analysis tables were collated, the results were dissected and analysed with the help of one of the authors whose expertise is in statistics.

Findings

Bylines by Gender	Females	Males
<i>Worcester News</i>	34%	66%
<i>The Mail</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	32%	68%
<i>The Guardian</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	28%	72%
<i>The Times</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	26%	74%
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	22%	78%
<i>Daily Mirror</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	21%	79%
<i>The Sun</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	20%	80%
<i>The Independent</i> (Cochrane, 2011)	16%	84%

(For *Worcester News* n=722).

Table 1: Comparison of bylines by gender: Worcester News compared with Cochrane, 2011).

The findings are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) if our expected values are 50-50. The articles in *Worcester News* over this six-month period tended to be written more often by male journalists (66%) compared with female journalists (34%). However, in comparison to the data from Cochrane (2011) *Worcester News* had only slightly more articles written by female journalists (only 2% better than *The Mail* which had 32% bylines written by female journalists). Therefore male journalists dominated all the newspapers highlighted and gender imbalances still remain.

<i>Worcester News</i>	Females	Males
Business	27%	73%
Crime	27%	73%
Politics	11%	89%
Family	64%	36%
Leisure	66%	34%
Charity	44%	56%
Entertainment	29%	71%
Health	35%	65%

n=722

Table 2: Article categories in Worcester News by gender of journalist.

Gendering Hard News/Soft News in Worcester News

Male journalists tended to write more frequently about Business (73%), Crime (73%) and Politics (89%) compared with female journalists. This reinforces the notion of hard news stories being associated with males (Harp, 2015) – especially with regards to politics in this regional newspaper. Only 11% of the political articles were written by females and 27% of the Business and Crime articles were by female journalists. Thus, as Cochrane (2011) noted, male domination in relation to politics is about the way the masculine establishment reproduces itself. Similarly, there were more female journalists writing articles about Family (64%) and Leisure (66%). This reinforces the notion of soft news still being associated with female reporters and maintains a gender binary in relation to hard news as masculine, soft news as feminine. This echoes with the GMMP for UK and Ireland which noted (2015, p.17):

'...women remain significantly under-represented in 'hard' news stories and over-represented as parents, homemakers... thus perpetuating a normative framing of women which marginalises their contribution as experts, business people, politicians and professional people in general.'

(GMMP, 2015, p.17)

Readers of *Worcester News* may also be influenced by these subtle gender stereotypes. For example, for women this could lead to less willingness to engage in politics (Marsh, 2014) and for potential journalists to exclude political journalism as a future career. In a list of 20 top political journalists only 3 were female (Sparrow, 2009) and a lack of female political journalists is an ongoing issue for the industry (see Ruddick, 2017). There may also be a lack of opportunity for women to engage in political reporting in regional and local newspapers and therefore women interested in political reporting may find their enthusiasm waning through lack of prospects in this area. The stark figures from *Worcester News* suggest that this is likely to be the case. Women may also be perceived as the voice of popular opinion compared with men who speak as experts and professionals (GMMP UK and Ireland, 2015, p.17). Thus, it is clear from this analysis that *Worcester News* reinforces these gendered distinctions

Who 'speaks' in *Worcester News*

<i>Worcester News</i>	Female	Male	Both male and Female
Gender of authoritative expert quoted in the article	14%	49%	37%
Gender of sources quoted in articles	34%	37%	29%
Gender in the headlines of articles	7%	57%	36%
Letters written by gender	32%	68%	0%

n=722

Table 3: Representation of gender in *Worcester News* articles.

The authoritative voices that tended to be used in articles were often male (49%) or both male and female (37%). A sole female authority was quoted far less often (14%). This suggests that female authority figures only tend to be given credibility and status when accompanied by a male authority figure. Often there would be two male authorities alongside one female authority. For example, in an article about schools getting more space, the article quoted a female head teacher and two male authorities – the strategic commissioner and a male MP (9th May 2016, *Worcester News*). Likewise, another article about a night ending in violence (13th May 2016) had a female authority being the prosecutor, but also included a male defendant and male judge. It seems that in order to combat the authority of a female voice that male voices are used to give credibility. Females are not allowed in *Worcester News* to stand alone or to be backed up by other females. Instead, the authority comes from males being placed alongside even professional females. This can be compared with the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project for UK and Ireland (GMMP UK and Ireland, 2015, p.12) that also found men were more likely to be quoted in stories than women. Thus, men have a more dominant voice and are placed hierarchically above women, being perceived as more credible and prestigious.

This is also represented, to an extent, in the letters pages with 68% of letters published being written by males and 32% being written by women. Whilst this is not symbolic annihilation (a complete absence of women's voices) (Tuchman, 1978), there does appear to be a lack of authoritative female voices in *Worcester News*. A reporter for *Worcester News* noted:

'men seem to write more letters to the local paper than women...When it comes to the criteria used to publish them, most papers I have worked for over the last 28 years are desperate for letters...regardless of gender'

(*Worcester News* Reporter, 2018).

Perhaps the writing of a letter itself takes a certain amount of confidence and may also reinforce the public/masculine and private/feminine discourses working at an individual level (Harp, 2015). Whatever the reasons, the letters pages highlight subtle (and less subtle) cues of heteronormativity in the way that these reports are presented. Males are seen as important in relation to local issues such as politics, housing, complaints and crime. Females are less likely to write about these kinds of issues in this particular newspaper.

The implications of this is that male voices are heard and communicated, whereas female voices are less likely to be heard. This also reinforces notions of what is and is not considered as appropriate masculinity and femininity. Females might perceive that getting involved in such issues as politics or raising one's voice to be less feminine and therefore this exacerbates a self-fulfilling prophecy of who 'speaks' in *Worcester News*.

Gendered Headlines

The headlines also provide interesting gender analysis. Most headlines, when mentioning a gender, tended to highlight males (57%) more often than females (36%) rather than both (7%). This is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). However, even when the headlines are focused on females, 82% of those headlines frequently used the word 'Mum' or 'Mother', compared with only 15% of male headlines that used the word 'Dad' or 'Father.' This suggests that women are much more likely to be represented as domesticated and in their roles as a mother. This also happens in the content of articles. For example, on 10th December 2016, an article quoted Jamie Oliver that 'girls are much better than boys' at organisation around Christmas dinner. Thus *Worcester News*, like other media still socialises girls and women into the domestic sphere and roles of motherhood (Mitra and Mirza, 2015) and boys into authoritative, public roles (Holloway and Valentine, 2000 cited in Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Males are perceived to be important regardless of associations with gender roles, whereas women are given importance only when they adhere to appropriate gender roles (Connell, 2003).

Gendered Content of articles

Femininity and masculinity also tend to be reinforced by the content of the article, or the language that is used as highlighted by Lucht (2016). For example, on August 9th 2016 edition, the Business section was about a woman representing a cleaning firm and holding a cake sale for charity. Thus, whilst Business may be perceived as hard news stories, the actual content of this article reinforced perceived appropriate femininity. Likewise, on 9th November 2016, an article noted in Dad's world: 'and you do what adults aren't really supposed to do. Especially not men, and especially not in front of your two-year-old daughter. You start to weep.' This clearly reinforces notions of hegemonic masculinity as highlighted by MacKinnon (2003). Thus, even where articles appear to challenge the gendered stereotypes, this is only at a superficial level and deeper analysis suggests that gender stereotypes are reinforced in *Worcester News*.

There were a few exceptions to this gender divide. One was that Entertainment articles in *Worcester News* were mostly written by male journalists (71%) rather than female journalists, although this could be due to entertainment often focusing on local entertainment features. For example, in the entertainment category of *Worcester News*, male journalists reported on local features such as the Ledbury Poetry Festival (11th July 2016), musicians and singers at local venues such as *Frankly Sinatra* at Number 8 in Pershore (10th August 2016) or a band called *The Bluewater* performing at the Artrix in Bromsgrove (7th September 2016). Other reports also included events at local venues such as the comedian Nish Kumar at the Artrix in Bromsgrove (11th October 2016), a brass band in Ledbury (9th November 2016) and a new community choir performing in Pershore (6th December 2016). This could account for males being more prominent in the entertainment category in *Worcester News*.

Charity was less divided in terms of gender (56% of charity articles were written by male journalists and 44% were written by female journalists). Charity was also sometimes combined with local interest such as local people running marathons for charity, or local charities themselves such as local hospices. Overall, though, there were only two areas where female journalists tended to be given more print space – these were in the area of family and leisure. In all the other categories including topics such as Business, Crime, Politics, Entertainment and Health, there were significantly more articles written by male journalists.

Thus, the gender divide is clearly present in *Worcester News* and can suggest to readers how they should perform their masculinity and femininity as Goffman (1990) suggests. The implicit and more subtle gender cues give signals to the readers as to what is and is not considered appropriate femininity, particularly in relation to politics not being perceived as something for women to become involved in. Instead it is more appropriate for women to be 'passive, service, nurturing, home-and child- focused, and heterosexual' (White, 2015, p.7) which subconsciously underlines the hard news/soft news split, as well as the perceptions of who

will be drawn upon as experts, authoritative voices and sources of information.

Conclusion

Our research suggests that gender stereotypes are still very evident in *Worcester News*. How men and women are represented and what they report on are important, because these may implicitly place limitations in relation to self-perceptions of gendered behaviour for both women and men. Readers of *Worcester News* may also construct their worldview in relation to these gender stereotypes, perhaps reinforcing notions of the type of issues that concern men (politics, crime) and women (family). The lack of engagement in local politics is highlighted by only 28% of females being local councillors (Worcestershire County Council Website, 2018). More than this, the fact that females are placed alongside males might reinforce the notion of male hegemony as the dominant norm, highlighting men as authoritative, to be trusted and as credible sources. Females, on the other hand, might be perceived as being associated with family issues and soft news – seen by some as less important (and by implication, women themselves perceived as less important). Thus ‘what constitutes a reliable, weighty and relevant expert may be more tightly linked to masculine stereotypes than to actual gender’ (Niemi and Pitkanen, 2017, p. 356).

Our study therefore reveals the ideological workings of hegemonic masculinity which are still present in this regional paper. For readers of this newspaper, the binary divide is ever present and may reinforce stereotypical gendered perceptions of appropriate behaviours, voices and even issues that men and women should concern themselves with. For some, these implicit (and explicit) ideologies may be internalised and limit their own performance, conforming to the norms that they read. It may also limit their engagement (or lack of involvement) with local issues. To be aware of these stereotypes that come through in *Worcester News* as symptomatic of ‘middle England’ and thus the wider UK, is the first step to challenging such gendered assumptions.

Importance for Journalism Education

Whilst journalists might suggest that there is little time to pay attention to gender in relation to sources, or authoritative voices, it is ‘only by actively raising the question of gender in the day-to-day journalistic work... can inequitable practices be changed’ (Niemi and Pitkanen 2017p.365). In order for this to happen educators need to raise these issues with the current influx of students who are studying journalism at all levels, particularly if talented women leave journalism because of having to cope with entrenched masculine newsrooms cultures and lack of opportunities, or assumptions made about the kind of things they want to cover as reporters (Barnes, 2017). As Richardson and Wearing (2014, p.126) argue there is a need to reflect on the ‘gendered nature of media representation’ and surely journalists and journalism education should be leading the way.

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