

Mass Media Framing and Gender

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Abstract

From a feminist perspective, the authors approached mass media using the framing paradigm to conduct and analyze interviews with 8 newspaper journalists in the Seattle area. One major concern, beyond the exploration of framing itself, was with the way that women are being portrayed. The use of women as sources and the possibilities of *influencing* perceptions of women was of special interest. The authors found that portrayal of women was not always favorable and often reflected the larger society with regard to who are experts or executives in companies. Finding alternative sources was not a real option for journalists because women often do not have the needed information or there is a lack of time (i.e. who is available before deadline). However, all of the journalists admitted that the influence on reader perception depends on how stories are framed and how women are portrayed, especially as sources. Trying to change that situation, through some form of advocacy, was not considered favorably by most of the journalists.

Introduction

This paper uses a feminist perspective to examine the role of newspaper journalists in the framing of gender-related issues. Beginning with an overview of the meaning of feminist perspective, the authors proceed to outline framing as a paradigm for mass media research, to report the results of interviews of Seattle-based journalists, and to offer some inferences from the interviews.

Feminist Perspectives

Feminism began with the women's suffrage movement, which was championed by Susan B. Anthony in the 1850s in the United States. However, after gaining the right to vote in 1920, feminists were not as organized or visible again on the national scene until the 1960s when the Women's Liberation Movement came into force. This second wave of

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feminism sought to improve women's lives in the areas of (a) job categories, (b) employment compensation, (c) division of labor in the home, (d) portrayal of women as "objects" to attract men, and (e) ability to develop one's full potential (Busby & Leichthy, 1993). The premise for these goals, and feminism, is that men and women are equal but are treated unequally in society according to gender roles and that "notions of gender are considered to be social and cultural constructions of meaning" (Lewis & Neville, 1995, p. 220). Feminism has moved into a third wave, and "central to the feminist agenda today is the understanding of difference and critically accounting for these inequalities" (Hegde, 1998, p. 272).

With regard to the exact meaning of feminism, there exists a fair amount of diversity in definitions and "a unifying feminist theory seems impossible, nor desirable for describing the unique and varied voices of women" (Aldoory, 1997 b, p. 18). In that regard, "if it is to be feminist research, there has to be, at some basic, common-denominator level, a belief that women have, in the past, been oppressed or repressed, and that we are looking for ways to emancipate women" (Patai & Koertge, 1994, p. 39). Further unifying aspects of feminism is that while conducting research, the researchers (a) must avoid the pretense of neutrality, (b) bridge communities, (c) reverse the invisibility or distortion of women, and (d) politicize "the very process of representation and interrupt[ing] the supposed neutrality of knowledge" (Hegde, 1998, p. 284). Specific methodological approaches, according to Aldoory's (1997a) review of past research, have centered around (a) rejection of objectivity, (b) rejection of imposed hierarchies, (c) recognition of human diversity, and (d) the need to report many voices.

With regard to avoiding a pretense of neutrality and rejecting objectivity, Aldoory (1997a) stated that researchers should declare their perspective so that the *context* of the data collection is clear. This idea of perspective is not only feminist; Kosick; and Pan (1996) noted that all researchers bring their own frame to the research setting which influences the salience of things researched and the results. Journalists themselves are researchers. Acosta-Alzuru (1999) said that feminists assert that the starting point, questions asked, and data gathering techniques will affect the results. In fact, she stated that "the researcher's class, race, culture, gender assumptions, beliefs, behaviors, and reactions during the study must be included in [the] research report [making] the researcher a real, historical individual, not an anonymous voice of authority" (p. 31). Although it is very difficult to report all of these items, the authors have strived to do so. Reporting of such details will be left for the methods section. However, the above noted feminist philosophy is part of the beliefs of the authors, including the beliefs that men and women are equal, that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, and that inequalities be-

tween men and women should be eliminated. Sex is defined as a biological attribute while gender relates to cultural and social roles.

The mass media are important in maintaining or revising gender roles (see for example, Acosta-Alzuru, 1999; Busby & Leichty, 1993; Kitch, 1999; Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus, & Berkowitz, 1996; and Olson, 1994) to the point where they “have become a pervasive and powerful part of the process of how notions of gender are constructed and maintained” (Lewis & Neville, 1995, p. 220). From the above outlined feminist perspective, the authors sought to examine the impact of mass media on maintaining and revising perceptions of gender. The following review serves to shed light on the mass media framing paradigm and how journalists are involved in the process of choosing and presenting stories.

Framing Paradigm

Similar to the idea that gender is socially constructed, mass media research in its current stage is now characterized by social constructivism (Scheufele, 1996). One area of that research approach is the framing paradigm, which uses the metaphor that a mass media product is a window on the world. How that *window frame* is constructed by the mass media affects how one perceives the portrayed event or information. One way to analyze framing is whether an event is presented as an episode or a theme (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1996). A thematic-framed article presents an event including relevant background information and implications. An episodic frame merely presents the event.

The premise of agenda setting research, another perspective, is that mass media consumers will adopt the news agenda presented by the mass media. Similarly, the mass media frame can become the consumer’s frame for viewing the world. However, as Entman (1993), Scheufele (1996), and Yows (1994) noted, the effect of framing is not a simple media-frame-equals-consumer-frame phenomenon. In fact, there is more than just the media frame. Yows (1994) stated that there are at least three frames: the journalist’s, the media’s, and the consumer’s. Those three frames represent (a) the journalist’s view of the world as it affects what the journalist perceives and reports, (b) the mass media products (i.e., newspaper, television broadcast, or magazine, for example) which offer a specific portrayal of an event or issue, and (c) each consumer’s perspective that is present when the mass media product is consumed. Journalists are the main source for creating the media frame (Scheufele, 1996), which is the concern here.

Frames are created by a process of classifying, organizing, interpreting, and inferencing of information to make sense of events and issues (Kosicki & Pan, 1996) which helps

us understand the world (Entman, 1993). The result of such a process is the *simplification* of information. Susser (1998) warned that simplification can interfere with reality and the richness of events, thereby causing misunderstandings or limited views.

However, limitations on space (in a newspaper or magazine) and time (both air time and gathering/production time), as well as “professional conventions, and organizational constraints, combined with heavy reliance on official sources” (Yows, 1994, p. 5), necessitate that journalists engage in this *simplification* process as part of their job. On a daily basis they are gathering information which they must classify, organize, interpret, and infer to make sense of events and issues so that they can present the world to the consumer.

And the situation is true in all news rooms, whether they are mainstream media or alternative press (such as community-based). Hindman’s (1998) research showed that the dominant journalistic culture (such as is taught in journalism courses) and the values held by the larger society seemed to dominate even the news room of an alternative newspaper. Even readers of the newspaper, who selected the newspaper as an alternative voice, expected mainstream journalistic practices to be used. She concluded that “the traditions of mainstream journalism run deep” (p. 190). Reliance on sources for information and definitions of what is news were specific similarities that she found between the community and mainstream press. However, objectivity, she found, was not a goal for a community newspaper, “though balance may be” (p. 186).

Another study looked at mainstream and alternative press in Sydney, Australia, and concluded that that culturalization takes place through socialization and training (Dunham, 1998). The interviewees in that study referred to professionalism, duty, and code of ethics as the reason for certain journalist practices. However, unlike Hindman’s findings about objectivity, the Sydney study found that all the journalists rejected the notion that a journalist can be objective, instead one should strive for fairness to the event, the issue, and the reader. The journalists in that study expressed a feeling that they are required to take on the reader’s perspective and present the news from that point of view, which can affect *objectivity* to the point of advocacy for readers of alternative or community newspapers. It becomes a case of journalists presuming what the readers want and then deciding what to report on and what to include. Appealing to the reader is also driven by the need to have the reader continue to buy the newspaper. The newspapers then become some reflection of the readership as well as a reflection of the world the newspapers report on. There may be a reinforcement effect in this regard.

As noted above, Hindman (1998) found reliance on sources in news reporting. Dunham (1998) found that that importance can spill over to influence the journalist and to

affect the meaning of stories. Sources hold some power over journalists especially in that the sources control information. But by selecting certain sources, journalists can influence meaning for the reader (one important aspect of framing). The overall conclusion of the Sydney study was that inability to be truly objective, personal beliefs about fairness, reader demands, assumptions about reader perspectives, professional considerations, sources, and the newspaper as a business are all putting demands on journalists. How to balance these forces and use them to observe, evaluate, interpret, and report the world is key to affecting the final news story.

The current study sought to conduct research similar to the Sydney study noted above but looked at U. S. journalists. Because of the feminist perspective, the main concern here is with a comparison of how men and women are presented in newspapers, in particular the use of women as sources (see for example, Berkowitz, Fritz, Parameswaren, & Lafky, 1996; and Zoch & Van Slyke Turk, 1997). Seven research questions were posed. (R 1) What do newspaper journalists look for in news gathering? (R 2) Do journalists believe that they can be objective? (R 3) In what ways do news stories and newspapers influence readers with regard to how information is framed? (R 4) How do newspapers portray women? (R 5) How much attention do journalists pay to the sex of sources? (R 6) Is there a need for some sort of advocacy to present women in a fairer light? (R 7) What are the differences between journalists at mainstream and community newspapers? The Sydney study served to answer these questions but replication and possible cross-cultural differences need to be addressed. Therefore, the following methods were used to look at the United States.

Methods

Part of this research, how it was conceived, planned, executed, and reported, depends on who the authors are, which constitutes the basis for the entire research project and its execution. Therefore, reporting some of those details is appropriate. The lead author is a married, heterosexual, male Caucasian who teaches at a women's college. The second author is an unmarried, heterosexual, female Caucasian who teaches at a four-year, co-ed university.

In-depth interviews were used to gather information that would help answer the research questions. The following questions were used to give some continuity among the interviews, though many more questions were asked for clarification and as a result of curiosities stimulated by the interviewees. As much as possible, the sessions were allowed to follow a natural course within the parameters of the areas of research interest.

The initial questions were:

- How do you or reporters at this newspaper find stories?
- What do you look for in a story?
- What do you present (choose to write about) in a story?
- Can a reporter be objective?
- What are your thoughts about framing?
- Can stories be divided into event-oriented and issue-oriented?
- What is the portrayal of women in this newspaper?
- What are your policies and thoughts with regard to using women and men as sources in stories?

The mainstream newspapers used were the Seattle Post Intelligencer (P-I) (a weekday and Saturday morning broad sheet, created in 1863, with a weekday circulation of about 200,000, and owned by the Hearst Corp.); The Seattle Times (Times) (an evening daily created in 1896, with weekday circulation of about 232,000, and owned by the Blethen family). The P-I and the Times are jointly operated papers that serve the Seattle and greater Puget Sound area.

The community newspapers used were the Mercer Island Reporter (Reporter) (a weekly tabloid-size, created in 1945, with a weekly circulation of about 13,000, and owned by King County Journal Newspapers) and the Seattle Gay News (SGN) (a free weekly tabloid-size, founded in 1973 and owned by two individuals in the community). The Reporter serves the residents of Mercer Island, and the SGN serves the gay and lesbian community of the Seattle area.

Three editors and five reporters employed at the newspapers listed above were interviewed. The interviews were conducted by the first author in the following order: August 21, 1998, Jane Meyer, editor of the Mercer Island Reporter; August 24, 1998, Nick Provenza, an assistant Metro editor at the Times; John Iwasaki, reporter for the religion and the K-12 education beats, and Constance Sommer, the retail reporter, at the P-I also that day; August 25, Tom Flint, an editor, and Kate Tossey, a reporter, at the Seattle Gay News; and later that day Times ethics reporter Carol Ostrom by telephone; and August 26, Chris Beringer, one of three managing editors of the P-I.

Except for the Ostrom interview, the interviews were taped and transcribed by the authors. Because the Ostrom interview was over the telephone, notes were taken concurrently. Those notes and the transcripts were examined for information that answers the above questions and lends insight into the framing process. The results are given below, using the words of the interviewees where relevant.

Results

What is reported here is limited by interpretation and editing of the interview transcripts, but the use of two authors helps offset limited perspectives. Every attempt was made to faithfully represent the interviewee responses in light of the context they were made. The results are reported in sections in the order of the research questions listed above. The order of responses within each section is (a) the mainstream editors, (b) the mainstream reporters, (c) the community editors, and (d) the community reporter.

News Value

The first research question dealt with what journalists believe makes a good news story. As a mainstream newspaper editor, Beringer said that when deciding what to include in the newspaper, she looks for the overall “mix of how things are gonna be presented. If there is a lot of really breaking hard news, like bombings in U. S. embassies or something, those are no-brainers, go by that. You look for the most telling sidebar stories that’ll give you a look into the human elements, in the political ramifications, that kind of stuff.” She also looks for a story that is something people will not get from “CNN or CBS or by listening to the quick headlines on the radio. So when we look at, I guess, when I look at what we want the front page of the paper to be, I hope it’s a window on more than just what everybody thinks are the important major stories, you have to represent on those, but I also think you need to give to people something that reminds them of their humanity. And I also like our section fronts to have something that, you always would love to have kind of the ‘Hey, Martha,’ a story somebody’s gonna want to talk about. . . . As for stories themselves, we want the usual journalistic who, what, when, where, why when you can get it. We’re really, even when we deal with those institutional stories, we really try as best we can to make them ‘why should anybody cares about em’ kinds of stories.”

The other mainstream newspaper editor, Provenza, said, “I know a story when I see one. . . . A lot of it is gut feeling, if it interests you,” and often localization is part of that. However, he expressed concern that the paper may be out of touch with some readers. He said, “I worry sometimes about what our interest level is, or, something that we’ve seen over and over again might still be an interest to people, and we miss that aspect because we’re so tired of hearing about it.”

Looking at reporters, Sommer said, “I value something that the reader would need to know, want to know,” which often translates into “anything that might interest me.”

Iwasaki said, “Things you include are things people should know, good for them to know, and what they’d like to know, the interesting part.” Further, “it doesn’t matter what kind of story it is, include people. . . how it affects somebody’s life, real humans, because the worst thing is to produce a story where you, that’s so dry that you can’t tell, ‘What does this mean to me?’”

Ostrom spoke more globally, about the job of a reporter. She said that a reporter “needs to tell a story fully” and show how it fits in the world. However, the paper does not “have all the space and people don’t have all the time in the world” to afford the luxury of complete stories, so something must be left out.

As editor of a community newspaper, Meyer said “it takes a lot of experience [and] I think we do a good job of sort of figuring it out” but that some aspects of news value are tied to “the number of people affected.” And what the readers are interested in is news worthy. Meyer specified that three of the most important topics that the Reporter covers are property issues, education, and issues related to senior citizens.

Flint said that he is an “advocacy journalist. I am looking to provide the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual community with information they need or can use to improve their lives. We’re informing and providing information to the community that is useful for taking action.” As a member of that community, knowing what the community needs is “kind of self-evident,” he said. In writing, he said he tries “to make it human and not abstract.” He tries to not “just say things are bad, but I also try to include potential solutions to the problem. A lot of mainstream media in America right now is just catastrophe news. But it’s taken out of context, and I think it’s for entertainment value.” The SGN is limited in resources so they cover “things basically related to human rights [and] don’t cover all the bases.” If something was carried in both mainstream and the SGN, Flint said, “We’d really try to find a personal angle. . . or some way that it was related to the community.”

Tossey said she “looks for stories that actually have meat to them, that there is some substance to the story” and supplement mainstream stories: “this is what you’ve heard, now let’s hear the rest of the story.” She added, “Personally I look for issues of lesbians discriminated against; mostly what I find has to do with family issues.”

The journalists indicated that relationship of an event to the reader’s life was a primary determination of news worthiness. This leads to the question of who are the readers.

Who are the Readers?

With regard to readers of the mainstream P-I newspaper, Beringer said, “the people

who are reading the paper are the people who have more at stake in a community, the business people, politicians, teachers, people who have a reason to want to keep connected. But we're not really appealing to maybe the people who. . . younger people, who are starting to develop into the community."

Provenza expressed doubt as to knowing exactly who reads the Times but he was confident that "a lot of our readers are older because they're the ones who grew up in a culture where there wasn't as much competition as now [and] newspapers provided a lot of the news." Later he expressed concern that the paper may be out of touch with some readers.

Sommer said that readers "probably aren't exactly like me, but I assume they are because that's the best I can do." Later when she was asked to compare the P-I to other papers, Sommer said "I really wish I knew more about our circulation; I don't know who our readers are compared to theirs."

Iwasaki pointed out that a new P-I policy of putting the writer's phone number and email address at the end of each article has increased the feedback he gets from readers. But beyond that he is not very aware of who the readers are.

Turning to the community newspapers, Meyer, said that readers of the Reporter are members of a "really highly educated, very literate community." She added, "we know our readers get their national and regional and statewide and city news from the big metros." Local is the key, "we know that our niche is Mercer Island. . . we know who our readers are, there are no boundaries better defined than an island." Which translates into "an ideal situation for a community newspaper." And the population is fairly homogenous: "it's primarily white, middle-to-upper class with about 12-15 percent Asian, and then the other minority groups fall off," according to Meyer.

Flint said, "We are very closely linked to the community. . . . There has always been this kind of symbiotic relationship . . . [and] they're very vocal about what they like and what they don't like." Because of the sense of community, there is "a lot of personal interaction" between staff and community that occurs at various community meetings, as well as letters and phone calls to the newspaper.

Tossey said the readers are members of the gay community in the Puget Sound area.

The mainstream journalists did not have a very clear picture of who their readers are, even though most of those journalists stated that news value was related to the readers. On the other hand, the community journalists were able to define their readership, which included them as members of those communities.

Objectivity

The third research question deals with journalist's beliefs about their ability to be objective. Beringer said that "everybody. . . [has] biases of all sorts. [But] I think a reporter can write a story that's reflective of various sides of an issue [which] is a challenge [which results in] journalism that is fair. The perfect story is when you get complaints from both sides that you favored the other side, you know, if there's only two sides, which there rarely are. But that's usually the story where you've probably hit pretty close to being fair to everybody. I think accuracy is more of a concern than being unbiased."

Provenza responded that reporters can be objective "to a degree. It's hard not to put yourself into a story, but everybody has a point of view and you have to know what your point of view is and make sure it doesn't leak into the story. And people who are not aware of how they feel. . . tend to be less objective or risk being less objective." As he said about news itself, "I mean, the very idea of news is an opinion; you know, so if I choose to do this story and choose not to do that story, I'm already making a subjective decision. . . . You just hope that when you present the story, report it, and in the editing, it all comes out without biases."

Sommer said, "Objective, I don't know. That's a tricky word." She said, "You come to everything by way of your personal experience. . . [and] during the course. . . bias will come up; it will just happen." As an example, she referred to a time when she was on another beat and told to do a story on parking and mass transit in conjunction with another reporter. She said that there would have been "totally different stories" if either one of them had written the story separately. In fact, "if that had been my project, that story wouldn't have even been considered."

Iwasaki responded, "Can't be; you strive for objectivity. Personally I don't think anyone's truly objective. Everyone has some kind of background, experiences and feelings; it's very difficult to shelve those." As an example of how perceptions can be different, he noted that a reader may comment on a P-I story or Iwasaki may read another newspaper about a meeting he attended, and he will wonder "were we at the same meeting?" In general, "you see things differently than different individuals, and you might emphasize something different" in a story. (This is the crux of framing.)

Ostrom also said reporters cannot be objective "and I don't think they particularly ought to." Rather, they should "present both sides, or all sides, so that each side would say it presents my side fairly, not that any faction would be happy with the story selection or other things." She said that deciding to pay attention to certain things is a form of subjectivity. Therefore, "We should bring our judgments into it, but not try to fool the

readers.”

Meyer said, “we come with our own set of biases, beliefs, etc., but I really watch out for loaded words.” The key is to “strive for fairness. . . to make sure we are as fair as possible, knowing that that’s maybe an unachievable goal of perfection.” She added that knowing that she “will see those people [other members of the community] tomorrow. . . makes us, I think, more careful.”

Flint said that “no, they can’t [be].” He said that there is a big debate among journalists now and that “the mainstream media don’t talk about being objective; they talk about the appearance of being objective or they have the appearance of disinterest.” He then referred to Europe and his time there. He said that newspapers in Europe are identified with a group, “so they’re open [about their perspective] and argue their point.” He said he thinks that “that’s more honest than what we’re doing here. In this country there is a sort of pretense, but it’s very subtle. It’s very subtly slanted by the way the stories are chosen, which stories they choose to report, where it is in the paper, on the front page or page 13, what sources they choose to quote and [where in the article]. All of that stuff is value judgment.” When asked how many readers are aware of that, he said, “very few are.” Even though it is not conscious, he said that these things have an affect on readers. Knowing what to choose, for him, Flint said, comes from “personal experience and having been involved in the community and activism and different organizations. I know the kind of issues they’re working on and what they want to know about.”

Tossey responded to the question of being able to be objective, “No, I don’t believe so. I think that every person on Earth is subjective. The best a reporter can do is say as often as possible, because you’re going to be getting new readers all the time, these are my perceptions, these are my biases, and let the readers take their cue from that. But I don’t think that that’s an illusion. I think that even so called facts can be interpreted in so many different ways and you can draw inferences from them depending on your point of view. So, I think it’s a better route to take to say, “This is what I believe, this is my perspective on life, and, as a person with that perspective, here is my story.” She continued that a journalist’s responsibilities to the reader is to be “truthful. . . not be slanderous. . . [and] not work from a hidden agenda.” She said, “It’s fine to have an agenda as long as you put it forward.” The second responsibility “is to develop stories. . . detail. . . and what exactly is the meat of the issue that’s being reported.”

Overall with regard to objectivity, all interviewees said that journalists cannot be objective but should try to be objective either by overcoming any biases or individual perspectives or by making their perspective clear from the beginning. By acknowledging that people cannot be completely objective and that everyone has a perspective, especially as

noted by Iwasaki, the journalists touched on the essence of framing.

Framing and Influence

Framing is presenting information from a certain perspective that may influence how a reader will interpret that information and affect subsequent behaviors. The result is that newspapers may influence how people vote or respond to social issues. The interviewees were asked about their thoughts on framing and the potential for influence.

None of the journalists interviewed had heard of or used the term framing before the interviewer said it and gave a brief explanation. In general, they said that the idea either made sense or that the idea had occurred to that person prior to the interview. Iwasaki used the term snapshot in describing articles, and Beringer used the word window in her reference to the purpose of the front page.

Beringer commented about framing that there is a lot of subjectivity and noted that what page a story is on, where it is on the page, and size of the headline can have some meaning. She contrasted the newspaper to the internet where there is “no hierarchical framework for most of it. . . . And there is some greatness to that, that everything is kind of egalitarian and nobody’s opinion is ranked more highly. But I also think the framework that a newspaper sets for things does help people who are busy make some sense of it. And that’s why it’s such a huge responsibility.”

Provenza said that readers often ask why stories are included in the paper or why on page one or too long or too short, and “that fits the idea of framing. If we think it’s important enough to be on the cover of the newspaper, then we think it’s important for you to read, and that’s making a decision” He attributes reader awareness to Seattle because “the population is fairly well educated.”

Sommer seemed to link the idea of framing to the bias, or point of view, that a reporter brings to a story. In her words, “you don’t create some kind of frame and say that your reader is just like that. . . [you write it from what you see] and I feel at least it’s better for them to get my slanted impression than none at all. . . because a reader is intelligent enough to make their own decisions. [So] you just try to be as responsible as you can and try not to worry about it.”

Iwasaki said he had never really thought about the dynamics of framing, but he said he has thought about the phenomenon itself in that a story is a “single image” in the way a photographer shows from “my viewfinder what I saw, what I thought was the most important idea to bring back.” He elaborated that there is often a vast range of information or views from which a reporter can only pick a few and “you try to get a representative view, you try to pick a theme” which becomes the theme of the story. He said

that snapshot might be a better term than framing.

Ostrom said “Oh, sure, I’ve thought about it.” She likened it to blind reporters examining the same elephant but from different parts. She said “last year I did a story on female circumcision or female genital mutilation depending on your view.” She elaborated that it is cultural interpretation of the same procedure that determines how one labels it. She said that newspapers do have an influence and there is a “sacred trust and we should never lie and never misrepresent. We need to represent different views in the community and not miss any: shed some light on all.” When asked do journalists reflect or influence reality, she said, “We reflect but we influence in how wide we reflect.”

Meyer did not have as much to say about framing but she did indicate that reader perceptions may be influenced over time. For example, if the newspaper did not carry very much about girls high school sports, a reader over a five- or ten-year period might subconsciously think that such sports were not important or barely existed.

Flint’s comments echoed the ideas presented by Beringer. He elaborated on those ideas when he talked about AIDS as an example of differences between mainstream and the gay press. He said, “The mainstream basically had a blackout on anything related to homosexuality or the gay and lesbian community.” The “silence” precluded “a national discussion. . . or getting the information out to people and on how to protect themselves.” Now he said the mainstream media is recognizing the community but there is still a need for alternative media “because we see things differently. . .” and the mainstream media do not deal honestly or fairly with the gay and lesbian community.

Tossey said, “I think that media have a lot of influence in terms of the perceptions, the stories that we present; that will color people’s perceptions.” She stated that broadcast media does it much more, “in terms of manipulation” but that “every paper and everything is going to do that to a certain extent.” She gave an example, “There’s very little information in print, relatively, about what’s going on in Central and South America, in general. Your mainstream press is more likely to talk about what’s going on in Europe, and so the impression a lot of people are left with is [that] not much is going on [outside of Europe].” In general, she said that the editorial boards at mainstream media are able to do some leading in the editorials they write. “And part of that also is as they report news that happens, choosing what to or what not to report is going to influence what the people read and it’s going to influence the people’s sense of where we’re going.”

Although the interviewees had not heard of framing per se, they all seemed to be aware of some potential for influence in that regard. Some of the interviewees were very aware, to the point of some concern, of the framing phenomenon.

Event vs. Issue

As noted above, one area for analyzing news frames is to look at whether a news story is reported as an *isolated* event or that it is connected to some issues or other events.

With regard to the event-issue dichotomy, Beringer said, we “look at what’s been going on and before something breaks or maybe afterwards, you can interpret it, you try to take things another step.” However, she said these type of stories are kept separate from the “straight news event” stories and placed in “sidebars.”

Iwasaki said, “I think the better stories combine the two [but] part of it is dictated by time. . . [ideally] even if that means not getting a story the next day, even if it means maybe the second day, to tell it so that you truly understand it and that the public knows what the meaning is.”

Ostrom said that Times articles include both event and issue aspects and she “doesn’t really see the dichotomy” between them.

Meyer said she is very aware of the fact that different stories are event oriented and others issue oriented and “we do a little of both it seems like.”

Flint said that, for example, a gay bashing incident would be “news and an issue would be the issue of violence [such as] what are the organization that fight violence doing; are police departments aware of the issue; and how do they handle it when it comes to their attention.” And he said that he would tend to handle the two separately “because one is an event that has happened and there is an urgency to make the community aware; the other, the issue oriented article, it’s not urgent; it’s more of a standing back and looking at the broader picture, contextualizing.”

Although articles can not always include thematic information because of space or time limitations, the journalists indicated that reporting of events *should* include connections to other issues.

Portrayal of Women and Use as Sources

If the framing of news stories has potential for influence, a look at some specific frames is warranted. In this case, portrayal of women and use of women as sources in news are the main research interests.

Beringer said about portrayal of women, “I think probably underrepresented in their achievements, partly because we do a lot of institutional reporting. . . . And institutions tend to still be led by men. I mean every once in a while we’ll look through the paper and say ‘OK, how did we do, do we have anybody diverse, do we have anybody, women or minority, is it all just white powerful men in the paper?’ And still too often that’s the case.

We have a lot of people in the news kinds of things that have women, but when it still comes down to movers and shakers they are misrepresented.” When asked if that may be a reflection of society, she responded, “Probably to some extent, but yeah, I guess, you know, I haven’t really thought about that whole question of how we represent women. I need to, need to probably think about that some more.”

With regard to sources, Beringer noted that it is a function of who has the information (i.e. job). For example, “the two Police Department representatives, who we quote all the time, are women, they’re police officers who are information officers. But you know when it comes down to the homicide detectives, most of them are men and the Department’s run by a police chief who’s a male.” With regard to policies for quoting sources, Beringer said there were none and to have one “would be artificial and fake, but just like we wouldn’t say, make sure you put a black in this photograph. I mean that would be, I think that would be awful. . . . I’d be more interested in getting women into the news room as reporters and editors, as opposed to make it an issue because, then I think those connections probably develop (might take care of itself) right, as they network.”

Provenza concentrated on the newsroom itself and responded, “I think 20 years ago, the idea of women doing things for the first time was news and people were involved in that but we’re long past that.” More specifically, “if we point it out, then we’re just maintaining a stereotype. . . we used to do that more, but now we’re aware. . . reflect society that women are mainstreaming in a business and all the news fields.”

However, when he was asked about quoting sources, he said “unfortunately, most corporations executives and leaders, are still men.” But for quoting that is less of a concern because “that’s what you have to interview, the position rather than the sex, and that reflects society.” (He made an aside, “That’s an interesting cultural thing, if you assume, and a lot of people do assume, they assume that the person [quoted or referred to in a story] is a man if they can’t tell the sex.”) Later in summary, he said that the Times staff are very aware of portrayal and diversity but that it is “mostly along race lines, as opposed to men and women.”

Sommer indicated that portrayal of women may be different on different beats but that “I think about it in terms of the people who are reading my stories, but in terms of retail, it tends to be not about people, but it’s business, about companies.” But a reader’s impression would be “from looking at my stories you would get a sense that a lot of the women aren’t in a lot of the big positions, and the men run a lot of things, and, unfortunately, that’s pretty much the thing. . .” except for some retail brokers and public relations people.

Sommer sometimes tries to get more men sources because at some retail outlets

“there are usually more women around.” In general, though, she said, “my stories are very women oriented and very oriented towards women’s products and things like this.” Part of the reasons she cited was that each year “men only make one and a half shopping trips; women make a heck of a lot more than that.” As far as sources, the two women she talks to frequently are in the wrong area to be used as sources and “it just so happens that the men I talk to are the most gossipy and the most willing to blab.” Stating that one might expect the opposite in terms of willingness to gossip, she said the women tend to be “very closed mouthed and very worried about being professional and they don’t gossip.”

Iwasaki said with regard to newspaper policies that there were no real “pronouncements,” but that a few years ago Hearst papers held a “sensitivity training session” to raise awareness of all people. An equally important thing is that for “mid-level editors, [there are] more women than men,” which “does not affect how I write about it” but they would “catch” an “unfair” story.

With regard to sources, Iwasaki said that he does not “consciously try for any kind of balance.” His concern is with who has the information, who is available, or “whoever calls back first.” He said that in the past he was concerned about ethnic background, but at that time he was on a different beat and covering different issues.

Ostrom said, “In our newspaper, I don’t see any particular problem. With newspapers around the country, what I’m struck by is the lack of pictures of women,” especially in business and sports. She said the Times is generally aware of these things and, “maybe even leans over backwards and ends up making things sterilized.”

Ostrom said that quoting of women “depends on the beat.” She said quoting women in science and medicine tends to be more difficult than other areas because “spokespeople are often men.”

Meyer stated that, “if we counted up in our news and lifestyle coverage, we’d be pretty balanced,” including newsmakers, “experts, sources, the people we feature would be pretty even handed, I think. And we *really* make the effort in sports.” The emphasis on really was hers because of an incident that occurred a few years ago. As Meyer explained, a woman had studied the newspaper over a few months and “counted up the number of stories on the front page that featured girls sports versus boys, not only whether there were stories, but how large the photos were and whether they were above the fold or below, whether they were inside” and the woman was “complaining that we weren’t giving enough coverage to girls sports at the high school.” Meyer said she sat down with the sports reporter and found that the woman was correct, “we had equal number of stories for boys and girls sports but the way we played them was not equal.”

When asked if this was an average reader or that the average reader would be aware of this, Meyer said, “no, maybe unconsciously, but I don’t think it is anything conscious. . . I don’t think they are conscious of placement like we are.” With regard to overall portrayal and gender parity, Meyer stated that “our thought is to balance this community, to give a portrayal of this community, and I think the character of this community, it’s pretty balanced. Because we have movers and shakers of all kinds, the power people, it makes our job easier.”

Later in the interview, Meyer was asked if the woman’s pointing out the imbalance in sports coverage affected her general consciousness of that issue. Her response was, “Oh, yes, absolutely. I think it spilled over. We talked about it at our news meetings.”

Meyer said, “it depends on the story. If we’re looking for experts, then we try to look for the best expert no matter what the gender. . . [at times balance is] a consideration, but when it’s deadline time and we need three or four sources, we’re going to try to get those three or four sources and not worry about gender, if there is a deadline issue, and who’s gonna be at home and who we can get.”

Flint said, “I think we have a fairly good reputation of presenting women and their concerns in a non-sexist way, and we have a feminist outlook.” He added, “We’re very conscious to talk to women and men; often times the women sources are more. They’re over represented because the women, I think, in the community tend to be more politically active than males.” When asked to comment about sources in mainstream media, Flint declined to comment about gender but, “I will say that they don’t contact gay or lesbian sources when they’re writing stories that are of interest to us.”

Tossey responded to the portrayal question that in the SGN it “has never been good; it goes up and down; sometimes it’s tolerable. . . it’s not a women’s paper.” She said that the paper started out “fairly balanced, genderwise, but that there is such a polarity between what lesbians want to read and. . .” what gay men want to read. Some of the difference has to do with interests, especially as they get older, and money. She said that “gay men are more likely to have money and so they are more sought after by advertisers than lesbians are.”

With regard to sex of sources, Tossey said that it is a function of the topic of the story, whether or not it was local versus national, and what sources are available.

Overall, concern with the portrayal of women is not a top priority for most of the journalists, and it seems the newspapers may not give a favorable portrayal of women. *Manipulation* of sources, in the sense of seeking out women who are under-represented experts, as a means of altering the portrayal was not considered a viable option. Instead, the use of sources is a function of who has the needed information and who is available,

which leaves little room for journalists to select sources. In general, gender parity does not seem to be a major concern and may even be somewhat of a *luxury*.

Advocacy

The somewhat unfavorable portrayal of women combined with the potential for framing influences lead to the question of advocacy in the sense of seeking out certain sources or stories that would portray women in a better light. At various points in the interviews, the word advocacy was used and the interviewees were asked to think about a newspaper reflecting reality, which most indicated was male dominated, but sort of leading society or the community and maybe nudging along some changes.

Beringer responded that “Well, there’s a whole role, I guess, this paper doesn’t, I think if this paper leads a community, it’s only through it’s editorial pages and maybe through the selection of the elements we think are worth concentrating on. . . . There’s a whole element of public journalism, or civic journalism, that my bosses don’t believe in. They think it goes too far in that sense of leading the community or the newspaper stepping out of it’s role of observer and into a role of facilitator or leader, and I don’t have as many problems with that as they do. I mean, I do think that people look to a paper for leadership and if the paper is in a position as being an impartial party that can bring sides together to make a community safer or to air issues that haven’t been dealt with. . . . I think it’s good if you don’t take a side, if you’re working as a facilitator then it’s, then it works, but just so you don’t get to advocacy.”

When Sommer was asked about the newspaper trying to change the situation of men having higher-position jobs, she said that if there were any wrongdoing, then a story exposing that would be appropriate, but she does not have the sense that such is the case. However, she said she has not really given much thought to how stories can subtly send messages that women can be executives, rather she is interested in retail trends and consumer needs being met.

Iwasaki stated a number of times that he had not really thought about most of the issues involved in the questions that were asked. At one point he said, “You’re asking things I don’t normally think about.” In spite of that, his responses seemed thoughtful and insightful. That is not to judge or praise him specifically, it is to suggest that journalists do not in the normal course of their duties consider these issues; however they seem to have the capacity for thoughtful consideration of these issues and to have a sense of responsibility.

Meyer indicated that she does not have to concern herself with representational balance of minorities and others “because we have movers and shakers of all kinds” in the

community to report on. When asked about the possible need for advocacy journalism at some newspapers, she responded, “I have a bit of a problem with [it]. I think, again, there has to be truth out there in the newspaper, as objective and as truthful as that can be [and] the editorial page is the place for advocacy.”

As noted above, Flint stated that he is an “advocacy journalist.” The SGN reporter, Tossey, said she was not sure about the need to change the community or change some images or perceptions and said such a thing needed to be thought out. Yet, in terms of a newspaper reflecting or leading the community, she said, “I think ideally, it would be some of both. It would be a reflection, but it would say, ‘OK, this is where we are, let’s go here.’” But she said that would take some unity at the newspaper and the people at the SGN seem to be going in “many different directions.”

In general, advocacy did not seem too appealing to most interviewees. Beringer did seem accepting of some mild form, but was prevented by her superiors from engaging in it. Flint labeled himself an advocacy journalist.

Conclusions

With regard to news value, one mainstream editor indicated that journalists have some instinct for what should be carried in the newspaper. However, he expressed concern that sometimes their judgment is different from the readers’. Beyond that, news value depends on how an event, or the implications that it raises, are related to the reader. The other mainstream editor focused directly on the need to relate to the reader somehow and noted a “Hey, Martha” effect. An editor in the Sydney study used the term “Hey, Mabel factor” for the same effect. Such a factor refers to connection with the reader either because of the interesting nature of a story or direct implications on that reader’s life.

Similarly, two of the mainstream journalists stated that news value equals social issue that the reader needs to know about or wants to know about. One community newspaper editor specified that number of people affected and the specific community issues of property, education, and senior citizens are selection criterion. A community reporter cited the same ideas and added usefulness as another criteria. All reporters noted that the human side or inclusion of people is important. The key is relationship to the reader either through implications for the reader or some humanistic parallel.

A problem with these ideas is the fact that the mainstream journalists are not clear about who their readers are yet they stated that information related to readers’ lives is important for story selection. One can wonder how they might know what is important or

interesting to the people when media journalists seem to be unsure of who the readers are. On the other hand, as members of the community served by the newspaper, the community newspaper journalists have a very clear idea of who their readers are. They are, therefore, better situated to know what is relevant to the readers and what is not.

Looking at objectivity, fairness seems to be more important. In fact, all the journalists stated that true objectivity is impossible. Rather journalists feel they have a responsibility to try to overcome any bias and to be fair to all parties, the story, and the reader; to clearly show their perspective; or to compensate for any bias.

With regard to framing, none of the journalists had previously heard of the metaphor for mass media influences; however, most of them had given some thought to the ideas behind the framing paradigm. They all stated that how news is presented may have some influence over people's perceptions of the world.

With regard to the portrayal of women, the journalists were a bit varied in their evaluations, perceptions, and responses. That variance included two journalists from the same paper giving opposite evaluations: "fairly good" versus "never been good." On the other hand, one community newspaper editor became aware of portrayal issues only after a reader complained about women's sports coverage. Other journalists noted the low numbers of women in the news and the paucity of women used as sources in most areas. In general, there seems to be a need for more attention to gender portrayal at all newspapers.

Another area for improvement is the use of more women as sources, but all the journalists indicated that the important factors are who has the information and who is available, especially near deadline. Although the journalists generally recognized the lack of citing women sources in stories, most of them did not agree with such a type of advocacy journalism that would purposely concentrate on choosing women as sources. Some would accept advocacy journalism under certain circumstances, but the journalists felt that readers should make up their minds from the facts, even though they all had agreed that bias or perspective, not objectivity, were the result of journalists being people with background and perspective. Concerns or attempts at getting certain types of sources seems to be a luxury.

Differences between the journalists seemed to lie on either the editor-reporter and mainstream-alternative-media borders. As the framing paradigm shows, the way that one frames the world influences how one perceives it. Job, whether as an editor versus reporter or as a mainstream journalists versus a community journalist, affects how one perceives the world.

Sex of journalist seemed to have less of an effect in that some men seemed to be

more thoughtful about all of these issues than some women, who even tended to be a bit less concerned with how women are portrayed. The main factors at work are the tenets of journalism: news value, serving the reader, and fairness, not objectivity or overall need for equal portrayal of women.

Discussion

Journalists seem to be constrained by many different things. There is some awareness of the influence or power that newspapers have with regard to framing, yet that awareness is not always conscious nor part of decisions. Rather than thinking about effects down the road and trying to control the newspaper (i.e., what is printed and the overall portrayal of the world), journalist seemed to be controlled by a number of more immediate factors, including advertisers, higher managers, training in journalism schools, training on the job, deadlines, and natural human tendencies, such as being attracted to a burning fire, regardless of its importance, and being concerned with the things in your community.

Recognition of those factors and clear statement of one's perspective may be important for readers, who are not trained as journalists. As Tossey said, journalists should present their perspective and the consumer can judge the story from that basis. The biggest problem is space and time to do such, as well as choosing what aspects of one's make-up to include and what to exclude. In some ways, a byline is supposed to tell who is writing but time and familiarity with that writer, which only few regular readers have, are necessary to understand a particular writer's perspective. In some respects, being a journalist at a particular newspaper can reveal the writer's perspective.

The word bias was used by most of the interviewees. It has a negative connotation, but in the electronics industry it is a stabilizing force, a constant voltage. Although most people are not that consistent, it may be more reasonable for a newspaper to admit its position, similar to an electronic bias, and people can judge an article in that context.

The interviewee comments suggest that framing teaches, or influences, how to see things. Reader feedback and complaints indicate that there are a number of factors involved in how much a media outlet can teach or influence a consumer. Some of those factors might be (a) newness of the issue/topic to the consumer, (b) newness of the frame/perspective, (c) closeness of the issue to the consumer, (d) amount of exposure to that frame (number of times read or heard), and (e) the consumer's openness to new ideas.

One can only wonder why most of the journalists did not connect the reality of framing, the scarcity of women being quoted as sources, and the need to better reflect the

slow changes in society. If, as all the journalists noted, each story is a perspective, why do most of the journalists hesitate to be more proactive in writing the news? Why are they not more concerned with how a story is *crafted*?

There are certain obvious limitations to the conclusions found in this study. The interviews constituted a convenience sample of a very specific segment of mass media (i.e., four newspapers) in a very specific culture (i.e., the Seattle, WA, area of the United States). And the interviews were limited to the 8 journalists noted above. Certainly their responses do not represent the journalists at their newspapers let alone others. However, there were some telling moments in the interviews. These results and conclusions can serve as a starting point for future research on journalism. Panel studies of journalists need to be conducted, some in conjunction with a content analysis of the media where they work. Differences among reporters in different areas need to be examined. Differences among levels of management at various media also need to be examined. Equally important is an examination of reader awareness of the tenets of journalism and their effect, which pervade the newsroom culture and hold much power over journalists fairly consistently but with some variation from one newspaper to another and from newspaper to TV or other type of media. Finally, there needs to be research that ties this together with media consumers.

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