Female News Professionals in Local and National Broadcast News During the Buildup to the Iraq War

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This study examines gender representation of news professionals within broadcast news. Using a gender model, the development of female news professionals is examined by looking at their relative representation across local and national news according to story length and type. Results show that the proportion of females is higher in local news segments of both “hard” (including war) and “soft” news than within national news segments. Further, an interaction between perceived age of the newscaster and story length suggests that younger women are seen more often in shorter news segments than more seasoned female newscasters.

The years of 2004 and 2005 brought major changes to the network television news landscape. Longtime NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw gave way to Brian Williams, ABC’s Peter Jennings succumbed to lung cancer, and CBS newsman Dan Rather resigned amid controversy. Although the presence of women is increasing, it still has not ascended into the national anchor’s chair (Gibbons, 2002; Sanders, 1992), although Katie Couric is expected to assume CBS’s anchor post this fall. She would be the first-ever solo female anchor on network news.

Despite the fact that roughly 65% of bachelor’s degrees conferred in journalism were awarded to women in 2003, which has more than doubled from the 30% awarded in 1970 (Becker, Vlad, Huh, & Mace, 2003), little progress has been made in the newsroom. For example, in the early 1990s, only 33% of the journalism workforce was made up of women, and upper management of corporate media was predominantly male (Duckforth, Lodder, Moore, Overton, & Rubin, 1990).
2003, only 26.5% of local news stations employed a female news director, and women accounted for just 12.5% of television newsroom staff (Papper, 2003). In 2002, 60% of assignment editors and 70% of managing editors in broadcast news were male (Papper, 2002).

Numerous studies have found that diversity has not been reflected in who is producing and reporting news content (see Liebler & Smith, 1997; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003; Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998). It remains a male-dominated newsroom. In a culture in which source sound bites are decreasing and television news reporters are taking up more airtime per story (Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 1999), limiting the types of coverage for male and female news professionals (i.e., sports for men, education for women) may impede progress of women in the broadcasting world. Such organizational issues may also influence how male and female news professionals perform their job duties, as suggested in recent work (e.g., Armstrong, 2004; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003).

In studying newspaper production, Armstrong (2004) found a large intraorganizational influence on gender representations within news stories. Specifically, representations of women were found to be dependent on the section in which the story appeared (most often in lifestyle sections) and the placement on the page (women were more often mentioned below the fold). S. Craft and Wanta (2004) found that newspapers with male editors often had more negative content than those with female editors. Similarly, Rodgers and Thorson (2003) found that, although men and women often carry out reporting tasks differently, organizational factors, including the circulation size and the ratio of male-to-female editors, mediated those differences. Given these findings in the print medium, it seems likely that organizational differences may also play a role in gender representations of news professionals in broadcast news. Further, given the mediation role that organizational factors seem to play for newspapers, it seems likely that similar situations may exist in broadcast news. For example, national news audiences are broader demographically than most local news audiences, so the types of stories and news professionals needed to attract those audiences may be different.

In an attempt to extend current research on the role of organizational factors in news production, this study uses the gender model put forth by Rodgers and Thorson (2003) to examine the influence that different types of stories and newscasts have on male and female news professionals’ representations. Briefly, the gender model suggests that men and women have different workplace roles and behaviors because they are socialized differently. This work examines how often-suggested factors, like age and type of program, may mediate these gender effects.

Because of the dominance of Iraq in news coverage during 2002 to 2005, the buildup to the war serves as a strong vehicle in which to examine the progress of women in television journalism. All types of stories related to the war in Iraq have been pervasive in the media from the buildup through to the aftermath of the war, including policy decisions, war stories, and “heroic” events. Despite the increase of women serving in the military, war remains a gendered construct (Goldstein, 2001).
Therefore, in addition to potential differences in general news coverage between male and female reporters, the focus on the traditionally masculine discourse of war will allow us to examine the relationship between male and female news professionals in a specific topic area. If gender is a factor in key news coverage, it should be evident in war coverage.

Specifically, we wish to examine how male and female broadcast professionals are represented in war and nonwar stories and in shorter and longer stories. In addition, there are two overall research questions: (a) What is the proportion of women in local and national newscasts? and (b) Does perceived age of newscasters vary as a function of gender and newscast (local/national)? Given the emphasis on promoting diversity within the newsroom from groups like the Radio–Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), determining the progress of women in television news at this point is an issue of keen interest in journalism scholarship (see Schudson, 2003).

**Gender Differences in News Coverage**

Research indicates that women have historically been both underrepresented and misrepresented in media coverage (see Armstrong, 2004; Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999; Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998). Tuchman, Daniels, and Benet (1978) argued that a “symbolic annihilation” occurs because of the dominance of males on television. Tuchman et al.’s study of gender representations on television from 1954 to 1975 found that at least two men were shown on-screen for each woman. Although symbolic annihilation has traditionally been linked to gender representations in entertainment television, it can logically be extended to television newsrooms. None of the major networks currently have female anchors for their national evening newscasts, although CBS recently announced that Katie Couric will assume its evening news anchor position this fall. However, despite that announcement, women have generally been less likely to appear as news professionals in news coverage. For example, during a February 1992 examination of 60 network news programs, male correspondents appeared more often than females in 59 of the 60 programs (Sanders, 1992).

Although these findings suggest a lack of female representation, the results in television news are mixed, as a 1986 study found no difference between male and female reporters in the lead story of a newscast (Smith, Fredin, & Ferguson, 1988). Similarly, in a content analysis of television news coverage during the first 100 days of the Clinton Administration, Liebler and Smith (1997) found few differences between male and female reporters in their coverage. However, male sources were more likely to appear in stories, regardless of reporter gender or type of story. Liebler and Smith suggested that female reporters have been socialized into using traditional or “male” definitions of newsworthiness. If women were bringing in their own perspectives, then, the news would likely be more diversified. “I think we’re still doing a disservice to the American people—still presenting a white male
perspective—actually a white, upper middle class, middle-aged perspective,” said Carole Simpson, the first African American female network anchor for ABC News (Konner, 2001).

The possibility that men dominate news coverage gains credence when examining how news has changed during the past 15 years. The rise of cable television news has resulted in multiple 24-hour news channels, like CNN and Fox News Channel, providing more overall airtime for news anchors and reporters. Television reporters have become news analysts, spending more time pontificating about everything from politics to Oscar predictions. “Journalists today often treat information from sources as raw materials to be taken apart rather than simply being related to the news audience” (Grabe et al., 1999, pp. 295–296). Given this climate, where reporters are providing and synthesizing information for viewers, it follows that news reporters might seem educated and knowledgeable by viewers. If men are conducting the majority of this interpretation and analyses, women may be stunted in their move toward newsroom equality.

Schudson (2003) suggested that viewers have a relationship with television anchors. In times of crisis, they turn to television newscasts they trust for information. If women are seen on television reporting on soft (or fluff) news segments repeatedly, future journalists and audience members may be socialized to believe that female reporters do not have the qualifications or characteristics to act as pundits or news analysts. Thus, female news professionals may not strive to report on those events or comment on such issues.

This idea may be best recognized through the type of story to which a reporter is assigned. A newscast is often split up into segments. The first 5 to 10 minutes are generally devoted to the day’s most important stories, such as politics or crime. If gender equality exists within the newsroom, there should be no significant difference between story type and gender in newscasts. As noted previously, studies have shown differences in the stories on which men and women reported. For example, Smith et al. (1988) found that female television reporters are more likely than men to cover education stories. Rodgers and Thorson’s (2003) results showed that male newspaper reporters in large newspapers were more likely to cover sports, whereas female reporters were more likely to write about human-interest topics. Thus, it appears that gender roles may be at play in assigning news stories.

Role of Socialization in News Production

Examinations of media content have generally focused on how representations of the social world compare to the external “real world.” Content can be viewed as a reflection of the producers (Gans, 1979). Therefore, because White men have traditionally controlled the media industry (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000), media content has largely reflected their perspectives on the world. A male perspective, according to the gender model (a socialization theory of learned sex roles, attitudes, and behaviors;
Rodgers & Thorson, 2003) might reflect typical male values such as independence, assertiveness, and self-orientations. A female perspective, on the other hand, may emphasize cooperation and interdependence (Gilligan, 1982). Such perspectives and worldviews are formed out of socialization experiences learned and reinforced in childhood (Thorne, 1993). In this context, news professionals' values are likely to influence their behaviors in the workplace that “will affect the manner in which news stories are researched, framed and written” (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003, p. 660).

Those values may also serve to reinforce cultural stereotypes of men and women and the types of stories they can or should report. If women are only seen reporting soft news stories, they may not be given the opportunity to report on hard news issues (such as war) with their own perspectives. For example, it has been suggested that women present the more human side of news (Konner, 2001), whereas men focus on structures of power and authority. If true, the gender of the reporter may influence how a news story is presented (see Armstrong, 2004). Indeed, the personal characteristics of those who report current events may be a subtle reminder of perceived differences between men and women. That is, if men and women are continually assigned to the same types of news stories, it may be reflective to both the news producers and viewers of a gender gap.

This gender gap may be particularly noticeable during news coverage of the war in Iraq, which has dominated the airwaves in recent months. The concept of war has traditionally had masculine connotations, from the idea of “protecting” and “defending” people at home, to the former military policy of women being prohibited from serving in combat (Goldstein, 2001). If soldiers are primarily male, it follows that male news professionals would be reporting those stories, illustrating their dominance and authority for telling important stories. To test this idea, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1a: Female news professionals are less likely than male news professionals to appear in broadcast news segments.

H1b: Female news professionals are less likely than male news professionals to appear in Iraq War coverage.

National Versus Local News. Television news is a visual medium, and news content studies often compare television to newspapers (e.g., Coulson & Lacy, 1996; Gans, 1979) or to other types of television news programming (Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999; Liebler & Smith, 1997). However, within-medium differences may also contribute to news content. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) suggested that organizational factors are one of the five levels of influence on news content. If so, comparing local and national newscasts seems a key component to determining how organizational shifts may influence content.

For example, local and national news have different audiences. Local news stations have less money and fewer resources than network newscasts, so the quality of the programming is likely to be lower in these markets. Conversely, on-air talent
is likely to be better on network news, as they can pay higher salaries, promise larger markets and use vast resources, which would likely attract more seasoned reporters. These different venues could provide a strong organizational difference in the use of news professionals.

More specifically for this study, national news is often deemed more important than local news because it has a broader audience base and potentially affects more people. Most of the Iraq War stories were initially generated by national news correspondents before being expanded by local news professionals. Coverage about key events and happenings often begins with national coverage because of the resources and staff available to reach such areas. Not many local newscasts can afford to send correspondents to Iraq or remote locations within and around the United States, so they use network feeds.

Because national news has more opportunities for celebrity, and it has more potential for covering “impact” audience stories, male news professionals may be afforded greater opportunities on national news than local news. In addition, given that local news typically hires people with less experience than national news, the differences in gender might also be expected to be less significant in local news as compared to national news.

Thus, the following is proposed:

\[ H_2: \] The proportion of female news professionals will be lower on national news than on local news broadcast segments.

Factors Contributing to Gender Differences Among News Professionals

Perception of Reporter’s Age. When examining the particular elements that contribute to gender differences in television news reporting, it becomes important to think about the medium of television and how that may influence gender-reporting patterns. Appearance is paramount on television. Therefore, the physical characteristics, congenial nature, and overall perceptions of the reporter are always under scrutiny. Two former longtime anchors for local Madison, Wisconsin, news stations say they were taken off the anchor desk—at least in part—because they were women over the age of 40 (Alesia, 2002).

In a highly publicized case, Christine Craft was fired in 1981 from KMBC-TV, the ABC affiliate in Kansas City. At the age of 37, she was told, “the people of Kansas City don’t like watching you anchor the news because you are too old, too unattractive, and you are not sufficiently deferential to men” (C. Craft, 1988, p. 9). Craft prepared a breach of contract lawsuit against the station and its parent company, charging they were guilty of sex discrimination. Although two juries ruled in Craft’s favor, both decisions were later reversed and the Supreme Court ultimately declined to hear her case.
This phenomenon, although certainly not limited to local news, illustrates the double standard that women face as television news reporters. News experience becomes secondary to a younger, fresher look for women in newscasts. A 1991 study of television newscasters from the RTNDA found that the average age of female reporters was 28, whereas the average age of male reporters was 32 (Stone, 2000). Although the difference between 28 and 32 is not great, it illustrates that men may be working as news reporters longer than women. Similarly, Engstrom and Ferri (2000) examined female and male news anchors’ perceptions of potential career barriers and found that female news anchors believe that physical appearance is the top-rated career barrier for women. For men, physical appearance was 27th out of 34 possibilities.

Older women may not appear on the news because they are perhaps more likely than men to exit the journalism field, potentially to raise families or to pursue another career choice (Weaver, 1999). These findings suggest that women are, in fact, absent from news coverage, particularly as their careers progress, when they must choose between family and profession. Although men are increasingly helping with child-rearing, it is still primarily the women’s responsibility (Griswold, 1993; O’Connell, 1993). Local news may afford women more time with their families. National news professionals may often be sent on location for assignments, whereas local news professionals would likely work near their homes.

**Story Length.** Generally, the first few segments of television newscasts cover the top stories of the day. These stories are placed at the beginning of the newscast to indicate their perceived importance. The story topic may also include sidebar stories in addition to the main event or issue that is being covered, in a practice called “localizing” a story. Localizing a story means that local news directors will attempt to highlight the importance of a national news story by bringing a local angle to it, illustrating to audiences why it should be important to them, even though it took place a thousand miles away.

For example, when local newscasts reported on the war in Iraq, stories not only focused on the event happening in Iraq (which were often covered through network affiliates), they also reported on issues in the community, such as area soldiers being deployed or increased local security measures. This type of coverage allows for a proximity connection between the events and viewers. Because of the localizing of news, many events receive a substantial amount of airtime, as several minutes of the newscast may be devoted to these sidebar stories. In addition, because newscasts are generally limited to 30 minutes (including roughly 8–12 minutes for advertising), the more time devoted to a news story implies that the issue being covered is important and should be taken seriously.

As with most employment, a newscaster’s professionalism and capability improves as they gain experience. Once they show aptitude for news stories, they are given more difficult and complicated assignments and, as a result, appear on-camera more frequently. At the same time, coverage is longer for the more important stories of the day. The news professionals who cover those stories may attract more viewers, so
they strive for those assignments, as most newscasters like to be involved with substantive stories. Those reporters who are not reporting on substantive stories are often not receiving the same amount of airtime.

Interactive Effects of Story Length and Perceived Age of News Professional. It appears then that both story length and age of the reporter may have conditional effects on the proportion of female reporters in a news segment. If female news professionals are receiving less airtime as they age, they may not be appearing on-camera as often as younger looking news professionals. Conversely, the longer professionals are in the news business, the more experience they gain through their work. Often, they are rewarded with more plum reporting assignments and meatier topics to cover—accolades not generally provided to less-experienced professionals.

Although older looking reporters may not receive as much screen time as their younger looking counterparts due primarily to appearance, older reporters have gained experience in newscasting and should be given key assignments. As a result, we believe that story length and perception of age of the news professional may have conditional effects on the proportion of women within broadcast news segments.

Thus, the following is suggested:

H3: There will be an interaction between perceived age and story length for proportion of women appearing in newscasts, such that those perceived as younger than 40 years will appear more often in shorter segments than in longer segments. Similarly, those perceived as 40 years or older will appear more often in longer segments than in shorter segments.

Method

This study’s research method is content analysis, which allows for an unobtrusive appraisal of television news programming. The sample consisted of 60 television news programs taped on three national networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC. They included national news programs produced by each of the three networks (5:30–6:00 p.m. CST) and local news programs produced by each of the three respective affiliates (6:00–6:30 p.m. CST). The Fox network was excluded because its local and national news segments appear on different channels. Although local Fox affiliate newscasts appear on the basic cable or by antenna, Fox national news is conducted on a 24-hour cable channel in expanded cable systems and is formatted differently from the other national news stations, which have a 30-minute evening newscast.

Programs were taped for 10 weekdays during the weeks of February 17 and 24, 2003, in Madison, Wisconsin. Taping occurred roughly 1 month prior to the first bombing in Baghdad by the United States on March 20, 2003, which signaled the beginning of the war. All programs were 30 minutes in length and coded from sign-on to sign-off. This rendered 1,172 news segments.
Two student coders received comprehensive training in the use of the coding instrument before coding began. Intercoder reliabilities were determined using Krippendorff’s (1980) agreement coefficient alpha, using 78 news segments of the overall sample. One coder examined the content of all the ABC and NBC news programs; another coded all the CBS newscasts. Overall reliability among the coders was .86.¹

Seventeen story-type categories, adapted from Bae’s (2000) story topics, were used in the original analysis. The categories were then collapsed to signify the major story types represented, which included war, business, crime, politics, health, science/technology, religion/arts, weather, and sports. Intercoder reliability for story type was .78. Segments were initially coded for lengths between 0 and 5 minutes, before each was dichotomized into (a) stories 30 seconds or under, or (b) over 30 seconds. Krippendorff’s alpha for story length was .95; the variation likely occurred because some stories overlapped or the beginnings or endings of news segments were cut off by poor production of the story, causing some uncertainty by coders in terms of when stories began and ended.

Every anchor in the news studio, every reporter at the news scene, and every announcer who provided voiceover for a video segment was coded separately for each news story identified. Because multiple news personnel appeared in some segments, as many as five potential individuals could have been coded per segment (male M = 1.06, SD = 0.62; female M = 0.38, SD = 0.58). The study resulted in 17.3% female news professionals in news programs, which is similar to a 2004 industry average of 14.1% television female news staff (Papper, 2004). To create the continuous gender variables used in the analyses, the number of females and male news professionals appearing in a news story was calculated by dichotomizing the presence or absence of women or men within the five gender variables of each segment. The results were summed to create a total number of female and male news professionals in each segment (Krippendorff’s α = .87).² From those totals, the proportion of women was created by dividing the number of women news professionals by the total number of news professionals in the segment.³

Perception of age was coded as 39 and under, 40 and over, and unknown (Krippendorff’s α = .82). Although the exact ages of the news personnel were not obtained, we were looking for how old the person “looked.” The age of 40 was selected as an important chronological marker because it approximates a midpoint to retirement for most professions. Several content analyses have similarly dichotomized or trichotomized the age of models appearing in print and television advertisements (Carrigan & Szmigin, 1999; Peterson, 1992; Swayne & Greco, 1987; Zhou & Chen, 1992). In addition, a 1995 study of cable television coded age approximations of both children and adults, finding that roughly 58.2% were between 20 and 40 years of age, and 27.5% were between 41 and 64, lending support to the age dichotomy (Kubey, Shifflet, Weerakkody, & Ukeiley, 1995). For the purposes of this study, an anchor or reporter was coded as 40 and over if there was evident signs of aging (e.g., fine lines or wrinkles, graying hair or eyebrows).
Unknown cases were typically coded when an announcer or speaker was not shown on-screen.

**Results**

The four hypotheses were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA). When the hypotheses examined news stories from the Iraq War coverage, those cases were selected and the same statistical test was conducted as for the overall news coverage analysis.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b suggested that female news professionals are less likely than male news professionals to appear in news segments. To test this idea, an ANOVA was conducted examining the effects of program type (national vs. local news) and story type (e.g., business, crime) on the proportion of female news professionals within the segment. Table 1 reflects those results; however, only female proportions were shown, as male proportions would be opposite to the female proportions.

Significant main effects, $F(1) = 153.81, p < .01$, were found for program type, indicating that women were more likely to appear in local news programs ($M = .41$) in this particular market than in national news programs ($M = .06$). Similarly, significant main effects were found for story type as well, $F(8) = 4.98, p < .01$. Scheffe’s post hoc tests indicated that female news professionals were most highly represented in health, science, religion/arts, and business stories, whereas they were least likely to be represented in sports and weather stories. The interaction between program and story type was also significant, $F(8) = 2.70, p < .01$, which reflects that the representation of women news professionals is much greater in local news than national news. The interaction illustrates that, in local news coverage, the mean proportion of female news professionals is .50 or greater in stories about religion/arts, business, politics/government, science, and, most important for this study, war.

These findings indicate that the proportion of women news professionals is equal to male news professionals for most story types in this particular local market, although the same does not hold true for national news. More specifically, for Iraq War stories, female news professionals appear in local news as frequently as males do. Conversely, in national news, the mean proportion for women in war coverage is .05, which means that male news professionals appear in nearly all of the war stories and most other stories at the national level as well. Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b are partially supported.

Table 1 also shows the test of the second hypothesis, which suggested that the proportion of women news professionals would be lower on national news segments than on local news. The mean proportion of women was .41 in this market of local news, whereas the mean proportion of women in national news was .06, $F(1) = 153.81, p < .01$. When examining the interaction results of story type and program, the proportion of women was greater in every story type in the local market than it was in the national news segments. These results lend support to Hypothesis 2.
Table 1
Analysis of Variance of the Influence of National and Local Broadcast News Program and Story Type on Female Representations Among News Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences on News Content</th>
<th>Proportion of Female Newscasters</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>M Square</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National news</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.65</td>
<td>153.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local news</td>
<td></td>
<td>.413&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
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<td>.29&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td></td>
<td>.28&lt;sub&gt;bcd&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td>.33&lt;sub&gt;ef&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29&lt;sub&gt;g&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td></td>
<td>.27&lt;sub&gt;lh&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics/government</td>
<td></td>
<td>.28&lt;sub&gt;hik&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion/arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29&lt;sub&gt;j&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
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<td>.08&lt;sub&gt;cek&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program x Story Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>2.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Business</td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
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<td>National Crime</td>
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<td>National Health</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
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<td>National Science</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>National War</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Politics/government</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Religion/arts</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Weather</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Sports</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Error</strong></td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>802</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This analysis excluded stories that did not fit one of the listed categories. Generally, these included the teaser segments at the beginning of each newscast. Means with same subscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.
Hypothesis 3 suggested an interaction between the length of news stories and the perception of reporter’s age such that a higher proportion of female news professionals would receive longer news segments as their perceived age increases, but younger looking reporters were more likely to appear in shorter segments. We conducted an ANOVA and found no main effects for age or story length. However, two interactions were found among the three variables, suggesting that conditional effects exist on the proportion of female news professionals (see Table 2). Specifically, in national news, the proportion of female news professionals participating in a segment does not change regardless of its length, but in local news, the higher proportion of women exists in segments of 30 seconds or less in length (see Figure 1). In addition, if female news professionals are perceived as under 40, they participate in a larger number of segments 30 seconds or less; however, if women news professionals are perceived as over 40, the proportion of women in the story is virtually the same, regardless of the story length (see Figure 2).

### Table 2
Analysis of Variance Results Illustrating the Proportion of Women Appearing in Local and National Newscasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>M Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p Value</th>
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<td>Program (local)</td>
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<td>15.00</td>
<td>143.56</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (over 40)</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story length (31+ seconds)</td>
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<td>0.25</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program × Story Length</td>
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<td>5.48</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Hypothesis 3 suggested an interaction between the length of news stories and the perception of reporter’s age such that a higher proportion of female news professionals would receive longer news segments as their perceived age increases, but younger looking reporters were more likely to appear in shorter segments. We conducted an ANOVA and found no main effects for age or story length. However, two interactions were found among the three variables, suggesting that conditional effects exist on the proportion of female news professionals (see Table 2). Specifically, in national news, the proportion of female news professionals participating in a segment does not change regardless of its length, but in local news, the higher proportion of women exists in segments of 30 seconds or less in length (see Figure 1). In addition, if female news professionals are perceived as under 40, they participate in a larger number of segments 30 seconds or less; however, if women news professionals are perceived as over 40, the proportion of women in the story is virtually the same, regardless of the story length (see Figure 2).
The findings suggest that perceived age and story length produce conditional effects on the proportion of female news professionals. The sample for local news included approximately 58% of segments that were 30 seconds or less, whereas only 37% of national news stories were 30 seconds or less. It appears from the findings that, as women are perceived to age, they are less likely to appear in newscasts, regardless of the segment length. These findings lend partial support to Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The analysis of the proportion of female news professionals in broadcast news found that the progress of women is mixed. In local news, women are reporting on hard-hitting topics as often as men; however, they continue to be nearly nonexistent in the national spotlight. Perhaps the most interesting finding in this study concerns the interactive results of age and story length on female news professionals. It seems that younger women appear on-screen more often than older looking women; as women age, they are seen on-screen less often and primarily in local news. Experience is not paying off for women. When they start to appear older, they receive less airtime.

Although women have made substantial gains in terms of education and workforce employment, their progress in the media world is less clear. Today there is a wider variety of images of women in the media than there was 25 years ago, but such advances are still not entirely depicted in television news. Clearly, male news professionals are still favored within news coverage, although in local news, virtually equal numbers of men and women were found in local newscasts, indicating that on-air gender favoritism may be lessening in certain news markets.
Examining these findings more closely, the results lend support to two areas: (a) that local and national news have differing approaches to decision making and on-air talent, and (b) that age and gender are still important factors to consider when examining broadcast news content. The study found that gender is less of a factor in local news but still a key variable in national news content. This result highlights the divergence between local and national newscasts. Although women are advancing in local news, they are not making the same strides at the national level. This finding could, in part, be a product of the local market that was chosen for this analysis; however, future research should compare local markets to determine the generalizability of this research.

This study did not look at how newsroom management decisions may influence those differences, but scholars may want to examine the possibility that administrative choices may influence hiring practices and who appears on-air (e.g., organizational factors; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). For example, viewership demographics may influence decisions about who reports the news. Demographics for this time period revealed similar patterns for women and men across local and national news, but noted that people 50 years and older were more likely to watch news than their younger counterparts. Such differences in demographics are important considerations for advertisers, which may influence news content or selection of anchors.

Findings support recent work by Rodgers and Thorson (2003), who suggested that differences in socialization might account for why female print news professionals covered stories differently than male print news professionals: “Newsroom norms and practices may operate as a conformity mechanism that socializes all reporters, regardless of gender, to maintain the male-dominated power structure of larger news organizations” (p. 673). Although we found that women are increasingly appearing on-screen covering the same topics as men—in local news—we did not look at how the stories were covered. Future scholarship may want to examine how the stories were framed to see if gender differences within reporting styles exist, following a model suggested by Liebler and Smith (1997).

More important, as the new millennium, post-September 11th world brings stories of war, globalization, and foreign policy, the opportunity for reporting at the national level does not bode well for female news professionals. Certainly, in the 2 years since the start of the Iraq War, this issue has dominated news coverage. During the invasion, reporters were repeatedly embedded with U.S. troops—a situation that did not produce many stories from female reporters. Male reporters and anchors were often shown in Iraq, as less than 10% of reporters embedded with troops were women (English, 2003). Perhaps the most promising news for women is that, with male reporters handling the overseas assignments, female news professionals have more frequently been called on to handle the government foreign policy and legislative debates, at least according to these findings.

Another issue worth addressing in future research is the impact that media ownership issues have on news content and news professionals. Often on television, hiring decisions and story assignments are made following corporate policy and potential for market draw. Story assignments may be dictated through an organizational hierar-
chy that warrants more examination. Investigating the impact that media ownership has on gender—and how salaries compare—may be telling influences on predictors of differences between male and female reporting.

This research employed content analysis methods, so there is no measurement for how men or women came to report on their particular stories. Were they assigned? Did they volunteer? Future research might delve deeper into the newsroom to discern how gender or other diversity factors play into reporting decisions. Ethnographic research or in-depth interviews may show the behind-the-scene side of the newsroom. Although socialization and gender theory are used to explain the potential effects of media representations, we did not gauge audience reaction in this article. Future research could examine explicit and implicit meanings derived from news representations. Do male authority figures lend credibility to the newscast? Are female war reporters considered “deviant”?

A few caveats are necessary in analyzing the results of this study. In this study, the focus was on broadcast network news stations because of formatting similarities—a decision that excluded the Fox News Network. Fox is a popular news channel and may have additional female anchors and reporters that were not examined in this analysis. Because we chose not to include Fox News, the results of the study should be treated with caution when examining cable news content, as the focus was broadcast news. Second, the analysis was conducted in a liberal-leaning local market in the Midwest. It is possible that the local news stations were not representative of other local news broadcasts. Finally, the content analysis focused on the buildup to the war, so, once the invasion began, it is possible that female news professionals became more involved in overall coverage.

**Conclusion**

Although examination of reporter gender within news coverage has been conducted previously, this study examines news professionals within the timely context of war coverage, using the gendered issue of the Iraqi military conflict as a backdrop. It tracked the progress of women in television reporting and found that the results are murky. Female news professionals reported on war stories as often as male news professionals did, but only at the local level. Gender equality is becoming more attainable within local news contexts but not in network broadcasts. The perception of age of news professionals appears the least promising, as it was found that younger looking reporters are appearing more often than older looking reporters—a finding that harkens back to Christine Craft and her age discrimination allegations.

**Notes**

1. This statistical program tests intercoder reliability for the possibility that the pattern of results occurred because of chance, rather than because of the manipulated variables. Specific reliability scores will be discussed with individual variables.
2. For the Iraq War stories, $M = 0.20$, $SD = 0.42$, for women; and $M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.59$, for men.
Although it might be more ecologically valid to treat gender as a nominal variable, gender was used in this analysis as a ratio variable in order to use more advanced statistics.

No men or women who were perceived to be under 40 years of age appeared on national news.

Information obtained from Nielsen Media Research, DMA rankings, January 30 to February 26, 2003.

References


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