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Gender Specific Rhetoric: A Look at Today

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GENDER SPECIFIC RHETORIC:
A LOOK AT *TODAY*

by

Mary Helen Richer
Bachelor of Arts, Heidelberg College, 1993

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
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for the degree of
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This thesis, submitted by Mary Helen Richer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Lana Robson

(Chairperson)

[Signature]

[Signature]

This thesis meets the standard for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Harvey Knell
Dean of the Graduate School

July 28, 1995

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Title: Gender Specific Rhetoric: A Look at *Today*
Department: School of Communication
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ABSTRACT

Gender impacts every part of life. From the moment a baby is born, that child is placed in a gender category. As one grows, these categories define how the person should act as well as how they should speak. These stereotypes become such a part of an individual that often they are seen as an innate or biological part of women and men, but this is not the case. These stereotypes can be broken and many are, particularly by women who feel it necessary to conform to the male standard to get ahead in business. Therefore, it is important to not only understand the social stereotypes, but it is also vital that their historical evolution be realized.

Throughout gender research, many differences between the language of women and men have been observed. These disparities were expected to be apparent throughout the communication between co-hosts, Katie Couric and Matt Lauer, on the *Today* show. Along with the verbal gender differences, co-host communication was examined for differences, hard and soft news approaches and interruptions. The methodology was a qualitative content analysis using feminist theory and gender communication research.

After both the history of stereotypes and gender communication research is discussed, a brief look at qualitative research follows. The artifact, one week of NBC's *Today*, from January 30-February 3, 1995, was used to examine gender stereotypes as they do or do not influence the news as well as if and how they might be reflected in the co-hosts speech patterns. A variety of articles on gender research, ranging from Campbell (1973) and Spender

(1973) to Borisoff and Merrill (1985) and Sanders (1993), was used to determine if co-hosts Katie Couric and Matt Lauer follow social gender stereotypes or not. While it was expected that both co-hosts generally would follow the stereotypes, this proved untrue. Couric was not a stereotypical female and Lauer also deviated from the expected patterns.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many times miscommunication between women and men is brushed off as simply the inability of the genders to speak the same language or is attributed to simple genetics, something most people have no control over. Researchers have been interested in the issue of gender-influenced communication and many have suggested that these differences are socially perpetuated and subject to change.

The research conducted in this paper evolved from an interest in feminist rhetoric and gender-influenced speech patterns. As gender stereotypes impact all aspects of life, the question began as a search for understanding the rhetorical patterns of women and men to discover whether or not the results of earlier research such as Campbell, Gray, Glass, and Borisoff and Merrill still remained true or if women were breaking out of the stereotypes of 20 years ago and possibly creating new gender roles.

As television plays a major role in today's household, the communication patterns viewed on television, and specifically the morning news, are scrutinized in this study. Earlier research on gender is first laid out and serves as a basis for this research. Following a review of the current literature, qualitative research and feminist theory are discussed as a method for framing this study. An analysis of the artifact follows, with discussion surrounding the findings and finally conclusions are drawn and possible questions for further research are posed.

Gender differences were examined using transcripts from one week of NBC's morning news program, *Today*, which airs from 7-9 a.m. EST. The week of January 30 through February 3, 1995 was chosen after careful consideration, realizing that the regular co-host, Bryant Gumbel, was out of town that week. His replacement was Matt Lauer, a Caucasian male, thus simplifying the study of examining the communication between Lauer and Katie Couric, a Caucasian female. This allowed the research to focus only on gender issues and eliminate the race variable. In this study, the communication examined is that which is spoken by co-hosts Couric and Lauer, and of particular interest was the nonscripted bantering between co-hosts. Also included in the analysis is a look at the length and type of stories or interviews conducted by each co-host. A short biography on the *Today* show and each of the co-hosts follows as an introduction to the subjects examined within this research.

According to NBC's online information (1994),

NBC News pioneered the morning news program when it launched *Today* 42 years ago....The two-hour live program provides the latest in international and domestic news, weather reports and interviews with newsmakers from the worlds of politics, business, media, entertainment and sports. Since its premiere broadcast on January 14, 1952, *Today's* hallmark has been its ability to revise an entire program to bring viewers breaking news as it happens.

Today periodically broadcasts from a varied number of remote locations, taking the audience to many places around the world that individuals would otherwise never have the opportunity to see. *Today* has been broadcasted

from “China, the Soviet Union, Italy, Australia, South America, Cuba..., most of America's major cities,” (NBC, 1994) and many other exotic, unusual locations.

In a telephone interview, Alex Constantinople (personal communication, June 30, 1995), *Today* Publicist discussed the general breakdown of the program's format. The two hour program is divided into four half-hour slots. Each half-hour is further broken up into top news stories, weather, and two five minute interview segments (see Figure 1).

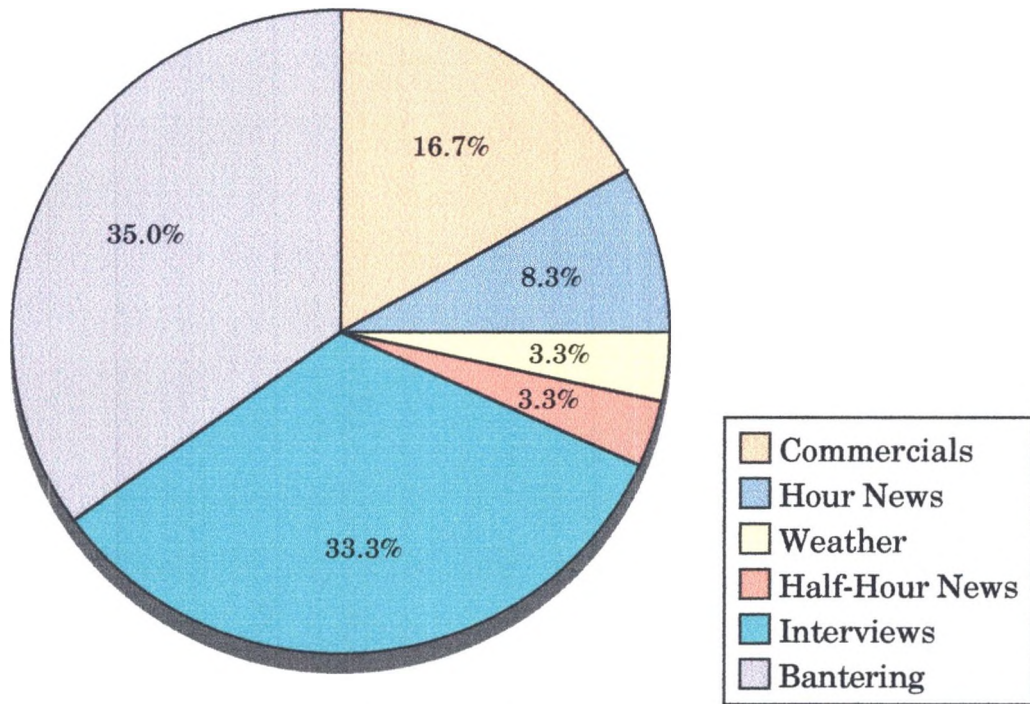


Figure 1. Program Format Breakdown

While this is the general format, variations are possible. For example, the bottom of the hour news, which is news on the half-hour, is much shorter than the top of the hour news as the news anchor simply updates a story. The short news updates at 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. are based on the assumption that people have tuned in to the news at either 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. and lengthy

explanations are not necessary (A. Constantinople, personal communication, June 30, 1995). This format breakdown becomes increasingly important as the communication between Katie Couric and Matt Lauer is examined.

Couric and Lauer have both worked in the news field for the same number of years and have had many similar job experiences. Katie Couric began working for the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) as a desk assistant in 1979. A year later, she became assignment editor for the Cable News Network (CNN). While at CNN, she was named associate producer and later became producer for a news program, eventually moving on to a political correspondent position. After leaving CNN in 1986, she worked for a Miami station as a general assignment reporter, also writing and producing several news series' (NBC, 1994).

In July 1989, Couric became deputy Pentagon correspondent at *NBC News*. "She joined *Today* as the program's first national correspondent and served as substitute co-anchor from February 1991 until her appointment as permanent co-host of *NBC News' Today* on April 4, 1991" (NBC, 1994).

Matt Lauer began his career in 1979 as producer of the noon news on a local West Virginia television station. He moved on to become a reporter on the station's evening newscasts. Lauer has hosted morning talk and entertainment programs for several stations throughout the East Coast. In January 1994, Lauer accepted the News Anchor position the *Today* show. He provides the latest in international and domestic news updates throughout the program (NBC, 1994).

Couric and Lauer are assumed to be traditional newscasters, successful in their field. Whether or not they are equally effective in their job is not discussed in this study, rather, the focus of this research is on whether they meet the expected societal stereotypes or if they deviate from them. These

expectations have been outlined in the literature review. The literature review has been divided into three categories: 1) Gender Differences, 2) Women's and Men's Language, and 3) Women and News. The first subsection discusses the psychological theories associated with gender differences as well as some of the assumed reasons for these stereotypical dissimilarities. The second part examines the specific verbal and speech pattern characteristics associated with women and men. The influence of women on their work environment and how women are treated in the workplace is the theme of the third area. This final section also examines women's influence in news as well as the issue of hard and soft news as it relates to the genders.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been argued that gender influences everything a person does or says. So, in order to understand an individual, one must understand what it is to be both male and female and the pervasive stereotypes and expectations. Many people believe, however, that while studying the communication differences may be interesting, it has no real value except to further an individual's understanding of the opposite sex because these differences are biological and therefore unchangeable. This belief has been challenged by feminist scholars on the basis that if gender were a biological category, all women and men would have stereotypical desires and never challenge the social system, which is simply not the case. Therefore, feminist researchers have begun addressing the issue of gender as a social category developed to place women and men in opposing groups and then defining what each gender should and should not do.

The biological category versus social category debate, as well as other opinions and research into gender differences is examined in the first section. It will be followed by a section on female and male language differences and another on women and work, specifically news.

Gender Differences

Gray (1992) equates the communication differences between the sexes as a gender gap as if men and women were from different planets. Each gender has their own language and interpretation of language. The lack of

understanding and subsequent misinterpretation of meanings is what leads to conflict between the genders. The fatal flaw in this argument is the assumption that women and men are fundamentally, biologically different and only understanding is possible.

Glass (1992) examines the communication differences between men and women and attempts to find the answer to gender differences. In this book, the author also asserts that female and male differences do indeed stem from some biological differences. One of these differences is the hormones in the brain which influence masculine or feminine traits in utero. Also, since male and female brains develop at different rates, this accounts for some sex differences. Beyond these innate differences, society impacts and shapes what boys and girls learn is acceptable behavior.

Psychological theory has, for many years, examined the development of people, more specifically, boys. When young girls' development began to be examined, the same psychological theories were used and the girls were found deficient, not measuring up to the boys. Gilligan (1993) attributes this to the fact that the measuring instruments created had been created for boys not girls. Gilligan also examines the woman and how and where she fits into the man's life cycle. The communication and language differences discussed are that often men and women talk not to one another but past one another as the language interpretations are different. This is the difference of the voice of care, which includes personal, emotion-provoking speech, versus the voice of justice, dealing with right and wrong.

Gilligan (1993) argues that one reason for gender differences is separation and attachment. Young girls develop an attachment to their mother and try to imitate their mother throughout their lives while young boys decide to be opposite from their mother and separate, causing them to become

more independent than girls. It is asserted that this is the reason boys become aggressive and independent and girls need companionship and relationships.

Betcher and Pollack (1993) examine the stereotypes with the intention of dispelling the silent, unemotional male stereotype to create a male voice more aware and accepting of the female voice as women emerge into the public light. The need for men to work on expressing their emotions and acknowledging their desire and need for interdependence is discussed. Gender differences are examined and it is concluded that the stereotypical differences are a result of social pressures and not biology. The issue of power and authority is also examined, particularly the differences in definition by men and women. While men want power over something or someone, women see power as necessary to accomplish great things. One of the main reasons for men to act the way they do is because of their treatment as children, assert the authors. Young boys are subjected to shame and punishment techniques to mold them into the men parents believe they should be because men have a very narrow acceptable stereotype which they must comply with while women have considerable more lenience.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) examine the development of young girls into teenagers to determine when, why, and how girls lose their voice and conform, almost without fail, to the quiet, passive stereotype which has been prevalent in society for centuries. Over a four year period, the authors observed and interviewed girls entering adolescence. As time passes, the authors began to see and hear young vivacious girls become quiet, unsure young women. Young girls began changing around 12 years of age and many expressed confusion about the change occurring because they did not understand what was happening. This is not to say that all the girls lost their voice; some whose mothers were outspoken resisted the stereotype and refused to allow it to

define them. While this might sound simple, the energy required to stand up even as others complied was difficult.

As women's voices is studied, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) cite five stages in the development of one's voice. These include silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. Each of these stages of expression build on one another as an individual learns to combine her feelings, facts, and others opinions.

Silence, the first stage, is not generally considered an expression of voice. However, many women find themselves unable to express themselves; thus the issue of why women find it difficult to speak up is examined.

Received knowledge, the second stage, is when an individual listens and completely believes authorities. The person does not take the other's statements as opinion and interpretation of fact based on certain world views.

The third stage is subjective knowledge, in which a woman begins relying on intuition and gut feelings about what is right and wrong. This is an important stage particularly as a woman matures because this is when one begins listening and knowing what she wants as an individual. However, she is still very aware of other's feelings and many women expressed the hesitation of voicing their opinions for fear of offending or upsetting someone.

Procedural knowledge, the fourth method of expressing voice, is described as the voice of reason and integration of the authority and the inner feelings to evaluate what is appropriate for the individual. It is the understanding of not only what an individual's opinions are but also a deeper knowledge of how those opinions were formed and influenced.

Constructed knowledge is the final level of expressing voice, creating the glasses through which one looks, not just observing the world through the

perspective of others. It is the taking of bits and pieces of knowledge from a variety of sources and creating a unique view according to what is best for the individual.

Bem (1993) discusses the three lenses through which people view the world in the hopes that once persons are aware of the unconscious methods through which the world is seen, the glasses can be removed and thus interpretations altered.

Biological essentialism, the first lens addressed, is the belief in natural biological differences through which men are innately superior. Scientists sought to prove this through several methods. Many believed education interfered with the reproduction capabilities of women due to the theory that the body contains an unalterable amount of energy and in women, thinking uses energy which should be at work within the reproductive organs. Biological predisposition was also discussed as a possible answer to gender differences. This predisposition, along with social pressures, it was argued, created and shaped the differences between the sexes. After presenting these arguments of old, the author offers the theory of psychological predisposition as a possible reason for the perceived differences between women and men. The author suggests that women are socialized to be more nurturing and caregiving than men who have long been brought up to be the protector and breadwinner.

Androcentrism is the second lens through which people examine gender differences. Many believe that men are the center of the universe or the perfect model through which everything else is measured and defined. It includes the issue of equal rights and Amendments and cases which attempted to address the inequalities between men and women. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, in particular, were examined as turning points for women because prior to that, women were classified as property.

The third and final lens is gender polarization, or the view that social life relies on and pivots around the very concept of female and male differences. Society depends and functions on the realization that there are two sexes which are different; there are no more and no fewer genders and this theory is deeply embedded in society and the ways in which people relate to one another. One particular psychological test scrutinized was the Terman-Miles Male-Female (M-F) Test, which allowed people to check to see if the child felt they were in the correct category of either female or male. This standardized test was the first one to officially define people as needing to be in one category or another, putting on paper what people had been saying for centuries.

Bem (1993) also discussed the negative possibilities of androgyny which is usually assumed to be the “utopia” of gender issues. While androgyny is defined as the desirable type of person to be, having the best of both the traditionally “male” and the traditionally “female” attributes, this in and of itself creates problems. The idea of androgyny, while ideally symbolizing the best of both worlds or at least attempting to dispel the myth that one must be either feminine or masculine, still needs a ruler by which one can be compared and the ruler, by default, becomes the male.

The most vital reason for understanding these lenses is that now one is capable and responsible for change, not only in her/himself but also in others, at the very least, their family and children. In the chapter entitled, “The Construction of Gender Identity,” the point is made that it is the individual as much as the social structure who influences and changes others’ attitudes and outlooks. Society is composed of individuals and if the people change their feelings and remove these lenses, then society must necessarily be changed.

Martyna (1980) examines the English language in which the masculine terms have been used to denote the generic and poses three problems. First, is

inequity, or the lack of parallelism between female and male. Ambiguity, the second fault, is that it is difficult to determine what the intended use of the word is; is it male or is it generic? The final problem is exclusiveness, where at times using the generic male necessarily excludes a female interpretation.

Two research questions are posed in this study of the generic male: a) Is the generic male always used or do people use other terms when no gender is implied or the gender is unclear? and b) When the generic "he" is used, is it always understood as such? The findings of this study showed that while the generic male is generally used, there are other alternatives and they are used on occasion. The other major result was that the pronoun used was greatly influenced by who the comment is believed to refer to and by the participant's gender.

Sexist language pervades today's society and in order to understand why and begin to eradicate it, one must take a careful look at society and the underlying assumptions and beliefs which influence such behaviors. Political critique language, speech which combats sexist communication, takes implicit language rules and makes it explicit, exposing the problems of these sexist patterns.

Spender (1980) begins with the dissolution of the theory that women are inferior and there is something wrong with their language. The history of this belief is examined and the resulting silence of women is addressed. Society perpetuates the stereotype that the ideal woman becomes fulfilled after having children and entering motherhood but for many this is not automatically true. While there is nothing wrong with motherhood and the sense of fulfillment that may accompany it, there is also nothing wrong with not feeling this way. The problem is that mothers who do not feel complete after having children, normally keep those feelings hidden, thereby perpetuating the motherhood

stereotype. Women's talk is then examined both in different sex conversations and in same sex conversations and it was found that women prefer talking with other women because their language is similar.

The Biblical historical account of Adam and Eve is then examined to explain and illustrate the male perspective and the implications of men writing history. In regards to writing, it is interesting that publishing is considered in the public sphere and for women to enter it, they must write for other women in the form of articles for other women or novels, particularly romance novels. The area most protected or hidden from women has been poetry, a strictly male domain.

Recently, there have been proposals to change the English language in an attempt to eradicate sexist language, specifically in two areas, suggests Blaubergs (1980). The first is to make the masculine/generic terms clearly neutral and the second area is to change the usage of masculine/generic words to be gender specific such as woman/man.

There have, however, been many opposed to such changes and Blaubergs (1980) documented eight of the main reasons for people to not desire this change. Many argue that cross-culturally women are lesser than men, even when their language does not contain these sexist ideas so language must not be the problem. This leads to theories of innate male superiority and dominance of women. The reality, however, is that those who believe this do not understand that while language itself is not evil, it does reinforce sexist actions.

The second argument is that language is a trivial concern. It is not very harmful on the continuum of sexist injustices and feminists' energies could be better used fighting some other cause.

Freedom of speech and unjustified coercion is the third opposition. These

people believe that this change of language would infringe upon their First Amendment rights and the change to nonsexist language practices would be forced.

The fourth argument is that sexist language is, in fact, not sexist. If people do not intend for their words to be sexist, then they are not sexist and feminists just read too much into these innocent words.

The fifth justification for not changing is word etymology or that the historical meanings were not originally sexist so the word can not be sexist. The reality of this is that word meanings do change over time and can become sexist in nature regardless of their origins.

Appeal to the authority is the sixth reason cited. This involves the idea that it is the dictionary's fault because it contributed to the sexism, the people just read the meanings, but did not create them.

The seventh appeal for not changing the language is that change is simply too difficult or inconvenient. While the language might contain some sexism, it is a necessary evil and should be tolerated as it is impossible to change the entire society.

The final explanation given is that such a change would destroy historical authenticity and literary works. The belief is that to change the language would involve rewriting all the literature as well as historical documents and this would destroy their value and diminish their impact.

Women's and Men's Language

Traditional persuasion or rhetoric, argues Gearhart (1979), is detrimental to society as it promotes violence. Therefore a female model of communication is necessary as an alternative because should the current rhetorical principles continue to be taught, society faces self-destruction. The violence in rhetoric is in the intention to change others which creates a

conquest or conversion model. Communication should not promote violence and aggression, rather it should be a creation of an atmosphere in which people can change themselves and not be changed by others. This gentler approach stems from the nurturing, listening atmosphere of women.

Campbell (1973) argues that this separate genre of rhetoric, feminist rhetoric, has evolved from the traditional form of persuasion. She points out two major differences between traditional rhetoric and feminist rhetoric: substance and style.

The first major difference between traditional and feminist rhetoric is the substantive features. The very idea of a female rhetor goes against the traditional concept of sex/gender roles. Usually, a speaker is thought of as the embodiment of the dominant characteristics and values of the American culture. These values include "self-reliance, achievement and independence" (Campbell, 1973, p. 75). These dominant qualities are typical of the male gender role and women are not usually expected to possess all, if any, of these qualities. Men are traditionally the active, dominant sex while women are thought of as the passive, secondary sex. As women are to be dependent and passive, this violates the traditional, standard requirements for a speaker. In other words, for a woman to give a public speech, she would be defying the very idea of what society defines as acceptable behavior from men and women.

The stylistic features, the second aspect of feminist rhetoric, is broken down into two parts: first the role of the rhetor and second the use of personal experience in public speaking. Women's rhetoric is in direct contrast to the traditional rules of persuasion. Rather than an expert or a leader persuading the audience to believe or do what the rhetor tells them to believe or do, a feminist rhetor relies heavily on consciousness raising techniques to inform the audience and make them aware of a concern or problem which the rhetor feels

strongly about. Consciousness raising is the use of personal experience to allow the audience to paint a graphic mental picture and to create understanding and sympathy in the audience rather than appealing to the audience's logic and citing many sources to back up and substantiate the speech's hypothesis. The rhetor also uses consciousness raising to justify herself as a speaker and to gain rapport with her audience. The feminist rhetor tells many stories throughout her speeches in order that her audience, which she recognizes as a diverse group of individuals, may find some common link with her and, therefore, count her as an effective expert on the speech topic. This is unlike rhetors following the traditional, male oriented speech patterns who use statistics and fact based evidence which can be attributed to someone who is considered an expert in their given field.

The author ties style and substance together by stating that these two features are interdependent. The reason for the stylistic differences probably lies in the societal norms which give the guidelines acceptable for women. That is to say, that because women are not supposed to be independent, self reliant, and self-confident, they are more effective as passive rather than active speakers.

Along with communication attributed to one gender or the other is Rysman's (1977) study of the evolution of gossip, whose original definition described a god-parent and family friend, "God-sib." This person was not just god-family to a newborn, they also became "adopted" family members. This term slowly evolved from the family relationship to an individual relationship. It began to connote the drinking companion of the men as well as the person who announced the birth of a new child to a family. As this person heralding the birth was generally a woman, the male definitions of gossip became obsolete and evolved into a negative meaning about the chatter of women.

Gossip was also examined by Jones (1980) as a common, acceptable mode of female conversation. For this study, it was broken down into five basic principles: settings, participants, topic, formality, and house-talk.

Settings, the first principle, is both the specific time and place at which the communication is happening as well as the cultural situation, or the private domain. The second principle is the participants who are women using talk as the preferred mode of communication because no other method of communication is available to a repressed group such as this one. Topic is the third principle and is not only the specific topic of discussion but also the wider issue of sharing personal experience. The next principle is the formal features and little is known about this component. It does, however, involve both sharing of information and questioning what new dimensions of information have been revealed by this news. The final principle within gossip is four-fold in that it is defined as house-talk or informal training toward fulfilling the female stereotype. It is also usually defined as scandalous because many women appoint themselves enforcers of morality. Bitching, also included in this final principle of gossip, is the expression of women's anger at their restricted role for which consciousness-raising is the political equivalent. The last area is chatting, a mutual self-disclosure where women nurture one another.

Along with gossip as a woman's mode of communication, many researchers have begun to look at language and speech patterns in general to determine if some common elements could be found in women's speech that are not apparent in men's speech. Three major areas of communication differences are discussed in Tannen's (1990) book: rapport-talk and report-talk, listening and lecturing, and interruptions. While there are a number of other issues addressed in this book, these are the main ideas in the area of gendered language.

Rapport-talk is commonly thought of as women's talk, private conversations through which relationships are built and maintained where women share experiences. Report-talk, on the other hand, uses conversation to establish independence and exhibit and impart knowledge to others, often not conversation oriented rather center-stage entertainer oriented. The second aspect is lecturing versus listening, where men tend to dominate conversation and women become the silent observer, falling into traditional stereotypes. The final issue is that of interruptions and who interrupts whom more, which implies domination, importance and control. While women are thought of as always talking and interrupting, in mixed groups, men generally interrupt women more than women interrupt men.

Borisoff and Merrill (1985) identify verbal communication differences between the genders. They examine five major verbal differences between male and female speech, including tag questions, qualifiers, vocabulary differences, disclaimers, and compound requests. They assert that each of these communication patterns are found in women's speech and not in men's.

Tag questions, the first verbal difference, are a combination question and statement and often used in women's speech to gain approval and confirmation from the listener. It is less risky for the speaker's self-confidence to phrase a comment this way because a negative answer feels less rejecting of the person.

Qualifiers, the second difference, are words "such as *maybe, probably, rather, kind of, sort of, really, I think, and I guess*" (Borisoff & Merrill, 1985, pp. 25) which women tend to use more frequently than men. According to the authors, while these words may appear to strengthen the statement, they, in fact, soften the statement and make the statement more passive than assertive.

Third are the vocabulary differences between males and females. Females usually pepper their sentences with adverbs of intensity like “*awfully, terribly, pretty, quite, and so*” and with adjectives such as “*charming, lovely, adorable, divine, cute, and sweet*” (Borisoff & Merrill, 1985, pp. 26). It is also more acceptable for men's vocabulary to contain curse or swear words. Women, however, are thought to use less forceful words such as “*dear me*” and “*oh my goodness.*”

The fourth vocal difference between men and women is the use of disclaimers, which are when the speaker puts down and belittles her- or himself so that listeners observe the lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem the speaker portrays. In their speech, men appear more confident and self-assured while women often use disclaimers to denigrate themselves, thus showing a lack of self-confidence.

Compound requests is the final difference between women and men cited in this book. Women, it is suggested, have difficulty vocalizing requests and often phrase commands as choices in which the listener can decide whether to carry out or not.

Women's and men's language being different and unequal, with women's speech lower on the hierarchy, has also been examined and evaluated by Kramer (1973). Women and men do use language differently, as suggested by Borisoff and Merrill (1985), Lakoff (1973) and others, but the question still remains whether or not women's speech is lesser than men's speech. Many of these earlier researchers lead one to believe this is so. A distinction is made between biological differences and culturally influenced differences. Biological differences include pitch, which is based on “length, tension, and weight of the vocal cords” (p. 19). The other differences between speech patterns across the genders is culturally ingrained. Women's speech is not biologically lesser than

men's, it is just that society chooses to denigrate women's speech, thereby relegating it to a lower position than men's.

Another study by Kramer (1977) examined female and male speakers to determine if their speech patterns were differentially stereotyped and if they are perceived as different by observers. The results disclosed a general belief that the speech of males is very different from the speech of females and that stereotypes influenced the perceived differences. Finally, as society is based on competition, it is the male speech that becomes more valuable and women's is considered useless and inconsequential.

The construction of conversation and female and male sentences and meaning construction is the focus of Tannen's (1986) book. Of particular importance is the chapter on female-male talk, which is explained as a cross-cultural communication because girls and boys are raised differently. Women are aware, for example, of the metamessages within conversations and men may only hear the spoken word. The silent man is also examined as the unemotional person who not only does not speak, but also may not be perceived by women as listening. It is also argued that unless the issue of gender-influenced communication is understood, communication barriers will continue to be erected, prohibiting full, productive relationships.

In a study examining verbal communication differences, Fishman (1983) taped daily conversations of three Caucasian, heterosexual couples. These conversations were analyzed for verbal differences and power issues.

In regard to power and control, the men were in charge, across the board. The tape recorders were set up on timers to record but the couples were allowed to turn the tape on and off at will as well as to edit conversations after the fact. All of the men ran the tape recorders and there were times when the men turned them on without their wives' knowledge but the reverse never

happened. Other findings included women asking two and a half times as many questions as the men. Questions ensure a response where as statements require no comment so women attempted in this manner to get conversations started or keep them going. Another method was the asking "did ya know" which, as opposed to the question which requires only an answer, requires a third step: a question to prompt the answer. This technique was also used by women twice as often as men. Attention getters was a third area examined in which the speaker essentially says "pay attention to me" and was again used twice as many times by women.

Two basic methods of replying to the other person were discussed. The first was the minimal response which, while used by both genders, each gender used this technique very differently. When the men used minimal response, it generally expressed disinterest whereas when the women used minimal response, it normally signified support. The other response type was composed of statements or fillers which did not intend to evoke a response from the listener. Men used this twice as many times as women, however, men normally received a response from the woman while the women received no response from the man.

When examining the topics suggested to the actual number of topics discussed to determine assertiveness and control, it was found that women introduced 47 topics but only 17 became conversations whereas 28 of the 29 topics men started became conversations. The conclusions of this study overwhelmingly showed that men decide what is appropriate conversation while it is the women who, once a conversation is introduced, must maintain it.

Women and News

Men dominate not only the interpersonal settings but many professional environments as well. According to Treichler and Kramarae (1983) academic

settings are one area where inequalities exist between women and men because the academic setting has been formed by men and does not allow for the typical female patterns of classroom interaction to exist. Teachers treat male and female students differently with boys receiving more attention than girls. Teachers interact the least with intelligent girls; male teachers state that they do this to discourage crushes and female teachers do it because they have confidence in the girl's motivation and ability. In regard to universities, researchers believe that the current structure upholds and promotes current gender stereotypes. The classroom should no longer be regarded as a place for professors to lecture and solely impart their knowledge to students, rather it should be a warm place which stimulates self-awareness and growth as well as discovering answers for oneself.

These inequalities are seen not only in academic settings, but in most other work environments as well. Fine (1987) researched the obstacles women must overcome in order to work in male-dominated settings. These include off-color humor and obscene language, sexual talk to women, and the need to cooperate to successfully accomplish work's informal side. The study looked at four restaurants in Minneapolis/St. Paul in which the conversation between chefs and the serving staff was scrutinized. The author criticized the thought that obscenities were a natural part of the workplace and to remove them might destroy the camaraderie between staff members. Physical contact and sexual teasing are playful and should not be considered offensive or harassment. Fine argued that while these elements were a part of the work environment, women should not need to accept these events as inevitable within the work environment.

The problems Treichler and Kramarae (1983) and Fine (1987) discuss are not unique to their respective areas of study. Most women, regardless of

their profession, face any number of these issues on a regular basis, and television is not exempt.

Rakow and Kranich (1991) examine the role women play in television news, comparing their stereotypical roles to how that impacts women, anchors or news subjects, upon entering the electronic media. The main argument is that women are placed in a certain role and are used to symbolize specific ideas, while men are observed on television more frequently than women and therefore become the norm.

Sanders (1993) looked at the networks and found that in a February 1992 survey, rather than rising numbers of women entering the media, the number of female correspondents fell two percent, from 16% to 14%. In reporting the results of the Women, Men and Media survey, women played a minor role in both the news reporting and the expert or interviewee, regardless of the subject. She argues that while the networks say they are making an attempt at gender equality, this is not evident. The networks argued that this study failed to account for the women anchoring weekend morning news programs and co-anchoring weekday morning broadcasts, however Sanders' study only intended to examine prime-time newscasts.

Another argument offered was that women often report on long-term issues, not breaking news, and these ongoing stories require more time and effort; therefore women might not appear as visible but they are just as vital. However, this is a weak argument as many men also report these types of stories as well as current, timely issues. This discrimination against women, Sanders (1993) argues, is due to women's lack of power and control in the media as few women are in top management positions at any of the networks or on specific programs and the few who hold these coveted jobs have likely conformed to the male way of thinking and operating.

As television and news are primarily a male field, men have also created the language surrounding the news stories. Beasley (1993) cites a study, the Maryland report, which

...recommended that journalism educators emphasize the blending of news and feature-writing that has occurred in recent years. To a degree this represents a blurring of the sharp lines that used to denote "hard news" (the front-page news stories denoting action) and "soft news" (the feature stories appealing to the emotions). Calling attention to the blatant sexual overtones of these terms, the Maryland study urged that journalism schools not perpetuate old stereotypes by assigning women students feature stories, for example, while grooming males to be campus editors or by giving male instructors general reporting courses and women instructors feature-writing classes. (Beasley, 1993, p. 126)

While this is true and hard news and soft news are terms from the male genre of news reporting, they are useful guidelines in determining what types of stories society expects women to cover and what they decide men should cover. Turow (1983) defines hard news as "national, international, and local affairs of government, as well as other matters, such as criminal acts or trials, that the journalists consider collective concerns" (p. 111). He also quotes a top reporter for *PM Magazine* defining hard and soft news as

Hard news is anything that takes place on that day that is reported on that day and has some special significance--in other words, it's out of the ordinary....Hard news is a major political event; what happens at the state house, a major piece of legislation that is passed. Soft news--I like

the term evergreen better. In that it's a story that doesn't have to be run today to be topical....It could be something you could leave out of the program without being accused of skipping the important news of the day. (p. 117)

In this definition of news, hard news is the "real" news or the headline news while soft news, then, includes the human interest or feature stories. This definition, however, is too narrow and short-sighted, not accounting for stories which are timely but appealing to the emotions and leaving large gray areas which are subjective such as sports or long drawn-out court cases. It also discounts the importance of so called "soft news," relegating it to a position of non-importance or interest. "This relative neglect is unfortunate, since soft news, whether conveyed through a recited story, an interview, a film, or a tape, presents agendas about lifestyles, activities, and meanings that may very well carry profound implications" (p. 111).

Throughout the gender research of the past 20 years, many differences between the language of women and men have been documented. These disparities were expected to be apparent throughout the communication between co-hosts. While Couric was the regular co-host and Lauer was just standing in for Bryant Gumbel, based on the gender research, it was still expected that they would conform to the stereotypes. It was presumed that Lauer would be the controlling co-host or at least take a dominant role in interpersonal interaction, controlling conversations and interrupting Couric, while Couric, even though she is the permanent co-anchor, would become the listener and conversation sustainer, but not initiator. Based on the definitions of hard and soft news, Lauer was expected to report stories which were considered timely, current news events while Couric was more likely to inform

the viewer about emotional, sensitive issues, probably directly concerning women. Since news, as stated earlier, is a male-dominated setting, Couric could potentially possess some masculine stereotypical tendencies as this might be the only way she could become successful on national television. However, according to earlier studies of women's speech, communication patterns still should be evident which identify Couric as female.

The other portion of this study examined the news distribution during the updates every half hour. This was designed to see the gender breakdown of the correspondents and to determine if there was any relation to the women correspondents, if there were any, and the amount of air time allotted. Statistics say there are few women involved in news reporting and particularly breaking news, and because of this, few if any female reporters were expected. It was also assumed that they would hold a directly proportionate amount of time to their numbers. For example, if five percent of the correspondents were women, then five percent of the air time was expected to be allotted to these reporters and their stories would also be human interest in nature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As the literature review provided a base for the study, this chapter examines the procedure by which the research was conducted. The artifact for this research has been outlined, as well as the qualitative and feminist theory used in this study. As much of the research is an interpretive content analysis, content analysis has also been discussed.

The artifact for this study was a week of NBC's *Today* program from January 30, 1995 through February 3, 1995. The artifact consisted of the transcripts from that week which were read and analyzed. The analyzation process was primarily a qualitative content analysis based on subjective interpretation with some quantitative elements when the expected content differences were difficult to determine. In addition to transcripts of the *Today* show, interviews were conducted to understand the program format and day to day operations of the morning news program. Through a telephone conversation, Alex Constantinople, *Today* publicist, offered many insights into the program and its structure as this study was being conducted. Other information, background on the program, co-hosts, and reporters were accessed from America Online.

Qualitative Research

These artifacts were examined through a qualitative methodology. The criteria for qualitative research as it differs from the earlier natural sciences or quantitative methodology are outlined by Christians and Carey (1981). Prior

to defining these criterion, Christians and Carey lay two misconceptions to rest. The first is that qualitative studies are unwilling to use statistics or any mathematics. However, qualitative and quantitative are not necessarily diametrically opposite. There are problems with counting as it denotes some type of normal to abnormal scale, but they can be used in qualitative studies, particularly to clarify and illustrate a point. The second misconception is subtle and deals with the idea that qualitative studies are historical research. There are certainly historical analyses involved but not all qualitative studies need to be historical.

Next are the four criteria for evaluating qualitative studies, but only one applies to this research project. The guideline is contextualization, in which the researchers attempt to understand all the elements of the case studied and verbalize them. This is the basic frame of content analysis which takes apart an artifact to see what can be found within.

Lindlof and Meyer (1987) discussed the elements of qualitative research, in particular, mediated communication, to determine what areas can be studied under the interpretive paradigm which “takes its subjects to be the fields of meaning that pervade the projects of human life” (p. 4). The first area of study is media use that defines subcultures. The second is media use as “frames for a greater knowledge of life concerns and experiences,” (p. *) which examines how individuals use media for making inferences about the world. “Media use as constitutive of social interactions and relationships” (p. 13) is the third area which examines how people relate to one another. The final area is media use as it influences the development of expressive competence where the long-term impact of media influences personal expression.

One issue inherent in the qualitative and content analysis process is that of ethnographic teams. While it can be productive to have several

perspectives, rarely will different researchers find the same things, making it difficult to produce a single interpretation. This is why much research is considered interpretive and why many theories have been tested and different results found.

Manning (1987) dealt with the limitations of fieldwork and four areas in particular: a) ad hoc problem selection, b) limited domain of analysis, c) role relationships that are inconsistent, and d) descriptive forces. Ad hoc problem selection deals with "accepting available opportunities for study" which might not always be systematic. The limited domain of analysis is the realization that sometimes limited studies can not be generalized. The third limitation is the inconsistency of the role of the fieldworker and her/his relationship to the field of study. Finally, descriptive focus is the idea that participant observation studies comment on a part of society. Each of these issues is important to consider when entering a content analysis; however, this does not mean that they are not scientifically rigorous.

Within qualitative analysis is the flexibility to use some quantitative elements as the study requires. West and Zimmerman (1982) provide a systematic account of the approach to conversation analysis and to understand the assumptions in its empirical work. One advantage with the empirical focus of conversation research is that it allows the focus of research to be on social activities during the course of time and does not merely look at the end result of a conversation. Ethnomethodology, another important feature of some qualitative research, is to create analyses of the method of reasoning involved in empirically observed times of social interaction.

The next area for discussion cited by West and Zimmerman is the method and measurement of conversation analyses. First one must define conversation explicitly by understanding what is and is not naturally occurring

interaction. After this, the researcher must transcribe all conversation, including the tone and way a participant says something. In the examination process, the tone and attitude should be carefully considered because it could be as important or more important than the actual words spoken.

Three parameters of conversational organization are examined in relation to nonverbal communication. The first is placement and involves examining the question of "why that now?" The "that" involves saying or doing something which causes an alteration in conversation such as interruptions or simultaneously speaking. The second is timing, which is often tied to placement and looks at when things occur. Finally, one needs to examine the implications of all verbal and nonverbal behaviors, "what does this say?"

Feminist Research

It has been argued that one can not create a theory that intends to address gender equality if the theory is embedded in history for it is this history that has played an important role in the current sex role stereotypes. Therefore, McCormack (1981), explains the just or social justice theory of which feminist theory is a part.

Science and empirical studies are considered male abilities, therefore quantitative studies necessarily reflect a male bias whereas qualitative studies are considered "soft" or female. If this is the case, then a new method is required which is androgynous. The method in itself is genderless. However, the treatment and construction of theory around a method becomes gendered. The method examined for its genderlessness is the just theory. This theory acknowledges that every person carries with them a standpoint epistemology through which the world is viewed. This theory excludes all explanations upholding "the biological or social necessity of social inequality" (McCormack, 1981, p. 5). One requirement within this theory is the idea of consciousness-

raising as “a conviction grounded in evidence that equality is one of the options of history” (p. 6).

Four ideas are given by McCormack (1981) to offer possible direction for the future of just theory. The first is to disregard history on the basis that it neither proves nor disproves equality. Comparing sexual equality to racial equality is the second idea, looking at the values and beliefs that accompanied racial inequality. Examining peace research, the next idea, might give insight to how researchers moved from expecting the ideal to creating more realistic goals or taking small steps toward an end rather than a big leap over a wide chasm. The final concept is simulation, introducing possible factors into a controlled environment.

Six theoretical approaches to research on women’s and men’s language are outlined by Kramarae (1990). The first is sex differences research which stem from social psychology and not from feminist theory. This examines the treatment of boys and girls from birth in an attempt to determine what might later create the differences between powerless and powerful speech. Androgyny is the second area and using a feminine-masculine scale, it attempts to determine the sameness of the genders. The problem is that the method is patriarchal in nature, still stressing the masculine traits as more desirable. The third theory is that of two cultures, the opposite from androgyny, examining how the genders are different and stresses these as the important items to examine. Hierarchy is next and it is the idea the men are the standard by which humans should be measured and women become lesser than the men as they deviate from the conventional. Moral development, the fifth area, examines development based on relatedness, cooperation and relationships, all traditionally female characteristics, when ideally moral development should be built on both women’s and men’s experiences. The final

theoretical approach is that of ecofeminism and language. This examines the individual and autonomy as personal empowerment is a step toward social reform but this is often controlling.

The next section of Kramarae's (1990) article mentioned five types of female-male relationships as possible areas for future research. The first of these areas is the 'love' relationship, which is currently defined as an intimate heterosexual relationship in which the language constrains expression and description of personal experiences. The abusive relationship is the next area for study, specifically the possible correlation between verbal and physical abuse and what lies at the center of this abuse. Third is the business relationship, where sexual harassment should be scrutinized and its long-reaching implications uncovered. The professional relationship is the fourth relationship. This is the doctor-patient relationship, for example, which could be examined as the doctor's gender changes. The final relationship is one that has been taken for granted and overlooked in research, friendship which could be looked at to see the differences between genders as well as cultures and ages.

The question of what is or is not feminist scholarship is further examined by Duelli-Klein (1983), looking first at research on women to determine if it can be classified as feminist or not. Then some criteria for feminist research methodology are outlined after which the lack of development in feminist methodology is scrutinized and strategies for continuing development are considered.

Not all research on women is research for women according to Duelli-Klein, and this distinction bears some examination. Research for women is any study that reflects women's issues and experiences which may be used to improve women's position. Many studies on women use male standards and

often assume that gender is not a variable when it constitutes a major issue in the feminist study. Knowledge gained from studying women should be used not only for expanding knowledge but also for social reform. Researchers also need to be aware of the ingrained biases in methods of research which influences the outcome of the study. It is also asserted that the personal issues of one woman if they can be seen in others, become political; this idea of the personal as political is a basic tenet of feminism.

Duelli-Klein (1983) also outlined several criteria for feminist methodology. The first is conscious subjectivity, which acknowledges and validates the participants' feelings and experiences. This leads to the second criteria of intersubjectivity of the research or the free exchange of ideas between the researcher and the participant as opposed to the sole dissemination of knowledge by the researcher. The final aspect of feminist methodology is the attempt to maintain an honest relationship between the participant and the researcher.

According to Duelli-Klein, when feminist scholars pursue such non-traditional methods of research, they are often not taken seriously and with the pressure to have work which is scholarly and academically sound, it is a battle to convince others that the work for women is profound. The method for making feminist research profound lies in the creation of a feminist paradigm through which feminist methodology and theory could be created. In creating these methods it is not necessary to discard all men's methods but one does need to scrutinize them to determine which could have feminist equivalents to combat the patriarchal methodologies. The other strategy is for colleges and universities to create classes on feminist methodology and research but it is important to use caution that a supermethodology does not evolve, causing as many problems as other methodologies.

In regard to the question "What is feminist scholarship?," Reuben (1978) also gives six notes. The first is that one must understand that research by and/or about women does not necessarily classify it as feminist research. If this is true, then the next issue becomes an attempt to define feminist scholarship. The author's second and third points give direction to the definition of feminist research that is explained as "personal enterprise and collective endeavor" which "demands a continuing faith and a 'tolerance for ambiguity'" (p.217). It follows, then, that this research necessitates a knowledge and understanding of one's own epistemology and has a problem-oriented focus. It is also important to understand, as the author's fourth thought points out, that each feminist scholar and each study is a part of the whole, not equal to the whole. Reuben also mentions the fact that part of the study is very personal, the discovering of one's own voice, thus becoming involved in the research and not just operating as an outsider observing. The final comment is the reminder that feminist scholarship is not just an academic issue, nor is academia the only place for feminist issues to be discussed.

McRobbie (1982) examines "naturalistic" sociology research which is a combination of ethnography, participant observation and history to create a feminist ethnographic sociology. When conducting research, it is important to remember that it is not possible to simply mirror what is observed because a researcher will automatically interpret the observations through her/his standpoint. In feminist research, a vital distinction is the relationship between the researcher and participant. Rather than the researcher acting as an objective observer and the participant the subject of study, both members play some form of both roles. When conducting research, it is necessary that the scientist realize that only a partial portrait can be examined and in the

issue of change, one can not change another as no one struggles with the same issues in the same way as anyone else.

Glennon (1983) examines four types of feminism that address duality: instrumentalism, expressionism, synthesisism, and polarism. The first type of feminism, instrumentalism, is when the private sphere is eliminated, leaving only the public realm. Expressionism, the second type, is the opposite of instrumentalism, where the public sphere is eradicated on the basis that the only road to happiness is through the emotional, private life. Synthesisism is the third type of feminism which suggests that the ideal human is an equal combination of emotion and reason and to divide these would be to dehumanize. The final feminism type is polarism which posits an essential difference between sexes in an attempt to dissolve the lesser human stereotypes in favor of the idea that both genders are just different from one another.

Bristow and Esper (1984) examine feminist ideology to explain how research becomes a part of consciousness raising as a part of a larger question which researches the issue of rape and its long-term effects. Two assumptions are vital to this study: first, the research participants are classified as experts because of their individual experiences and second, sexism is the root of rape. Research participants as experts also applies in many other areas of feminist research as women studying women are examining others through their own standpoint.

The method used to study rape is an interview or "true' dialogue" where both researchers and participants discuss and exchange ideas, allowing the participant to also be a researcher, both learning and teaching. There are three dialogues occurring in this study which expand consciousness-raising: the researcher's internal conversation, the discussion between the participant and researcher, and the dialogue between the researcher and society.

Zoonen (1994) examined feminist issues in communication and looked at several areas of gender, communication and media. The area of most current interest and relevance was the chapter on media texts and gender, more specifically the content analysis section.

Zoonen suggested four main research criticisms based on other feminists' comments and concerns. The first is that women are severely underrepresented as scientists and professors because of stereotypes that have prohibited women from entering these domains easily. Second, the experimentation methods are sexist, thus creating sexist projects and outcomes. Themes, the third area of critique, have been shown to be male-biased and male-centered with women being largely excluded from research. The fourth concern is with the very tenets of science where everything is seen in dichotomies and as this is a male mode of thought, it does not acknowledge that women might possess a different way of thinking.

Content analysis, a feminist research method, is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Zoonen, 1994, p. 69). The method for conducting a content analysis is to determine what one is going to study and how large the artifact must be. Second, one must devise a coding scheme by which to examine the artifact. The difficulty at this stage is to ensure validity and to accurately describe categories to eradicate any problems.

Along with devising feminist research methods, social science is criticized through feminist evaluation which Westkott (1979) discusses. First is that it distorts and misrepresents women's experience. It also examines patriarchy and the man and his experiences as the standard; therefore, the woman must be inferior. Feminist criticism and Marxist theory are similar in their methodological approach to women's experience. They argue that

women's studies should be grounded in concrete experience and the result is an unpredicted discovery not a controlled outcome. The third criticism against social science examines the "purpose of the social knowledge of women" (p.427) or the value of women's understanding.

Along with feminist research, is the issue of the gender for the researcher. Scott (1984) examines the issue of women as researchers and particularly the difficulties women most likely face which men would not. The study examined the treatment of a female interviewer by peers and found a variety of responses. The most important findings were those of the treatment of the women interviewers by the majority of the male interviewees. Also of importance was examining the interviewers' standpoint because this greatly influenced interpretation and understanding as a person's reaction also greatly influences the way society, and in this study, sociology is perpetuated.

The ethics of research are scrutinized and Finch (1984) argues that the ethics that apply to men do not apply when the subjects are women. In examining the woman-to-woman interview, there are three situational differences that influence discussion and self-disclosure. First, women are used to intrusions into their personal life through questions. Second, if the interview is conducted in the participant's home, the atmosphere is a comfortable, friendly one for guests, and rather than being seen as an inquisition, the conversation can be seen as a relationship. Finally, the atmosphere alone is conducive to intimate conversations. One of the most important factors in woman-to-woman interviews is trust and mutual sharing.

As qualitative research requires accuracy of participant's words, transcripts provided by NBC were used as opposed to watching tapes and attempting to transcribe entire conversations from video. Some information, when observation and repeated examination of the transcripts provided no

clear results, was counted and graphed as this, too, assisted in the accuracy and validity of the content analysis.

The feminist theory laid out in this chapter directly relates to the earlier chapter on gender differences. Many early gender communication researchers discussed the differences between female and male language as women's rhetoric being somehow deficient. This was not surprising as the standards for evaluating and understanding women's talk was to measure them against the male method of communication and if it did not conform, then it was considered lacking and abnormal. Feminist studies and feminist theory have attempted to dispel these myths as well as to argue that women's conversation is at least as valuable as men's.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The *Today* show features two co-anchors who share the responsibility of running the entire two hour news cast. This particular study examined one week of this program, January 30, 1995-February 3, 1995, scrutinizing the communication between these co-hosts. While Gumbel is the regular host and Couric the permanent co-host, the week chosen was one in which Gumbel was out of town and the news anchor, Lauer, replaced Gumbel as co-host. While one might believe this to have slightly altered the general flow of the week, it allowed this study to deal only with gender issues and not race issues since Lauer and Couric are both white. Also, Constantinople (personal communication, June 30, 1995) stated that the general format of the week remains the same and interviews were not chosen with a specific co-host in mind, unless either of the co-host requests a specific story or the interviewee wishes to speak with a certain co-host. Also, interviews were not assigned with Gumbel in mind as all assignments occur the night prior to the program.

In accordance with past gender research, traditional societal stereotypes were expected to be observed. While Lauer was the guest co-anchor, since he is well known on the *Today* show and has established a rapport with Couric, it was presumed that Lauer would control bantering and conversations while Couric would pickup on the conversations but not necessarily begin them. As the man, Lauer was expected to interrupt more frequently than Couric and when the speech patterns were inspected, Couric's

language was likely to contain stereotypical female words and phrases or it was to deviate slightly as she is a woman successfully entering a male dominated workforce.

Hard news, as defined earlier, was expected to be reported by Lauer and soft news by Couric. Again, because news is a male-dominated profession, Couric might possess some stereotypical masculine traits in order to become a successful on television co-host. Yet, Couric's verbal communication patterns should still identify Couric as female.

Another section of this study examined the correspondents and the division of news during updates every half hour. The reporter's gender might determine the amount of air time allotted, and the number of female reporters, it was expected, would reflect the lack of women in news.

In this content analysis and qualitative research on gender communication, the study was four-fold: (1) looking at the distribution of the news stories, hard news versus soft news and who is responsible for which type of news; (2) at the amount of speech by each person; (3) examining the words spoken as opposed to what was scripted; (4) and finally the interaction patterns of the co-hosts. Each of these areas will be examined to see how the co-hosts, Couric and Lauer, as well as the *Today* show in general, measure up to the expected stereotypes or how effectively they diverge from the societal expectations to forge new ground and create a more gender equitable news program.

Within the hard and soft news categories, both Couric and Lauer approached their interviews in a soft news manner, leading the entire program to become a soft news program. However, one portion of the two-hour newscast was hard news, the updates every half-hour. While there were more male reporters than female, it was expected that they would dominate the air

time. However, a majority of the news updates were reported by the three female correspondents. The difference in air time stemmed from the amount of time the female news anchor reported. Returning to Couric and Lauer, both were very similar in their sentence construction, word choice and amount of interruptions. These areas are examined in greater detail, beginning with hard and soft news.

The first part of this study examines the interviews each of the co-hosts conduct and determine which can be considered hard news and soft news and then looks at how these interviews are distributed between co-hosts. This week of NBC *Today* programming consisted of a total of 37 stories or interviews by one of the two co-hosts. Of these interviews, Couric anchored 20 of them and Lauer 17. Over the course of the week, this gave Couric almost 10% more stories (see Figure 2). This does not mean, however, that she received more or less air time or that her stories were of greater or lesser consequence than Lauer's.

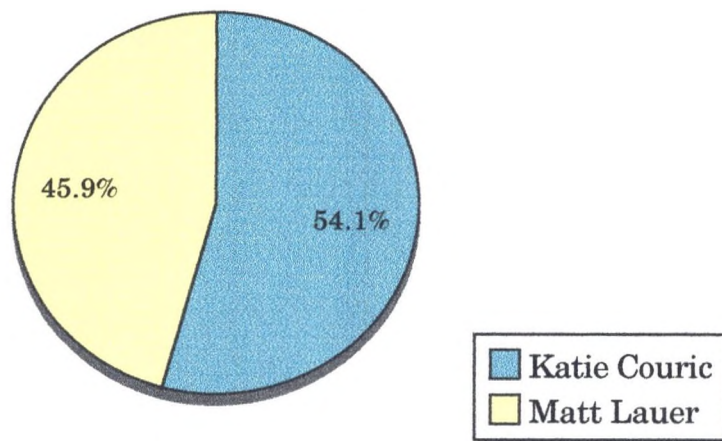


Figure 2. News Anchor Divisions

According to Alex Constantinople (personal communication, June 30, 1995), *Today* publicist, the anchors did not have a choice of interviews; they

were each assigned stories by the executive producer the night before the interview. Stories are arranged to give each anchor approximately the same number of stories, although some variation may occur. For example, if an interview is going particularly well, the interview may be lengthened and if an interview is not progressing, it might be shortened. On the average, interview slots are broken down into five minute segments, some interviews being given two segments to accommodate longer interviews.

In order to better examine the stories and their classification as either hard or soft news stories, it was necessary to divide the stories into topics and classify each story. The breakdown of stories was as follows:

- 11 stories about O.J. Simpson;
- 6 interviews of authors/new books (2 on O.J.);
- 5 interviews with actors/actresses (3/2 respectively);
- 4 part series on the art of flirting;
- 4 miscellaneous including benefit report, snow leopards, Ben & Jerry's new president, and an analysis of 1996 Republican candidates;
- 3 helpful hints including cooking, supermarket savings and better banking;
- 2 interviews with athletes (tennis pro & Super Bowl winners); and
- 2 other court cases.

In examining the above topics, at first glance they might have been easily divided into soft and hard news but upon further study, the lines between soft and hard news blur and several stories can be placed in either category with ease. The O.J. Simpson stories, for example, could quite naturally fall under hard news as most people consider the events in this court case headline news. However, the O.J. Simpson case might also be classified as soft news, particularly as it is reported on the *Today* show. The daily interviews

surrounding this case are legal correspondents, judges, and lawyers who are all speculating on the outcome of the trial and second guessing the people directly involved in the case. Because of this, the interviews take on a feature story quality rather than a pure factual report.

For example, on January 30, 1995, Couric interviewed Jack Ford, NBC News' chief legal correspondent, about the Simpson trial and the entire interview was based on speculation. Couric began the interview with the following comments: "This is a day of reckoning for the defense in terms of what Judge Ito might do. What are his options? Can you just run the gamut for us?" (Zucker, 1995, January 30, p. 9). She continued asking Ford speculative questions: "Do you think he'll [Judge Ito] give the prosecution the 30 days the prosecution has requested so they can brief themselves and prepare to interview some of these witnesses?" (p. 10).

Lauer also asked similar speculative questions to Ford when he interviews him the following day. "You talk about reasonable doubt. Doesn't the jury also have reason to doubt that O.J. 's telling the truth? First, he says he's sleeping at the time of the murders, now he says he's golfing" (Zucker, 1995, January 31, p. 9). Later he questioned, "but in your opinion, will it be easier for Cochran to prove bungling on the part of the LAPD than conspiracy?" (p. 11). In both cases, Couric and Lauer were probing the legal correspondent for possible outcomes of the Simpson case; but they were not dealing directly with what was happening that day in the case. Therefore, as they are not imparting new information, these topics fall into the soft news category since whether the interview was on one day or the next was not of great importance.

This soft news categorization is true not only of the O.J. Simpson case but of the other court cases discussed, analyses of Republican presidential

candidates, and the report of the new president of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, all of which could have been hard news stories but were approached in a soft news manner. In an interview with Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, and the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Bob Holland, Jr., Lauer jokes and banters with the interviewees at the outset of the interview. While this is likely a tactic to create rapport, the entire interview is a light look at the change of management in this company. Lauer does ask a couple of serious questions, but nothing that would make the headlines.

In the case of the potential 1996 Republican presidential candidates, Lauer interviews not the candidates but Charlie Cook, editor of *The Cook Political Report*. His questions were structured much the same as those illustrated from the Simpson case as can be seen in the following example.

Let's start with these two people in the GOP who are not running. Former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, and, on Monday, former Housing Secretary Jack Kemp both said they won't go. Were they either--were either of those people legitimate candidates?...Let's talk about some of the others who appear to be ready to go. Senate Majority leader Bob Dole. Can he raise the money and can he be a good candidate?...If you were a handicapper, how would you rate Lamar Alexander's chances? (Zucker, 1995, January 31, p. 16)

Given these examples of soft news and interviewing, all of the stories Couric and Lauer reported during this week can be classified as soft news. This classification then leads to the question of when all stories within broadcast are classified as one type of news, what effect, if any, does this have on the classification of the program as a whole?

Not only can individual reports be classified as soft news, but entire programs can also become known as soft news programs, and overall this is true of *Today*. For the most part on the *Today* show, the headline or hard news stories are given in short update form by the news anchor four times during the program, every half hour. These news stories may spill over into the feature stories of the day, but are reported in a soft news or feature story manner.

There are several reasons for this feature story or human interest approach to the news. First, if this type of communication is classified as women's talk, this categorizes the bulk of the program as a woman's show. It has been said that women do not enjoy watching the nightly news because all that is reported are the bare bones, there is no humanness and compassion or display of emotion through this form of information-giving. The morning news programs are midway between talk shows and nightly news, and this approach informs women about current events.

At this point it is advantageous to examine the hard news segments of *Today*. While neither Couric nor Lauer directly report this hard news, the distribution of the news is important to look at for possible gender implications. These short news updates are likely aimed at male viewers who want only to hear the most minimal of information, without any feeling attached. In regard to the hard news reported during the two-hour *Today* news program, news reports were given every half hour: at 7 a.m., 7:30 a.m., 8 a.m., and 8:30 a.m., which resulted in 99 individual updates during the course of the week examined. Of these stories, many were updated multiple times on the same day, leaving a total of 52 stories reported over the course of that week. Many of these stories were reported on more than one day, resulting in a total of 39 different topics reported (see Appendix 1).

Looking first at the 99 updates (see Figure 3), the female/male breakdown shows a majority of the stories were reported by women reporters. The problem with this breakdown is that it equates each of the stories having the same amount of importance and length, which is not the case. While some of the stories were interviews, others were no more than one or two short sentences summarizing any current and new information. Still other, later reports were almost identical to their earlier counterparts, given likely for the sake of those viewers who had just tuned in. Also, one would naturally assume that there were more female reporters than male reporters according to the high number of stories attributed to female reporters. However, all of the updates on the half hour were given by the news anchor, Elizabeth Vargas, and this is, to a great extent, the reason for the women outweighing the men in report coverage four to one.

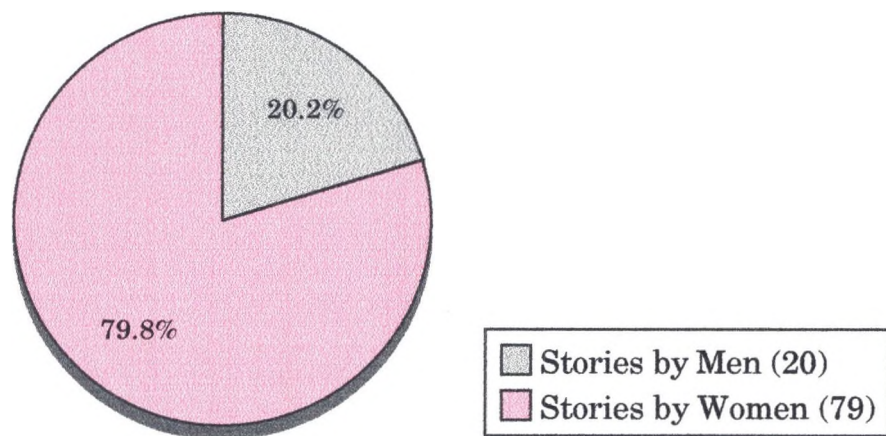


Figure 3. Report Breakdown

Rather than attempting to set up equitable standards for weighing each story which would account for length of report, new information given, and all other variables, the stories were broken down two further ways as mentioned earlier. The first divided up the 99 reports into daily stories in which all the

reports were categorized by story, regardless of how many times it was updated during the day and each day, the individual stories were tallied and then the stories were totaled to get an account for the week. This gave a total of 52 stories during the week, but some of the topics were repeated from day to day.

In looking at this first breakdown (see Figure 4), each day the stories were tabulated and attributed to either a female or male reporter. If there were more than one report during the course of the *Today* program, the reporter who gave the most in-depth report was chosen, in most cases, resulting in the male reporter receiving credit for the story. Overall, the female reporters still reported almost two-thirds of the stories as compared to their male counterparts.

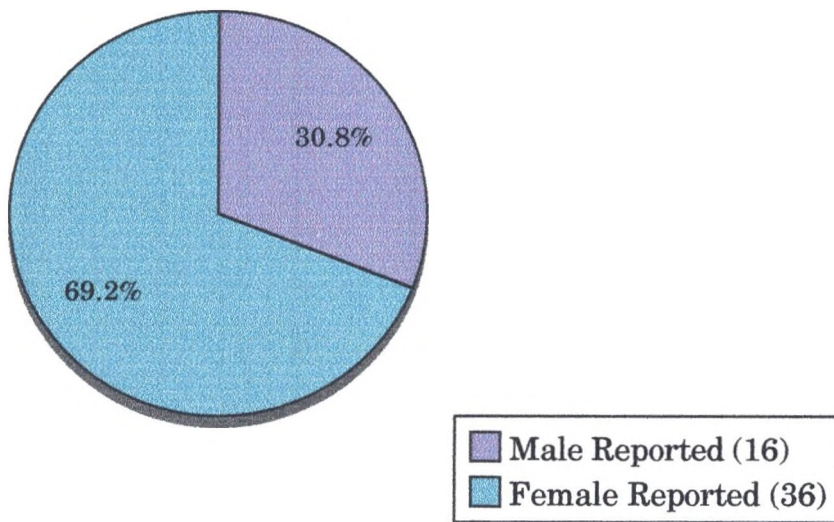


Figure 4. News Update Story Breakdown

The second breakdown, then, narrowed these 52 stories down into topics and each topic, whether repeated numerous times during the week or only mentioned once, was given equal value as a news worthy report. The results were very similar when examining the breakdown of topics and attributing

them to either female or male reporters (see Figure 5). In the 39 topics reported during the one week examined on the *Today* show, only seven of the reports were recounted by the eight male reporters, one of the stories having two male reporters. While there were only three female reporters, they still outweighed the men in stories four to one.

This leads to the assumption that the women, at least in the hard news area of this broadcast, dominate the screen far above the men and this idea contradicts earlier studies about the prominence of women on television. Campbell (1973) discusses the assumptions of the female and male stereotypes and suggests that for a woman to enter the public, and in this case the television, world, is to defy the very root of the female stereotype which is

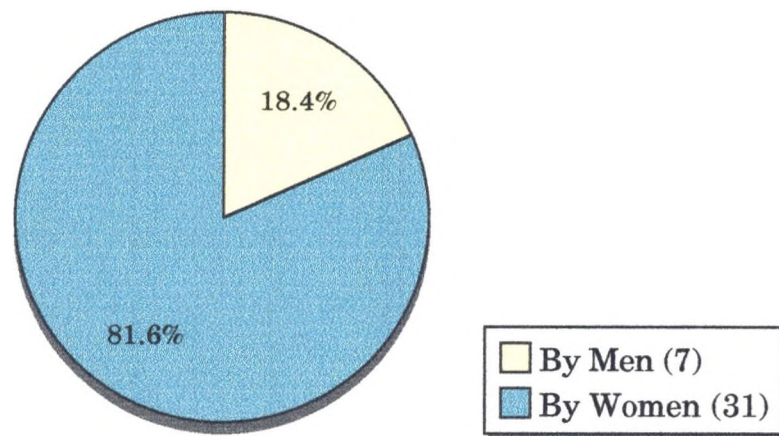


Figure 5. Stories

to be dependent, passive and subservient. Women are supposed to stay in the home and be the primary care-giver and nurturer, not a money-maker and authority figure, which a reporter is assumed to be. Tannen (1990) also discusses the stereotype expectations when she discusses the idea of private and public talk. Private talk is any conversation that occurs in the home and is about domestic issues whereas public talk is generally thought of as having

greater relevance and importance, as it includes “shop talk” and world or social issues. She asserts that women are expected and far more likely to engage in private talk as opposed to public talk and since public talk necessarily includes television, it is surprising that women appear to take a dominant role in this setting.

Sanders (1993) cites a network survey supporting the idea of women as little seen on television; as a matter of fact, the February 1992 survey cited in Sanders’ work stated that women correspondents were 14% of the total number of television correspondents (p. 167) (see Figure 6).

If this is the case, then it bears a moment of examination whether or not during this week, the *Today* show news reports and reporters are consistent with these findings (see Figure 7). As has been illustrated, the *Today* program during the week examined, had almost double the female representation of reporters as compared to the national average.

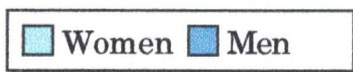
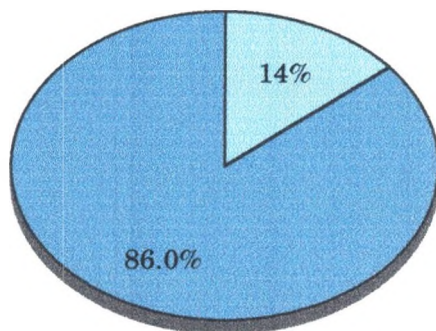


Figure 6. National Survey 2/92

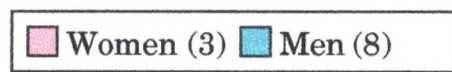
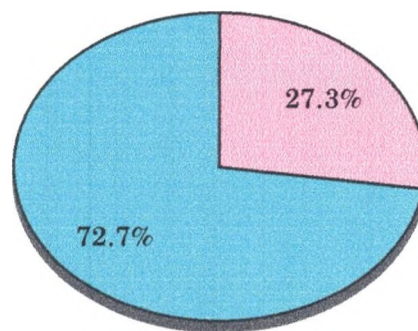


Figure 7. Number of Reporters

Rakow and Kranich (1991) support the rarity of women as television reporters. They discuss television as a masculine genre and trace it back to the idea of hard and soft news creating news along the lines of gender. Beasley

(1993) examines the delineation of hard and soft news and concludes that due “to the blatant sexual overtones of these terms” (p. 126), it is necessary to move away from classifying news as one or the other and from teaching women to write only feature stories and men to report the headline news.

If it can be stated, then, that the hard news is confined to the brief segments every half hour, and that both Couric and Lauer’s reports are feature stories, then the next question to ask is how the air time is divided up between the two co-hosts. Since this study was conducted using only paper transcripts, air time was calculated according to the program format outline diagrammed earlier, and with an approximation of the average time length one transcribed page would take in an interview setting. The base time for an interview was calculated at five minutes, consistent with Constantinople’s (personal communication, June 30, 1995) breakdown of *Today*. In a page count, three pages of transcribed interview is approximately five minutes. After counting the number of pages for the interviews and ascribing them to one of the co-hosts, an approximate total time per co-host was calculated (see Figure 8).

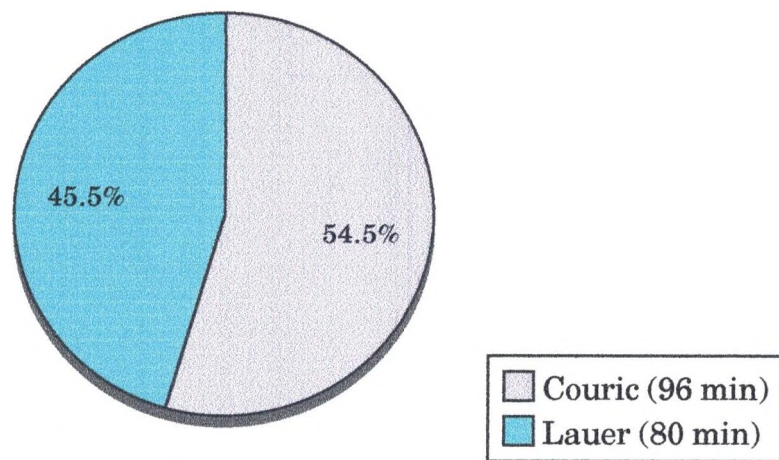


Figure 8. Interview Time

Past research in female and male communication would expect Lauer to greatly outweigh Couric in the amount of interview time. Spender (1980) discusses the dominant male and the muted female, where the man is the one in control and the woman often is placed in a secondary role. Lakoff (1973), Tannen (1990) and many others state that society places women in the stereotypical role of the quiet homemaker who is to be the great listener as the male becomes the primary orator, particularly since language was created using a male standard and therefore is the correct method of communication.

Even though *Today* has both female and male co-hosts, if language is indeed male created and woman's talk is considered deficient, it was expected that the male co-anchor would have higher amounts of speaking time than the female co-anchor was allotted. As this is clearly not the case, the reasons for this must be investigated. Perhaps the reason is that the woman, Couric, has conformed to using the male language patterns and not the stereotypical female communication structures, thus allowing her to become successful in the news and television world. If Couric does speak in a stereotypical female pattern, then possibly the reason lies in the simple fact that the executive producer attempts to divide interviews equally.

Within the interviews, language and vocabulary differences play a key role in determining speech influenced by gender stereotypes. Studies have shown that women and men speak differently, using different words and having different meanings. Many researchers have attributed this to the socialization of women and men while others feel that these differences are biological. Do women really choose different words and have unique speech patterns? Can the reasons for these differences be determined? Before being able to answer this question, the conversations of Couric and Lauer must be examined to see if there are any unique patterns that can be attributed to one gender or the

other. In looking at the conversations between co-hosts, particularly the bantering, no obvious differences were immediately detected.

Couric: We're back at 8:30 on this Friday morning, taking a gander at Central Park.

Lauer: Looking north to the George Washington Bridge.

Couric: Yeah.

Lauer: That's the Hudson River.

Couric: What a beautiful, clear day. Lots of folks are out enjoying it. I think they're nuts, but we appreciate them coming here. It's what did you say, 20 degrees or something?

Lauer: Twenty degrees, yeah.

Couric: That gentleman is so *nice*. He comes here every day. I'm starting to get a little concerned.

Lauer: Wait a second. First, they're nuts, now, because he holds a nice sign up, they're so nice?

Couric: Yeah. Well, that one, that particular guy. He's a very, very *nice* guy. There's some youngsters from the Boston area.
(Zucker, 1995, February 3, p. 40-41)

In the above conversation, where Couric and Lauer discuss the weather, the one noticeable verbal communication difference was Couric's use of the word "nice." This word, used in the context which Couric intends, is about a man whom she has never met, but has observed over the course of a number of days. This word, "nice," while a stereotypical female word as suggested by Borisoff and Merrill (1985), is alone not enough evidence to make any conclusive arguments. The following excerpt is another illustration of the

words the co-hosts use in their unscripted bantering. Again Couric uses a few stereotypical female words.

Couric: Michelle, I hope you're watching. Emory will be home soon.
Got a *pretty good* crowd out there...

Lauer: Right.

Couric: ...and it's *really* cold today.

Lauer: Twenty degrees out there this morning, snow on the way...

Couric: That's right.

Lauer: ...for the East coast.

Couric: I know. What, six to--to--inches to a foot...

Lauer: They say...

Couric: ...is that right?

Lauer: ...six inches. possibly, in the city. A little bit north and west of here could be a foot, yeah. First storm of the season.

Couric: I'm *kind of* excited about it, though.

Lauer: Actually, I am, too. And I know a lot of people don't like it when I say that sort of thing, but I am looking forward to it.

Couric: Yeah, let's get out the sleds, right? I'm Katie Couric here in Studio 1A with Matt Lauer while Bryant's in a much warmer climate enjoying himself. Ahead in this hour, we're going to have some advice on how to be a smart shopper at the supermarket. Too many of us waste both time and money when we go grocery shopping. We're going to learn how to avoid doing both. Matt...

Lauer: Also ahead, too many of us don't know the score when we go to the bank. On *Today's Money*, we'll show you how you can

negotiate--that's right, negotiate some of those bank fees and charges. They seem a little high? We'll do something about it. Later in the hour, something I'm going to enjoy, I'm going to get to talk to Melanie Griffith.

Couric: Well, isn't that special? And we're going to meet first-time novelist, Linda Davies, whose book "Nest of Vipers" is getting *a lot of* attention, a movie deal already, and she's very much like the protagonist in her novel. So I'm sure looking forward to that as well. (Zucker, 1995, February 3, p. 26-27)

Borisoff and Merrill (1985) stated that there were obvious verbal differences between female and male speech. They cited four verbal patterns, including tag questions, qualifiers, vocabulary differences and disclaimers which are stereotypical found in women's speech. Lakoff (1973) also assumed several verbal differences in speech patterns and considered women's talk to be deficient in these areas. Campbell (1973) and others examined women's speech patterns and found these differences as well.

In studying both Couric and Lauer's communication patterns and word choice, few apparent differences were found. In the above excerpt, Couric did use some stereotypical female words and phrases. While this study does not wish to imply that communication containing any of these stereotypical word choices or patterns would diminish an individual's speech, Couric's language showed confidence in herself and her position and contained few of the expected verbal differences.

Even as both co-anchors' language and word choice was similar, there remains a question of who dominated the interaction or controlled the conversation shifts. In essence, who interrupts whom more? That question

has plagued gender communication researchers for years and studies have shown that men traditionally interrupt women more than the reverse. Whether this is true or not was another area of investigation in this study, examining the communication, and particularly the spontaneous speech between Couric and Lauer.

It was expected that Lauer would dominate the bantering and that he would cut Couric off whenever he had something to say. Couric was expected to follow the stereotypical expected female pattern of minimal interruptions and allow the male co-host to control the conversations.

Couric: We are back up in our satellite studio here at Studio 1A.

Lauer: This chair is not the more comfortable thing in the world.

Couric: Well, this--the pillow behind it is a little weird. I wonder what was going on--I was sitting on the pillow during that Sam Waterston interview, and I was thinking, 'This isn't comfortable at all.' But, anyway.

Lauer: If you take it out it's better.

Couric: Yeah, oh really?

Lauer: Mm-hmm.

Couric: Oops.

Lauer: Oh. Yours is attached. Don't do that.

Couric: No, it's not. I got it. Ok. Good idea. Do you do that at home?

Lauer: Do you like Chinese food?

Couric: Huh?

Lauer: Do you like Chinese food?

Couric: I do, I do love Chinese food.

Lauer: Do you find, though, that it's difficult to find good Chinese food,

that there are probably 4,000 Chinese restaurants in Manhattan, but to find a good one is difficult?

Couric: It is tough. That's why I've started to make my own Chinese food at home, Matt. I bought a new wok and some peanut oil, and I've really gotten to be quite an expert, actually. I'm great.

Lauer: Now what's your favorite dish?

Couric: Well, I like--I like the moo-shoo pork. But, the pancakes are sometimes very difficult to get just the right consistency, just the right--the right thinness.

Lauer: Right.

Couric: But I make a heck of a moo-shoo pork, and there's some other dishes.

Lauer: When you--when you make the pancake, when you spin it, how big do you make them?

Couric: Oh, no, you don't spin it. You actually roll them out, and...

Lauer: Oh, good. I thought I was going to catch you on that.

Couric: Yeah, yeah. No, I'm kidding, I don't make my own Chinese food. I used to do that, though, in a wok. But, yeah, I don't know, I eat a lot of Chinese food, almost too much. I'm almost OD'd on Chinese food.

Lauer: Yeah.

Couric: Because I'm always getting Chinese carry-out.

Lauer: I like the worst things you can order: barbecued spare ribs.

Couric: Oh, you do?

Lauer: Oh, man.

Couric: I would never get that from a Chinese restaurant for some

reason, even though they're good, but...

Lauer: Oh, they're great.

Couric: Really? Well, sometimes.

Lauer: Barbecued chicken wings.

Couric: Really, you can get that from a Chi...

Lauer: Oh, yeah.

Couric: See, I would just call--if I wanted that, I would just call the wings place and get buffalo wings. (Zucker, 1995, February 1, p. 38-40)

Above is an example of the conversation styles of the co-anchors and their interrupting each other. While the other illustrations fail to show any verbal differences between the co-hosts, this one follows a bit more stereotypical pattern. During this conversation, Lauer does two very stereotypical male things. First, he offers advice to Couric and then he changes the subject, not answering Couric's question and expecting her to follow his conversation lead. This follows very closely what Spender (1980), Tannen (1990) and Glass (1992), among others, suggests will happen in mixed-sex groups that the man or men will interrupt and change the conversation topic as part of their desire to dominate and control.

Couric: Matt was just telling us he had a weekend form H-E-L-L. How so?

Lauer: Well, I was flying out to see Kristen in Waterloo, Iowa...

Couric: His girlfriend.

Lauer: ...girlfriend, and I left here Friday night...

Couric: He gets so bummed when I do that.

Lauer: ...right after Al [Roker] and I did the news. (Zucker, 1995, January 30, p. 27)

Here Couric interrupts Lauer to inform the audience who Lauer is talking about and then to offer an aside about what she just said. Her interruptions let the audience in on a conversation that would otherwise exclude viewers had she not offered some background information. This interruption could be an attempt to change the conversation, refocusing it from Lauer back to herself or it could be that she is aware of the audience and their needs.

Couric: You know, there is no longer any show on TV that I just make it a point to watch it.

Lauer: Well, if I miss Seinfeld, I...

Couric: Isn't that terrible?

Lauer: ...I feel really bad. (Zucker, 1995, January 30, p. 43)

Here, Couric again interrupts Lauer, this time with a bit of sarcastic sympathy. Unlike the previous example, this time it is not a refocusing of the conversation, rather Couric offers her own aside, not intending to detract from what Lauer is saying, just give her own commentary about it. In the next example, when Lauer interrupts, he corrects Couric, although she was not incorrect in her comments. This could be a simple assisting with the explanation of what is happening or an attempt to show superior knowledge.

Couric: We're back at 8:26. We just had a wild thing. We were taking a picture with the flirts...

Lauer: A photo-op.

Couric: ...the flirting coach and the flirtee. (Zucker, 1995, January 31, p. 36)

In the following example, both Couric and Lauer interrupt each other. As can be seen, this conversation could be changed or control could be taken by either co-host but rather than changing the conversation, both follow the same train of thought, even using the same type of one word conformation when interrupting the other. This conversation illustrates the likemindedness of Couric and Lauer as well as their camaraderie and mutual respect for the other. It also serves as an example of their equal relationship, neither trying to one-up the other and dominate.

Lauer: This morning in the newsroom we were watching the complete interview he did when he was 100 here on the *Today* show. He was spectacular...

Couric: Yeah.

Lauer: ...just incredible.

Couric: And he was in great shape...

Lauer: Absolutely.

Couric: ...almost to the very end...

Lauer: Yeah.

Couric: ...which is truly amazing. (Zucker, 1995, February 1, p. 4-5)

After having read the conversations between Couric and Lauer, it was difficult to tell who interrupted whom more, both did their share of cutting the other off as well as vying for conversation control on occasion. Both also

interjected comments which intended to support the other's thoughts and ideas. Upon closer review of the co-hosts' communication with one another, generally, they did not seem to follow the stereotypical patterns researchers including Borisoff and Merrill (1985), Tannen (1990), Lakoff (1973) and many others found that men and women follow (see Figure 9). While research has shown that men interrupt women far more frequently than the reverse, Couric interjected her thoughts and comments more often than Lauer. This might be due to Couric and Lauer's permanent positions, Couric as co-host and Lauer as news anchor, but it seems to be more substantial than that. From what was observed, Couric does not fit the stereotypical role of a woman, taking on characteristics generally attributed to men.

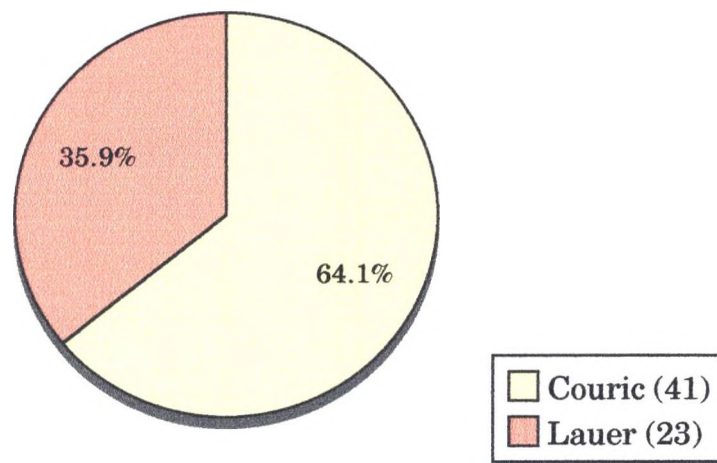


Figure 9. Co-Hosts Interrupt Each Other

Couric and Lauer did not always interact alone; often Al Roker or Willard Scott, both meteorologists for *Today*, or Elizabeth Vargas, stand-in news anchor for the week, were often also involved in the conversations. This multi-dimensional communication potential affected the amount of interruptions as well as who interrupted whom. Therefore, they must be taken into account as well when examining the bantering during the show. In the following example,

Couric and Vargas are carrying on a conversation and Couric is interrupted a couple of times by Vargas. As the conversation continues, the women are interrupted by Roker who acts in a stereotypical manner.

Couric: That whole crew, and then the ER folks are apparently very friendly with the Friends people...

Vargas: Right.

Couric: ...so they all get together and...

Vargas: Probably the new shows together, same season.

Couric: It's a beautiful thing. Yeah but I haven't seen ER since we were out in Los Angeles doing two shows...

Vargas: Mm-hmm?

Couric: ...because it's just too late for me...

Vargas: It's on really late.

Couric: ...and they were so nice because they got me cassettes so I could watch them at my leisure, and I want to see them if I can get them. Have you all...

Roker: You have a VCR at home, don't you?

Couric: Well, yeah, but...

Roker: You set the timer... (Zucker, 1995, January 30, p. 41-42)

What is particularly interesting in the above example is the type of interruptions the genders made. For example, was the interruption a simple affirming word such as yeah, or mm-hmm, or was it a more complex statement where one finished the other's thought or changes the subject? Vargas offers short comments, supporting Couric's conversation and giving immediate verbal feedback which does not generally hinder the communication nor does it

alter the direction of the conversation. However, when Roker gets involved in the conversation, he begins immediately to instruct Couric on the proper method of programming her VCR so that she can tape her program. This idea of Roker imparting his mechanical knowledge to Couric is a stereotypical male response to a woman's comment. Note that Couric did not ask a question or request help, but was given it regardless, viewed as a female who does not have the knowledge or is not capable of managing on her own.

In looking at all of the people involved in on-the-air communication during the one week, it is interesting to see who interrupts whom more (see Figure 10 and Figure 11).

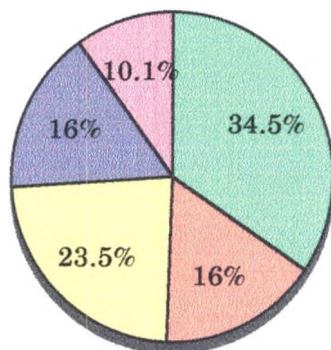


Figure 10. When Couric Speaks

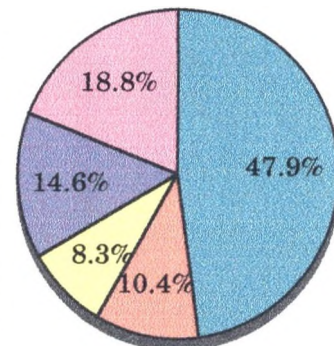
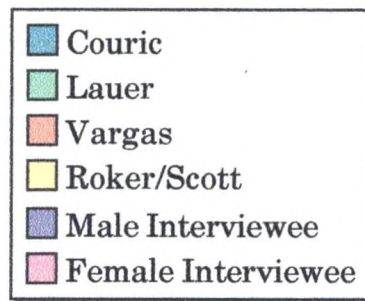


Table 11. When Lauer Speaks

In this study, some expected patterns were followed while others violated the societal norms. Spender (1980) discussed interruptions and stated that

It is difficult to isolate interruptions from amount of talk for he who interrupts most (and I use *he* specifically) tends to do the most talking. According to the stereotype of women's language, females are supposed to nag, chatter, talk too much and listen too little, and are therefore the

prime suspects on any measures of interruption. But research findings reveal just the opposite. In mixed-sex conversations it is primarily males who interrupt females. (p. 43)

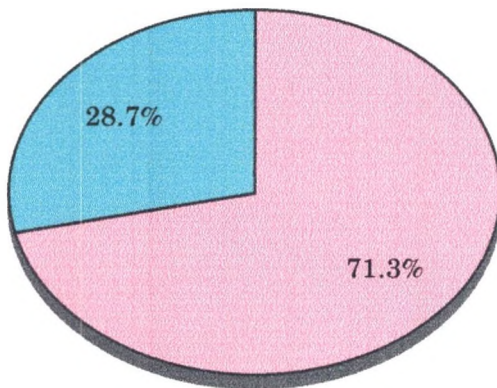
In same sex communication, men interrupt each other frequently. According to Tannen (1990), this can be attributed to the men's need to compete with one another. While it is expected that women interrupt men less frequently than they interrupt women, it was still expected that women would interrupt women less than men interrupt men as, according to the stereotypes, women are not socialized to compete verbally as men are. Glass (1992) suggests that women need more immediate verbal feedback, such words as mm-hmm or simple one word interjections. This may account for many of women's interruptions of other women.

It is important to note that portions of the graph show mixed-sex conversations and other parts are same sex conversations. The same-sex conversations are those in which Lauer is interviewing a man or when Couric is interviewing a woman. Otherwise, both men and women could have been involved in the communication. It was expected, then, that Roker and Scott would interrupt Couric far more than they would interrupt Lauer and they did interrupt Couric three times as much as Lauer. Vargas interrupted Couric more frequently than she did Lauer, and this too was expected as with Couric this was same-sex communication. However, the female interviewees stereotypical should have interrupted Couric more than Lauer but this was not the case. Quite the reverse, female interviewees interrupted Lauer almost twice as often as they interrupted Couric. Male interviewees interrupted both co-hosts about equally while it had been assumed that they would interrupt Couric more. As was noted earlier, the more unexpected deviance from the

interruption expectations was that the co-hosts did not follow the stereotypical expectations. Quite the contrary, Couric interrupted Lauer considerably more than the he interrupted her.

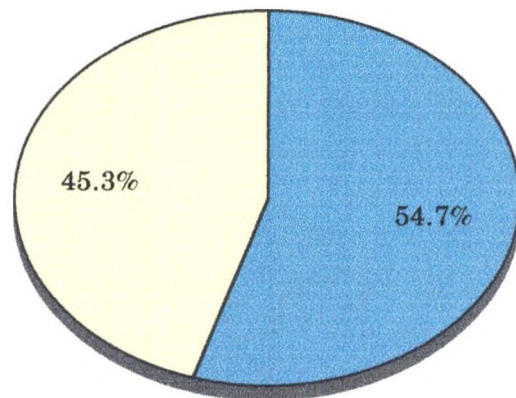
Overall, Couric should have been interrupted far more than Lauer and this was the the case when viewing the week of the *Today* show as a whole (see Figure 12). However, if those stereotypes are completely followed, then while Couric is the one being interrupted, Lauer should be doing the majority of the interruptions, which is not what occurred (see Figure 13).

While Couric was interrupted more than Lauer, this only supports the stereotype as it applies to the secondary characters involved in the communication. Neither Couric nor Lauer, followed the expected stereotypes. This was true whether the stereotypical behavior was interruptions, word choice, verbal differences, or amount of speaking.



■ Couric (119) ■ Lauer (48)

Figure 12. Amount Interrupted



■ Couric (81) ■ Lauer (67)

Figure 13. Co-Hosts Interrupt Others

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research examined female and male communication and the stereotypes associated with the genders. In this content analysis, which was primarily an interpretive, qualitative study, a number of questions have been raised for further research. Before posing those questions, the results of this study should be reiterated.

In the area of soft and hard news, the *Today* show can be classified as a soft news program. Both co-anchors approach their interviews in much the same manner, forming similar questions. One reason for this may be attributed to the fact that the executive producer divides up the interviews between the co-hosts and gives them a list of potential questions (A. Constantinople, personal communication, June 30, 1995). Since the executive producer is a man, based on general stereotypes and expectations from men, one would expect, however, for the suggested questions to resemble some form of fact-finding, probing query. However, each interviewer is able to alter the questions however they choose, including adding and deleting questions at will, allowing co-hosts to phrase their comments in a comfortable sentence and word structure.

Because both co-hosts are either given human interest stories or approach interviews with the intention of finding the emotional angle, all of the interviews conducted by Couric and Lauer were classified as soft news, creating an entire soft news program. Just because this program has been

classified as soft news, does not mean that it contains no hard news elements. Indeed, every half hour there are short news updates, discussing current international and domestic issues. One potential reason for the structure of the program is that the human side appeals to women, who prefer hearing the news in this manner as opposed to the bare facts. The majority of the viewers for a morning program of this nature are women, while the men may turn on the news for the updates at the top of the hour.

Within the hard news area, it originally appeared that female reporters must greatly outweigh the male reporters as the women dominated the screen during these updates. However, fewer than one-third of the reporters were female and the majority of the female-reported stories were given by a single reporter, the stand-in news anchor. This created an interesting question: would these statistics change, and if so, how significantly when Gumbel returned from vacation and Lauer returned as news anchor? Originally, this week was chosen because Gumbel was out of town so it would not be necessary to account for racial issues. However, in regard to the news breaks, Lauer is the permanent news anchor and Vargas is a news correspondent. This might alter the amount of women reporters and as a result, women might not be as visible as they were during this week.

After examining hard and soft news, Couric and Lauer's on-air time was scrutinized to see how it was distributed. Their speech patterns were also investigated to determine what, if any, verbal differences could be observed. Both co-anchors appeared to share the air time about equally, with Couric having just slightly more time than Lauer. This time likely fluctuates from week to week with both anchors receiving about the same amount of time. This was much better than what was expected and may have been influenced by several different factors. First, since the executive producer divides the

time up, the intent is to give both hosts equal time. He also plans the program so neither co-anchor gives two stories back to back. It appeared that the co-hosts were chosen for their similar temperament and assertiveness. If Couric approached the news with a stereotypical female voice, she would probably never been chosen, so speaking in male voice influences her perceived ability to report. As well, with Gumbel on vacation, Couric became the primary co-host and Lauer moved from his news anchor position into the secondary co-host seat. Constantinople (personal communication, June 30, 1995) felt that moving the co-hosts did not influence the news break up, but, this may alter, however insignificantly, the distribution of the news.

No significant differences were found with regard to the stereotypical verbal differences researchers have documented. Couric did use a few words which fall under the stereotypical female patterns. The area of most interest was the differences in interruptions: who interrupted whom more? Couric interrupted much more frequently than did Lauer, inconsistent with the stereotypical expectations. Overall, as far as Couric and Lauer were concerned, both spoke in similar rhetorical patterns and particularly in the bantering, gossip, a type women's talk, was used. These patterns might have changed if Gumbel had been the primary co-host. He might have dominated and controlled the conversations and bantering or interacted more with those on the sidelines. Also, as Lauer would still be a part of the daily conversations as news anchor, his presence, along with Gumbel's, might have created a situation where the men far outweighed the women in interruptions and outspokenness.

This research poses several questions for further study, several mentioned earlier. In order to provide some conclusions about the normal makeup of speech on the *Today* show, it would be necessary to examine the

program when all the anchors and correspondents were in their permanent spots; Gumbel as host and Lauer as news anchor and Vargas as reporter. This may significantly alter the makeup of the program, from the amount of interruptions, the the verbal patterns, and the prominence of women as reporters. A comparison of a standard week with the week in this study might reveal changes in Couric and Lauer or it might reinforce the program as women's talk.

In addition to conducting the study with all the *Today* show talent in their proper places, it would also be interesting to see how the other networks morning news programs measure up. Are there any female co-anchors or reporters who use the stereotypical female voice and if there is, how does this influence her effectiveness? Are there any male co-hosts who tend to speak in a stereotypical female voice and what effect does this have on their reporting? A reexamination of this study under a more feminist research style might also reveal that rather than a deviation from male stereotypes, this program and others like it are intentionally written and spoken in a female voice

In the area of bantering, can this be qualified as gossip, a female pattern? Also, during the bantering, who occupies more air time and who imparts the most useful information? If the video tapes were purchased and the bantering could be seen and heard, what would be the impact of the nonverbal communication and how would body language and vocal tone and pitch effect the stereotypical expectations of the genders?

Finally, in with regard to hard and soft news, these terms imply a hierarchy of importance. Could stories and interviews be broken down in other ways using different, more equal terms? For example, categories could include political issues, human interest stories, features, court hearings, among many other possibilities.

APPENDIX 1

NEWS UPDATE STORY AND REPORTER BREAKDOWN

| <i>Monday, January 30, 1995</i> | <i>News: 7 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 7:30 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8:30 a.m.</i> |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| O.J. Simpson | George Lewis | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Welfare Reform | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Jim Miklaszewski | Elizabeth Vargas |
| San Francisco 49ers win | Kelly O'Donnell | | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Poverty | | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| W. Europe Winter Storms | Elizabeth Vargas | | | |
| Pacific NW Earthquakes | Elizabeth Vargas | | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| World Trade Bomb Trial | | Elizabeth Vargas | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Space Shuttle Discovery Launch | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Smithsonian Exhibition | | | Joe Johns | |
| <i>Tuesday, January 31, 1995</i> | | | | |
| | <i>News: 7 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 7:30 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8:30 a.m.</i> |
| O.J. Simpson | David Bloom | Elizabeth Vargas | George Lewis | Elizabeth Vargas |
| UN Peace Force to Haiti | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| W. Europe Winter Storms | Elizabeth Vargas | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| AIDS | | Elizabeth Vargas | Bob Kur | |
| Clinton's \$\$ Loan to Mexico | | | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| World Trade Bomb Trial | Rehema Ellis | | | |
| Smithsonian Exhibition | Elizabeth Vargas | | | |
| Japan's Rulers Visit Kobe Quake | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Jack Kemp not Rep. Candidate | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| on Dateline: Killer in Mental Inst. | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Term-Limit Reform | | | Joe Johns | |
| Sickle Cell Anemia | | | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| <i>Wednesday, February 1, 1995</i> | | | | |
| | <i>News: 7 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 7:30 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8:30 a.m.</i> |
| O.J. Simpson | David Bloom | Elizabeth Vargas | George Lewis | Elizabeth Vargas |
| W. Europe Winter Storms | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Richard Roth | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Clinton's \$\$ Loan to Mexico | Jim Miklaszewski | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| Rising American Interest Rates | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| George Abbott Death | Elizabeth Vargas | | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| PLO, Israel, Jordan, Egypt Summit | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Cancer Research | | | Bob Kur | |
| Ag. Dept. Food Inspection | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Space Shuttle Discovery Launch | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| on Dateline: Air Force Pilot & Son | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |

APPENDIX 1 (cont.)

NEWS UPDATE STORY AND REPORTER BREAKDOWN

| <i>Thursday, February 2, 1995</i> | <i>News: 7 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 7:30 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8:30 a.m.</i> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| O.J. Simpson | George Lewis | Elizabeth Vargas | David Bloom | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Rising American Interest Rates | Mike Jensen | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Space Shuttle Discovery Launch | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Washington City Debt | Elizabeth Vargas | | Bob Faw | |
| Public Schools' Disrepair | | | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Earthquake in Japan | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Groundhog Did Not See Shadow | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Presidential Live Item Veto | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Cuban Refugees | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| | | | | |
| <i>Friday, February 3, 1995</i> | <i>News: 7 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 7:30 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8 a.m.</i> | <i>News: 8:30 a.m.</i> |
| O.J. Simpson | George Lewis | Elizabeth Vargas | David Bloom | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Fred Briggs Death | Elizabeth Vargas | | | |
| Boeing Job Cuts | Elizabeth Vargas | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| Space Shuttle Discovery Launch | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| MI Preemie Baby's Dad Not Guilty | | Elizabeth Vargas | Elizabeth Vargas | |
| Minimum Wage Increase | Jim Miklaszewski | | | |
| Surgeon General Replacement | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| on Meet the Press: Dole & Byrd | | Elizabeth Vargas | | |
| Welfare Reform | | | Joe Johns | |
| Trade Sanctions Against China | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| US Unemployment Figures | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |
| on Dateline: Feuding Families | | | | Elizabeth Vargas |

APPENDIX 2
INTERRUPTIONS

| Monday, January 30, 95 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------|-------------|--------------------|----------|---------------|
| <u>Speaker</u> | <u>Interrupter</u> | | | | <u>Interviewee</u> | | <u>Totals</u> |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 11 | 8 | 12 | 4 | 4 | 39 |
| Lauer | 10 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 16 |
| Vargas | 1 | 1 | | | | | 2 |
| Roker/Scott | 11 | 4 | | | | | 15 |
| Male Interviewee | 2 | 5 | | | | | 7 |
| Female Interviewee | 1 | 0 | | | | | 1 |
| Totals | 25 | 21 | 9 | 14 | 7 | 4 | |
| Tuesday, January 31, 95 | | | | | | | |
| <u>Speaker</u> | <u>Interrupter</u> | | | | <u>Interviewee</u> | | <u>Totals</u> |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 11 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 21 |
| Lauer | 1 | | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Vargas | | 0 | | | | | 0 |
| Roker/Scott | 1 | 2 | | | | | 3 |
| Male Interviewee | 7 | 0 | | | | | 7 |
| Female Interviewee | 2 | 0 | | | | | 2 |
| Totals | 11 | 13 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 0 | |
| Wednesday, February 1, 95 | | | | | | | |
| <u>Speaker</u> | <u>Interrupter</u> | | | | <u>Interviewee</u> | | <u>Totals</u> |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 12 | 2 | 11 | 2 | 4 | 31 |
| Lauer | 6 | | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 10 |
| Vargas | 1 | 0 | | | | | 1 |
| Roker/Scott | 2 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| Male Interviewee | 4 | 0 | | | | | 4 |
| Female Interviewee | 9 | 6 | | | | | 15 |
| Totals | 22 | 19 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 7 | |

APPENDIX 2 (cont.)

INTERRUPTIONS

| Thursday, February 2, 95 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Speaker</i> | <i>Interrupter</i> | | | | <i>Interviewee</i> | | Totals |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 3 | 3 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 15 |
| Lauer | 1 | | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 8 |
| Vargas | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| Roker/Scott | 0 | 0 | | | | | 0 |
| Male Interviewee | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| Female Interviewee | 0 | 0 | | | | | 0 |
| Totals | 9 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 12 | 2 | |
| Friday, February 3, 95 | | | | | | | |
| <i>Speaker</i> | <i>Interrupter</i> | | | | <i>Interviewee</i> | | Totals |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 13 |
| Lauer | 5 | | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 12 |
| Vargas | 4 | 2 | | | | | 6 |
| Roker/Scott | 0 | 0 | | | | | 0 |
| Male Interviewee | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| Female Interviewee | 1 | 2 | | | | | 3 |
| Totals | 14 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 8 | |
| Week Totals | | | | | | | |
| <i>Speaker</i> | <i>Interrupter</i> | | | | <i>Interviewee</i> | | Totals |
| | Couric | Lauer | Vargas | Roker/Scott | Male | Female | |
| Couric | | 41 | 19 | 28 | 19 | 12 | 119 |
| Lauer | 23 | | 5 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 48 |
| Vargas | 9 | 4 | | | | | 13 |
| Roker/Scott | 14 | 7 | | | | | 21 |
| Male Interviewee | 22 | 7 | | | | | 29 |
| Female Interviewee | 13 | 8 | | | | | 21 |
| Totals | 81 | 67 | 24 | 32 | 26 | 21 | |

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