

‘Gender as a multi-layered issue in journalism’

A multi-method approach to studying barriers sustaining gender inequality in Belgian newsrooms.

In feminist media studies there has been a growing interest in media production in recent years. The research by those scholars has documented that despite the increase of female journalists in the last decades, journalism remains horizontally and vertically divided along gender lines. Although the blending of qualitative and quantitative methods can offer a fuller understanding of the mechanisms sustaining gender inequality in journalism, most studies either focus on quantifying the representation of women in media production or use qualitative methods to explore how female journalists experience these barriers. The purpose of this paper is to fill the lack of relevant multi-method research on gender inequality in journalism. In order to gain insight into the structural position of women in the journalistic workforce, we conducted a large-scale survey in Belgium in which all active professional journalists were invited to participate. These results are explored more in depth by means of qualitative interviews with 22 female journalists. The analysis confirms the existence of all ‘traditional’ barriers that women experience in the journalistic profession. The added value of this study is that we registered several additional difficulties for women in journalism, and most importantly that we gained insight into the strategies that our respondents use to deal with these gender-related barriers. These strategies were related to the support of a partner, the flexibility in the newsroom towards journalists with children, the choice to work part-time or freelance and the use of new communication technologies.

Keywords: gender inequality, journalism, gender segregation, Belgium, multi-method approach

Introduction

In recent years, feminist media scholars have developed a growing interest in the media production process, the structure of media organizations and the people working behind the scenes of these companies (North, 2009). The recent research by those scholars reveals a considerable increase in the number of women in journalism in the last decades (Byerly, 2013; Franks, 2013; Robinson, 2008; Tsui & Lee, 2012). In Western countries, a similar trend is noticeable in journalism education, where women account for a majority of students (Beasley & Theus, 1988; Creedon, 1989; Gallagher, 1995; Ross & Carter, 2011; van Zoonen, 1994). This numerical progress of females both in newsrooms and education has led to optimistic views in the literature on the future of women in journalism (Mills, 1997; Steiner, 2014). A group of scholars was convinced that once women would reach a representation of one-third in the newsroom, they would obtain a “critical mass” that is able to change the dominant male journalism culture, news content and journalistic work practices. However, there are several reasons why this optimism should be tempered. Many authors have uncovered that, despite the increase in the number of women, the field of journalism is still organized based on masculine values (Creedon, 1993; Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010; Melin, 2008; Ross, 2001). The equal treatment of male and female journalists is prevented by a wide range of interrelated mechanisms. Researchers have shown that journalism is characterized by a deeply rooted gender segregation (Chambers, Steiner & Fleming, 2004; de Bruin, 1999; Gill, 2007; Lachover, 2005). Female journalists are still strongly underrepresented in older age groups, in decision-making positions and in prestigious news beats and media sectors.

To date, research on gender issues in journalism is more or less unexplored research territory in Belgium. International studies either focus on quantitative methods and exclusively provide statistical information about the employment patterns of male and female journalists or use qualitative methods to gain insight into the experiences of female journalists. Researchers note that although the ‘body count’ a useful and necessary step in monitoring gender inequality in journalism, it is often not sufficient to understand the subtle and invisible mechanisms of gender bias (Creedon, 1993; de Bruin, 2000; North, 2012). Because the blending of qualitative and quantitative methods can offer a fuller understanding of the mechanisms sustaining gender inequality in newsrooms, the aim of this paper is this to fill this lack of relevant multi-method research on the status of women in Belgian journalism. The central research questions of the paper were: To what extent is the field of journalism in Belgium segregated along gender lines and how do female journalists experience gender-related obstacles in their professional life. In order to gain insight into the structural position of women in the journalistic workforce, we conducted a large-scale survey in Belgium in which all active professional journalists were invited to participate. Thereupon, the study ‘moves beyond the

body count' by conducting qualitative interviews in order to attain deeper knowledge of the experiences and the perceptions of female journalists. Studying the way women experience and perceive mechanisms of gender bias in journalism is a fundamental step in exposing subtle forms of discrimination. Hence, this study can be an important foundation for organizational policies that are aimed at countering gender imbalance in newsrooms.

Literature review

Gendered journalism

Several researchers have documented that journalistic organizations are profoundly gendered (Djerf-Pierre, 2006; Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010; Melin, 2008). This means gender expectations are deeply embedded in this professional field. Perceptions of what is male and what is female penetrate newsrooms at different levels. This gender dichotomy influences the structure, the development and the dynamics of journalistic organizations. First, many studies characterize the structure of journalism in terms of a deeply rooted vertical and horizontal gender segregation. Women are strongly under-represented in the positions, the news areas and the media sectors with high levels of power and status (Chambers et al., 2004; Elmore, 2007; Franks, 2013; Gill, 2007; Goward, 2006; Lee & Man, 2008, van Zoonen, 1998). Second, this is reflected in journalism culture. Demoor, Saeys, De Clercq and Reymenants (2000) define the culture of organizations as a set of (informal) rules that determine the functioning of (workers in) the organization. These rules are based on mutual values, symbols and beliefs that are consciously or unconsciously adopted by the employers and strongly influence their behaviour. De Bruin (1999) notes that these cultural values are often taken for granted, embodied in convention, custom and professional rules. They structure relationships and practices and construct a 'gendered sub-structure' in the organization. The next section will elaborate on several examples of such gendered sub-structures in journalism.

The demand for total availability

Even though women in many professional fields experience the difficulties of reconciling domestic responsibilities with work responsibilities, this obstacle seems even more prominent when regarding journalism since this profession is characterized by a continuous need to be available and to make last changes in work organization (Aldridge, 2001; De Clercq, 2002; Lee & Man, 2008; van Zoonen, 1998). Although this demand for total availability is often considered an organizational necessity in journalism, several authors see this as an example a gendered substructure and of how journalistic culture is still organized around a male norm (de Bruin, 2000; Ross, 2001; van Zoonen, 1994). This combination is experienced as more difficult by female journalists than by their male counterparts

because of a division of household tasks according to traditional role patterns (Ziamou, 2000). Female journalists often carry a disproportionate share of the household work after their journalistic tasks, which is often referred to as the 'second shift' or the 'double burden' for women in journalism (Everbach, 2009; Demoor et al., 2000). This incompatibility of journalism and motherhood is an often cited reason for the early departure of female journalists in this profession (Aldridge, 2001; Elmore, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2005; Paulussen, Raeymaeckers, De Keyser & Van Leuven, 2010; Ross, 2001; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). North (2009) suggests that this male norm is made invisible by neoliberal discourses in newsrooms that frame women's decision to leave journalism as a personal life choice, instead of embedding it in a broader structural or institutional context. According to Hardin & Whiteside (2009) this is fuelled by the dominant essentialist belief that female journalists have a natural urge to take care their children and their husband and that they are biologically more suitable for domestic responsibilities. In other words, women leave journalism because they feel a *"biological 'pull' rather than a workplace 'push'"* (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009, p. 629). This results in the idea that specific gender politics (or policies) aimed at creating a better work life balance are unnecessary. Hence, female journalists are frequently forced to choose between their career and motherhood. Moreover, this is one of the reasons why optimism that is based on the substantial increase in the number of female journalists has been shown to be partially incorrect (Peters, 2001). When the inflow of female journalists is equal to the outflow this can result in a stagnation in the growth in the number of women in journalism, a trend which is often referred to as the 'revolving door'-effect (Hardin, Shain & Poniatowski, 2008).

Vertical gender segregation

The vertical segregation of positions in journalism is another example of how gender permeates the structure of the field of journalism. Numerous studies demonstrate that the increase in women in journalism has not reached the decision-making level (Chambers et al., 2004; Franks, 2013; Gallagher, 1995; Gill, 2007; Goward, 2006). Female journalists are strongly underrepresented in positions that are associated with high levels of power and symbolic capital (Djerf-Pierre, 2005). Moreover, even in countries where there is gender parity in the journalistic workforce, women who can make it to the top level are an exception (Byerly, 2013). Several studies show that women in journalism face an invisible barrier that limits their chances for advancement, often referred to as the glass ceiling (Chambers et al., 2004; Robinson, 2008). This underrepresentation of women at the top level of media organizations is sustained by a wide range of interrelated factors. Firstly, female journalists are often excluded from the informal exchange of professional knowledge and socialization in the old boys network (Aldridge, 2001; Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Delano,

2004; Kyung-Hee, 2006; Phalen, 2010). Secondly, opportunities for on-the-job training are unequally distributed between male and female journalists (Melin-Higgins, 2004). This difference can be brought back to the idea that, since female journalists often leave the company or choose to work part-time, the return on investment for the media companies when investing in training for women is not guaranteed (Robinson, 2008). This reduces the chances for female journalists to participate in key learning situations that are crucial for career development (Smith, 1980). Furthermore, female journalists have to deal with stereotypical thought patterns about the management capacities of men and women (Lee & Man, 2008; North, 2012). These stereotypes result in the idea that women are less competent and less suitable for leadership positions because they are too sensitive, too empathic or too soft. Fröhlich (2004), for example, uses the concept of the 'friendliness trap' to refer to the vicious circle that female journalists have to deal with. When they enter journalism, women are appreciated because of certain typically female capacities such as aiming for dialogue and consensus, honesty and sensitivity. However, these characteristics have often been interpreted as bad leadership capacities. In decision-making positions, typically male characteristics such as competition and assertiveness are valued more. Furthermore, numerous studies indicate that women who do make it to the top level, face some additional forms of gender bias. For example, they have to deal with a constant pressure to succeed or to adapt masculine management styles and priorities (Phalen, 2010), they are suspected of favouring other female journalists (Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010) or they get negative, sexist reactions from male co-workers (van den Wijngaard, 1992).

Horizontal gender segregation

Studies show that the field of journalism is also horizontally segregated and characterized by a gender-specific division of news areas and media sectors (Demoor et al., 2000; Elmore, 2007; Lee & Man, 2008; Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010; van Zoonen, 1998). Female journalists are overrepresented in traditionally feminine, 'softer' news areas and media sectors with low levels of prestige such as human interest, lifestyle and fashion news. Men, on the one hand, outnumber women in hard news reporting such as political news, financial news and crime news. Several authors note that this gendered division between hard news and soft news reflects the division between the public and the private sphere in the social order (McLaughlin, 1998; Steiner, 2007). Male dominated hard news beats are associated with a high status, with the watchdog role of the press in a democracy and with the public sphere as defined by Habermas (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox, 1974), whereas women are traditionally confined to the private sphere and, therefore, more active in softer news beats that correspond with their domestic tasks (van Zoonen, 1994). However, although these divisions are clear, many journalists believe that journalism is gender neutral and avoid discussing the existence of a division of news topics based on gender (Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010). Secondly, the participation of

female journalists is related to the status of the media sector. Less prestigious media sectors such as are more accessible to female journalists than prestigious media sectors. Van Zoonen (1994) clarifies this based on the example of the radio sector. She describes how the chances for women in the radio sector increased because the status of this medium was declining as the popularity of television increased. On the other hand, according to the velvet ghetto thesis of Creedon (1993) the increase of female journalists in a media sector will be accompanied by a decrease in the prestige and in the salaries.

Methodology and data

The empirical research adopted a mixed-method research design in order to answer the following two research questions:

- R1: To what extent is Belgian journalism segregated along gender lines?
- R2: How do female journalists experience gender-related obstacles in their professional life?

These research questions were answered by using the data of a large-scale journalists survey combined with in-depth interviews. The survey was conducted between December 2012 and February 2013. All active Belgian professional journalists were invited to participate. In total 1640 of 4913 active journalists (866 Dutch-speaking and 774 French-speaking) completed the questionnaire, which means the response rate was 33%. The sample was representative for the entire professional group for age and gender. The questionnaire was based on similar international journalists surveys, for example, conducted by David Weaver and his colleagues in the United States (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2007). For the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium we gathered longitudinal data because the survey was also conducted in 2003 and 2013. The survey data were combined with the data of qualitative interviews based on a semi-structured questionnaire. The data collection, coding and analysis followed a cyclic pattern in accordance with the Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We interviewed 22 female journalists (one pretest) between 25 and 88 years old. Two respondents had left the profession to become teachers in journalism education and one journalist was in retirement. The other interviewees were still active as journalists and had a wide range of positions (journalist, editor, editor-in-chief and news manager) and worked for different media (national quality newspaper, national popular newspaper, regional newspaper, online medium, magazine, public service television, private television, regional television). The duration of the interviews ranged between 30 and 90 minutes.

Results

The participation of women

According to the Belgian survey, 34.5% of journalists in 2013 were females. This is still lower than the ratio of females in the labor force at large. According to data of the FPS Economy, S.M.E.s, Self-employed and Energy, the labor rate participation rates for women is 45.5%. Moreover, longitudinal data of the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium demonstrate that the increase in the number of women in journalism is not a linear process. After the percentage of women had fallen from 29.8% in 2003 to 27.8% in 2008, it has increased to 31.9% in 2013. These findings indicate that the pace of the numerical progress of women in Flemish journalism is rather slow. During the interviews all the respondents confirmed the considerable inflow of female co-workers in recent years, especially in young age groups. They emphasized that this increase was accompanied by a greater acceptance and a recognition of their capabilities by male co-workers. The connection between age and the representation of women was also reflected in the survey data. The age distributions of men and women differ from each other significantly ($p=0,000$). Although the man-women ratio in the youngest age group is almost balanced (49.3% men to 50.7% women), the percentage of women drops sharply from the 35-44 age group to the 45-54 age group (from 50.7% to 37.4%). In the oldest age group (55 years and older) women represent only one-fifth (20.2%) of the respondents. Female journalists (40 years old) are on average five years younger than male journalists (45 years old).

Table 1: Man-woman ratio by age groups in Belgium

Age group	#	%	#	%
	Men	Men	Women	Women
- 34	166	49,3	171	50,7
34-44	263	62,6	157	37,4
45-54	358	69,4	158	30,6
55 +	265	79,8	67	20,2

Work-life balance

The results in the previous paragraph indicate that there is a significant fall-out of female journalists in age groups above 35 years old. The reason that was given in the interviews for the early departure of women was connected to the work-life balance. All the interviewees gave examples of female co-workers who had left the profession because it is incompatible motherhood. When we asked for personal reasons to consider a departure from journalism, most interviewees also referred in first instance to the combination of journalism and a family. Especially the unpredictability and the irregular working hours were often mentioned as obstacles. The interviewed mother-journalists

testified that they have to search for *'a delicate balance'* between journalistic tasks and the care for the family. Many respondents indicated that they have to *'hope and search till every link fits'*, *'puzzle'* and *'constantly make arrangements'*. Furthermore, the survey indicated that female journalists think this combination is more difficult than male journalists. The questionnaire for the Dutch-speaking of Belgium included a statement concerning the issue of combining journalism with a family. The respondents were asked to rate, using a five-point Likert scale (1= completely disagree to 5=completely agree) whether they agree that journalism and a family are hard to combine. Female journalists (54.7%) were more likely to agree with this statement than their male counterparts (43.9%).

Avoiding the revolving-door scenario

Although the mother-journalists described the combination of journalism and a family as a struggle, none of them had the intention to leave the profession. During the interviews they explained which strategies they use to avoid the 'revolving door'-scenario. Some of the interviewed journalists considered the irregularity in the job, that makes the combination of journalism and a family so difficult, as an advantage. These journalists associated the irregularity with other positive aspects such as freedom, flexibility and variety, which makes journalism in their eyes so interesting that a departure is no option.

Secondly, almost all mother-journalists emphasized that they can count on the support of their partner in the household. Only two interviewees (39 and 52 years old) accepted the traditional division of roles in the household. They considered it to be *'normal'* and *'obvious'* that they do more in the household than their male partners and they ascribed this to the mindset of their generation:

'Yes, I do more work in the household than my husband [...]. That's just something that has grown this way. Hopefully, when my daughter grows up, this will improve. My father, for example, could not even choose his own clothes... My mother had to pick them out for him and take them out of the closet. Fortunately, my husband already does by himself.'

All other interviewed journalists emphasized the indispensability of the support of their partner in the household. A first group has a partner with an regular work scheme and considered this as a necessary condition to be able to combine a job in journalism with a family. A female newspaper journalist indicated that her partner even deliberately changed to a job with regular working hours when they decided to have a baby. A second group has a partner with an irregular work schedule and contradicted the story of the journalists in the first group. These journalists saw it as an advantage

that their partner also has irregular work hours. They spoke of a mutual understanding in the relationship for the unpredictability in their professional life.

A third strategy was linked to the age of the children. Mothers with young children, who followed this tactic, wanted to *'survive the period with small children'* and were hoping for improvement once their children get older and not quite so demanding. A 39-year old newspaper journalist explained that she decided to have three children in less than four years for this reason. The hope of respondents who choose this strategy was contradicted by mothers with older children who had experienced that their children have more trouble getting used to the situation and they are more aware of their absence. Consequently, they also give more negative remarks and are more disappointed when their mother cannot keep her promises and, for example, family trips are cancelled because she unexpectedly has to work.

Additionally, the majority of the interviewed journalists with children appreciated a certain degree of flexibility towards journalists with children in their newsroom. According to some respondents this flexibility was limited to emergencies, for example, a replacement or the possibility to work at home when a child is sick. Other interviewees, especially the ones working in the magazine sector, referred to *'a gigantic goodwill towards private life and children'* and attributed this to the large amount of female journalists in their newsroom. However, in several interviews the journalists also discussed the other side to this medal, and emphasized that this flexibility is under strong surveillance in the newsroom. Especially, the employer draws boundaries on this flexibility. Several female journalists explained that their employer attaches most importance to the quality of their work. As long as the work output attains the same standards, than these journalists could enjoy certain concessions. The employer of a single female newspaper journalist with a child, for example, agreed that she stops working every day at five o'clock to get her son from after-school child care, but she emphasized that this was only possible because she keeps delivering news content that meets the same quality criteria. A freelance journalist summarized the way of thinking of the employers in the magazine sector as follows:

'Employers assume that you turn on your computer once again when your child is asleep, and that you work on a bit. [...] Everybody is professional and everybody takes responsibility. There is nobody that is going to tell you that you will have to come to work every day from nine to five. Nobody!'

Secondly, co-workers without children seemed to define the boundaries on the flexibility towards journalists with children in the newsroom. Two mother-journalists were confronted with a lack of understanding and negative reactions from childless co-workers. Interviewees without children added that *'a newsroom can't be adjusted to the needs of women with children'*. They saw having

children as a personal choice and they indicated that female journalists with children have to look for ways to reconcile fire and water on their own. As a consequence, mother-journalists internalized this social control and started guarding their own flexibility. They emphasized that they absolutely want to avoid getting a preferential treatment because they have children and they do not want their motherhood to become a label or a stigma in their newsroom.

Furthermore, scaling back of work activities was discussed in detail during the interviews. Most journalists had no trouble giving examples of female co-workers who started working fewer hours when they had children. Several interviewed journalists made objections to the scaling back of work activities in journalism. Some of them even rejected the option because they considered it unrealistic and almost impossible because of the nature of the work and the demand for total availability in journalism. A female newspaper journalist made the following comparison to illustrate this:

'If, for example, you are working as a cashier in a supermarket, then your part-time job is indeed part-time. In the sense that you sit behind your cash register on Monday and Tuesday and on Wednesday and Thursday you don't work... period! When you are writing articles for a daily newspaper that's completely different! [...] You're always a journalist!'

Moreover several interviewees noticed that the management does not always respond in a positive way to scaling back and that this subsequently can have a negative influence your career. A 37-year old magazine journalist had the impression that some 'doors stayed closed' because she worked only four days a week and a 55-year old television journalist added that she never considered working part-time because she was scared that she would 'lose touch with her work and with the news'.

Several female journalists knew co-workers who started freelancing when they had children. There were, however, some doubts about the effectiveness of this strategy because freelancing offers a greater freedom but at the same time is associated with more financial instability and a daily fight to make ends meet. For a female newspaper journalist freelancing was a temporary solution when her son was very young, but she entered employment when he was old enough to go to school.

Finally, some female journalists mentioned that information and communication technologies are responsible for creating new barriers for women in journalism because of the increased pace and pressure on their personal life. Another group of respondents described this evolution in a more positive way. They referred to these technological evolutions as 'relaxing' and 'reassuring' because they were available all the time and did not have to miss any news. A newspaper journalist also mentioned the increased flexibility for women with children because of Internet and the possibilities this offers to work at home.

Vertical segregation

The survey indicates that the percentage of women falls, as the power associated with a position increases. Even though 39.3% percent of the journalists, reporters and correspondents were females, this percentage drops to 30% in middle management, 28.3% in the editor in chief/deputy editor position, and 15.4% in the management/board. Women are least represented in technical positions (designer, photographer, director, ...) (9.1%). Furthermore, the survey asks whether or not the respondents had received a promotion yet. The percentage of male respondents (64.2%) indicated that they had received a promotion was significantly higher than the percentage of females (53.1%). Moreover, 81.2% of the promoted men had received an increase in their salary (against 71.9% of the women) and 77% of the promoted men got a higher position or job title (against 70.6% of the women). All these differences were statistically significant ($p < 0,050$).

Table 2: Occupational roles by gender in Belgium

Occupational level	#	%	#	%
	Men	Men	Women	Women
Management/board	11	84,6	2	15,4
Editor in chief/ deputy editor	91	71,7	36	28,3
Middle management	140	70	60	30
Journalist/reporter/correspondent	600	60,7	388	39,3
Technical position	100	90,9	10	9,1
Other	27	79,4	7	20,6
Total numbers and average %	969	65,8	503	34,2

Even though these findings indicate that the chances of advancement in Belgian journalism are limited for women, female journalists were still somewhat more satisfied with their current position than men. On a Likert scale that probed for satisfaction (1=completely dissatisfied, 5=completely satisfied), 86.7% of the females indicated that they are (completely) satisfied with their position, whereas this was only 84.2% for the men. During the interviews many respondents explained that they were completely satisfied with their current position and with their promotional opportunities because they prefer writing to coordinating. They associated a management position with deskwork and they emphasized their love for fieldwork. These respondents were not confronted directly with certain barriers that prevented them from climbing the career ladder. However, they could point out several obstacles for women who do want to make a promotion. We registered three central themes during the interviews: the presence of a masculine pattern in management positions, the impact of motherhood on the career of female journalists and the existence of an 'old boys network' in newsrooms.

Many interviewees referred to the dominance of a male pattern in journalism, especially at the top level. Some journalists attributed this male logic to the high degree of competitiveness in the media sector. In several interviews the respondents indicated that particularly *'catching the attention'*, *'screaming loudly'*, *'macho behavior'* and *'promoting yourself'* help to build a career in journalism. These qualities were considered by the interviewees as typically masculine. Furthermore, the female respondents also took this male norm as a reference point in their evaluation of female managers. They described the management style of their female managers as rather masculine, hard and authoritarian, with a limited communication to subordinates. One female newspaper journalist even considered taking over a masculine management style, as an absolute necessity in the higher hierarchical echelons. She described her own management style as typically feminine and she had experienced that this approach did not work when she was asked to coordinate a newspaper supplement. She wanted to *'keep things cozy'* and *'wanted to maintain a good understanding and a positive atmosphere in her team'*, but she found it very difficult to criticize the work of co-workers. Therefore, she offered space to articles of inferior quality. She decided to give up the coordinating position because she thought that she was *'a bad leader'*. When she was asked if she ever considered taking over a more masculine management style, she explained that she was scared that she would have lost the joy in her work. Another respondent with a management position had the impression that the *'masculine atmosphere'* in her newsroom was the reason why male journalists judge her differently than male managers. She explained that when male managers are very straightforward, this is shrugged off with a joke, but she gets negative reactions from male subordinates when she does the exact same thing.

A second theme that was repeated during the interviews, was the impact of children on the career of female journalists. Almost all respondents who were not in a management position referred to a family as a reason why some female journalists cannot make it to the top level in journalism. Three journalists who had a (temporary) management position agreed on this. One of them emphasized that work and private life completely blend in a position as editor-in-chief, and that this might put off women with children. Another journalist added that she did not hesitate to become the editor-in-chief of a local television station when she was offered the chance because she was single and had no children, but that her decision could have been different when she had a partner and children at that time. Furthermore, many respondents gave examples of women co-workers who started to curb their career ambitions once they had children. According to some of these interviewed women, female journalists can anticipate this by fully focusing on their career when they are still childless. A freelance journalist had used this strategy very consciously. In the period that she was childless, she

completely concentrated on her career. This gave her the opportunity to develop a network and prove herself, which in turn guaranteed assignments after she had children.

A third topic that was highlighted in several interviews was the existence of an ‘old boys network’. Two journalists were strongly convinced that male journalists prefer male co-workers when decisions for promotions are made. The presence of this old boys network, however, is hard to trace. A newspaper journalist discovered it indirectly when she got a negative reaction from her male superior because she wanted to write a newspaper article on a study that indicated that informal networks between male journalists limit the chances for women working in the media sector. She told us that:

‘The fact that this analysis of the media worldwide caused so much resentment could only be explained by some kind of recognition of guilt. [...] My editor-in-chief wanted to see himself as a feminist man... en he was! Absolutely! [...] But at that moment he felt bad when he recognized this form of discrimination.’

Horizontal segregation

Female journalists also differed from male journalists in the media sectors they worked for. The survey data show women have only reached a representation that is higher than 33% with magazines (38.4%), local television stations (40.8%), public radio stations (39.9%), national commercial radio stations (47.6%), local radio stations (33.3%). They are still strongly underrepresented with newspapers (27.6%), internet-only media (27.5%) and press or photo agencies (26%). Secondly, news topics in Belgian journalism are divided along gender lines. The survey indicates that women are significantly less specialized than male journalists (16.6% against 21.8%). Table 3 shows that men are still dominant in politics, economics , sports, technology and transport, whereas women are dominant in news about culture, education, lifestyle, health, society and tourism.

Table 3: Subject areas covered by men and women

Subject areas	Men %	Women %
Men are over-represented in:		
politics	23.7	15.3
economics	19.6	12.3
sports	22.4	4.4
technology	10.3	5.3
transport	7	2.3
media	13.1	6.7
Women are over-represented in:		
culture	23.2	30.1

education	4.1	7.6
lifestyle	6.2	21.1
health	5.3	16.9
society	17.8	27.8

The interviews offered insight in the evolution of horizontal gender segregation in Flemish newsrooms. Respondents from older age groups spoke of a nearly one-on-one relationship between female journalists and several more soft news topics such as health, family, fashion and social affairs. These topics were labeled as *'women's themes'* and remained *'a restricted area for female journalists'*. The women's themes were looked down upon by the majority of male journalists. Journalists from younger age groups were convinced that the degree of horizontal segregation has decreased considerably in recent years. They referred to famous female journalists in hard news reporting, to substantiate their statement. When we discussed the male-female ratio in different newsroom sections during the interviews, some examples of horizontal segregation were mentioned. According to the respondents, newsroom size is an be an important factor. Respondents who worked in small newsroom (especially local media) noted that there is no space for horizontal segregation in their work environment because every journalist has to be able to handle a wide range of news subjects. Respondents who worked in bigger newsrooms (especially in daily newspapers), with a higher degree of specialization, indicated that, in general, there are fewer female journalists who work for the political section, the sports section and the financial section, contrary to weekend supplements which seemed to be solely populated with female journalists. A newspaper journalist illustrated how sharp the line between 'male' and 'female' sections in her newsroom is drawn:

'There is no male journalist who writes for the women's magazine of our newspaper. That is a pity, but I think that, if a male journalist would work there, the other men would laugh at him and call him 'gay'. Journalism is still a macho world!'

Three factors seemed to influence the degree of horizontal segregation in newsrooms: internal pressure from the management, personal interests of journalists and the size of the newsroom. In the first instance, managers sometimes take into account the gender of the journalist when dividing the news story topics. This practice used to be more common in the past. Then typical female subjects were almost automatically assigned to female journalists as *'chores'*. Nevertheless, horizontal segregation was, according to several interviewees, not only the result of pressure from above, but also of personal interests. Interviewed female journalists indicated that sometimes they are more interested in covering certain topics from their own personal experience, for example, as a mother. This was emphasized in the story of a respondent with a management position. In her newsroom there was only one female journalist working for the news section of a local television

station. During an evaluation, this female journalist announced that she was annoyed because her male co-workers always gave her the softer subjects. They searched for a solution to her problem:

'We looked at the news areas we could give her so that... and which tricks we could learn her so that... these men would notice her more. Because it also depends partially on how you present yourself and your assertiveness. You have to say what you want to do. And that worked out fine. But then when I informed her that we would redistribute our news areas and we asked her which areas she wanted to cover, she automatically chose the softer news topics.'

A limited amount of female journalists indicated that they were strongly dissatisfied when a topic was assigned to them solely based on their gender. The strategy that these respondents used to keep their job satisfaction at the same level was *'resistance'*. This implies that they refuse to cover typically female subjects. The interviewed journalists emphasized that this strategy demands a lot of effort. This could be deduced from their use of words. The journalists told us that they have to *'fight'* or *'scuffle'* for their themes. However, in the end, this strategy seemed worth the effort because these journalists could cover the topics they preferred afterwards.

Finally, according to the respondents the size of the newsroom played a role in the degree of horizontal segregation. Journalists that worked in smaller newsrooms, for example in local media, emphasized that there is no room for horizontal segregation because the staff is small and every journalist has to be able to cover every topic. Journalists in larger newsrooms, for example, in national newspapers emphasized that there is a dominance of men in hard news.

Conclusion and discussion

The central question in this study was to what extent Belgian journalism is segregated based on gender and how female journalists experience gender-related barriers in their professional life. Because quantitative data on the situation of female journalists were scarce and outdated, the necessary first step in this research was to gather new figures on the employment patterns of male and female journalists in Belgium by conducting a large scale journalists survey. Based on the results of a large scale survey we can conclude that Belgian journalism is both horizontally and vertically segregated along gender lines, a pattern that is similar to many other countries in the world (Byerly, 2013). The reasons for the underrepresentation of women in high age groups, in decision-making positions and in prestigious news beats and media sectors were discussed with a diverse sample of female journalists. First, the primary motive for women to consider a departure from journalism at a young age was the incompatibility of journalism and a family, which is in accordance with the results

of previous research (Aldridge, 2001; de Bruin & Ross, 2004; De Clercq, 2002; Elmore, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2005). Secondly, having a family was also considered as one of the reasons why women cannot make it to the top level of journalism, alongside gender stereotypes about leadership skills and informal networking in homosocial male networks (Aldridge, 2001; Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Delano, 2004; Kyung-Hee, 2006; Phalen, 2010). Finally, the gender division of news topics was to a great extent sustained by pressure from supervisors, the interests of female journalists and the size of the newsroom. The added value of this research is that while most studies only focus on how women experience these obstacles, we also gained insight into some strategies female journalists used to deal with these barriers. Individual women are very creative in finding ways to cope with these obstacles, and in this way they are able to avoid that they interfere with their positive look on journalism as a profession. However, on a structural level, there is a lack of policies in newsrooms that are aimed a gender equal work environment. Moreover, women are hesitant to use existing arrangements such as part-time work, because these types of work often have other negative consequences. Furthermore, the results indicate that there has been a mentality change in the private sphere of female journalists and that for most of the respondents the '*non-sharing of domestics tasks*' (Ziamou, 2000, p. 29), seemed to have transformed into a '*sharing of domestic tasks*'. However, this mentality change is not taking place in newsrooms. The idea that a journalist should be available all the time is still sacred and this hampers initiatives that are aimed at a better work-life balance. Further research should look at how the recent developments in the media industry have affected these barriers for female journalists. In the last decades journalism is characterized by an increased work pressure, shorter news cycles and a high demand for functional flexibility. Researchers should address the impact of these changes on the barriers for female journalists. This study is limited because there were no male journalists interviewed. This study was limited because male journalists were not interviewed. It is necessary to include men's perspectives and experiences in journalism in future research.

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