WOMEN MATTER IN NEWSROOMS: HOW POWER AND CRITICAL MASS RELATE TO THE COVERAGE OF THE HPV VACCINE

By Teresa Correa and Dustin Harp

This study explored how female journalists affect news content when holding positions of power, reaching a critical mass in the newsroom, and covering an issue that appeals to them. The study compared a male-dominated news organization's coverage of the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine with coverage by a more gender-balanced organization in terms of news executives and reporters. It also explored whether content produced by female reporters from both organizations differed. The more gender-balanced organization covered the vaccine more frequently and more prominently, and used more diverse themes than its counterpart. The content created by female reporters at different outlets also diverged.

Introduction

Newsroom diversity remains an important topic within the industry and among scholars; newsrooms should reflect a diverse group of people similar to the communities they cover. The argument for diversifying newsrooms is that greater diversity would lead to a more complete, just, and fair representation of society. The reality, however, has been that white males often dominate newsrooms and news content.

Research exploring whether the presence of women and minorities in newsrooms influences news coverage is inconsistent. Some scholars assert female journalists have different approaches to news compared to male reporters. They argue that since women increased their representation in newsrooms, some news definitions have changed, providing more opportunities to address stories on social problems and human interest. It is argued these gendered attitudes are more likely to emerge at the organizational level than the individual level. When women journalists achieve a critical mass, reach positions of influence, or work in small organizations, they may affect the priority, coverage, and framing of the stories produced by the organization. Critical mass theory posits that as members who are in minority positions increase in number and

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become less marginalized, they are more likely to trigger change in an organization.

Other scholars have suggested factors that may override the influence women can exert over news content. The importance of neutrality and objectivity as news values could force journalists to erase their personal experiences, and organizational hierarchies and routines would standardize journalists' work. Additionally, socialization in a masculine newsroom culture and embedded patriarchal ideologies may play a role.

Rather than merely focusing on whether the gender of the individual reporter affects news content, this study explored whether the presence of female journalists in the newsroom affected news content related to their own group at the organizational and individual levels.

Because mainstream journalists share similar professional values, routines, pressures, and ideologies, the question is the following: Under what circumstances do their distinct identities, such as their gender, become more salient? Also, does social identification with their group influence behaviors that affect the news discourse? Social identification refers to people's connection with and positive image toward members of their own group. Do reaching a critical mass, holding positions of power in a news organization, and covering stories appealing to their own group trigger an effect on news content? Using a most similar system research design, this study examined how a male-dominated news organization covered the implementation of the vaccine aimed at preventing the human papilloma virus (HPV) as compared to a more gender-balanced news organization. The balanced organization was defined in terms of proportion of women reporters and women in news executive positions. At the individual level, the study explored whether the content produced by female reporters from both organizations differed.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Hegemony, Feminism, and Social Identification.** Hegemony theory posits that cultural practices and institutions, led by dominant groups, constitute and reproduce hegemonic orders and ideologies to the extent that they become transparent to people. Because men have historically dominated newsrooms, journalism culture is shaped by masculine values. News media coverage is strongly dominated by male sources, bylines, and male-oriented topics, such as traditional politics, war, and crime. Further, official sources rather than citizens' voices dominate much news, which also privileges men because they hold more top positions in government. Scholars have argued this masculine order is so deeply embedded in the newsroom culture that journalists, regardless of gender, embrace it as natural.

The feminist theoretical approach, which formed the foundation of this study, draws attention to mainstream news media's historic neglect of issues of importance to women. Normative cultural ideals about gender have meant certain news stories have historically been understood to represent women's topics and issues. Many gatekeeping processes from individual characteristics and professional norms to routines, organizational environment, extramedia
and ideological forces, interact and affect media content. Individual reporters may influence the content only if they have enough power to overcome other factors affecting media outcomes. Therefore, from a feminist perspective, professional norms of objectivity and neutrality, journalism training, routines, socialization in male-dominated newsrooms, and embedded patriarchal ideologies manufacture this pervasive masculine order. Steiner argued that when women pursue journalism education and enter the workforce, they may begin acting in masculine terms, especially in leadership positions, because they feel forced, consciously or subconsciously, to comply with existing masculine social culture.

Embedded cultural ideologies are also powerful forces pervading newsrooms and shaping news discourses. Studies have consistently found women and men are represented by a dichotomy—men as part of the public sphere and women within a "domestic" frame, highlighting the ideas of care, compassion, and motherliness. Regarding sexual activity and health, discourse usually reinforces traditional gender stereotypes: Men are sex seekers, and women are responsible for sexual health. The media reproduce this discourse by portraying men as always ready and wanting sex, while women serve as the primary targets for gendered hygiene products and birth control products.

From a socio-psychological perspective, social identity research addresses a similar phenomenon: people tend to have greater identification and more positive attachment with members of their own group and discriminate against out-groups. However, minority group members may downgrade their own group and show positive attitudes toward the dominant group. Further, it has been found that minority members are more likely than majority members to stereotype themselves. It is possible that hegemonic ideologies, especially those related to gender and race, become natural to minority groups.

Gender has been found to be a powerful social category with which people identify. Because the great majority of US media are led by and composed of white men, women become outsiders in the newsrooms. Therefore, one may argue the media's tendency to underrepresent or negatively portray women in certain types of news is due, in part, to a weak identification with them. In contrast, one could argue that when women are not in a diminished position, they would influence the newsroom culture and news priorities.

The Impact of Reporters' Gender on News Content. Numerous investigations have assessed whether the presence of women in newsrooms affects news content. While the majority have focused on the individual level of analysis, others have concentrated on the intersection between individual and organizational levels. Because research at both levels of analysis has been inconclusive, more studies and creative means for analyzing the issue are necessary.

Individual Level. This level has compared content produced by female reporters with content of their male counterparts and focused on...
how attitudes, background, and training may influence it. Results are inconclusive. Some studies have not found major differences between female and male reporters in news content, while others found women reporters included more female sources in their stories than their male colleagues. Rodgers and Thorson found that an organizational factor—size of newspaper—interacted with gender in the newsgathering process. The most significant difference in sourcing occurred in small newspapers. Female reporters also tended to cover human interest and health-related stories, while male reporters wrote political stories.

Many of these investigations explored the impact of female reporters on general newsgathering practices (i.e., coverage of more positive stories in general, use of wider variety of sources, and reliance on professional/official sources). Hardin and colleagues found, however, that female reporters used more female sources in the coverage of Title IX, an issue that appeals to women because it is a law that provided equal access to scholastic sports for women. Women reporters were also more likely to frame the issue as "enabling" than male reporters.

Organizational Level. Research at this level has focused on how media corporations shape routines and news content. Studies have examined the influence on news content and newsroom culture of women in positions of power. The results are conflicting. Bleske found gender affected the news selection only "when last-minute extra space opens in the newspaper." Other studies revealed a similar trend: Female editors or executives did not change representations of women. However, found women in positions of power have influence in newsrooms, although it is subtle. Newspapers with high numbers of women editors covered issues more positively and did not relegate female reporters to stereotypical beats as in male-dominated newsrooms. Similarly, Everbach found that a women-led newspaper changed the working environment. Regarding issues associated with women, Andsager and Powers found that women's magazines had a more women-centered approach than news magazines in covering breast cancer, namely by talking about cancer prevention.

Coverage of Women's Issues. Although issues are not necessarily female or male, some topics are commonly understood as "women's issues," including sexual harassment, reproductive health, family planning, abortion, and domestic violence. These issues have been consistently treated as second-tier by news media. For example, on a day the New York Times published a front-page story on four diabetes drugs expected to have a future impact on treatment of the disease, it buried on page 18 a story about a study that found condoms can block a cancer-causing virus from infecting women, a story that could have an immediate impact for women.

Case of HPV Vaccine. Human papilloma virus (HPV) is the most frequently sexually transmitted disease in North America and causes "virtually all cervical cancers." HPV is also associated with genital warts in males and females, and penile and anal cancers in men.

In 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved implementation of Merck's HPV vaccine, Gardasil, which aimed at inoculating
girls and women ages 9 to 26, before possible exposure to HPV. The public has been exposed to diverse and controversial voices in the mainstream media regarding the implications of the vaccine. In 2007, the Virginia legislature passed a vaccine requirement for sixth-grade girls, becoming the first state to mandate the vaccine. Since then, numerous states introduced legislation to fund the vaccine, suggest girls receive it, or educate the public regarding it.

Analysis of hearings between Merck representatives and the FDA’s committee about implementation of Gardasil revealed how embedded gendered ideologies shaped the discourse. The discussion only focused on the necessity to vaccinate women, although the vaccine is designed to protect those not infected with HPV, including men. The discourse followed usual patterns of holding females responsible for sexual health and ignored the roles of males as transmitters of the virus and vaccination candidates.

These theoretical foundations and literature generate the following research questions, organized in four areas:

**Amount of Coverage and Placement**

RQ1: Did the male-dominated news organization differ in its amount and placement of stories about the issue compared to the more gender-balanced news organization?

**Use of Sources**

RQ2: Did the more gender-balanced news organization use more female and private/citizen sources compared to the male-dominated news organization? In contrast, did the male-dominated organization rely more on male and official news sources compared to the more gender-balanced news organization?

**Themes**

RQ3: Did the more gender-balanced news organization differ in the story themes used in writing about the HPV vaccine compared to the male-dominated news organization?

**Interaction between Organizational and Individual Levels**

RQ4: Did the content produced by female reporters working at the more gender-balanced news organization differ in terms of sourcing and themes from their counterparts working at the male-dominated organization?

To compare male-dominated and more gender-balanced news media, this study used a most similar systems research design. This comparative design seeks to select systems, such as news organizations, that share common features in order to neutralize differences, but that vary in one critical variable. Thus, this investigation analyzed two newspapers of similar circulation and published in the same state to...
control for size and geographic area. To examine effects of the gendered organizational environment on news content, the newspapers differed in the percentage of female reporters working in the newsroom and the percentage of women holding news executive positions.

Two Virginia newspapers with circulations of about 200,000 were selected. Because Virginia was the first state to pass a law requiring schoolgirls to be vaccinated against HPV, the Virginia law generated heated debate and offered a fruitful case study. The number of women holding managerial positions was based on the 2008 Editor & Publisher International Yearbook.54

The percentage of women working in newsrooms was based on ASNE’s 2008 census data. ASNE released the percentage of females working at newspapers with the provision that the newspapers’ names would remain confidential. Therefore, the newspapers will be referred to as Newspaper A and Newspaper B. When the debate on the HPV vaccine reached a peak in the Virginia news media (2007-2008), Newspaper A’s newsroom was 40% female, and 50% of news executive positions were held by women. Newspaper B’s newsroom was 25% females, and no women were in news executive positions.55

Coverage of the vaccine by both newspapers was examined with quantitative and qualitative content analyses. Articles from each newspaper were selected using LexisNexis with terms such as “HPV vaccine.”56 The search yielded 109 news stories, briefs, columns, and letters to editors published between February 2005 and January 2009.57 The majority of the articles (77%, n = 84) ran between 2007 and 2008. The quantitative content analysis used the news story as the unit of analysis. The codebook contained identification variables (i.e., story ID, name of the newspaper), gender of the byline, placement of the story, number of words, number of sources, gender of sources, type of sources, and the list of themes and subthemes.

To develop the thematic categories, a qualitative examination of forty randomly selected articles was pursued, linking core themes with peripheral ideas. Qualitative analysis is an interpretive method that allows for meaning to emerge from apparent and latent structures in a text.61 To conduct this portion of the analysis, the authors began with what Hall calls a “preliminary soak.”62 The researchers initially read each of the forty articles and took notes on emerging themes and dominant ideas. With the emergent themes in mind, the researchers then re-read the articles several more times to look for instances of these themes. The authors discussed these findings before reading each article a final time to encourage openness to new discoveries. Finally, researchers determined one major theme per article and any various subthemes, which are less prominent and dependent on the central idea.63 This approach offered a more thorough understanding of the prominent ideas in the discourse and the secondary themes with which they were associated. As a result, a list of five major themes with their respective subthemes was identified: health, moral debate, controversy, legislative process, and business (see Table 2).64

Intercoder reliability was calculated based on a random sample of 15% of the stories coded by both authors. Measured by Holsti’s formula,
TABLE 1
Mean Number of Sources by Newspaper and Reporter's Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers (mean)</th>
<th>Female Reporters # (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper A (n = 66)</td>
<td>Newspaper B (n = 43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Words</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Total Sources</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Female Sources</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Male Sources</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Can't-tell Sources</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Official Sources</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Experts Sources</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Citizen Sources</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Anonymous Sources</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Newspaper A (n = 22)</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Newspaper B (n = 16)</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Note: The comparisons did not need a test of statistical significance because the population analyzed was a census of news stories. However, t-tests were conducted for illustrative purposes.

* Male reporters' articles were not included in the comparison because of the small sample size.

Newspaper A = gender-balanced; Newspaper B = male-dominated

Of the 109 articles on the HPV vaccine, 57% (n = 62) were news stories, 16% (n = 17) were briefs, 15% (n = 16) were op-eds, 6% (n = 7) editorials, 5% (n = 5) letters to the editor, and 2% (n = 2) other. Both newspapers published similar numbers of staff-written stories (38% for Newspaper A and 40% for Newspaper B, n = 25 and n = 17, respectively), and stories that used wire services (32% for Newspaper A and 26% for Newspaper B, n = 21 and n = 11, respectively). The remaining stories did not indicate origin.

RQ1 asked whether the male-dominated news organization differed in amount and placement of vaccine coverage compared to the more gender-balanced news organization. Comparisons between newspapers suggested strong differences. The more gender-balanced newspaper (Newspaper A) published 66 news accounts on the vaccine, while the news organization with the lower percentage of females (Newspaper B) published 43. Further, these stories appeared twice as many times on Newspaper A's front page as on Newspaper B's front page (11% versus 5%).

RQ2 asked whether there was a difference between news organizations in usage of sources. The newspapers did not differ in the average number and gender of sources. However, the male-dominated news
**TABLE 2**

**Thematic Analysis of HPV Vaccine**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Newspapers (%)</th>
<th>Female Reporters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 66)</td>
<td>(n = 43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 22)</td>
<td>(n = 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Health</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Health</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Responsible</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men as Disseminator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Advancement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Process</td>
<td>8 *</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Debate</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Health</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Women as Responsible</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men as Disseminator</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promiscuity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Process</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Health</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Health</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Debate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentages</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Tests of statistical significance were not needed because we used the entire population of news stories. However, z-tests of proportions were conducted for illustrative purposes.

# Male reporters' articles were not included in the comparisons due to the small sample size.

Newspaper A = gender balanced; Newspaper B = male-dominated

organization relied more strongly on official sources (see Table 1). The newspaper with more women used twice as many citizen/private sources, such as teachers, teens, and parents, although this difference was not statistically significant.

**RQ3** asked whether the more gender-balanced organization differed in the themes used in vaccine stories compared to the male-dominated organization. Both newsrooms structured coverage around similar
overarching themes, but the emphases and ideas associated with each theme were different (see Table 2).

**Legislative Process and Health through Different Lenses:** Both newspapers structured coverage mainly around the legislative process to implement the vaccine and linked the immunization to health issues, though the male-dominated news organization did so relatively more. For the male-dominated newsroom, the state's pioneering status and political business emerged as prominent subthemes. The newspapers also highlighted lobbying efforts by Gardasil's manufacturer. For instance, the second half of a long article titled “Mandate for HPV shot goes to Kaine [Virginia's governor]; parent could opt out,” stressed “More than a dozen other states are considering such legislation, though some have curtailed efforts in light of the aggressive lobbying tactics of vaccine maker Merck Pharmaceuticals.”

Health was the second most frequently published story frame for both newspapers, with women's health being a major subtheme, particularly consequences for women such as risks of cervical cancer. A story titled “A quarter of U.S. teenage girls received cervical cancer vaccine” associated the vaccine only with cervical cancer: “The vaccine protects against four strains of human papilloma virus that account for about 70 percent of all cases of cervical cancer in the United States.” The association of the vaccine with men's health was scarce in both newspapers. For example, Newspaper B titled a story “Virus once associated with women showing up in men.” In Newspaper A, a story was titled “Males may also benefit from HPV vaccination, new research finds.”

Within stories structured around health, the more gender-balanced newsroom was more likely to include a discussion of “men as disseminator,” although this frame was rare. An illustrative example of the subtheme of men as disseminators of the virus was present in a news story about the benefits the vaccine offers men. The article stated, “Experts say a primary reason for male vaccination would be to prevent men from spreading the virus” (emphasis added). Although the difference was not statistically significant, Newspaper A also more often highlighted the idea of women as responsible for sexual health. For example, a front page story about a national study revealed one in four teen girls was infected with a sexually transmitted disease and dealt mostly with girls' responsibility for their protection. One 17-year-old was quoted: “I knew the possible consequences of my actions, but I didn't pay attention....” In the next sentence, the article stated, “She's had three sexual partners during the past year but didn't use protection,” illustrating how the news discourse reinforced the dominant cultural notion of women being responsible for sexual health.

**Divergences in Controversy:** The most striking difference in the thematic coverage of the stories was seen in comparison of the controversy theme. Twenty-three percent of stories (n = 15) published in the more gender-balanced newsroom portrayed the vaccine as a controversial issue compared with 7% (n = 3) in its counterpart. The controversies involved three issues. Efficacy and safety controversies addressed the novelty of the vaccine and the lack of studies showing its safety and
effectiveness. The cost controversy involved the high price of the vaccine and insurance coverage.

**Similar Coverage of Moral Debate and Business:** These two themes seldom appeared in the newspapers, and coverage was similar. When reporters structured coverage around moral debate, the newspapers usually included liberal and conservative voices that debated implementation of the vaccine because of its infringement on parents’ rights or because it may foster promiscuity and premarital sex. This theme emerged through op-eds, editorials, and letters to the editor. For example, an op-ed headline stated, “Morality ensures young women’s health.” The business theme associated HPV vaccine with the manufacturer of Gardasil. For example, an article titled, “Merck to expand Rockingham plant,” linked Merck with the vaccine: “The expanded Elkton plant east of Harrisonburg will be involved in the manufacture of Gardasil.”

In sum, coverage of the vaccine was structured around five organizing themes in both newspapers. However, coverage by the gender-balanced daily was more diverse than that of the male-dominated newsroom. In the latter, almost 80% of stories were structured around two main themes—legislative process and health. In the gender-balanced organization, a similar percentage of stories were structured around three themes: legislative process, health, and controversy. The more diverse thematic approach and reduced reliance on official sources by the more gender-balanced newsroom illustrated that the newsroom with a greater percentage of women offered a richer perspective and understanding of the topic.

**RQ4** asked whether sourcing and themes of the stories differed for women reporters working at the two news organizations. Women working in the male-dominated newsroom used significantly more male and official sources than women in the more gender-balanced newsroom. The latter group used more citizen/private sources than women employed at the male-dominated news organization, although the difference was not statistically significant. There was no difference in the number of female sources (see Table 1).

The thematic comparison between women working at the different newsrooms revealed that almost 90% of the HPV coverage produced by women in the male-dominated newsroom was organized around two themes: health and legislative process. In contrast, the coverage of the HPV vaccine produced by women in the more gender-balanced newsroom included health, controversy, and moral debate as themes. Legislative process and business were present to a lesser extent (see Table 2). Interestingly, women working at both organizations associated the vaccine with women’s health and risks of cervical cancer, as well as “women as responsible” for their sexual health. However, only the female reporters employed in the more gender-balanced organization incorporated men in the equation by characterizing them as “disseminators” of the virus.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study explored to what extent the presence of females as reporters and news executives in the newsroom affected news content related to women, such as coverage of the HPV vaccine. The analysis was conducted both at the organizational and individual levels. Because jour-
nalists share a similar professional identity and female reporters have traditionally been more marginalized in newsrooms, this investigation looked at three factors that may trigger an effect on news content: reaching a critical mass in newsrooms, holding positions of power in a news organization, and covering stories that appeal to their own group such as the implementation of the HPV vaccine. This study examined how a male-dominated news organization covered the HPV vaccine compared to a more gender-balanced news organization. Additionally, it investigated whether women employed in dissimilar news organizations covered the HPV vaccine differently.

At the organizational level of analysis, coverage of the HPV vaccine was more prominent in the more gender-balanced newspaper. This news outlet published more stories about the topic and displayed them more prominently. The analysis also revealed organizational differences in sourcing: while the male-dominated news organization relied more heavily on official sources, the newspaper with more women used more citizen/private sources (i.e., teens, parents, teachers). Although the latter difference was not great, the sourcing patterns suggest that while the male-dominated organization relied more on the traditional/official version of the issue, the more gender-balanced organization more often included the human face of the debate.

The literature suggests that many forces, such as professional norms of objectivity and neutrality, journalism training, routines, socialization in male-dominated newsrooms, and embedded patriarchic ideologies manufacture a masculine newsroom culture that may prevail over the influence of women on news. The results of this study suggest, however, that women may counteract masculine hegemonic orders in many aspects of the news-making process such as space, prominence, and sourcing when they reach a critical mass, hold positions of authority, and identify with the story because it is associated with a group to which they belong.

Both newspapers structured their coverage around similar themes, although the more gender-balanced newspaper presented more diverse coverage than the male-dominated newspaper. The organization with a female-rich newsroom associated the vaccine with more themes.

The discursive construction around health suggests embedded ideologies regarding sexual health continue to circulate in both newspapers, which mostly related the vaccine to women’s health. Discourses about effects of the vaccine on men and portrayals of men as responsible for disseminating the virus were scant, although the latter more often appeared in the newspaper employing more women. Conversely, portrayals of women as responsible for their sexual health were present to a greater extent in the newspaper with more women. In conclusion, the discourse on sexual health was more diverse in the more gender-balanced newspaper, and the male-dominated news organization relied more heavily on a stereotypical gendered discourse.

One may conclude that these two newspapers relied on a stereotypical gendered discourse to cover the HPV vaccine. However, it is important to note that this discourse was present among official voices
starting when the FDA's committee discussed the implementation of the vaccine with Merck's representatives. Despite Gardasil's being designed to protect those who have not been infected with HPV, male or female, the discourse between public officials and Merck's representatives held women responsible for sexual health and ignored the roles of men as transmitters and participants in the inoculation process. Stereotypical discourse may be harder to counteract by the news media if it is strongly sponsored by official and expert sources. Still, this news portrayal is problematic because it ultimately reinforces the way male and female sexual relationships and their possible consequences are ideologically situated. Additionally, as Thompson argued, it undermines the hope of having men as sexual partners who are equally accountable and active in a participatory, partnered public/private role.

The interaction between the organizational and individual levels revealed that female reporters covered the issue differently based on their organization. Women working in the male-dominated newsroom used more official and male sources and structured most of their coverage around two themes, one of them the legislative process. In contrast, women working in the more gender-balanced newsroom used a richer variety of themes to portray the HPV vaccine, paid less attention to the legislative process and business aspects of the story, and portrayed men as "disseminator" of the virus more often. Within the context of feminist theory and previous studies about newsroom culture and norms, these results are not unexpected. The masculine culture of newsrooms includes male and official sources and traditionally male-oriented topics, such as politics. Women working in a more masculine environment followed this more patriarchal pattern, while the stories published by women in a more gender-balanced environment appeared to be less likely to highlight this masculine order.

This research demonstrates the importance of more complex investigations into the effects of women on news content. The study's design combined organizational and individual levels of analysis. Because previous research has offered contradictory results on women's influence in the newsroom, new analytical approaches are needed. This research presents a method for studying interactions that occur within the broad realm of influences on mass media texts.

This investigation used a most similar system research design to examine how a male-dominated news organization covered the HPV vaccine compared to a more gender-balanced news organization, controlling as much as possible for size of the newspaper and geographic location. This was an observational study, however, and not a controlled experiment. Thus, other factors may have affected the news content: one organization was closer to a capital area, may have had a consistently larger news hole, or a big, local story may have occurred during the years of the analysis. However, these alternative explanations alone can hardly explain the consistent differences found in this study in terms of the amount, prominence, sourcing, and framing of the HPV vaccine.

Future investigations on gender or minorities should take a more complex approach to isolating the influence of power and critical mass
factors in the context of specific news issues. Finally, this investigation was based on the theoretical assumption that women identify with women and so-called “women’s issues.” Future research should explore this link. Limitations notwithstanding, this research offers a unique approach to understanding issues of diversity in newsrooms and the effects they might have on content.

NOTES


8. Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York:


17. Steiner, “Critiquing Journalism.”


26. Susan T. Fiske, Amy J. C. Cuddy, Peter Glick, and Jun Xu, “A


30. Weaver and Loffelholz, “Questioning National.”


34. Rodgers and Thorson, “A Socialization Perspective.”

35. Anna Danilewicz and Roger Desmond, “Women Are On, but Not


37. Hardin, Whiteside, and Garris, “The Gender War.”


45. Poindexter, “Finding Women.”


52. Thompson, “Who’s Guarding.”

54. To compile the newspapers with high and low percentages of women news executives, the positions listed under the heading “news executives” was used. The names that were not clearly male or female were counted separately. If the number of questionable names made it impossible to select comparable newspapers, that was excluded.

55. These percentages include sports, which may skew the female vs. male proportion in the newsroom given the high number of men in sports departments. Therefore, a review of the current staff in both newspapers revealed that in both newsrooms the proportion of sports staff vs. total newsroom staff is very similar (12% for Newspaper A vs. 10% for Newspaper B). This suggests that if the sports staff is removed, the female-to-male proportion in the newsroom would remain similar.

56. The following search terms were used: HPV vaccine, cervical cancer vaccine, and Gardasil.

57. Although the HPV vaccine was not approved until 2006, the debate on the issue started the previous year.

58. The categories of authors’ byline were female, male, can’t tell author’s gender, no author.

59. Placement was categorized as front page or interior pages.

60. The sources were coded as: official (e.g., congressmen, federal office spokesperson), expert (e.g., doctors), citizen/private individual (i.e., parents, teachers, and teens).


63. The major theme was identified through the headline, lead, picture caption, and/or consistent repetition of certain ideas in the discourse. The subthemes—less prominent and dependent on the major frame—were identified through the provision and repetition of keywords, metaphors, and catchphrases throughout the news story. Each story was categorized under one major theme but could have various subthemes.

64. The health theme was identified when HPV vaccine was mainly associated with diseases’ prevention, such as cervical cancer and genital warts. Some keywords or catchphrases to identify this theme were “New vaccine protects against...,” “cervical cancer vaccine.” The moral debate theme refers to the liberal or conservative voices that treated the vaccine as a moral issue. Keywords used to identify this theme were “morality,” “parents’ rights,” and “premarital sex.” Controversy theme appears when the vaccine is treated as a contentious issue due to concerns of efficacy, safety, and costs. Keywords or phrases to identify this theme were
“Experts discuss on vaccine concerns,” “A shot of controversy,” and “Debating the merits.” The ideas, catchphrases, and keywords to identify the legislative process theme included “bill,” “legislature,” and “governor vetoes.” Finally, the business theme appeared when the vaccine’s manufacturer business was highlighted, such as in the construction of a manufacturer’s plant.

65. Although tests of statistical significance were not needed because we used the entire population of news stories published by both newspapers on the HPV vaccine, they were conducted for illustrative purposes.

74. Byerly, “Feminist Interventions”; Shoemaker and Reese, Mediating the Message; Steiner, “Newsroom Accounts.”
75. Thompson, “Who’s Guarding.”
76. Thompson, “Who’s Guarding.”