

Sexualization of the Journalism Profession: TV Representation of Female Journalists' Intellect, Labor, and Bodies

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Abstract:

The representations of journalists in popular culture contribute to the public perception of journalism, journalistic routines and conventions, the processes of newsgathering, and overall reality of news media. In a historically male-dominated profession in which the routinization of journalistic conventions seems to perpetuate the male perspective of journalism, the increasing presence of women journalists both reinforce and challenge the masculine culture of the newsroom. By employing a feminist perspective, combined with the discussion about journalistic norms and routines, this paper analyses representations of female journalists in two American television shows – *House of Cards* and *The Following*. The critical analysis of the representation of two women journalists' characters contributes to the understanding of the mediated construction of newsroom reality in which women's labor is gendered and sexualized for public consumption.

Three thematic categories emerged in the content analysis – challenging the existing journalistic norms, negotiating femininity and sexuality, and victimization. All three categories are the most common discourses that negotiate two characters' femininity, sexuality, and their bodies intertwined with their intellectual labor in the newsroom. The themes are not exhaustive of or limited to femininity and sexuality, but include discourses of access to information, new technologies, and business model changes in the media industry. The study considers how the representation of women journalists for public consumption portrays the use of their bodies to gather the news and how viewers might downplay the abilities of not only women in journalism but mistrust the process of news production and the journalistic profession overall.

Keywords: women journalists, journalistic routines and norms, femininity, sexuality

Zoe Barnes: I am gonna be late to meet someone.

Janine Skorsky: Who? Like a date?

Zoe Barnes: A friend.

Janine Skorsky: Oh, the mysterious fuck-buddy who you get all of your stories from?

Lighthen up. I was just teasing. Not that I would judge. We've all done it. I used to suck, screw, and jerk anything that moved just to get a story.

(*House of Cards*, Netflix original series, season 1, episode 9).

The representations of journalists in popular culture contribute to the public perception of journalism, journalistic routines and conventions, the processes of newsgathering, and overall news media (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In a historically male-dominated profession in which the routinization of journalistic conventions seems to perpetuate this perspective, the increased presence of women journalists both reinforces and challenges the masculine culture of the newsroom (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Steiner, 2008). Both in real life newsrooms and as portrayed in television shows and the film industry, women journalists want to be seen as their male counterparts – tough, competitive, and ambitious. At the same time, they reinforce and fight stereotypical gender roles of being compassionate, nurturing, and caring (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Steiner, 2008). Moreover, in the reality of a capital-driven global society, the female body, physical attractiveness, and sexuality are exploited in the newsroom as a part of what Steiner (2008) calls market-driven exploitation of sex. According to Steiner (2008), the bodies of female journalists, reporters and anchors are used in media business strategies to attract wider audiences, both male and female.

By deconstructing representations of female journalist characters Zoe Barnes in the TV series *House of Cards* (2015), played by the actress Kate Mara, and Carrie Cooke in *The Following* (2015), played by Sprague Grayden, this article argues that television representations of female bodies and sexualities normalizes gender-typing of journalistic routines. Using a feminist lens, this article examines the ways in which the two characters are portrayed, and contributes to the existing research about representations of women's intellect, bodies, and labor in pop culture. This article also adds to the conversation about the gendering and sexualization of women journalists.

To explore cultural discourses of women journalists' bodies, intellect, and labor this article is situated within the literature on the normalized conventions and routines of the journalism profession, and within literature focusing on the representation of journalists on television. This paper provides close readings of the first season of *House of Cards* and the second season of *The Following* to analyse the representations of two female journalist characters and to disclose patterns present in the images of fictional characters (Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke). We argue that these patterns are produced in the male dominated television industry (Lauzen, 2015), which reinforces the gendered way that women are perceived in the processes of gathering, producing, and presenting news. The textual analysis of the two shows offers multilayered readings of on-screen female journalists who challenge newsroom routines.

With the aim to offer a rigorous textual analysis of the characters' development in reference to newsroom practices, we first provide the theoretical and conceptual framework of our study. Next, we present an overview of journalistic norms and routines, and how they are affected by and affect women journalists. We also provide a brief overview of conceptualization of female bodies, and gendering and sexualization of feminine subjectivities. Next, we address the collected data and the method of textual analysis, and we discuss the emerged themes. Lastly, we discuss the findings implications addressing the complexity of the characters' portrayals.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A core assumption of this study is that the televised reality does not exist in a vacuum, but that is rather informed and based on off-screen practices. Therefore, this article incorporates both the news industry practices in fact and fiction and is grounded in the conceptual framework of journalistic routines and norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978) and informed by Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) model of critical communicology of gender and work. Moreover, to explicate what it means to be a woman in newsroom, we draw on McRobbie's (1994) concept of "real me" and expand on Shimizu's (2007) understanding of female hypersexuality, which we apply in a different context.

Routine practices provide journalists with guidance on how to gather information, produce, and deliver news by applying the accepted norms of the profession (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978). Routinization is an outcome of the professionalization of journalism and the process in which journalists conform to institutional practices (Tuchman, 1978). Selection of the news, objectivity, fact checking, newsworthiness, proximity and scope, and many other routines and norms as a part of the journalism profession were institutionalized through different journalism programs at universities in the United States.

However, being affected by new news formats and technology, routines have undergone some significant changes over time (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). More specifically, some of the rule changes affect and have been affected by the way gender is constructed in a newsroom (van Zoonen, 1998). To address the importance of gender construction in a newsroom, we draw on the model of critical communicology of gender and work (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). This model comes from the field of organizational studies and argues for complex and nuanced relations between gender, discourse, power and organizing. Gender is embodied in the communication praxis (Schrag, 1986) and, therefore, affects and is affected by those communication processes that reproduce gendered subjectivities through discourse constructs (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). According to Ashcraft and Mumby, feminine gendered subjectivities use body and sexuality in constant negotiation between power and resistance in the workplace.

To further explicate what it means to be a woman, and how a female body is used to negotiate power and resistance, we draw on McRobbie's (1994) conceptualization of "real me" in respect to differences in understanding what a woman is, how a woman behaves, and how a woman redefines and invents her social self. The "real me" entails different and contested definitions of a body. A female body is a site where physical, symbolic, and social conditions are interwoven (Braidotti, 1989). A body is also a contested site women used to negotiate their identities, sexual subjectivities and create opportunities for empowerment (Braidotti, 2003; McRobbie, 1994).

To embrace different understandings of using sex and body as transforming tools, we expand Shimizu's (2007) notions of Asian women's bodies and hypersexuality as both enslaving and empowering tools to all women in the workplace. According to Shimizu, Asian women's recognition of their own social marginalization enables them to self-invent their own bodies and subjectivities. We expand Shimizu's claims beyond race and argue that women journalists as feminine subjectivities, in a similar way to Asian women, accept their bodies in the political act of redefining sex as a commodity of exchange, and thus empower themselves to redefine the boundaries of normativity. Expanding on Shimizu's claims we added the new dimensions of female subjectivity recognizing different identities, experiences and histories.

The model of critical communicology of gender and work, as well as concepts of “real me” and female hypersexuality, open the space of cross-reading of the portrayal of Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke with news industry practices and routines, and therefore, provide multilayered and nuanced readings of the ways televised journalist characters negotiate what women are, what women journalists are, and how they redefine the journalism profession.

Along with the conceptual framework we draw upon in this article, it is important to situate our own bodies and experiences in the discussion of television representations of women journalists as a means of self-reflection because the first author has been a daily news political reporter for eight years. In accordance, her first-hand experience and insight into journalism routines contributes to reading and understanding the nuanced layering of Barnes’s and Cooke’s bodies, intellect, and labor in the newsroom. In addition, the second author is guided by working predominately in male-dominated business environments. These experiences offer alternative readings of the sexualization of women’s bodies in a male-dominated profession and workplace.

Journalistic Routines

Through the establishment and influence of journalism schools and departments especially in the United States, there has been an increased professionalization of journalism that has standardized and homogenized rules and established practices in news production (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). These rules, more often referred to as routines, provide journalists with guidance on how to gather information, which news are more newsworthy, who are considered to be more reliable sources, how to write an article and organize the lead, and how to disseminate the news by applying the accepted norms of the profession. Even though media routines also differ depending on the news organization or the media outlet type, such as print or television, the overarching goal of routinization is to ensure rationalization and efficiency. For instance, the gatekeeping routine guides editors in selecting which news stories are newsworthy to get published or broadcasted on a particular day (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Tuchman, 1978). Prominence and importance of an issue, conflict and controversy, the unusual event, timeliness, and proximity are factors that define newsworthiness (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Similarly, when gathering data and producing the news, journalists also rely on fact checking to avoid disinformation and potential libel suits. They are also expected to follow the industry codes of conduct and report objectively. Objectivity is a tool used to legitimate the news media that produce unbiased and value free information (Hallin, 1986; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Furthermore, journalists follow particular narrative structures such as the inverted pyramid, which define the form of the news presentation in descending order of importance, and comply with the rules of news classification of hard vs. soft news (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr & Legnante, 2012). Hard news refers to news reports about politics, economy, science and technology, while soft news is represented in reports about celebrities, sports and entertainment (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). According to Shoemaker and Reese (2014), reporters rely heavily on official sources, such as governmental officials, to provide accountability for their reports, and on expert sources as a way to maintain objective reporting. Journalists also rely on public relations news releases, organized press conferences, photo opportunities, and they frequently check facts and compare ideas among each other – a routine known as media groupthink (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

The routine of gatekeeping, as well as the other routines, are not based only on individual decisions but on the structural norms of news organizations and its audience's needs. New technologies, business model changes, and overall changes in the media industry include the erosion of investigative journalism, the 24-hour news cycle, decreased autonomy of journalists followed by the increase of the influence of those who are not considered to be traditional journalists (PR professionals and bloggers), and stakeholder-driven media (Lee-Wright, Phillips & Witschge, 2012) have affected routines, which are constantly adapting in response to those changes (Hallin, 1992). New media communication technology, such as online news, live news streaming, blogs, and social media platforms altered the nature of journalistic labor and some control of the work process, fostering frequent interactions with the audience, blurring lines between the roles of producers and consumers, and enhancing the need for immediacy (Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). However, adoption of new platforms and business models does not necessarily challenge and change norms and routines since journalists transfer the old norms and routines into the new media environment (Singer, 2005).

Gendered Routines

Gender and its effects on performance within organizations has been studied in the field of organizational communication (Acker, 1990) and, specifically, feminist approaches to studying organizations (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). In news organizations, men have historically dominated the field of journalism in the United States. Data from 2015 revealed that women in the United States comprised 37% of the national workforce in print media ("Employment of men and women by job category," 2015), and a record 42.3% of the workforce in local TV news ("RTDNA research 2015", 2015). According to the data, the overall percentages of women working in journalism have remained at 40% or below since 1999.

In the 1920s, women journalists were treated as biologically unfit for newsroom duties, relegating females to administrative duties (Delano, 2003). Even though the number of women in newsrooms has increased worldwide, women journalists still remain a minority among male counterparts and often feel discriminated against in pay, promotions, and assignments, as well as having limited access to some beats and sources (Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005; Walsh-Childers, Chance and Herzog, 1996).

Male journalists, editors, and publishers have dominated the newsroom, creating a culture that reflects masculine values of objectivity and interests in politics, crime, and sports that used to be perceived as predominately, if not exclusively, male (Carter, Branston, & Allan, 1998). The historical lack of diversity in the workforce and its influence on establishing masculine values, standards, and norms implies that an inherently male-dominated industry would produce bias towards, and exclusion from, participation of women and potential values of compassion and caring that they promote.

In a male-dominated newsroom culture, women tend to comply with newsroom rules constructed by predominately white men. In order to be treated as equals with men, women journalists have placed journalism first and left behind their femininity to be accepted as one of the boys (Miloch et al., 2005; van Zoonen, 1998). Even though women denied their femininity to be accepted in male-dominated newsrooms and treated as professionals, they were simultaneously othered by the journalism profession and labelled as compassionate, nurturing, and caring (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Steiner, 2008).

However, more recent studies show that gender in the journalism profession cannot be a neglected trait because women journalists now challenge the practice of journalism as a male-constructed profession, shaped to accommodate male-created realities (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003; van Zoonen, 1998). Women journalists question the idea of objectivity by approaching news coverage with compassion and sensitivity and by recognizing context and the importance of their readers' interest and feedback (van Zoonen, 1998). While still being assigned marginalized positions in the newsrooms to cover beats about fashion, social issues, health, education, cooking, and children's issues, women journalists still constantly must prove themselves in the profession. They tend to use more diverse sources, report more positively, and rely less on stereotypes than their male counterparts (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). Women editors are also more likely than men editors to avoid assigning stories based on gender distinctions (Craft & Wanta, 2004). Furthermore, Craft and Wanta (2004) argued that in male-dominated newsrooms, men are more likely to be promoted to editor positions and still predominately cover political beats, whereas women are assigned "soft news" – reports on education, health, and entertainment.

Journalistic routines are gendered through women reporters' bodies. There is a breadth of research that politicizes women's bodies as spectacles and commodities (Coward, 1984; Mulvey, 1989). Within the discussion of gender and sexual difference, female journalists' bodies, attractiveness, and sexuality have become conceptualized as part of the journalistic practices of reporting and presenting the news. In broadcast journalism, women presenters have to regulate and discipline their bodies by looking presentable and attractive (e.g. "smile flirtatiously, ask personal questions, hug villains, and show cleavage"), whereas their male counterparts can be older and less concerned about their weight and physical attractiveness (Steiner, 2008, p. 286). Steiner (2008) argues that visual appearance and sexuality have become a constituent in global discourse of capitalism in which women reporters actively participate in the role of selling the news, both to audiences and advertisers. Moreover, van Zoonen (1998) argues that in market-driven journalism, female journalists' identities are constructed around contested conceptualizations of being a good professional journalist and being a "true" woman. Female journalists' sexuality and femininity challenges their professionalism in the newsroom reality historically created by men. Thus, women in journalism not only follow journalistic norms and routines, at the same time they constantly challenge, redefine, and reject gender differences.

Television Representation of Women Journalists

The representations of journalists in popular culture shape the public perception of journalism as a profession (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). The way journalists, and especially women reporters, are portrayed on screen influences what members of society, outside of the profession, think about off-screen journalists, their daily routines, the newsroom culture, and journalism ethics.

In the early twentieth century film industry, journalists were portrayed as hard-drinking, heavy cigarette-smoking social eccentrics as in the *Front Page* movie from 1931 (Gersh, 1991). Contemporary representations of journalists have become more varied. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) argue that there are five archetypes of journalists in popular culture representation: an energetic and opportunistic journalist, portrayed as always in the process of getting some breaking news; a tough and sarcastic female reporter proving her worthiness while competing with her male counterparts; an enthusiastic novice who wants to make a name in journalism; a

big city newspaper editor who wants the story first at any cost; and a ruthless media tycoon who uses the power of the press for his or her own selfish ends.

According to Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015), women journalists are often portrayed either as competent and smart professionals, who are at the same time subordinated to male authority or in need of men to save them, or deceitful and untrustworthy journalists who will do anything to get a story. Another, but less frequent media narrative, presents on-screen women journalists as “sob sisters” who write emotional stories or pay attention to issues that are only of women’s concerns (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In the detailed analysis of journalists in popular culture, Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) found that sometimes women reporters are portrayed as women who manage the tension between professional and private life. However, as the scholars argue, no matter how hard they work to manage the tension, women journalists are frequently portrayed without companionship in their personal lives due to failing to manage both professional and domestic roles at the same time, typically leaving the profession to pursue true love and a traditional family life. The scholars also found that another type of representation of woman journalists includes the stereotype of female reporters who use sex and/or good looks for news gathering and career advancement. These redundant narratives of a journalist’s professional and personal life seem to be reserved only for females, warranting a better understanding of how various media artefacts portray routines of female journalists in popular television shows as well.

To conclude, many works of scholarly research address journalistic routines and norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), the way they are adapting and changing over time (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009), and the way gender is constructed within a newsroom (van Zoonen, 1998). However, it is important to understand how on-screen journalists are portrayed, specifically in regard to gendered representations, how those journalists apply newsroom routines and norms, and the potential media effects on public perception on women journalists. Therefore, this article adds to the growing body of work involving gendered representations and addresses the way the representations of women journalists in two contemporary American television shows both reinforce and challenge the public perceptions of journalists, their roles, and contribution to mediated knowledge production.

Barnes and Cooke as Journalists Who Use Their Bodies to Gather Information

The two women journalists, Zoe Barnes of *House of Cards* and Carrie Cooke of *The Following*, are worthy of examination and critique because even though these two fictional characters are not the main characters of the shows, both are journalists in different media outlet types, which provides the authors varied situations to consider gendered representation. Barnes works for *The Washington Herald* daily and later for the online news site *Slugline*, whereas Cooke is a TV reporter who also published a book. Both are portrayed as professionals who perform various journalistic routines. Though each woman works in a different journalistic capacity, they both are represented as journalists who use their bodies and sexuality in the processes of news-gathering, especially in sourcing news and in hopes of obtaining career advancement.

House of Cards is a political drama television series, and a, American remake of a British TV show. In the United States, the show is produced by the online streaming service Netflix and premiered in 2013 (“House of Cards”, 2015). The plot of this online-only drama series focuses on the political intrigue surrounding Democratic Congressman Frank Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey). Zoe Barnes, represented by the actress Kate Mara, is a young newspaper

reporter in Washington, D.C. with a desire to cover important political events, graduating from mundane city beats. Zoe's ambition to advance in her journalism profession led to her orchestrating an opportunity to meet Congressman Underwood. He subsequently became her lover and a source for all of her ground-breaking stories.

The Following, starring Kevin Bacon as FBI agent Ryan Hardy, is a crime drama focused on fictional serial killer Joe Carroll and his followers that premiered on Fox in 2013 ("The Following", 2013). Television journalist and book author Carrie Cooke, played by actress Sprague Grayden, appears in only the second season that aired in 2014. Cooke, like Zoe Barnes, initiated the opportunity to meet Hardy for the purpose of using him to get information. After Hardy saved her life, they became involved in a sexual relationship. This flashpoint, along with Cooke's awareness of Hardy's hidden alcoholism, provided opportunity for further manipulation of Hardy.

This current research analysis encompasses specific episodes of the two programs. The authors viewed 12 episodes of the first season of *House of Cards* and the first episode of the second season in which Barnes's character gets killed. In addition, eight episodes of the second season of *The Following* in which Carrie Cooke appeared were viewed, along with episode five of the third season in which her character is not visible but gets killed by Carroll's followers.

After deconstructing the depiction of Barnes and Cooke, we applied a feminist lens to organize narratives about the women and their journalistic performance into thematic categories. Three thematic categories that emerged from the analysis were: challenging the existing journalistic norms; negotiating femininity and sexuality; and victimization. These three categories emerged as the most common discourses that negotiate the two characters' femininity, sexuality, and the presence of their bodies intertwined with their intellectual labor in the newsroom. However, those categories are not limited to femininity and sexuality, but include access to information, new technologies, and business model changes in the media industry as well.

Challenging the Existing Journalistic Norms

Modern media practices have changed significantly, challenging journalistic norms. Emergence of the Internet, further technology developments, and fierce competition followed by the changing media business models, have influenced re-organization processes within the newsrooms as well as the nature of journalistic work (Hallin, 1992; Schmitz Weiss & de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009). Immediacy and interactivity have become the new norms of technologically altered journalism labor. Decrease in revenue has challenged both print and electronic media to adapt and negotiate the normalized rules established in the golden era of journalism when advertising money was pouring into media companies. At the same time, conglomeration and horizontal and vertical integration of media companies concentrated in a handful of media corporations, has affected and challenged traditional business models forcing media companies to cut costs and apply different strategies to increase profits.

Taking into consideration the changing media environment, Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke are represented as journalists who negotiate routines and norms in the modern newsroom. As a millennial representative, Barnes is tech savvy and open to different modes of media production and consumption. In her first scene of the first season's episode of *House of Cards*, she is portrayed as a young journalist who does not like the city beat she is assigned to cover for the print newspaper, but she wants to write for the online edition. "Move me online," she says, convincing her editor, Lucas Goodwin, to let her write in a more unconventional manner.

“My first blog. First person, subjective, 500 words” (*House of Cards*, S1, E1). Barnes embraces new media and the rules imposed by new platforms by rejecting traditionally accepted objectivity and value-free reporting. She is willing to explore online practices of interactivity and immediacy. Moreover, she shifts the focus from source reliability and multiple fact-checking to the importance of instant publication of the news. When asked where she dug up the story on the new education bill, she responds, “Wrong question. The right question is how quickly can we get it up on the site?” (*House of Cards*, S1, E1).

While reporting for *The Washington Herald*, dominated by a masculine worldview, Barnes resists and negotiates the norms and practices from the less powerful position of a novice in the newsroom. More experienced journalists positioned as editors or those whose instructions the newbies in the newsroom should follow, often question Barnes’s routines and methods in the process of news production. For example, when Barnes wrote a story about the Secretary of State that could ruin his career, Goodwin asks her, referencing pre-established routines: “Did you call for a comment?...What about research?” (*House of Cards*, S1, E2). In the traditional newsroom of *The Washington Herald* her intellectual labor is labelled as unconventional and therefore, suspicious and not reliable enough. Her methods are in juxtaposition with the journalistic norms of re-checking information, relying on familiar sources, consideration of publishing newsworthy information, and doing thorough research before publishing the news. Accordingly, Barnes states in a television interview, talking about *The Washington Herald* editor-in-chief Tom Hammerschmidt and the conventional routines he follows: “He is...uhg...Tom has very high standards...He makes you double and triple check things, and you want to get the news out the moment you have it, but he makes you re-write it until it’s perfect” (*House of Cards*, S1, E3).

The novice role situates her in a less powerful position but, at the same time, empowers her to be less constrained by the existing norms that journalists learn through socialization in the newsroom. This novice position also gives her the agency to delineate who counts as a journalist and redefine the ways she produces and shares the news, as well as what the news is. Furthermore, changes in the current journalism profession are displayed by Zoe’s negotiation between old and new media (news print and online reporting), establishment of new norms (less gatekeeping and news space constraints), and introduction of alternative news formats and routines (blogs and online publications) that are becoming a part of the evolving routines. *Slugline*, one example of an alternative media outlet used by Zoe, represents marginal areas of journalism. *Slugline*, as an online media outlet, offers alternative ways of reporting in which reporters write whatever they want, wherever they are opposing the traditional expectation of developing an article in the newsroom when possible, mostly producing and distributing news on their smart phones or tablets, and posting reports online without the editor’s formal review process. Alternative routines and alternative media became valorised and accepted in the media environment when Barnes, as a *Slugline* reporter, gains access to insider reports from the White House.

Barnes’s negotiation of norms and routines in the modern newsroom is evident in her decision to reject the White House correspondent position for *The Washington Herald*. By rejecting what is considered a prestigious position for journalists, Barnes is redefining what is news and newsworthy, questioning the importance of news coming from the White House through official channels. “The White House news is going to die,” she said when discussing with Goodwin whether she should accept the White House correspondent position. “Everything is canned. These perfectly prepared statements... It used to be [a prestigious job] when I was in ninth grade. Now it is a graveyard...Who needs that?” (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). She

simultaneously resists the existing structure in the newsroom and breaks out of the established patterns of how a journalist should climb the ladder in a profession.

However, the representation of Barnes as a novice journalist also positions her in the existing institutional structure in which she is well aware of the established rules. She negotiates her position within the structure by going back and forth in redefining the rules. For instance, she is fully aware of, and accepts the established norms and the impact to her credibility as a reporter when she questions Underwood's story about the Secretary of State. Underwood wants to expose the future Secretary of State's involvement in the college newspapers which published articles that were undermining the United States' relationships with Israel. Zoe challenges her source by responding, "But did he write it himself?... There is no story... There is no link. I can't get this past Hammerschmidt," (*House of Cards*, S1, E2). Moreover, she acknowledges journalistic routines as a part of the structure later in the show when she tries to fight the political establishment embodied in the character of Congressman Underwood. Once becoming aware that Underwood has used her to plant the stories he would benefit from, Barnes embraces traditional journalistic routines of thorough research, re-checking the acquired information, and reaching out to different sources in order to back up the story. She goes back to the normalized routines in order to redeem herself and her deviation from the norms. In the first episode of the second season, before she gets killed, she admits that she crossed ethical lines professionally, physically, and that she holds herself accountable for crossing the lines.

Barnes is ambitious and open to the use of social media to fight the rigid norm of objectivity, whereas Carrie Cooke wants to establish herself across different media platforms. She established herself as a television broadcasting journalist but crossed the boundaries of media platforms and wrote a book about a serial killer. She proved that she could be equally successful as a book author and a broadcast journalist, and therefore, she has re-defined what type of labor counts as journalistic labor.

Like Barnes, Cooke also negotiates power relations with the FBI representatives as sources in terms of who has power to own the information, and who has the right to disseminate it. She always asks official sources to comment on new developments in an active investigation but does not limit the story only to the official comments. For example, Cooke does rely on FBI information about Joe Carroll (a cult leader) but follows her instinct, does not trust the FBI, and reaches for sources outside of American institutions, such as Dr Stroud, a former Carroll mentor. In the following example, Cooke shows her persistence in looking for information outside of what she obtained from official FBI and police sources:

Cooke: Dr Stroud, I'm Carrie Cooke. Remember we spoke last year.

Stroud: Why are you people all showing up today?

Cooke: That's easy. Ryan Hardy believes Joe Carroll is alive. Care to comment?

Stroud: Last time I saw Joe Carroll, he was 17. I've made that quite clear.

Cooke: Really? My sources put you at Winslow University on April 4th, 1997. Did you not see him then? And on June 12th, 1999 once again you visited the university.

Stroud: All right. Come in. I can explain.

Cooke: Thank you. (*The Following*, S2, E8)

The aforementioned examples construct disruptive images of journalists – the women who report hard news and embrace modern newsroom practices and are able to communicate news across a variety of platforms. Nevertheless, both Barnes and Cooke speak from the space of

difference where they negotiate and define in their own terms what is mediated knowledge, what is the news, who owns it, and who reports about it. They both embrace different platforms for reporting news, include a variety of official and less official sources, and promote more intimate approaches to news gathering and news production. By reporting hard news, and not reporting what is considered to be gendered topics such as health, fashion, and human-interest stories, both reporters decenter the Western male-centered forms of knowledge and privilege through a different set of re-defined journalism practices. Barnes and Cooke represent disruptive images of journalists because they, as female reporters, embody epistemic disobedience by gathering, producing, and reporting sensationalistic news, a practice which, according to van Zoonen (1998), is at odds with the mainstream conceptualization of femininity. By embodying epistemic disobedience, they negotiate power relations and redefine objectivity in their own terms. Moreover, they both participate and create intellectual work across multiple media platforms by producing what they discern as topics in which the public might show interest.

Barnes' employment of social media and her interactive inclusion of news audiences especially aligns with what Schmitz Weiss and de Macedo Higgins Joyce (2009) describe as digital media practices that benefit democracy. Building on what McRobbie (1985) argued about the production and conceptualization of the "real me," both women journalists construct and embrace their "real me" by challenging, re-negotiating, and sometimes rejecting traditional practices and routines of journalism through a debate about what is knowledge and who is powerful enough to produce it. Both reporters do not act out of despair or resignation but instead they invent in their own terms who they are as women, who they are as female journalists, and what practices they adopt as useful and successful. These daily practices are largely influenced by the reporters' active negotiation of femininity and sexuality.

Negotiating Femininity and Sexuality

The second theme constructed around discourses of femininity and sexuality places women's bodies as a visible difference (from men's bodies) that defines women's labor not only in the newsroom, but also in the working environment of the journalism profession. Being a woman constructs how female journalists both position themselves in the news production process, and how others see them while practicing journalism.

The on-screen female labor and female bodies and intellect, which take part in this labor, are the space for the representations of changes in a traditionally male-dominated media industry. For instance, in a television interview, Barnes discusses the ongoing changes in journalism and the transition of the profession from the stability of the all boys' club to a breakup with the traditional newsroom perception displayed in an inclusion of women who still have to be managed and positioned under the men's rules.

Reporter: Journalism used to be that way [old boys' club] too not so long ago.

Barnes: I feel lucky. I had lots of trailblazers come before me. For instance, my colleague Janine Skorsky was the first woman at *The Herald* to become chief political correspondent, and that was only five years ago (*House of Cards*, S1, E3)

In this scene, Barnes is suggesting that upper positions in the newsroom hierarchy are mainly reserved for men, whereas women have to work harder to break the glass ceiling and be accepted in the men's club. The tension between the notions of who is in charge and the rules is visible in her communication with the editor-in-chief, Hammerschmidt. He reprimands her

for the behavior that deviates the norm since her “job is to create the news, not to be the news.” Facing her rejection of the norms he treats Barnes like a little girl, who has not “even earned the right to be treated as an adult,” (*House of Cards*, S1, E3) and calls her “a little cunt” (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). Hammerschmidt’s choice of words focuses on Barnes’s femininity and positions her as a child-like, immature woman who needs to be controlled and guided by men. His outburst contributes to the existing understanding of journalism as a profession in which to be a respected journalist, she needs to have not only exclusives, but also many years under her professional belt.

However, the choice of the word “cunt” underlines Barnes’s feminine body and her reproductive organ, and therefore, implies her incapability to perform in an appropriate and reasonable manner standardized by her male counterparts.

With the redefinition of journalistic practices, and the way gender norms position journalists within the profession, we can see ongoing negotiations through the representation of women who hold positions of power in the news industry hierarchy. Moreover, the construction of femininity in journalism is built around women who are more open to accept and negotiate new media forms, new methods of business, and new rules. This feminine approach is evident in the characters of women owners of *The Washington Herald* and *Slugline*. Both women support Zoe Barnes and her efforts to negotiate what the news is, who has the right to produce it, and what kind of news is business viable. Margaret Tilden, the owner of *The Washington Herald*, said in her conversation with Hammerschmidt: “Tom, we don’t need people who follow the rules. We need people with personality. We want Zoe’s face, her energy. We want to get her on TV as much as possible. It helps us through the noise” (*House of Cards*, S1, E4). Tilden encourages changes in daily journalistic routines, keeping in mind that those changes are consequences of stakeholder-driven media and the global power rearrangements.

Finally, this theme is built also around sex as a commodity of information exchange, portrayed as a normalized women’s routine in the processes of newsgathering and news production. Revealing apparel, flirting, and offering bodies and sex in exchange for information, are evident in the representation of both Barnes and Cooke. Barnes intentionally shows deep cleavage and flirts with the aim to get information from Congressman Underwood, whereas Cooke uses FBI agent Hardy’s weakness toward alcohol and sexually seduces him to get a story about the serial killer that she wrote about in her book.

After getting drunk and seducing Hardy, Cooke reveals her identity as a journalist, negotiating the ethical boundaries of obtaining information: “I was surprised when you didn’t recognize me last night. So I went with it. I’ve been trying to get you on the record for a long time, Ryan” (*The Following*, S2, E8). Cooke is aware that using sex to get information is her decision, and she justifies her decision to use sex as a newsgathering tool because more conventional tools have not proven successful. Cooke positions her decision in juxtaposition with Hardy’s decision to drink, talk, and accept sex in exchange for his angle of a story: “You don’t want your story told, you need to keep your mouth shut. That includes the alcohol you pour into it” (*The Following*, S2, E8).

Similarly, Barnes consciously chooses revealing apparel when meeting with Underwood. This is particularly visible in comparison to the everyday clothes she wears in the newsroom – a hoodie, green army jacket, jeans with her hair in a messy bun. The fact that Barnes is in charge of her body is evident in the scene when she decides to offer her body as a newsgathering tool in the arrangement with Underwood: “As long as we are clear on what this is, I can play the

whore. Now pay me” (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). By accepting her sexuality as a part of her femininity, Barnes accepts her own body as an inseparable part of her subjectivity and professional performance. She uses her own body under her own terms and feels empowered by pushing the boundaries of the ways her body will participate in her labor.

Women’s sexuality as a part of the journalistic routine is silently accepted in the profession, as Skorsky points out in episode nine, by stating that all women use sex at some point in their career. In a conversation with Barnes, Skorsky admits that she, along with many other female journalists “used to suck, screw, and jerk anything that moved just to get a story” (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). With a contradictory nature, Skorsky both accepts and denounces these sexual methods. Skorsky’s confession uncovers that sexual relationships and overt uses of sex in the news gathering processes are often practiced, but at the same time, those practices, are condemned as unethical. Skorsky claims that she doesn’t “do that slut anymore” (*House of Cards*, S1, E9). Offering advice for career advancement, she said: “Cause once word got out, it was like I hit a wall, and nobody took me seriously” (*House of Cards*, S1, E9).

Additionally, it seems that both on-screen journalists and sources, both male and female, would rather assume that women journalists use sex to acquire information than they give women any credit for intellectual labor in the process of news gathering. For instance, before Barnes admits her sexual relationship with Underwood to Skorsky, both male and female journalists in the newsroom assume that the female novice reporter has acquired breaking news stories, not by doing thorough research, but by using her body and sexuality to get the information. This assumption is rarely made about on-screen male journalists. When Barnes brakes the news that Senator Catherine Durant would likely be the new nominee for the Secretary of State, Skorsky’s first questions about Barnes’s process of news gathering are: “Where are you getting this, slut?...Your stories...Who are you fucking?...You have to be fucking somebody important” (*House of Cards*, S1, E2).

Sexual involvement is not seen only as a strategy to gather the news but also as a technique that women use for career advancement. With this regard, Lucas Goodwin questions Barnes’s ethical norms because she “fucked a Congressman to get ahead” (*House of Cards*, S1, E12). Similarly, in *The Following*, Agent Hardy accuses Cooke of a “pathetic attempt at journalism” referring to the past event where she used her sexuality to retrieve the information from him and climb the professional ladder. Therefore, he refuses to meet her for dinner because he doubts “a dinner is just a dinner,” alluding to her unconventional methods to generate news (*The Following*, S2, E9).

By representing sexuality as a part of women’s way to perform journalism and produce news, *House of Cards* and *The Following* contribute to the normalization and standardization of commodifying and objectifying women’s bodies in journalism. Commodified women bodies are spaces of contestation and materialization of desire, pleasure, and pain. The on-screen female journalists recognize and accept the commodification and, as Shimizu (2007) argues, their acknowledgement of their marginalization and sexuality leads to self-invention. In the self-invention processes women journalists accept their sexuality as an empowering tool. Moreover, female reporters on-screen accept that they embody difference and live difference in the male-dominated newsroom. Embodying and living difference is not a pure confrontation of two opposites of a male and female knowledge and existence, but represents a space of difference in which women, as McRobbie (1985) argues, redefine what it means to be a woman and a woman journalist. Both women embrace their bodies as an integral part of who they are, and reject living the binary of being a good professional journalist and being a good woman.

For them, being a journalist means accepting being a woman who has the agency to push and mold the existing boundaries according to their own needs.

However, worth noticing is the fact that both women who negotiate empowerment through the use of their bodies are white middle-class women. Through this portrayal whiteness plays a role in who is allowed to consciously accept and use their bodies, femininity and sexuality as professional tools. Even through accepting their bodies, femininity and sexuality allows all women to be and feel empowered. The portrayal of the on-screen women journalists enables only the white middle-class female journalists to think, live, and embody the empowerment through difference. However, at the same time, this empowerment through difference and respect for difference opens the door for other feminine subjectivities to bring into the discussion their identities, experiences, bodies and desires.

Victimization

The third theme emerging from the analysis involves discourses of victimization of women journalists and manipulation of their “weak” female bodies and intellects. Despite feeling empowered and being able to deliver the breaking news, both Barnes and Cooke are manipulated to publish or broadcast the news on behalf of men. In both representations, the women reporters need to be fed the news and do not find the news on their own. For instance, Barnes texts Underwood in expectation for new information: “Where are you? What are you doing? What’s next on the plate? Feed me” (*House of Cards*, S1, E3). Similarly, Hardy negotiates with Cooke to postpone airing the news and to deliver it after he progresses with the case. He promises to “feed her with a bigger story” if she complies with his request (*The Following*, S2, E9). Both women journalists position themselves, and are positioned by their sources, as subordinated and dependent on somebody else to get the news.

The series writers’ choice to apply the metaphor of feeding the women with the news positions female journalists as those with primal instincts and therefore lacking objectivity and bias-free reasoning. This metaphor strengthens the portrayal of Barnes and Cooke as easily manipulated, controlled, and presented as malleable because of their hunger for the scoop. They are portrayed as weaker, both physically and intellectually. Consequently, they need to be guided when producing news and need men to dictate to them not only what is newsworthy, but also when the news should be published or aired. For instance, Underwood pushed information through Barnes on several occasions and he even used her phone to tweet about a shoot-out in Washington, DC, as a strategic move to blame his opponent, whereas Cooke was threatened and forced twice to air messages crafted by cult leader Carroll and his followers.

Additionally, both reporters are portrayed as women who negotiate fluid boundaries, and resist playing by the established rules. However, the women are depicted as vulnerable because they cannot keep the boundaries between what they feel for the men with whom they are sexually involved and a level of professionalism needed to credibly generate a story. As van Zoonen (1998) claims, women journalists who become sexually involved with their sources lose prestige as professional journalists. Barnes is deemed as deviant because she needs somebody to provide her with information and lead her through the process of career advancement. On the other side Cooke is deemed as vulnerable and therefore, deviant, because she digs too deep to get the information that her life is at stake several times. Both female journalists are not exceptional enough to be portrayed as heroes in their own right. When done by women, resisting the standardized routines and digging deep for the news in an unconventional manner is considered as weakness and unprofessional behavior.

Not only are they portrayed as weak and disreputable, but both on-screen female reporters are portrayed as victims and needing to be saved by men, both literally and professionally. Barnes and Cooke's characters are constructed as victims of the men who used them to disseminate the news and spin public opinion, but also as the victims of their own choices in the negotiation between private and professional spaces. Therefore, they are portrayed as victims of their weaknesses and deviations. However, their weakness and deviation conflicts with the representation of their inner strength. Both are revealing information for the public good when fighting against evil. This contestation between fearless and empowered women who defy the imposed rules and who redefine how they should approach sources and whether they should involve their personal opinion when reporting news is reserved for women reporter. Likewise, the representation of weak bodies and minds who picked the battles which they a priori cannot win in the male-dominated world of journalism and politics, contributes to the complex and multilayered representations of contemporary women who re-invent their subjectivities through this conflict.

However, the importance of these contesting narratives becomes diminished by the creation of characters who need to be controlled and disciplined and who were created in a television drama to subsequently die. In this regard, both Barnes and Cooke resisted traditional norms and negotiated boundaries of how to perform their jobs and use their bodies, but ultimately they are represented as women whose bodies, intellect, and labor needed to be disciplined. They are portrayed as transgressors who are killed as the move of final control over them. Barnes is pushed under a train by Underwood, who felt that she escaped his influence, whereas Cooke is burned alive in a van, preventing her testimony in court. Even though throughout both television shows both Barnes and Cooke resist the norms and negotiate the methods of how they perform journalism, the analysis implies that their deaths are designed to reinforce their weakness and normalize their subordinate roles in the journalism profession.

Conclusion

The fictional representation of journalists has been an increasingly popular subject for academic scholarship for film and screen studies. This article not only contributed to the existing body on scholarly research of televised portrayal of journalists but it also provided a critical examination of representation of women journalists and professional practices in the male-dominated newsrooms. The nuanced analysis of the representations of female journalists in *House of Cards* and *The Following* implies that the female journalist characters were shown simultaneously as marginalized women who used their bodies, femininity and sexuality to challenge marginalization. Analysis of multiple episodes from both series revealed themes of the women journalist characters challenging the existing journalistic norms, negotiating femininity and sexuality, and victimization. These themes were contextualized in contemporary, market-driven American journalism, and represent and contested narratives of normalcy and resistance to, and even rejection of, masculine norms in the journalism sphere.

The ambiguity and ambition of the characters in reference to newsroom practices suggest that female journalists are both drivers for social change, but also vehicles for deviation from norms established in the male-dominated newsroom culture. As the drivers of change Zoe Barnes and Carrie Cooke embraced new news formats, modes of production, and business models in the stakeholder driven market. They adopted more diversified approaches to the process of newsgathering, and challenged the traditional norm of objectivity through the application of more subjective and intimate techniques. Barnes and Cooke incorporated a trans-platform news delivery, and confused the boundaries of whether they themselves were the news or reporters,

or both. The female reporters negotiated and redefined the limitations of what should be considered as news and the nature of journalistic routines. They also reinvented their subjectivities by accepting their femininity and sexuality as a tool of power in the processes of negotiation.

Analysis of these two television series' discourses revealed the ways in which the female journalists used their own epistemology and bodies to create and practice epistemic disobedience. The female reporters used their vulnerability and compassion to defy male-driven rules and position themselves as the carriers of change and bearers of respect for difference.

However, even though these women journalists' lived experiences of gender difference in newsrooms construct the way they are perceived and perceive themselves, their bodies, labor, and intellect, they were still constructed as weak, malleable, and deviant. This contested narrative provides gender-typing of journalistic routines and might be in place because all the directors of the *House of Cards* episodes we analyzed were male. In addition, for the same episodes, only 13 female writers were credited compared to 55 males ("House of Cards the full cast and crew", 2017). Similarly, male, directors and writers were credited three times more in *The Following* than females ("The Following the full cast and crew," 2017).

Representations of journalists in TV shows do shape the public perception of journalism as a profession and the overall perception of news media. This article contributed to the unpacking of the meanings of the female bodies, intellect, and labor portrayed in the characters of Barnes and Cooke. Our study also contributed to the existing research of work and gender by providing the more complex framework that includes model of communicology cross-read with the concepts of "real me," hypersexuality and news industry practices, routines, and norms. Since diversity in newsrooms is still an ongoing process of including not only women but also men of different races, ethnicities, age, and classes, further research is needed to understand how underrepresented journalists see reinvention of their subjectivities in off- and on-screen newsrooms. Furthermore, further research regarding respect for difference in other historically male-dominated professions including soldiers, scientists and/or technology-oriented jobs would encourage both the epistemic disobedience of women in real life and the redefinition of those professions in terms of feminine experiences and identities.

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